



Pick Your Party

There's more than one way to entertain for the holidays

BY STACEY FREED

This holiday season, the mantra for hosting parties should be “keep it simple,” and that starts with determining what type of shindig you want to have: a casual Friendsgiving get-together, a sit-down dinner or perhaps a late afternoon brunch. Here are some tips on how to have a great time, no matter what type of party you choose to throw:

FRIENDSGIVING

+ Just friends lounging around? Turn it into a special event by creating an experience. “A theme simplifies everything from food to drinks, to music and décor,” says Rashida Purifoy, managing partner at Ricki Kline Design + Build, an LA-based hospitality and interior design firm. Your concept doesn’t necessarily have to center on the holidays. Purifoy’s Hawaiian-themed parties are among her favorites. She suggests wrapping the door in fabric, swapping out the couch pillows and decorating the tree (leis for garland) to fit the theme. And don’t forget the food. “I do a spiced popcorn every year that now has to happen,” Purifoy says.

+ Nonalcoholic drinks mean everyone can partake in the fun. Greet guests at the door with shot glasses full of soup, hot cocoa or chai, suggests Ellen Swandiak, founder of hobnobmag.com, a site that offers hosting tips.

Friendsgiving origins

For Friendsgiving, a gathering of friends over a Thanksgiving feast, the host prepares a turkey, and guests bring sides, potluck style.

Friendsgiving might have started among college students or co-workers who were unable to travel home for the holiday. But, it can refer to any time you share a meal with friends during the holidays.

The term was first used in 2007, and many credit the popular Thanksgiving episodes of *Friends* for giving fans a reason to coin the phrase, but *Real Housewives of New Jersey* might have had more to do with it. In a 2011 episode titled *Gobblefellas*, the housewives host competing Friendsgivings.

— Ashley May

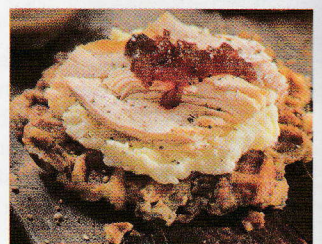
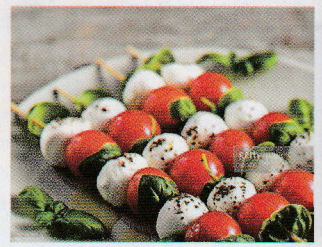


Guest Gifts

It's nice to send guests off with a little something. Decorate cookies with guests' names or the name of your party, says event planner Nicole Marie Pittmon, of Chicago-based Nicole Marie Events. "You can set them at the table as part of the décor."

SIT-DOWN DINNER

- + Maintain a sense of calm: "Consider the size of your room and, if possible, invite fewer people than you might normally," says Alex Koones, founder and chef of Babetown, a pop-up supper club that meets in private homes and caters to members of the LGBTQ community. Koones suggests serving family style, instead of plated, which requires more work for the host. "The more you stress yourself, the more stress is in the air."
- + Take the guesswork out by following the guidelines of table setting — diagrams abound online — but tweak them. "The rules are a good starting point, but work backward from your menu. If you're not serving salad, there's no need for a separate salad fork," says Liz Curtis, founder and CEO of Table + Teaspoon, an on-demand tabletop design service based in San Francisco that sends its settings anywhere in the U.S.
- + Liven up a formal sit-down by having a calligraphed card at each setting with a name on the front and an interesting fact about the person sitting to one's right or left, suggests Lisa Vorce, owner and creative director of Lisa Vorce CO, an event design and production studio in Santa Ana, Calif. "It always leads to lively conversations and even new friendships."



BRUNCH BUFFET

- + "When in doubt, put it on a skewer," says Ilana Eck, founder of Manhattan-based Stylish Spoon. "Kids and adults love anything on a stick." Deconstruct a Greek salad by sliding a grape tomato, a cucumber, a kalamata olive and some feta cheese onto a skewer, then drizzle with olive oil and lemon juice. "When it's visually appealing, everyone will smile."
- + Since guests are already on their feet, direct them toward the tequila shot bar, Koones says. Try this: Dip orange slices in coffee grounds on one side and sugar on the other. Shoot the tequila then bite into the orange. "I don't care who you are," says Koones, "doing a shot makes people feel young again."

Available at your local supermarket