

Throw Your Best Party Ever!

Follow this plan, and your guests won't leave until New Year's

4 Quickie Decorating Ideas

- 1 Create a festive runner for your table by rolling out a length of holiday wrapping paper. When the party's over, crumple it and toss.
- 2 For a sit-down dinner, invest in dining-chair slipcovers, which start at \$20 each. (Choose red, and reuse them on Valentine's Day and Fourth of July.)
- 3 Stack a seasonal fruit, like clementines, in a pair of bowls; place them at the ends of your sideboard.
- 4 Fill an oversize, clear glass bowl with a tangle of all-white or even multicolored Christmas tree lights, and plug them in for a modern holiday touch.

Cleanup Kit
Make sure to stock: extra-large garbage bags, paper towels, coasters, and a charged mini vac.

AVOID DRESS DISTRESS

If you have...

- **VISIBLE BRA STRAPS** Get them out of sight with clear double-stick Hollywood Tape (\$7, hollywoodfashiontape.com). The tape can also close up blouse gaps.
- **DEODORANT STREAKS** Buff away pesky white stains with Gal Pal reusable sponges (\$10 for two, gal-pal.com for stores). In a pinch, a clean toothbrush should work.
- **CREEPING HEMLINE** A spritz of good old Static Guard neutralizes the electric charge to help clothes lie flat. Or try rubbing a dryer sheet under your skirt. Embarrassment averted!

Map It Out

Keep the good times flowing (and partygoers from stalling in one area) by setting out snacks in several locations. Have a second platter of each in the kitchen, ready for reinforcements. Place wine bottles or premade cocktails or punch with the food; set up the bar elsewhere in the room.

HIT (PARTY) MAKERS

Play these festive favorites:

James Taylor at Christmas; The Three Tenors Christmas; Let It Be Christmas, Alan Jackson; **Christmas Songs**, Diana Krall; **A Very Special Christmas** pop compilation; **A Boogie-Woogie Christmas**, The Brian Setzer Orchestra; **Merry Christmas**, Mariah Carey; **A Charlie Brown Christmas** soundtrack. (Go to goodhousekeeping.com/playlists for more album suggestions)

Get-Pretty Basics

- 1 **For a perfect kisser** If your lipstick typically disappears before all the guests are even there, try a long-wearing version like L'Oréal Paris Infallible Never Fail Lipcolour (\$12, drugstores).
- 2 **For the right amount of glow** Overtly sparkly eye makeup (with actual bits of glitter) is best left to your teen daughter, as it can accentuate lines. Go for subtle shimmer with Cover Girl 1-Kit Eye Enhancer in Champagne (\$3, drugstores).

Guarantee RSVPs

During the holidays, the casual two-week party heads-up doesn't cut it—yours won't be the only invite going out. Send 'em at least three weeks ahead and follow up.

5 No-Hassle Nibbles

No one wants to spend the evening balancing plates on their knees and sawing tricky appetizers with flimsy plastic utensils. Give guests something they can hold in their hands and gobble with gusto—and that you can make in minutes.

- 1 **Cucumber-Cheese Rounds** With vegetable peeler, peel 1 seedless cucumber (1 lb.) lengthwise, leaving on a few strips of peel. Cut cucumber crosswise into thirds; trim ends. With apple corer or table knife, remove seeds from center of each third. Fill centers with 1 pkg. (5.2 oz.) apple-cranberry spreadable cheese, pressing firmly. Cut crosswise into 1/2-in. rounds; arrange on serving plate. Makes 18 slices.
- 2 **Shrimp Boats** From 1 lemon, grate 1/2 tsp. peel and squeeze 2 tsp. juice; place in large bowl. Stir in 1 Tbsp. olive oil, 1/4 tsp. salt, and 1/8 tsp. coarsely ground black pepper. Add 1 bag (12 oz.) frozen cooked baby shrimp, thawed; toss to coat. Separate 2 heads Belgian endive into 24 med. leaves (reserve larger and smaller leaves for salad for another day). Place leaves on serving plate; spoon shrimp mixture onto leaves. Garnish with dill. Makes 24 boats.
- 3 **Salsa-Bean Dip** Rinse and drain 1 can (15 to 19 oz.) pink beans; place in medium bowl and coarsely mash. Stir in 1 c. chunky salsa, 2 green onions, chopped, and 1/4 c. fresh cilantro, chopped. Serve with baked tortilla chips. Makes 2 1/4 c.
- 4 **Cheddar Crisps** Arrange 12 melba rounds (2 in. each) on baking sheet. Brush lightly with 1/2 tsp. spicy brown mustard before topping with 2 Tbsp. shredded sharp Cheddar cheese and 1 1/2 tsp. freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Sprinkle with 1/4 tsp. ground chipotle chile pepper. Bake at 400°F for 5 minutes or until cheese melts. Makes 12 rounds.
- 5 **Sweet Spiced Nuts** Heat 2 c. salted mixed nuts in large nonstick skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally. In cup, mix 2 Tbsp. sugar, 1 tsp. each chili powder and ground cumin, and 1/4 tsp. ground red pepper (cayenne); stir into nuts. Drizzle with 1 Tbsp. honey and cook, stirring, until nuts are glazed, about 2 minutes. Spread on foil-lined cookie sheet to cool. Makes 2 1/2 c.

GIFT EMERGENCY!

If you hate getting caught empty-handed, keep a few of these items wrapped and ready to go: local foodstuffs (think jams, chocolates from a family-run business); a book by your favorite author (pre-write a note, saying, "I hope you love this as much as I did!"); or your own custom-made specials (whipped up either in the kitchen or your crafts corner). And while regifting is tempting, be careful not to be too slapdash—lest you give that friend or neighbor the same present she gave you last year.

Bar Math

Use this beverage-buying cheat sheet:

Each guest = 2 to 3 drinks

1 (750 ml.) bottle wine or champagne = 5 to 6 pours

1 liter hard liquor = 22 measures

Also Get at least twice as many mixers as bottles of liquor, plus garnish, ice, and options for nondrinkers.

EASY BRIE MAKEOVER

Combine 1/2 c. apricot preserves or orange marmalade, 1/2 c. dried fruit (such as raisins, cranberries, chopped apricots, or figs), and 1/4 c. chopped nuts.

On microwave-safe serving plate, heat 2.2 lbs. whole Brie in microwave on Medium (50 percent power) 1 minute or until warm. Top with fruit mixture and sprinkle with another 1/4 c. chopped nuts. Serve with crackers, cucumber slices, or Bosc pear wedges.

More Ideas Online!

Go to goodhousekeeping.com/recipefinder to get inspired

Ham It Up

Guests want delicious and filling; you want quick and festive. The perfect compromise: an oven-warmed, fully cooked, sliced supermarket ham, which gives the feel of a homemade entrée without the hours spent at the stove. Place it on your best platter, and surround with fresh fruit such as grapes and kumquats. Then serve with small bowls of prepared chutneys, assorted mustards, and biscuits or crackers.