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Nadine Hughes'

5 TIPS



for hosting the Holidays

BY *Kathy Buckworth*

TOP PHOTO BY *Peter McCusker*

Today's economic climate has many folks opting to stay in instead of going out, and the good news is that home parties are in-style. But whether you're thinking of having 5 or 50 people over, start planning now, otherwise the details can seem overwhelming.

Nadine Hughes, owner of The Cook's Companion (www.thecookscompanion.ca) offers the following tips for a successful and stress free event.

1. Use a planner or notebook. There's so much going on during the holidays, on top of the everyday responsibilities, so find a place to keep all of your information. "By writing everything down that you need to do, it will not only help you remember all the details but it will give you a much needed sense of accomplishment when you get to check things off the list," advises Hughes.

2. Know your budget and plan accordingly.

Everyone's watching their pennies today, so there's the additional challenge of having to get creative. Think about having a traditional potluck dinner, but remember to keep track of the offerings. Hughes suggests "Have the guests contribute their favourite winter/holiday dish and a story to go along with it." If you're concerned about the cost of alcohol, consider hosting a potluck brunch.

3. Do as many things as possible ahead of time.

Plan your menu accordingly so that you can make most of the food ahead and either freeze or keep in the refrigerator. At least 24 hours ahead, set the table, arrange the bar, make room in the closet for coats etc.

4. Plan your guest list. "Cocktail parties can handle a wide mix of people because shorter conversations occur which is suitable for people who don't know each other. Dinner parties require a bit more planning. Think about who will interact with whom and set your seating plan to have the greatest opportunity for lively conversation." Says Hughes, who has hosted many of these in her own home. The number of people on your guest list should obviously be commensurate with your budget as well.

5. Chill. Remember that the key to being a good host is making your guests feel comfortable which means that you as the host need to feel comfortable as well. "Think in terms of moderation and don't stretch your cooking skills, your budget or your resources. If you join the party and enjoy yourself, your guests will too." Adds Hughes.

Planning a holiday party can add a huge amount of stress to your already busy life. "It's important to know where your strengths lie as a hostess and outsource everything else," says Hughes. "If you're a great entertainer but not a great cook then order in dinner or have your cocktail party catered. If you are a great cook but not a great planner, make sure you find the shortcuts to gain you more time such as rented dishes, hiring a bartender, splurge on a housecleaner for the event and enlist a friend to handle all the music."

Budget permitting, decorating the house doesn't mean you have to employ a design firm to help you to pull it all together. Using your existing Christmas decorations in new ways can be both economical as well as fun. Consider putting glass balls in a bowl on your dinner table, sprinkle tree "icicles" on shelves and other flat surfaces, and wrap garland around banisters for a quick and easy holiday look. If you want to buy new decorations, check out the dollar store first for some real finds, including tablecloths and napkins.

The most important part of the evening? "Above all else remember that your guests have come to spend quality time with you and the other guests and the food, drink and atmosphere are all secondary!" Hughes wisely advises. Cheers! **GOODLIFE**

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