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Be a great

party boss

Your holiday bash will be a night to remember with these expert tips

BY PATRICK HUGUENIN

With the holidays comes the urge to party — or the requirement to party, if you've got friends and family who expect invites. But whether you're a domestic diva or equipped only with bartending basics, entertaining can be a breeze. The key: Keep it simple. The secret: Simple can be stunning.

Just ask our panel of party experts: 14 of the city's best hosts, who have advice on throwing the perfect party. The styles of their festivities run the gamut from a heavy-metal brewhaha to a holiday-movie-theme bash to a cozy Christmas dinner with family.



Jimmy Duffy

Preparation

◆ "If there's something specific that you do want guests to bring, you need to let them know. I had someone bring a big chocolate cake to a Greek Easter and I was mortified. ... It needed counter space and to be refrigerated — and (a) no counters exist in New York City, and (b) the fridge was full of Greek Easter food."
— **Amy Sedaris**, actor and writer

◆ "Take all of your painkillers out of the medicine chest in the bathroom and replace them with Flintstones chewables."
— **Jimmy Duffy**, owner of heavy-metal bar Duff's Brooklyn

CONTINUED OVER



Amy Sedaris

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Ambience

◆ "You must really consider lighting. It's the single most important factor at a party. If your guests look good and if you look good, the party will be great. If there's a choice, err on the side of dim."
— **Isaac Mizrahi**, fashion designer and host of Bravo's "The Fashion Show: Ultimate Collection"

◆ "Make sure you have festive decorations — what's lamer than a holiday party with no atmosphere? Have a good mix of males and females ... preferably more females and lots of mistletoe."
— **DJ Skee**, disk jockey and entrepreneur

Guest list

◆ "Invite all the interesting people you have worked with over the last year from as many different fields as possible. Be sure to mix different age groups, from teenagers to your fascinating downstairs neighbor who plays piano for the Philharmonic."
— **Suzanne Vega**, singer/songwriter

◆ "To try to meet new people, throw a two-degrees-of-separation party: If you want a total of 15, invite five people and have each one invite one, and then that person brings one."
— **Claire Robinson**, host of Food Network's "5 Ingredient Fix"

◆ "Get a friend who's a real 'touchy' type of person at the door to say good night to everyone as they leave. That way he can discreetly pat them down for any valuables they might be trying to steal."
— **Jimmy Duff**

Libations

◆ "Prepare a punch bowl as one of your cocktails. It becomes a great centerpiece and mingling point. You freeze a giant cube of ice in any container the night before."
— **Johnny Iuzzini**, pastry chef, Restaurant Jean-Georges (Look for punch recipes in Sunday's Eats section!)

◆ "What I'm going to do, because we have six grandkids ages 16 to 21, we encourage them to have a glass of wine with dinner so we can toast. It's a gracious way to live. But the adults will have a cocktail as well, and I set up a table where they can take their own Scotch or whatever they want."
— **Sylvia Weinstock**, cake guru

Snacks

◆ "Plan ahead and serve food that you can make in advance. Your guests are there to celebrate the season with you, so don't spend all your time cooking and plating up in the kitchen!"
— **Marcus Samuelsson**, chef/owner, Red Rooster Harlem

◆ "Serve something that's not too messy, something bite-size you can hold with one hand. You'll have your glass in one hand and you need to be able to pick up the food with the other."
— **Amy Cao**, blogger, amyblogschow.com (For one of Cao's "stupidly simple party snacks," see below left.)

◆ "Most of these cocktail hours have so much food that you don't get to the main dish. I might do deviled eggs, maybe a little smoked salmon. But I want people to have an appetite because I've got a big turkey coming."
— **Sylvia Weinstock**

Entertainment

◆ "Be sure to book the proper deejay — or prepare the right music mix if you're providing the music yourself, according to the musical atmosphere."
— **Grandmaster Flash**, hip-hop legend

◆ "Rent a karaoke machine. It will entertain people and keep the party going. ... I like drinking beer, vodka or shochu when I sing karaoke with my friends. Having great drinks on hand will help loosen up your guests before they rock the mic."
— **Masaharu Morimoto**, chef/partner, Morimoto NYC

◆ "Don't have any expectations! Just let things happen. Sometimes the best parties just happen. You've planned enough, so the night of, just go with the flow."
— **Anna Sui**, fashion designer

easy bites

Pull together your edibles before the guests arrive, and you won't be stuck in the kitchen. **Amy Cao**, the Brooklyn food blogger behind amyblogschow.com, shares a holiday favorite from her "stupidly simple snacks" series.

Candy Cane Chocolate-Covered Marshmallows

Serves many (... or one)

Says Cao, "My friend Mari Tuttle taught me how to make these with graham crackers, so they were like s'mores, but crushed peppermint candy gives them that Christmasy taste and look."

- 1 bar of dark chocolate (usually 3½ ounces)
- 1 bag of marshmallows
- Crushed peppermint candy
- Toothpicks

Top as many toothpicks as you'd like with marshmallows. Break the dark chocolate into a stainless steel bowl. In a small saucepan, bring about a cup of water to a simmer. Place the stainless steel bowl on top of your simmering saucepan of water to gradually melt the chocolate. Stir occasionally until the chocolate is smooth. Remove from heat. Dip your marshmallows into the melted chocolate. Allow to cool for a second before dipping them into the crushed peppermint candy. Let the chocolate coating cool completely before serving.



LAUREN COLCHAMIRO

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Isaac Mizrahi

Johnny Iuzzini

'Serve a punch bowl as one of your cocktails.'

LINDA ROSIER/DAILY NEWS

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Marcus Samuelsson

Suzanne Vega

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Masaharu Morimoto

Amy Cao

Sylvia Weinstock

Favors & gifts

◆ "It is a good idea to have a bunch of CDs burned of the music you played at the party, as a cheap but clever take-home gift."

— Johnny Iuzzini

◆ "End your holiday party on a high note by sending each guest home with a treat, like a sample of homemade salsa verde [recipe at right], so they can enjoy the flavors throughout the holidays. Make a couple of batches and then place in jars with lids. Add a colorful label and place at each place setting, or by the door for guests to take as they leave."

— Sandra Lee, TV cook/author, companion of N.Y. Governor-elect Andrew Cuomo

◆ "If you want to bring the hostess something or give her a gift, I think it's classier to do it either a couple of days before or a couple of days after. Don't burden her the minute you walk in the door and hand her something. ... I love flowers, but it takes you out of circulation when you have to find a vase, cut 'em down, put 'em in water, find a spot."

— Amy Sedaris

◆ "Always have a parting gift. I like to cello-bag my pumpkin seed trail mix — I have nicknamed this 'Crackola' [recipe at right] — and give it as a great takeaway for guests. ... I have also sent guests home with a votive candle and written, 'To light your way home' on the tag."

— Claire Robinson

fab favors

With a takeaway snack or s no one goes home hungry

Sandra Lee's Santa Salsa ▶

Yield: about 3 cups

Prep: 20 minutes, Cook: 20 minutes, Chill: 8 hours

- 1 pound tomatilloes, husks removed, quartered
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1 serrano pepper, minced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 cups water

1. In a large saucepan, place tomatilloes, onion, pepper, cilantro, oregano, salt, garlic, cumin and 2 cups water. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally, over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 10 to 15 minutes, or until the tomatilloes are soft.

2. In the container of an electric blender, add tomatillo mixture in batches, if necessary, and process until smooth. (When processing hot foods, the heat needs to escape.



Remove the cap from the blender's lid and cover with a dish towel before processing.)

3. Cool completely (about 8 hours) in refrigerator. Spoon into sterilized jars, cover with lids and store in refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

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Claire Robinson's Pumpkin Seed Dried Cherry Trail Mix

Yield: about 6 cups

Cooking time: 20 minutes

- 2 cups baby pumpkin seeds
- 1 cup slivered almonds
- ¾ cup raw sunflower seeds
- 6 tablespoons pure grade maple syrup
- Coarse salt
- 1 cup dried cherries or cranberries

1. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mat.

2. In a large bowl, toss the seeds, almonds, sunflower seeds and the syrup until evenly coated. Spread the nuts and seeds in a single layer, on the lined sheets and season with salt. Bake the nuts, stirring several times with spatula or wooden spoon, until just golden, about 20 minutes.

3. Cool the nuts completely on a wire rack, then add the cherries to combine. Store cooled trail mix in an airtight container at room temperature.

Recipe courtesy Claire Robinson

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Grandmaster Flash

Anna Sui

Sandra Lee

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