



The Ciraulos home on Main Street in Pendleton was among the most elaborately decorated for the holidays in 2016.

EO file photo

## Throwing the perfect holiday house party

By KATIE WORKMAN  
Associated Press

There are many ways to entertain, but during the busy holiday season, it's the open house party that I gravitate to.

Not a big, sit-down meal. Not a frenetic, crowded, two-hour cocktail party. Rather, a gentle stretch of time with people coming and going as they please.

With a serve-yourself bar and an array of (mostly) room-temperature food, you can create a relaxed atmosphere that says the whole point was to connect for a little while, and share a drink and something good to eat.

Here's how to put together your own open house:

**TIME AND DATE:**

Evenings are festive, but consider an afternoon party if you are including a lot of families with kids. A four-hour time frame allows for a nice flow of people coming and going, and hopefully means that you will be able to spend some real time with your guests. Send an invite — either paper or online — and include any helpful information about directions, parking or attire.

**PLAN AHEAD:** 1. Write down all tasks, from bringing the pork loin to buying flowers to stocking the bathroom with towels and soap.

2. Make a list of what to buy and when to buy it. Shop for non-perishables, including all drinks, as far in advance as you can.

3. Plan out what can be made ahead, and especially what can be frozen.

4. Sketch a timeline for the day: what needs to happen, what gets served when. Name who is responsible for each item.

**THE FOOD:** The key words are "make ahead" and "room temperature." You might pick one or two things to serve hot, like pigs

in a blanket, and pop a few batches of those into the oven over the course of the party — or not! Serving one dish from a slow cooker, like a hot dip, is another option for a hot offering.

Start by thinking about a buffet and what foods are happy to sit out for a while. You don't need an enormous menu; four or five offerings are fine. You will likely want to make extras for certain dishes, so you can swap in a fresh plate as the party goes on and new folks arrive.

Also think about color — things that make sense together on a plate. Be sure to have something from every food group. And don't forget to have something for those who are vegetarian and/or gluten-free.

Have a few dessert options as well, placed in a separate area if possible.

If people ask if they can bring something, say yes. You can't have too many desserts during the holidays!

**MUSIC:** If there's one thing that adds instant energy to a party, it's music. You can create a playlist (or ask a teenager for help!), or turn to streaming services like Spotify or Pandora; choose a theme and let the app create a continuous soundtrack. Or consider employing live talent (a small local band, a pianist, even your kids) if you have the space for it.

**OTHER TIPS:** Decide how "open" your open house will be. Are you going to leave the door unlocked, or do you need to make sure someone is answering the doorbell (or apartment buzzer) throughout the evening?

# One big, happy home

## Tips for hosts and houseguests to keep holidays happy

By KATHERINE ROTH  
Associated Press

The holiday season often means houseguests. What does it mean to be a good host — or a good houseguest?

"Remember the spirit of the holidays. It's easy to get caught up in wanting everything to be perfect. The point is to have fun, and whether you're a guest or a host, flexibility and thoughtfulness go a long way," says Leslie Yazel, editor in chief at Real Simple magazine.

Here are some tips from the pros to keep things running smoothly and minimize stress.

**FOR HOSTS**

— Talk with guests before they arrive about any allergies, dietary restrictions or preferences, and get a sense of what they do and don't want to do during their stay.

"Some people want to go to museums and shopping, and for others, just hanging out at home and relaxing is what they prefer," Yazel says. "Checking in with guests before they arrive helps ensure that everyone's on the same page."

— Try to discuss morning schedules the night before, and set out a basket with some fruit, muffins or other snacks in case your guests get late-night munchies or turn out to be early risers.

The day they arrive, "it's nice to give guests a set of spare keys, show them where the mugs and coffee are, and discuss morning schedules," says Tanya Graff, style director at Martha Stewart Living magazine.

— Little touches make a big impact,

Graff says. If guests are staying for the weekend, you can make their room more comfortable and welcoming with thoughtful details like fresh flowers, magazines, a water carafe, a suitcase rack, a waste bin, a bathrobe and quality sheets.

"Try sleeping where your guests will be staying for one night to ensure the space is comfortable and you haven't overlooked something obvious ... like bedside lighting for reading in bed or a shade to block the sun streaming through the windows in the morning," Yazel says. "Play act through it. Is there a clock with a night light? A place to hang a wet towel? And leave a little card with your WiFi password. That's always appreciated."

Add a little color. Floral designer Ariella Chezar, author of the forthcoming book "Seasonal Flower Arranging" (Ten Speed Press), suggests picking up a few blossoms or branches at a farmer's market, on a walk or even in a grocery store to lift the mood and look of a holiday home.

— Have a schedule in mind, but be flexible. "For something like Thanksgiving, you definitely don't want to wing it. Have a timetable mapped out to make things easier on yourself. Enlist help from your guests if you want. Otherwise have the table set and ready, with extra chairs in place, before they arrive," recommends Graff.

**FOR GUESTS**

— Communicate with your host ahead of time about any allergies, dishes you'd like to contribute or things you'd like to do while there.

— Offer to help. Be ready to set the table, clear the table, do dishes, serve drinks, be a sous-chef — whatever you can do to pitch in, says Graff. "And before you leave, strip the beds and gather up the towels, to make clean up easier for your host."

— Bring a gift, or breakfast. "It's nice to bring something for breakfast as a gift if you're spending the night," Graff says. "Something thoughtful and practical, nothing that requires them to do anything — that's much better than arriving with flowers that they'll have to arrange in a vase on the spot."

"If you're coming from another part of the country, it's great to bring a regional specialty from home," Yazel says, like your favorite salsa from Texas. Or something like ready-to-bake breakfast pastries or home-baked cookies might be a welcome gift.

— Prepare to entertain yourself. Bring books, games or other things to keep you or your children busy so that your host isn't burdened with non-stop entertaining, Yazel suggests.

— Compromise. That includes food and movie choices, and kids' bedtimes. A helpful, cheerful disposition and plenty of flexibility are always welcome.



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