

Meeting people is the salt of the Vincents' party recipe. You're sure to find at least two or three you've never seen before—out-of-town visitors, new neighbors, a couple they met on last Summer's vacation. New faces and different ideas keep a party from developing into a P.T.A. meeting or a discussion of whose lawn is handsomest.

A GREAT MANY party-throwers take pains to invite guests who are alike in opinions, occupations, and manners. This isn't as good an idea as it may seem. True, it usually prevents arguments, but it can also make mighty dull going.

Famous Washington hostesses often seat rabid Republicans beside dogmatic Democrats to let the sparks fly. A good fiery discussion stimulates everybody and never hurts so long as there's a mediator around who can break in before the fighting breaks out. Every guest list should include a few live wires who can be depended on to draw out the timid ones.

Before guests arrive, Dick Vincent rearranges the living-room furniture to make it hard to find a corner to sit in. He pulls sofas away from the wall, facing them to a chair or two. Other chairs are clustered in groups of three or four. There's none of that one-big-circle feeling; the Vincents want small, intimate groups for talking. When things get going, it looks like several games of musical chairs being played simultaneously.

In addition to concocting a tasty punch, Dick's remaining pre-party job is stacking long-playing records. Played low, this background music seems to encourage easy talk. But no vocals, just instrumentals to keep guests from "listening" for the words.

Laura Vincent's immediate pre-party duty is placing snack dishes in several strategic spots around the room, so that no dieting guest is ever safe from temptation! Though exotic foods are popular today, the daring hostess can't expect every guest to like fried grasshoppers or smoked oysters. One or two weird appetizers make good conversation pieces, but urging smoked eel on a squeamish guest is not good "hostess-ship." Be sure to stock plenty of peanuts, popcorn, and other snacks where everyone can reach them.

As for major refreshments, make them hearty enough for the men to dig into and plain enough for the most finicky person

to enjoy. One of my favorite hostesses always serves two hot dishes. Usually there's something "different"—a sea-food curry or beef Stroganoff—plus a popular stand-by—a succulent stew or a frankfurter and baked bean casserole.

Whether it's served buffet or at-table style, the food needn't keep a hostess in the kitchen all evening or work her so hard all day that she's worn out by party time. Think up dishes that can be prepared in advance—at your convenience—and frozen or refrigerated until just before serving. It's a good idea to arrange cold trays in the afternoon, cover them with foil or wax paper, and stow them in the refrigerator, ready to go.

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS are essential for that basic ingredient of a good party—a relaxed host and hostess. A worried, fluttering hostess can put everybody on edge. A host who's free to tell a few stories, make unhurried introductions, and keep the punch cups filled is a real boon to general good feeling.

The Vincents have a carefree air which sticks with them even if a bone-china plate is broken or a gooey hors d'oeuvre plunks on the carpet. Their secret, Laura confided, is a "fix-up fund"—money they add to the other party expenses and put aside for repair and replacement. When they don't have to draw on the "fund," they simply apply it to the next party's budget. When it is used, they don't mind.

Their casual attitude goes further: no guest is ever forced to do anything he doesn't really want to. A rug in an alcove will be rolled back for dancing. A game of charades may be going in the bay. A few guests may collect in the kitchen to discuss child psychology. But everyone is free to join—or not to join.

If party time includes some people's dinner hour, let them know whether you're serving dinner. It's also thoughtful to tell your guests—female, especially—what you're going to wear. This will save a new neighbor, for instance, the embarrassment of turning up in a street suit when others are decked out in chiffon and satin.

After it's over, how will you know whether your party has been the success you hoped for? Simple. Just ask yourself: did I have a good time? If host and hostess have enjoyed the festivities, their guests probably have, too. After all, that's what a party means—fun for all.



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