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## Making your holiday parties bright

By Amanda Eck



Photos Amanda Eck

The Holidays are fast approaching and there's lots of hustle and bustle happening. The endless list of gifts to buy and parties to attend can be daunting. But I do enjoy setting aside time to entertain friends and family in my home. Over the years I have hosted countless cooking exchange parties, Christmas tea parties, and pajama and wine nights. I have learned to streamline my party preparedness so that I can actually enjoy my guests instead of feeling completely wiped by the time the doorbell rings.

Here are a few of my holiday party tips:

A week before your event shop for all your nonperishable items: Paper goods, wine, coffee, etc. Keep your list with you at all times, so when you are out and about you won't forget something. Or if you are tech savvy, download a "to-do" list app. I am old school and still prefer to write things on paper.

Keep the décor simple: Fresh flowers or greenery and candles are your best friends. Make sure to use unscented candles near food. No one likes to smell aude de gardenia while eating hummus dip.

Keep the menu simple: This is not the time to try that new recipe you found on Pinterest. Keep to your "go-to"s and crowd pleasers. Or be sneaky like me and pick up some yummy pastries from La Chataigne bakery in Lafayette or some tasty orzo pasta from the Whole Foods' deli. From that point on it's all about presentation. I like to use unique items to serve or display the food.

Party Favors: I love sending my guests home with a little treat or memento. I've given Christmas ornaments, small wrapped hand soaps, votive candles,

small potted plants tied with ribbon, chocolates, and hot cocoa mix with a peppermint stick tucked in a mug.

The day before: I like to have the table set at least a day before, if it is a formal sit down. For more casual parties I lay out all my serving dishes and attach sticky notes with what food items are going where. It sounds silly, but I promise you, it's a lifesaver when you are running around the day of trying to get things ready. Place all the fresh flowers in their containers, this will give them a full day to open up and if you happen to realize you need more you are not running to the store last minute. I make sure all of my running around is done a day ahead, so that on the day of I can focus on getting the house ready.

Day of: After all the finishing touches, the table is set, the flowers are placed, I try and set aside at least an hour or two of downtime before the party. It may mean taking a leisurely bubble bath, or curling up on the sofa with a book and a cup of tea, or even a little power nap. Having that quiet time will help you recharge. One hour before everyone arrives light the candles and turn on some music.

Ding dong! Now go enjoy your guests. Happy Holidays, friends. I wish you and yours a very wonderful holiday and Happy New Year! See you in 2018!

Amanda's go-to cocktail: Sparkling Pomegranate Punch

- 3 tbsp. sugar
- 1 c. pomegranate juice
- 2 bottle Sparkling wine
- 3/4 c. white wine
- 2 oranges
- 1 c. diced fresh pineapple
- 1/4 c. pomegranate seeds
- Ice cubes

In a punch bowl, dissolve the sugar in the pomegranate juice, stirring vigorously. Add the sparkling wine and white wine, then add the orange slices, diced pineapple, and pomegranate seeds. Serve the sparkling pomegranate punch over ice cubes.



Photo Amanda Eck



As the Owner and Principal Designer of Lamorinda-based Amanda Carol Interiors, Amanda Eck believes your home's interior should be both approachable and well- appointed. She often asserts, "Beauty is a necessity." With a distinct sense of style that mixes contemporary and classic design she fashions spaces that are both elegant and inviting. Her design aesthetic is inspired by anything visual but especially fashion, architecture and art. Visit <http://amandacarolinteriors.com> for more design ideas.

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