

## 8 Holiday Party-Planning Tips

Written by Stacia Affelt

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Whether you're having an ugly sweater party or a classically chic soiree, there are a few things to keep in mind when it comes to throwing a memorable and comfortable holiday party. Celebrity event planner Stefanie Cove and lifestyle expert Jen Lawrence offer their expert tips on how to maintain stress as a hostess and keep your guests talking about your party for years to come.

**1. Send e-vites.** Go green this season and opt for an e-vite instead. With the help of Web sites such as Paperless Post, Cove says you can still make your invitations personal and tie in with your party's theme. The best part about online invites, according to Lawrence, is that guests get to see who else is invited. "E-vites are really easy and I think for casual holiday parties they are perfect," Lawrence says.

**2. Break the ice.** So all your guests are here, but not all of them know each other. The easiest way to break the ice, according to Lawrence, is to introduce people by their interests. Games such as Pictionary and Charades are also a good idea. Even if your guests already do know each other, Lawrence says try and get them to talk about something other than their kids. "Just get people talking about something other than what they always talk about when they get together because that can be really boring," Lawrence says.



**3. Be personal and thoughtful.** One way to make your party personal is whipping up your own signature cocktail. Lawrence likes pairing Champagne with pear nectar and a splash of ginger ale for a festive drink. Cove suggests offering guests more options with an adult hot chocolate bar, complete with various types of hot chocolate and delicious toppings. Before your guests head home, hand them a personalized takeaway gift such as a Turkish towel or felt soap. "Pick something your guests will actually look forward to using, wearing or consuming," Cove says.



**4. Bring out the creativity.** Cove says the key to making a memorable party is giving your guests more than one thing to talk about on the way home. Create your own photo booth by finding an open wall space in your home and decorating a festive border for them to stand with. Use lots of glitter, feather and gold for the border, then tape it on the wall. Complete the booth with props and plenty of Polaroid cameras and film set out on the table. Another way Cove recommends making conversation is with a mini wine tasting, where everyone can share their wine expertise.

**5. Create a cozy atmosphere.** "People make the party, and the atmosphere you create brings out the best in your guests," Lawrence says. Lawrence suggests starting with proper lighting. Candlelight and table lamps are much more flattering on guests than bright fluorescent bulbs. Never make your home too crowded with guests, or too empty feeling. Lawrence recommends staggering your guests by having families with kids come from noon to 2 p.m. and other guests come from 2-4 p.m., etc.



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**6. Add some sparkle.** Nothing is trendier for holiday parties right now than silver and gold. Some ways Cove likes to add sparkle to a soirée is making golden ice cubes by freezing water mixed with edible gold flakes in an ice tray. Another way to add sparkle is by dipping the wine glass rims into edible gold flakes too. “[Sparkle] just comes with excitement and joy,” Cove says. “It doesn’t go toward a specific holiday, it’s just the holidays, and the end of the year, and celebration in general.”

**7. Set your own budget.** One mistake most hostesses make is going so far over their budget that they have to sacrifice the important details such as food and drinks. In order to avoid this, Cove recommends setting a budget before going shopping and staying within it. Rather than focus too much on the little details, make sure the important things are covered.

**8. Don’t stress out.** As a hostess, the most important thing to remember is that your guests are there for the conversation, not your cooking or decorating skills. If you aren’t a good cook, then buy an already-prepped meal. If you’re not a good DJ, then turn to Spotify for an already-made playlist. Lawrence stresses the importance of wearing something comfy the night of the party, such as ballet flats and a dress that you won’t pop out of while bending down to get the roast out of the oven. “If you’re stressed out, your guests are going to pick up on your tension,” Lawrence says. Therefore, you should have a glass of Champagne a half hour before your guests even arrive and tell yourself to have a good time. “You should have fun with it so that everyone else has fun with it and not take it too seriously,” Cove says.