

Six Tips to a Stress-Free Outdoor Party

Written by Lauren Featherstone

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Looking for a summer event that is more elegant than the usual barbecue and pool party? Follow these tips from renowned party and event planner Tammy Carmona, the one responsible for planning Bella and Edwards' wedding in "Twilight: Breaking Dawn Part I," to spice up--or down--your next outdoor event.



Choosing a Theme

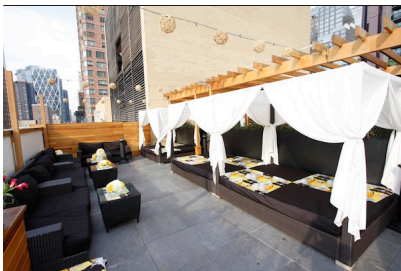
Many of us pick a theme without thinking about the rest of the party; thus, we have no idea how we are going to decorate, accessorize or cater according to it. Instead, think about how you're going to incorporate the theme into the whole party before setting your mind on it. Carmona uses the example of an ocean theme. She recommends water walls and double-layer glass tables with shells and sand in between to make guests feel as if they are surrounded by the beach in an elegant way. The theme should also be practical, but match the venue.

Decorating Like a Pro

Carmona's favorite themes are earthy with real and natural stones like the wedding from "Twilight: Breaking Dawn Part I." She uses moss, grape vines and twigs to remain unpredictable, yet impressive. In general, Carmona highlights the small details and charm of the venue by adding more to what's already there. Something as simple as an old garden door can become an entrance centerpiece. She also recommends adding plants to the base of a boxwood-style table at an outdoor venue that's full of natural plants.

What's The Magic Number?

There is no perfect minimum party size because smaller parties are more intimate and it's the people you invite who will make the party. For larger parties, like weddings and quinceneras, Carmona says 200 is the perfect number. Most venues can fit 200 people comfortably and the room won't look empty. If you start inviting too many people--say 600--the event becomes impersonal and it is near impossible to chat with all the guests.



Food For The Mood

Keep it light and organic. Salads, fruits, light hors d'oeuvres and organic drinks are great for Carmona's earthy themes; however, international and miniature foods are also a fantastic option. Miniature foods allow guests to walk around and mingle as they eat. Grilling is not out of the question, but keep an open mind. Fruits and veggies on the grill are a great addition or substitute to meat.

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Bottoms Up

It's not a party without Champagne. Carmona says any party that respects itself includes alcohol. For outdoor events, she recommends adding a fruit station at the bar for guests to add pomegranates, berries, apples or vegetables to their drinks.

Turn It Up

Good music is the key to a good party, but find music that matches the event. For instance, you wouldn't play classical music at a barbecue, but you wouldn't have a rock band at an elegant event. If you hire a DJ, discuss playlist options with him beforehand. You can also run the music yourself by making a playlist and plugging in your MP3 player.