

Be a Great Holiday Host Without Breaking the Bank

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Teresa Meek, December 2016

Everyone loves a party, but being a holiday host doesn't have to strain your nerves or budget and turn you into a grinch. Here are some simple tips to help you host a wonderful party and still get to enjoy it as much as your guests.

Get Creative With Decorations

You can find free decorations by scavenging boughs of fresh evergreens from your yard, a local park or a Christmas tree pop up store. Arrange boughs on your mantle with pinecones and red ribbons with dangling jingle bells. You can also place branches in vases to spread the scent across the room. For a unique and free table centerpiece, arrange your family's vintage ornaments in a glass bowl or a tiered cookie platter, and place lighted candles nearby for extra glow.

Go Paperless With Invitations

Being a holiday host is hard enough without having to stress over handwritten invitations, and they can also get expensive. There are many online companies that let you create low-cost "e-invitations" with holiday flair. You can add an RSVP deadline too, which will help give you an idea on how much food you need.

Make Your Own Appetizers

You can whip up stuffed cheese puffs for around 23 cents per serving. They look like something a caterer would bring but, in this case, the caterer is you. You probably have many of the ingredients on hand already – butter, flour, eggs, salt and pepper. You'll also need half a cup of finely shredded cheese (Gruyere works well) and a pound of mushrooms.

Set the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit, then boil 1 cup of water, 3 tablespoons of butter and salt and pepper to taste. Add a cup of all-purpose flour and beat with a wooden spoon until the dough forms a ball.

Place the dough in a bowl. With a mixer, beat in four eggs, one at a time. Then beat in the cheese. Break the dough into one-inch balls, place on greased baking sheets and smooth down the tops. Bake for 25 minutes, until gold and puffy. Then, cool on wire racks. Saute the mushrooms in a skillet, and when the dough is cooled, slice off the top third of the puffs, scoop out some dough and add your mushroom filling. Voila - a fancy hors d'oeuvre that costs you practically nothing.

Shop Around for the Main

Offering guests a main course of sliced turkey or ham at the buffet table makes you look like a lavish holiday host. But the truth is, you can usually find good deals on meat during the holidays without busting your budget if you shop around and avoid name brands. For example, ham on the bone is less expensive than boneless ham. It might require a bit more elbow grease to prepare, but it is not only cheaper, it usually leads to juicier and tastier meat.

Bake a Simple Sweet Treat

Ditch the expensive desserts for edible hot cocoa mugs, which look like a miniature version of the real thing. All you need to do is press sugar cookie dough into mini muffin tins and bake until golden. Then, make a quick mousse by folding whipped cream into melted dark chocolate and fill the cups. Attach mini pretzels with icing for the cup handles, and you've got a simple, but impressive, holiday treat.

Holiday parties should be fun for the host and guests. If you ease your stress load by taking advantage of deals and preparing dishes in advance, you can host the perfect celebration – without needing to take on a second job.

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