

Menu Item	Timing of Serving	Recipe Source	Notes
Getting the Meal Started			
The Main Event			
Sweet Endings			



Organizing Tasks & Time

If you leave everything to the last minute, you will have only a minute to do everything. The party should be staged and ready to go ahead of time. Your goal, as I've said, is to have one hour of relaxed time prior to your guests' arrival. The key is to plan for this hour. Ideally, planning begins two weeks out and includes one full weekend before your party.

IDENTIFY TASKS

You've established your party parameters and planned your menu. The next step is to identify, group and write down every task that you can think of. These tasks generally group as follows:

- Shop
- Prep and Cook
- Tabletop (identifying needed platters, etc.; see tabletop worksheet)
- Bar/Beverage (identifying needed beverages and supplies; see bar/beverage worksheet)
- Miscellaneous

DISTRIBUTE TASKS OVER TIME

Once you've identified your tasks, plan when you will get them done. You can shop for nonperishables any time. Most produce, meat and poultry can be bought three to four days out, with fish the day before. Bread is best the day of unless you freeze it and refresh it in the oven. Flowers last several days if kept cool. Plan your prep work. A lot of the time-consuming tasks are vegetable prep, most of which can be done up to two days ahead if you store the prepped vegetables properly. Many things may be cooked at least in part up to several days in advance. See the "do ahead" section of each recipe in Part 2. The night before the party, you can set your table and identify and label any platters you need. The day of the party you should have a written plan, including a clear schedule for accomplishing the remaining tasks—in what order and when—once guests arrive.

ASSIGN TASKS

It's essential to figure out what tasks can be assigned to others. You are the executive producer of your party, but that doesn't mean you need to be the director, makeup artist and actor, too. Friends and family—especially spouses, partners and children—are all fair game to help.

NOTES



Schedule Worksheet

Event Day/Date _____ Event Start Time _____

Goal: One relaxed hour prior to guest arrival

✓	Two Weeks Out	Date	Time	Who helps?
✓	Weekend Before	Date	Time	Who helps?
✓	Week Before	Date	Time	Who helps?



Setting the Table

Getting the table ready is the easiest do-ahead job of all. Unlike a salad, a well-dressed table doesn't wilt. Having ready everything you need to serve your guests starts with the menu. List everything you need to serve. The most efficient way is to make your list on repositionable labels and then stick a label on each tabletop item. (See page 12 for more on using repositionable labels.) Use the worksheet on the facing page to identify tabletop items you may need.

GOOD-ENOUGH STYLE

Your goal is to be thoughtful about how you set your table without worrying about being judged. If it's beautiful people will be impressed, but no one will be disappointed—if it's just serviceable—as long as their knife and fork are at the ready when dinner comes.

COMMUNICATION WITH COLLABORATORS

Anyone can set a table—and that anyone doesn't have to be you, especially if you're busy in the kitchen. The key is to have a plan for your table setting assistant and a simple way to communicate that plan. Otherwise, you may as well do it yourself. The best mechanism is to use the tabletop worksheet at right. Fill it out and hand it to your assistant along with your labels to go on platters and bowls. Be available for questions and do a little finetuning at the end if necessary.

PLATTERS AND BOWL BASICS

In home entertaining, whether it's plattering food for a family dinner or styling a buffet for Thanksgiving, having the right platters and bowls is as basic as having the right knives and a good cutting board. Make sure you have a good supply.

MIX AND MATCH

Food doesn't show well against a dark background and/or a complicated pattern. White platters and bowls in a variety of shapes and sizes are the most versatile and attractive vessels for food, and they play nicely with your patterned and more colorful tableware.

SHAPES AND SIZES

The best shapes for large platters are rectangles and ovals—long and narrow rather than wide. This is because the space across the table is more an issue than length. Food should not be crowded so large-enough platters are important.

TABLE DECORATION

Table decoration can run the gamut from beautiful floral arrangements to a few well-selected and arranged knick-knacks. One fundamental principle: Don't have anything so tall that it inhibits conversation between guests. Even beginners can make lovely flower arrangements if they keep things simple and follow the guidelines of the simplified flower arranging instructions on page 28.

Number	Flatware	Number	Bar Glasses	Number	Serveware
	Salad/Dessert Forks		All-Purpose		Large Oval Platter
	Dinner Forks		Highball/Soda		Medium Oval Platter
	Dinner Knives		Old-Fashioned		Small Oval Platter
	Teaspoons		Champagne Flute		Large Rectangle Platter
	Soup Spoons		Martini		Medium Rectangle Platter
					Small Rectangle Platter
					Large Basket
					Small Basket
Number	China	Number	Table Basics		Large Tray
	Salad/Dessert Plates		Candles		Small Tray
	Dinner Plates		Salt & Pepper Shakers		Large Serving Spoon
	Soup Bowls		Pitchers		Small Serving Spoon
			Centerpiece		Salad Bowl
			Tablecloth		Salad Tongs
Number	Table Glasses		Placemats		Serving Tongs
	Water		Coasters		Serving Fork
	White Wine		Cocktail Napkins		
	Red Wine		Dinner Napkins		
		Number	Busing Basics		
			Bus Pan		
			Dirty Silverware Tub		



Setting Up Beverages

Your liquids should be as well-planned as your solids. Here are some basic guidelines for setting up a bar and offering beverages.

THE BASIC BAR

Vodka
Gin
Tequila
White rum
Dark rum
Scotch
Single malt scotch
Bourbon
Jack Daniels
Dry vermouth
Sweet vermouth
Triple Sec or Cointreau
Bitters (orange or aromatic)
Campari

HOUSE COCKTAILS

Greeting your guests with a special house cocktail begins your party with the message that you've been thoughtful. See chapter 1 for a selection of recipes you can adopt for your very own signature drink.

BAR WINE

Serve a lighter, simpler and less expensive white and red during cocktail hour than you would serve for your primary meal. See pages 32 and 33 for more information on choosing wines.

BEER

Offer both regular and light beer. Consider offering an interesting microbrew or international beer as an inexpensive way of livening up the evening and expanding your guests' horizons. See page 53 for more on beer.

DINNER BEVERAGES

After cocktail hour, serve beverages that are appropriately matched to your menu.

ICED WATER: STILL AND SPARKLING

Unless it's an over-the-top formal dinner, a pitcher of iced water should be standard at your table. Sparkling water is a nice option, but hardly necessary.

OTHER NONALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Chapter 1 includes a variety of nonalcoholic beverage alternatives to accompany your food. Iced tea is a great choice, because its flavor is not too assertive and it goes with many styles of food.

WINE

Wine is the natural beverage to serve with a meal. Wine enhances and is enhanced by food. Pages 32 and 33 provide charts that will help you understand, select and pair wines with food.

BEER

Depending on the meal, beers are an appropriate and nice alternative to wine. See page 53.



Bar & Beverage Worksheet

Event Day/Date _____

Event Start Time _____

Number of guests _____

Bottles	Variety	Need
1-2	Vodka	
1	Gin	
1	Tequila	
1	White Rum	
1	Dark Rum	
1/2	Scotch	
1	Single malt scotch	
1	Bourbon	
1	Jack Daniels	
1/2	Dry Vermouth	
1/2	Sweet Vermouth	
1/2	Triple Sec or Cointreau	
1	Bitters (orange or aromatic)	
1	Campari	
3-4	White Wine	
2-3	Red Wine	
2-3	Sparkling Wine (optional)	
6-18	Beer	
6-12	Light Beer	
Specialty/Other		

A WELL-STOCKED BAR FOR UP TO 25

Modify this list based upon guest preferences, time of year, and type and length of party. Amounts are based on 750 ml or quart bottles.

HOW MUCH DO I NEED?

Whenever I provide a client with an estimate for alcohol, I tell them that I know I estimated too much, but I never know of what. The good thing is that except for opened wine, alcohol doesn't go bad. People's drink capacity and preferences are very variable. Do your guests prefer wine for cocktails or liquor? If liquor, the one thing you can rarely have too much of is vodka. Beer is very variable and depends, in no small measure, on the outdoor temperature and menu.

As a general rule, for a cocktail period prior to a meal, plan for one to two drinks per guest. A longer cocktail party could go between two and four drinks per guest, but remember, this is an average. So if you're planning an average of four drinks per guest, that means that for every guest having two drinks is a guest having six—and that's a lot.

I'll say it elsewhere in these pages, because it can't be overstressed: Always be aware of your responsibility to monitor your guests' drinking, especially when it comes to their ability (or lack thereof) to drive.

