

A GRAND AFFAIR

PLANNING THE PERFECT PARTY

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PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BARRIE GIBBY OF BARRETT DESIGN DISTINCTIVE FLORALS

The champagne is flowing, the tables are laden with sumptuous foods, and the guests are having the time of their lives. It's the talk of the social season. Isn't that how it always is in the movies? So why can't you throw the same kind of exciting bash for your friends? Planning the perfect party takes time. We've all had the little get-togethers where friends gather, eat a pleasant meal, and then everyone goes home. But with a little effort, you can make sure everyone is still talking about your shindig the next day.

When trying to decide what kind of party to throw, you might want to consult with a planner. Special event coordinators have many wonderful theme ideas that can make your gathering more memorable. Barrie Gibby of Barrett Design Distinctive Florals says, when planning a party, "Think big, and then pare it down to what is practical." Allowing a designer to plan

your party can also help alleviate much of the stress. You can have the planner do as much or as little as you'd like, adding your own personal touches.

Lend a festive atmosphere by planning your get-together around a theme. Barrie says she has helped plan parties that were a great deal of fun. "We did an 'urban beach party' where guests brought floaties. We set up blow-up pools in the back yard and had lots of beach decorations. The guests wore bathing suits and flip-flops. It was one of the most fun parties we did," says Barrie.

Since retro is the hot ticket right now, you might want to consider throwing a 60s/70s party, complete with disco lighting. Burn a CD with some of your favorite tunes from the era so guests can "shake their groove thing." Have guests wear their favorite outfits from the 70s, such as halter tops

and bell-bottom jeans.

Another fun theme is the western theme party. Decorate your tables with red and white gingham cloths. Use oil lamps for lighting and bandanas for napkins. Place a couple of hay bales around the backyard and you're ready for a hoedown. Serve up bowls of chili, cornbread and salad for grub, and you know the guests won't go away hungry. Other ideas include a garden luncheon with flowered hats, a Midsummer Night's Dream party with fairy wings and head pieces, and a mafia party where everyone dresses like Bonnie and Clyde or their favorite *Sopranos* character. Or, get in the pop culture spirit and throw a *Survivor* party (have everyone wear survival gear) or an Academy Awards party (have your guests wear their evening best and roast your friends.)

No matter what theme you choose, all successful parties center



Barrie Gibby helped a client decorate for a Mardi Gras theme.

around good planning. As with any successful event, the first step you must take is to determine your budget and stick with it. Make a list. Actually, you'll make several lists, including who's invited, what's for dinner and what decorations you'll need.

An event planner can take care of many of the details.

Deciding how to arrange the party can also make it flow better. Barrie recommends placing food and beverage at various locations around the house or in the back yard. "You don't want to create a blocked doorway by placing all the food in one location because people will gather where there's food. Having food and drink stations will keep the guests flowing through the house that you've worked so hard to decorate!" she says.

If your home will not accommodate the number of people comfortably, check into a banquet facility. Melba of Azalea Room says that they help you set up based on your needs for the party. A

PARTY PLANNING QUICK LIST

A Month to Six Weeks Ahead

- ✓ Set your budget; stick to it.
- ✓ Select your theme and choose decorations, food and any games to fit
- ✓ Send invitations

Two Weeks Ahead

- ✓ Plan the layout
- ✓ Plan the menu
- ✓ Purchase decorations

One Week Out

- ✓ Purchase food and prepare dishes as allowed
- ✓ Purchase beverages

Two Days to Go

- ✓ Purchase fresh foods
- ✓ Allow friends who ask to help

The Day Before

- ✓ Complete food preparations; pick up pre-ordered items
- ✓ Decorate
- ✓ Set the table

The Big Day

- ✓ Finish foods that can't be done ahead of time
- ✓ Complete outdoor decorations
- ✓ Give yourself time to relax and dress for the party
- ✓ ENJOY!

banquet facility can provide tables, chairs, linens and the space that you need. Many banquet facilities have a garden area giving you the option of an indoor/outdoor party, weather permitting. If your budget allows, they can help you in choosing a caterer and bartender service. Or you and your friends can prepare your own specialties. Melba says that they make sure the facility is clean before the party and they clean up after the party. They can help you take a lot of stress out of planning your event.

The more you can do ahead of time, the smoother the party will go for you and your guests. Do as much of the preparation in advance as possible, including decorations, food and music. When the party day arrives, you will have already completed most of the work. Add the finishing touches, such as any food and beverages that couldn't be made ahead of time, and finish any outdoor decorations. Then take a long bath, have a glass of wine and get ready for the guests to arrive.