

KEEP CALM AND PARTY ON

You may start out with a Holly Golightly attitude...but then the ice begins to melt and the bugs begin to circle.

This essential guide will help you stay cool (with a fabulous cocktail!) when hosting your next summer gathering.

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FOOD AND DRINK

It's summertime, people. The living—and your party menu—should be easy, so stick to cookout standards, like burgers and dogs. Save the flair for the fun stuff—desserts and drinks. But don't get fussy: Think make-ahead ice cream parfaits and "lazy" versions of classic cocktails that can be mixed by the pitcher.

NEED MORE MENU-PLANNING INSPIRATION? Find 10 ingenious hot dog toppings (including Bacon Barbecue) on page 140, and 10 gourmet burger options at realsimple.com/burgers. And for the most delectable ice creams in your supermarket, check out the Road Test on page 137.

THE SUMMER-BARBECUE CALCULATOR

Nothing says "party" like math, right? Here's an easy way to add up how much to buy and make.

FOR THE FOOD PER GUEST, YOU NEED:

1 1/2 servings of any burger, hot dog, or sandwich

1 1/2 cups total for side dishes (pasta salad, coleslaw, potato salad—you can mix it up)

FOR EVERY 25 PEOPLE:

2 big platters of cut-up fruit or vegetable crudités. (Picture the size of a vegetable-and-dip tray from the grocery store.) Scatter a few bowls of chips around for good measure.

FOR THE DRINKS PER GUEST, YOU NEED:

1 1/2 alcoholic drinks per hour

FOR EVERY 25 PEOPLE:

2 gallons of lemonade or iced tea, if you're also serving alcohol

IF YOU'RE GOING BARLESS, then bump up the number to 4 gallons of alcohol-free drinks for every 25 people.

4 rules for a safe buffet

It's all fun and games—until someone gets *E. coli*. Take the guesswork out of serving a germ-free spread.

Don't leave food out all day. In 85-degree weather, about two hours is the maximum for everything except the chips, says Faith Critzer, an assistant professor of food science at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Unless a dish is kept refrigerator-cold or piping hot, harmful bacteria can quickly spread.

Put salads on ice. You can keep them nice and fresh by putting the bowl into a larger bowl filled with ice and a little water.

Be careful with raw meat. Don't put cooked burgers back on the platter where the raw patties were. And have a second pair of tongs to use once meat is cooked.

Serve more vinegar-based salads. "Vinegar is acidic, which is good for preventing bacteria," says Critzer. It's not that mayonnaise is the enemy. "It's also acidic," says Critzer, "but that benefit is lost as soon as you mix in potatoes or pasta."

A GLASS WITH CLASS

It's a shame to pour a pretty, grown-up cocktail into a plastic cup that says "keg party." For a more sophisticated option, try a translucent (or frosted) shatterproof tumbler, says Calder Clark, an event designer in Charleston, South Carolina. "They're sturdy, great-looking, and inexpensive if you buy them in bulk." They're also dishwasher-safe, and if you're feeling fancy, you can have them personalized with your name or—wait for it—monogram. For lemonade and mixed drinks, a 12-ounce cup works. (Find them at paperhouseonline.com; search for "shatterproof." Plain 12-ounce cups start at \$57.50 for 50.)

stop muddling around

A few low-effort cocktails.

lemon soda Tom Collins

TOTAL TIME: 5 MINUTES | SERVES 4

In a large pitcher, combine 2 1/2 cups lemon soda (such as Sanpellegrino Limonata) and 3/4 cup gin. Serve over ice. Garnish with lemon slices and fresh basil sprigs.

limeade margarita

TOTAL TIME: 5 MINUTES | SERVES 4

In a large pitcher, combine 2 cups limeade, 1 cup tequila, and 1/4 cup Triple Sec. Serve over ice. Garnish with lime wedges and fresh mint sprigs.

white sangría

TOTAL TIME: 1 HOUR | SERVES 6

In a large pitcher, combine 1 bottle dry white wine, 2 cups white grape juice, 1 sliced peach, 1 sliced plum, and 1 cup fresh mint sprigs. Refrigerate until chilled.

hibiscus cooler

TOTAL TIME: 5 MINUTES | SERVES 4

Also delicious without booze! In a large pitcher, combine 2 cups ginger ale, 1 cup iced hibiscus tea (such as Red Zinger), 1/2 cup rum (optional), and 1 sliced peach. Serve over ice. Garnish with fresh tarragon sprigs.

THESE PAGES: HAIR AND MAKEUP BY SPRING SUPER FOR ENNIS INC.; MANICURE BY ANA-MARIA FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PRIANO



NO ONE WANTS TO DRINK LUKEWARM BEER

How to handle the ice situation, according to Denise Gee, the author of the cocktail book *Porch Parties* (Chronicle Books, \$17).

✗ FOR PITCHER DRINKS AND MIXED DRINKS: 1 to 1 1/2 pounds of ice per person. Double this amount if the temperature will top 80 degrees.

✗ FOR CHILLING BEER AND SODA: At least four 10-pound bags for each large (40- to 60-quart) tub or cooler.

✗ IS YOUR PLASTIC COOLER AN EYESORE? A galvanized bucket is more fun and will still keep the ice icy, says Gee. She also likes to use planter boxes, plugged with wine corks (trimmed to fit if necessary) or lined with plastic, and a curvy trowel for the scoop.

the parfait easy dessert

Assemble these frozen sundaes the morning of the party, then let them chill on a tray in the freezer.

pistachio chocolate parfaits

TOTAL TIME: 10 MINUTES | SERVES 8

Dividing evenly among eight 4- to 6-ounce cups, layer 2 pints pistachio ice cream and 1 cup hot fudge sauce; sprinkle with 1/2 cup crumbled chocolate wafer cookies. Freeze up to 12 hours.

strawberry, raspberry, and coconut parfaits

TOTAL TIME: 10 MINUTES | SERVES 8

Dividing evenly among eight 4- to 6-ounce cups, layer 2 pints strawberry ice cream and 1/2 cup seedless raspberry jam; sprinkle with 1/2 cup toasted coconut. Freeze up to 12 hours.

mango ginger parfaits

TOTAL TIME: 10 MINUTES | SERVES 8

Dividing evenly among eight 4- to 6-ounce cups, layer 1 pint vanilla ice cream and 1 pint mango sorbet; sprinkle with 1/2 cup crumbled gingersnaps. Freeze up to 12 hours.

chocolate peanut butter parfaits

TOTAL TIME: 10 MINUTES | SERVES 8

Dividing evenly among eight 4- to 6-ounce cups, layer 2 pints chocolate ice cream and 1/2 cup peanut butter; sprinkle with 1/2 cup chopped salted roasted peanuts. Freeze up to 12 hours.

SETTING THE SCENE

For a truly stress-free party, you want to keep the pests—and the guests—from buzzing in your ear. (To wit, three hours after you've shut down the grill: "Hey, any chance I could get a cheeseburger?") Here's how to create a backyard oasis where the revelers are satiated and no one gets eaten alive.

BARBECUING WITH THE SMALL FRY

So the grown-ups can kick back with the sangría, have some diversions for the kids: plenty of blowing bubbles, perhaps a sprinkler or a Slip 'n Slide, and beach balls. You can also buy a few inexpensive disposable cameras and let kids serve as official event photographers.

mosquitoes: how to prey on their weaknesses

GET RID OF STANDING WATER. "That's where mosquitoes breed," says Laura Harrington, an associate professor of entomology at Cornell University. "The week before the party, empty out the kiddie pool, the rain gutters, and any rainwater that has collected in the bottoms of flowerpots."

PLUG IN SOME FANS. "Mosquitoes are weak flyers, so even if a fan is set on low, it can create enough airflow to keep them away," says Harrington. This works best in a small area, like a deck, where you can set up two or three box fans around your guests. It's also a good idea to put a tabletop fan near the salads.

OFFER GUESTS BUG WIPES that won't create a smelly fog. "Look for products that contain the repellent picaridin instead of DEET," says Harrington. "DEET can degrade synthetic fabrics, damaging clothing." Try Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus Picaridin Towelettes (\$14 for eight, avon.com); stash them in a basket by the back door. You might also consider a bug-repellent gadget for the yard; for the most effective options, turn to page 92.

LIGHTING DONE RIGHT

Is that your dog Sparky? Or a skunk? Don't leave guests in the dark.

All you need is a little ambient lighting, says Jimmy Duhig, the owner of Creative Lighting Design, in San Francisco: "If you're outside while it's getting dark, your eyes will adjust." Just hang strings of lights on the deck, the fence, even tree branches, and add some hurricane lanterns or tealights. Duhig recommends **globe string lights**, elegant round bulbs that give off a warm glow (try Room Essentials Clear Globe Lights; \$13, target.com). "This is what you always see strung overhead at outdoor dinner parties on TV," he says.

What to do with extension cords (a.k.a. trip wires)

If you need to run cords through the yard, says Duhig, snip old wire hangers with a wire cutter and bend them into skinny U-shaped pegs (like croquet wickets, but only an inch or two wide). Then arc them over the cords and hammer them flush into the ground.

the only party decoration you need (hint: it's a piñata)

It's colorful! It's interactive! It's wise to hand out the broom before everyone has had three margaritas! Buy a big piñata that fits the mood of the fiesta (try orientaltrading.com or confettisystem.bigcartel.com). "Fill it with dollar-store items in one color. Monochromatic always looks chic," says Calder Clark. "Buy things people can wear, like sunglasses and necklaces. It will make fun photographs." Other festive loot: lottery tickets and—especially for a pool party—mini water pistols.

3 THINGS TO INCLUDE ON THE INVITATION

When they'll be eating. Avoid referring the grill for latecomers with something like "The grill master will be slinging grub from 6 to 7. Come and get it!"

Attire. Everyone (OK, every woman) is wondering who to wear. Tank top? Sundress? Give guests a sense of the vibe: "You wear the flip-flops; we'll flip the burgers" or "Bring your swimsuits!"

Rain plans. "I don't think you need a rain date unless it's a 600-person church picnic," says Clark. "A 30-person barbecue at my house is going to happen no matter what." But if you want to clarify, add a note: "Rain or shine." Or "If it rains...game night inside!" Just be sure that you have room for everyone in your living room.



I'm melting! I'm melting!

How to play it cool in the sweltering heat.

HANDHELD FANS. Natural raffia fans or classic accordion fans (both available at orientaltrading.com) look pretty placed in big baskets.

ICE-COLD COMPRESSES. Buy a pack of inexpensive washcloths from a dollar store, roll each up and secure with a rubber band, then toss into a cooler of ice water for guests to grab. (The best cooling points are the neck and wrists, where large arteries run close to the skin.)

HEY, MR. DJ

Playlist tips from Michael Antonia, the owner of the Flashdance, a production company in Los Angeles.

✗ DON'T CRANK THE SPEAKERS. No one will want to stand near them if they're blaring. The best setup is four or more speakers, spread out, set at a lower volume. "If you're using a boom box or an iPod dock, place it above ear level so it's not blasting directly at guests' heads," says Antonia. "And turn it toward the side of the house—you can make it a little louder and the sound will spread out better."

✗ GO HEAVY ON CLASSICS: the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson—songs that people recognize. Keep it upbeat, and mix in some newer tunes here and there. "I like Bon Iver, Beach House, White Stripes, and Elliott Smith," says Antonia.

✗ PLAN FOR FIVE HOURS. "Most parties aren't going to last longer than that, and if there's anyone who realizes the playlist has started over at hour six, well, they probably need another drink."

have a seat

What if you have five patio chairs and 25 guests?

Assess your indoor furniture. The easiest option is to press dining chairs into service, along with any drum stools or poufs. If you're keeping things casual, you can spread pretty quilts on the ground and let people gather picnic-style.

Renting can be another surprisingly cheap way to go. Folding chairs start as low as \$2 apiece. (You may also be able to rent coolers, speakers, tableware, and a bigger grill.) Many vendors will even drop off and pick up, so all you have to round up is the guests and good cheer.