

Your Budget



Decide up front what you can spend on your party. For most party givers, food and beverages are the main attraction, so first and foremost, budget whatever you need for what. A gorgeous floral centerpiece can be a beautiful mood setter, but not if it means skimping on the food and drinks to pay for it. If you're planning a big party, your budget will also determine if you can afford to hire help or rent supplies.

If your budget is limited, don't feel you have to pull the plug on your plans. Instead, consider the following cost-cutting tips:

- **Buy in bulk at warehouse stores.** Purchasing food and supplies in the party-size quantities is one way to save. You'll not only find great deals on paper goods, but you can also get good prices on party foods sold in bulk (nuts, crackers, chips, and salsa).
- **Find a house wine.** Look for reliable, drinkable red and white in your price range that you can serve for most occasions. Discount warehouses usually have a good bottle price, but you may be able to save more at wine or grocery stores that offer a case discount.
- **Build your menu around local and seasonal products.** Not only will you be doing your part for the environment and supporting local farmers but you'll also be buying the freshest foodstuffs available. By cutting out the middleman (grocery stores) and buying when a crop is flooding the market, you'll often be paying less. In the summer, for example, delicious fresh tomatoes, corn, lettuce, and beans are in abundance at farmers' markets; in the fall, the stalls are overflowing with just-picked apples, pears, squashes, kale, and brussels sprouts.