Planning to Have Fun

1.

Work out your overall party plan- including the type of party you're going to throw, the number of guests, and your budget.

2. Make a planning timeline so that you'll know when to send the invitations, hire help, purchase or rent supplies, order flowers, shop for food, clean the house, decorate, set the table, and prepare the food and drinks.
3. Draw up to do lists for all these tasks, along with detailed shopping lists that cover your entire menu and beverage needs.
4. Most parties or small gatherings won't need this step, but if you're having a serious party- sit-down dinner, lots of courses, mailed invitations- map out a party timeline to ensure that your party flows smoothly from beginning to end.

Managing Your Schedule

Our advice in a nutshell: You can never, ever be too prepared. A successful party looks effortless, but that's only because of the careful prep work that went into it. And of of the most vitally important parts of party preparation is managing your schedule. Prep is truly personal, so this means knowing how much time you need to set aside to prepare: to shop, clean or straighten up your house, set the table, set up the bar, prep and cook your meal, and shower and dress for the party (really!)

We strongly recommend sitting down and creating an actual timeline. That way you'll have what you need when you need it, and you'll also be sure to leave plenty of time for your cooking and setup. You can follow the same approach whether you're hosting a formal dinner party or a simple get-together: The idea is to walk through all the steps involved in preparing for the party, working backward from the party date, and trying to estimate how long each step will take. As you become more experienced in entertaining, this step will become automatic and simpler. For a serious party, we like to print out a blank calendar that begins a month ahead of our party date, and then we fill in all out various party tasks on the calendar. Spread the work out, filling in a few items at a time. That way you'll keep it fun and won't feel overwhelmed.

Write it Down, Make it Happen

While you can throw a party without making lists, you'll only drive yourself crazy The beauty of making lists is that they relieve you from having to remember so many things at once. Believe us, you'll be much more relaxed.

The easiest thing to do is to keep separate lists for specific reasons: a to do list that you can check off and add to as needed plus several shopping lists for groceries, beverages, and supplies. For a big party or important event it helps to organize lists by supplier once you have a master list.

After you've recalculated your recipes for the number of guests you'll be serving, make a master list of ingredients and amounts. Do a careful inventory of what you already have on hand and what you'll need to purchase.