

Dinner &gt; Entertaining



## Throw a Last-Minute New Year's Eve Party

IT'S NOT HARD TO PULL OFF A ROCKING BASH WORTHY OF RINGING IN 2008 -- JUST CHECK OUT THESE EASY, BUDGET-FRIENDLY, PRO POINTERS.

Still trying to come up with a great New Year's Eve plan? It's a safe bet that many of your friends are too. So spare yourselves and your crowd the hassle of squeezing into a packed club or the expense of a six-course meal at a restaurant and throw a party at your place. Although doing something worthy of this supposed-to-be momentous (but notoriously anticlimactic) holiday might seem intimidating, it's easier than you'd think. We rounded up expert advice on creating a stylish, fun affair that will have your guests begging for a 2008/2009 repeat.

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### The Right Party People

The first step in pulling together a rocking NYE bash is getting a great group of people to attend. Although it's ideal to send out invitations in early December, don't be afraid to start planning just a few weeks or even a few days before the big night -- many people put off making New Year's plans until the last minute, hoping that they'll be invited to a party...like yours! If you have time, send out paper invitations. Receiving something in the mail creates excitement and lets people know that you'll be putting some effort into throwing a legit affair. But if time is of the essence, an email invitation or a phone call will suffice. If you don't get RSVPs from everyone within a few days, follow up with a call or individual email so you can get a headcount and plan accordingly.

As for whom to invite, more is more on New Year's Eve. Even if your pad winds up a little too crowded for total comfort, the energy created by all of those people will fuel the festivities. And do mix crowds of friends so that nobody in the room knows everybody. One mistake to avoid: Starting things too early in the evening. "Begin your party at 9, or 8:30 at the earliest," says Alli Webb, of Bash! Events in Los Angeles. "If you start at 7, it can feel a bit like a five-hour drudge waiting for the clock to strike midnight." Also, a later start time takes the pressure off of you to provide a lot of food. "People will have had dinner and only expect hors d'oeuvres and cocktails," says Webb.

### The Bubbles and Bites

The food and drink aspect of a New Year's Eve party presents a dilemma: You want it to be elegant enough for the occasion (chips and three-layer dip won't do) but not wipe out your grocery budget for Q1 2008. One solution is to ask all of your guests to bring a bottle of Champagne, so bubbly will be abundant but you won't have to fund it all. To create more of a "hosted," less BYOB feel, create a sparkling cocktail bar. Put all the Champagne on ice and surround it by carafes of mixers. Think assorted juices and liqueurs such as Crème de Cassis, Poire William, and Chambord, suggests Webb.

On the food front, you can turn inexpensive ingredients into posh-seeming appetizers with a few presentation tricks. "Place your hors d'oeuvres in symmetrical rows on simple plates to make them look professionally catered and appetizing," says Paige Anderson, another partner in Bash! Party Planning. Another pro trick: Shrink apps down to bite-size. Think mac and cheese bites (just make your favorite recipe in mini muffin tins), tiny potato latkes (topped with dabs of applesauce, crème fraîche, and chives) and store-bought desserts like brownies and lemon bars sliced into two-inch squares. To dress up your standard cheese plate: "Add some gourmet ingredients," says Anderson. "Top a round wedge of goat cheese with pomegranate seeds and rosemary, serve a small pot of gourmet honey next to a wedge of gorgonzola, and dress up the platter with champagne grapes instead of red grapes."

If you want to serve something more substantial, pass on dinner (too much pressure) and do a postmidnight breakfast buffet instead. "Do a delicious breakfast casserole that you can make ahead and just pop in the oven. Serve it alongside pastries and fruit," says celebrity event planner Steve Kemble. "It's a fun change for people and puts something in their stomachs at the end of the night."

### The Festive Factor

You need to do a little something extra to keep New Year's Eve at your place from feeling like just another Saturday night drinks-fest. But that doesn't have to mean live entertainment or casino tables. "People love the traditional New Year's party items like noisemakers, hats, feather boas, and horns," says Kemble. "Put them in a big bowl or platter and let guests grab the ones they wish." It's a cheap and easy recipe for creating a silly, festive vibe.

But to make your bash truly memorable, you also should do whatever it takes to make people dance. Move the cumbersome furniture to the sides of the room and put on tunes that are guaranteed to get them moving. How to know exactly what will get your crowd up out of their seats? "Ask your guests to list their three favorite dance songs when they RSVP," suggests Kemble. Create a playlist of them and hit "shuffle" once the party starts. (You can also burn custom CDs of the favorites to pass out as party favors.) Or, if you feel the need to pick one genre and stick to it, go with disco. "Disco brings out the moves in all of us and can be a real energizer," says Webb. "This is one night a year when people who don't usually dance will live it up like it's the reopening of Studio 54."

To build anticipation as midnight approaches, place clocks (ideally digital ones and all set to the same, correct time) around the room. Refill the Champagne glasses and turn on your favorite radio station for the midnight countdown (leave the TV off to keep your guests' attention on each other). As the evening winds down, pass out cellophane bags of black-eyed peas, a good luck token for the New Year, suggests Webb and Anderson. Or provide "morning after" care packages of Ibuprofen, Vitamin C powder, and stomach-soothing ginger tea bags.

by [Celeste Perron](#)  
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