

Plan Your Party with Flair by Asking These 10 Best Questions

Highlight

Worried about being the “Hostess with the Mostest at your upcoming party? Save yourself time, money, and stress by organizing with this 10-question checklist.

The 10 Best Questions

This is the shorthand version. The experts’ suggested best answers are below.

The 10 Best Answers

1. What’s the occasion? How do I want to celebrate it?

Celebrity party planner extraordinaire David Tutera says, “Ask yourself why you're celebrating. Whatever the occasion, ask this first. Even though it’s probably pretty obvious, a clear answer sharpens your focus.”

2. What’s my party budget? How much can I realistically afford to spend?

It’s important to have a total budget upfront. Digging out your credit card too many times is risky business.

Home entertainment maven Martha Stewart says, “Start with a total budget number. Consider liquor costs first, then food, rentals, service, music or entertainment, and flowers and decorations to establish your initial budget.”

[Related: Plan a Memorable Party But Pay Less: Ask These 10 Best Questions](#)

3. How much time and effort can I put into this party?

Most people are party-goers, not party throwers. Consider your other time demands and restraints right now.

Diane Phillips, author of the bestseller *Perfect Party Food* says, “No one has ever given a great party without a great plan.” Deborah Needleman, founder of *Domino* magazine agrees. She told *Allure*, “Spontaneity is essential to a good party, but you should plan ahead. Everyone will have a lot more fun if you're not stressed-out.”

That includes not obsessing about the cute party decorations you saw on Pinterest but don’t have time to make.

4. What type of foods? Do I equate cooking with getting a root canal?

Either you cook, cater, or buy premade foods. If you hate cooking or are inexperienced, ask yourself:

- How well do I know these recipes?
- Can I plan the menu to my cooking skills?
- How much can I prepare in advance?
- Is hiring a caterer worth the price of my sanity?

Aimée Wimbush-Bourque on her blog Simple Bites suggests:

- What do I love to cook?
- Which ingredients are in season right now?

[Related: How to Hire a Great Caterer: Ask These 10 Best Questions](#)

5. What to drink?

Most party experts agree you don't need a world-class liquor cabinet to party hearty. In fact, an insider secret to wowing guests and saving money is to offer one "signature drink."

David Tutera explains, "A drink that matches the look of the party is spectacular. It's really just the beginning. Then just let it crescendo."

Ask:

- What kinds of drinkers are my guests? Their expectations?
- Will most people drive home from the party?

[Related: How to Hire a Top Bartender: Ask These 10 Best Questions](#)

6. Who's on my guest list? How well do they know each other?

Pull together a refreshingly motley crew. Celebrity party planner Maneesh Goyal says, "The best parties happen when not everyone knows each other. Invite friends from all aspects of your life. It's all about the mix!"

Martha Stewart agrees. "Be strict about the size group that fits your space. Find an idiosyncratic mix of people who will make an interesting ensemble."

7. Party in my home or someplace else?

“Evaluate your space like a critic,” says Stewart. “Don't excuse a small oven or single bathroom -- and don't exceed the space and equipment you have.”

Ask:

- Indoors or outdoors? How to handle bad weather?
- What are unusual venues, like an art museum, winery, or greenhouse space?

8. Am I ready to be the “orchestra leader” for my party?

The timing and flow during your party are as important as careful pre-party planning, a fact often overlooked by novice hosts. Again, creating structure makes you seem spontaneous.

Susan Haywood, world-class party hostess for Hollywood stars and British royalty says, “Most important is to keep the event flowing. Build flexibility into your overall event plan. For example, don't rush dinner if the guests are enjoying it. Let the party breathe. Every party is different.”

9. How can I make sure my guests interact and really enjoy the party?

Think carefully about this question because it involves both good chemistry and use of the physical space.

Adam Bluestein writes in his *Handbook for Hosts*, “Hosts who handle everything with enviable ease know how to fill in conversational lulls and create a cozy guest room.”

Goyal agrees, “Ensuring the space has a special design changes peoples' experiences and interactions. The connection among everyone then becomes that much stronger.”

Sarah Haywood adds, “Even when we are planning events with million-dollar budgets, it's all about the guest experience.”

10. What will capture the best party memories and moments?

This question is often neglected. Should you think beyond your phone camera? Martha Stewart's editorial director Darcy Miller says, “I always start party planning by thinking about whom or what the party celebrates.”

The Golden Question

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

Will the current lighting in the party space create the ambience I want?

Room lighting? Yup, not many hosts ever think about it. You can create an elegant mood with cheap votive candles or softened lampshades. More from the pros:

Preston Bailey, Oprah Winfrey's party planner, says, "When I'm asked for tips on achieving a great-looking event without a big budget, I would say first, the lighting."

Likewise, New York society party planner Serena Bass told *O, The Oprah Magazine*, "Lighting is key to making everyone look good and sexy."

QDoc's Q-Tipsters

Ask well and ye shall party well.

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by Dr. Dede Bonner, The Question Doctor
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