



Extension News Column

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The holidays are the perfect time to have people over, but it doesn't have to break the bank. Careful planning will help you throw a party without spender's remorse.

Think about what time you are asking people over. If you don't want to spend a mint, think about asking people over for breakfast or brunch rather than an evening meal. Breakfast food is easy to prepare and less expensive. Think about serving a strata (stale bread on the bottom, eggs, cheese, vegetables and meat on the top), sliced fruit served with yogurt, and toast, bagels, or biscuits. A great meal and a short preparation time are keys to enjoying your guests.

So why do we always feel that we have to serve a whole meal? Think about doing a dessert buffet. Have an assortment of desserts, serve coffee or tea and you are done. If you are handy in the kitchen, prepare your own, but remember that the grocery stores have great bargains on desserts this time of year. And ice cream is a perfect dessert and simple to serve.

Do you have a ton of decorations that need to be put up? Have a holiday decorating party. Get out the boxes and serve a plate of cookies with hot chocolate.

Consider having an active party. We have friends that have a sledding party each year. They started this tradition years ago and have continued though their kids have grown up and left home. A simple snack with hot chocolate finishes off the day. Everyone has gotten their exercise, had a great time visiting and kept costs down. If your passion is skiing, consider a cross-country skiing jaunt.

Maybe you are looking for a less active way of entertaining. Think about hosting a party to view the latest DVD releases or cheer on your favorite football team, but keep it simple and you'll have fun and entertain your friends.

I visited with one lady who annually hosts a cookie party. She bakes tons of sugar cookies, invites all the children she knows for a couple of hours, and they decorate. This is a great get-together for the kids and is a second gift for parents — the gift of a couple of hours to do what they need to do.

If you are up for a meal, ask your guests to bring a part. You can furnish the main dish, asking guests to bring salads, side dishes, and desserts. This is a great way to share the responsibility.

Besides, you have to clean your house, so that is an equal division of work, isn't it?

If there isn't enough time to put together or to pay for a party right now, consider a Holiday Recovery party. Plan it for January when everyone's schedules open up and the blues set in. Who says everything has to happen in December?

No matter what you choose to do for entertainment, be sure to enjoy this time with your family and friends. Now if I can just figure out how to host a virtual party for my family in Texas — hmmm, that bears some thinking!