

Entertaining Questions (and answers!)

Written by L.A. Plume

Wednesday, 15 September 2010 10:33



Dear Readers,

I receive questions all the time about entertaining. Here are some excerpts from letters and suggestions for entertaining with ease.

Dear L.A. Plume,

I would like to do a little entertaining but am a bit intimidated by the timing – how to get everything on the table at one time and get the guests to sit down when everything is ready. Can you help?

Dear Ms. Plume,

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I live in a small apartment and don't have much of a budget for entertaining. I know how to make a good, inexpensive dinner but don't have nice tablecloths, dinnerware, etc. Do you have any suggestions for how to create some ambiance without spending a fortune on tableware, which I don't have a place to store anyway?

Dear L.A. Plume,

I work two jobs and just don't have the time to prepare elaborate meals. My husband thinks if we entertained his clients it would boost his business, but quite frankly, by the end of the day I am tired and have other chores to attend to. What can I do?

Dear Ms. Plume,

I recently invited eight friends to dinner by email invitation. I considered the guest list and felt that these people would be good company, each have something interesting to offer the group, and they were also people who had entertained us and I wanted to reciprocate. I emailed them the invitations two weeks ahead of time, but three days before the date, one couple still hadn't responded. I finally called them and they said they were busy and couldn't come. That threw off my planning and it was too late to invite someone to fill their place. I think that was rude; what could I do to avoid that happening again?

I understand that entertaining can be stressful even under the easiest of circumstances. The house has to be clean; a nice meal and drinks have to be offered; seating has to be considered; and then the dishes have to be done. It does take time and forethought, but presumably your

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guests are your friends and will be happy just to spend time in your company. Instead of planning a complicated meal, choose one main dish, a salad, bread, and a dessert. Ready-made desserts are easy to buy, or even individual servings of ice cream with an ice cream cone make a fun dessert. You can also order a dinner from a caterer or restaurant and just heat it up.

Table settings aren't that difficult or expensive to come by, especially in this part of the country. Palmetto leaves make beautiful placemats. Canning jars are a fun substitute for glasses, or layered desserts, or small vases for flowers, and can be used later on for jams or preserves. Dishes don't have to be fancy, they don't even have to match. Fill a pretty bowl with fruits, or floating flowers, to make a centerpiece. If it's an informal party, take your seat at the table and let your guests choose where they will sit. Put on a little background music, light some candles around the room, and enjoy your evening.

As for invitations, if you want certain guests, or a certain number of guests, call people and invite them. Email invitations, and paper invitations in the mail, just don't seem to elicit the response they should, or did in times past. When you are planning a meal, and a guest list, it is necessary to make adjustments based on who will, or will not, be part of your party.

Debbi Covington, who writes [Everyday Gourmet](#), and is a caterer par excellence, has more suggestions for you in her column.

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