

The Guesting Game

Written by L.A. Plume
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 06:27



Dear L. A. Plume,

Spring is in the air and I'm ready to throw some parties. However, it seems that everyone these days has some allergy, dietary restriction, or other impediment to easy entertaining. What is the protocol for making sure I don't serve something that is going to offend, or be harmful to, guests?

Deedee

Dear Deedee,

This has become a two-fold responsibility. Common food allergies are shellfish, chocolate, nuts, and gluten, but that does not by any means cover the spectrum. Some people are allergic to shrimp but not oysters; if they are allergic to one, none of the cooking or serving utensils can be used in common. The days of simply presenting a lovely meal and having everyone sit down to enjoy it are pretty well over.

As the hostess, you should ask your guests, in advance, if they have any restrictions and plan the menu accordingly. Or you can simply say that you are having an oyster roast and if they can't eat or don't like oysters then it's up to them to decline the invitation. Lamb is something people are rarely allergic to but just don't care for, so it's wise to advise guests if you're planning on serving lamb. (I had a dinner once and a guest said she'd just eat the salad and veggies because she didn't care for lamb; she was a good sport – tasted the lamb, and has loved it ever since.)

Guests also have the responsibility to advise you, ahead of time, if they have any allergies; they

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may offer to bring something that fits into the meal seamlessly. For instance, if they don't eat gluten, they might bring a loaf of gluten free bread, or a cake, or whatever will suit them and help you.

L. A. Plume

Dear Ms. Plume,

I had some guests who arrived at my house, then left almost immediately when they discovered I have pets. Apparently they are allergic to animal hair and dander. I offered to secure the pets in another room but they said that wouldn't help, which I understand.

Shouldn't they have told me in advance? I went to a considerable amount of trouble to have things nice and ready for them and now we are both disappointed. The other question is – do I need to offer to pay for the hotel room they chose instead of my house?

Kitty's Mom

Dear Kitty's Mom,

I have pets and have faced that issue on numerous occasions. Some people can take an allergy pill and be fine with it and others cannot. But anyone who comes to stay should let you know well ahead of time if they have an allergy. I knew someone with animal allergies who asked if she should supply her own gas mask when I invited her to dinner, so you just never know how people are going to react to our precious pets.

It seems like we are going to have to have disclaimers on invitations in the future that read something like:

- I have pets.
- I serve lamb, and put nuts in my salads.
- I supply only double-ply toilet paper in the powder room.
- I live on the water - do not go out on the dock if you are drunk and can't swim.
- There are snakes all over the place; exercise caution when barefoot at night.

Simple information like that may be extremely helpful to potential guests. Paying for their hotel room is not your responsibility, but it is your choice.

L. A. Plume