

ReMARKable Palate's "Must-Do" List for Entertaining

It's party time! You're ready to entertain, and after the time we've had of it these last 2 years, you deserve it! Here's a starting point for you to hone in on what type of event you want and how to prepare for it. With nearly 20 years of experience in helping people entertain successfully, Chef Mark and his team know how to throw a party!

What type of event is this?

- Birthday Party
- Client entertaining
- Anniversary Celebration
- Family Reunion Gathering

Style of service?

- Cocktail Party
- Plated Sit-Down Dinner
- Family Style Platters
- Self-Serve Buffet

Note: One important aspect of choosing the style of service is to think about what your living space and kitchen can accommodate. Here in New York City, even those with FABULOUS spaces with great city views sometimes have limited kitchen space. If your dining room can accommodate 20 guests, but your kitchen is tiny, that may dictate a lot about your event. Chef Mark and his team are experienced in planning menus that work even with the smallest of kitchen spaces. It's just about pre-planning and execution!

Those who have the luxury of a bigger kitchen space (Hello Westchester, Connecticut and Long Island folks!) might have more options for larger events, and even interactive cooking parties. Chef Mark loves to lead events where some of the guests can learn new cooking techniques and have fun with a cocktail before the other guests arrive and enjoy the fruit of their labor!

Scheduling

As busy as people are in today's world, planning ahead is essential! The more lead time the better. Many people make the mistake of assembling their guest list and checking for dates that everyone is available, often ending up with just one date that will work for everyone, and THEN contacting the chef to check on availability. The problem with this approach is unless you're working months in advance, you may find that the chef already has a booking on that specific night, and now your task becomes finding a chef for an event that's already locked in. This may severely limit you.

A more effective approach is to contact the chef as close to the beginning of the process as possible. Don't worry if you don't have a date locked in. In fact, the chef can tell you up front which dates are already booked and give you a bunch of possible dates that are free, giving you options. It's way better to land on a date with your guests AND know that it's also open for the chef. ReMARKable Palate gets lots of frantic calls from people who have a dinner event that's set in stone, but are scrambling to find a chef to cook only on that date. (or worse yet, a chef that WAS lined up but cancelled on them, but that's a topic for another day!)

Who to Invite?

Once you've decided what type of event you'd like, now it's time to make up the guest list. Sometimes the event itself will dictate who's there, but as with anything, putting the right people together is an important element of a successful event. Outside of a family event, you may want to be mindful of which of your friends you want to meet each other (or in some cases, be mindful to keep apart!) The best hostesses know that their events are less about them and more about introducing people to each other. Be the hub that connects the spokes!

When preparing your guest list, try to ensure it includes at least several people with wonderful personalities who can liven up the room, as well as assist in making sure no one is left sitting by themselves. If you have guests who may be a wallflower, sit them next to someone who is great at bringing out the best in people. Keep the Drama Queen away from the Attention Seeker, and if you know that anyone has a beef with someone else, seat them at opposite ends of the table!

Menu Planning

Whether you are doing the cooking yourself or working with a chef, one of the first steps in planning the menu is to find out if anyone has special dietary requirements, or more importantly, allergies. This is essential to ensure that your guests are taken care of, and to avoid the trouble of adjusting the menu later, having to throw in a last minute substitution and drive yourself or your chef crazy!

It's best to build a great menu around any such limitations, especially so the person or persons with the allergy or dietary restriction doesn't feel singled out. If there is a food allergy, our approach is to cut that item out of the menu entirely, especially if it's something that may create cross-contamination.

When we have vegan guests, we build a beautiful vegan menu that would wow anyone, then ADD meat, fish or poultry for the omnivores. This way, everyone is ensured to get a wonderful meal, and not just tofu and steamed vegetables as a sorry substitute.

When creating the menu, it's best to choose the type of cuisine as a starting point, and what you'd like the main course protein to be. Even if you love all types of food, it's much easier to create a menu when you narrow down the parameters a bit, vs "Oh, we eat everything, give us lots of suggestions".

When we create menus for clients, we start with a cuisine, the main course protein, any allergies or limitations, and then from there come up with 5 or 6 options for each course. Once clients see this all together, often what ends up happening is that certain dishes jump out for the hostess, and the combination of dishes comes together.

Be certain that the dishes you choose don't all need to be made "a la minute", and even choose one or two dishes that can be made partially or completely in advance, with only minimal finishing touches or plating. Also ensure that all your dishes don't have to be cooked in the oven at different temperatures, or all on the stovetop. One oven dish, another stovetop, a cold dish, and something that can be made ahead and finished in the broiler would evenly spread your work all around the kitchen and make the job easier.

Libations!

Planning drinks for your party doesn't have to be daunting! In fact, this can be the most fun part of planning your event! If you're having a standing cocktail party, then you'll definitely want to focus most of your attention on the bar setup, offering a full bar. Your chef can arrange for a professional bartender to set up the bar and be ready to mix up anything your guests should order. You will want to have a full complement of the standard liquors: Whiskey, vodka, gin, tequila, and rum. Then you'll want standard mixers such as fruit juices, soda, cola, ginger ale, sparkling water, and cut up citrus for garnishes. Pick out a nice white wine, red wine, possibly a rosé, and if you like, a sparkling wine. Lastly, be sure to have something festive that is non-alcoholic for those who are not partaking of alcohol.

Sometimes you don't want to go to the trouble of having a full bar, or your event is small. In this case, you can choose to offer your guests a "signature cocktail" that celebrates the occasion. The guest of honor's favorite drink, or something that recalls the anniversary couple's honeymoon, or an ethnically themed cocktail that echoes the menu you've selected. This signature cocktail can often be mixed up ahead of time and finished when you serve to keep things simple. In this case, you only then need to choose a red and white wine and non-alcoholic drinks for anyone who doesn't prefer the signature cocktail.

Your chef will be happy to consult with you to come up with ideas for the signature cocktail that will echo the menu themes and match the flavor profiles. The chef will also help you pick out appropriate wines (or beers) that will best accompany each course of your meal.

Do all this beverage planning before your event so that you have time to order everything and have it delivered, and ensure that anything that needs to be chilled is in your fridge well before the party.

Setting the Table

Take an inventory of your dinnerware, glassware, linens, decorative accessories, and kitchen equipment. Having a good sense of what's in the credenza may help to define the parameters of your party. Do you need to purchase additional dinnerware or glasses? Should you arrange with the chef to bring cookware or even arrange for china rentals? If you're using real silverware, it may need a good polish before the day of the event. All of this may help you decide on the style of service and plating.

Many hosts love to set the table themselves, putting those nice personal touches on the table, including decorations and placecards. But if this isn't your forte, not to worry. The chef and servers know how to set a beautiful table, and can take your china, silverware and linens and make a beautiful tablescape. Just think about whether you want flowers, and order those ahead, as your chef won't do that part!

One note about floral arrangements: Order something beautiful that's low to the table so that your guests can see each other across the table, and not be cut off by a beautiful floral arrangement that steals focus.

Don't forget that candles always make for an elegant finishing touch for the ambiance. If you have dimmers on the lights in your dining room, be sure to set a level that enables guests to see the delicious food your chef has prepared, yet complement the candlelight and flatter everyone, without being too dim.

Décor, table settings, lighting, and music all play an important role in setting the tone for your event. Do you want a calm atmosphere, something more festive, or a little bit of both? You may choose a favorite channel, or even create your own special playlist for the evening that matches the timing of your event from cocktail hour, through the courses, and to dessert. Just be sure that your music is at an appropriate level so that it sets the tone but isn't obtrusive to conversation.

Ready! Set! GO!

OK, you've done all the planning, you've created a beautiful menu, chosen the drinks and dessert, worked with the chef to provide staffing to make your event memorable, and set the table to be welcoming and beautiful.

Now you can sit back and let your chef and the team execute the plan and deliver on exactly the style and feel you want, so that your guests leave happy and well cared for.

Chef Mark and his team stand at the ready to make your event memorable.

Call us at 917-405-0088 or email us at remarkablepalate@gmail.com to get started on the planning process. We look forward to creating an event to remember!