

PARTY PLANNER

Timing and strategizing are crucial to the success of holiday parties and special feasts. Prevent a frenzy of last-minute preparation by using this itemized checklist as a guide for the season.

the month before

- Choose the type of party you want to throw.
- Prepare your guest list.
- Send out or e-mail invitations.

three weeks before

- Choose the menu; organize recipes for easy reference.
- Create a timeline for preparing your chosen recipes.
- Read through recipes and make lists of the ingredients you need to buy. Stock up on pantry items, such as sugar, flour, and other nonperishables.
- If ordering a fresh turkey, do it now; if you're buying it frozen, you still have time, but don't wait until the last minute. Remember: It's best to allow a few days for thawing, depending on the size of the bird (generally, it takes about one day to defrost every five pounds).
- Try out any new recipes you want to troubleshoot.
- Prepare any items—pie doughs, soups, and appetizers—that can be frozen.
- Order flowers. Florists are busy during the holidays, so place your order well in advance.
- Arrange to borrow, rent, or buy serving pieces and other items that you might need, such as platters, glasses, flatware, or table linens.
- Hire a bartender if desired.

two weeks before

- Purchase wine and liquor, and arrange to have cases delivered to your home.
- If you're throwing a potluck, or if friends have offered to bring something, let guests know what to make.
- Set the table, as a trial run, to make sure you have all the dishes and serving utensils you'll need.

a week before

- Call or e-mail guests who have not yet RSVP'd to see if they plan to attend, and also follow up with guests who have offered to bring a dish.
- Make space in the refrigerator or freezer so you'll have room to store groceries.
- Prepare recipes—such as chutneys and shortbread cookies—that keep well up to a week.

four days before

- Start defrosting a large frozen turkey on a rimmed baking sheet set in the coldest part of the refrigerator.
- Purchase all remaining nonperishables.

two days before

- Wash serving pieces, plates, flatware, and glasses, and polish if necessary.
- If using cloth napkins or tablecloths, iron them now.
- Place frozen pie dough in the refrigerator to defrost overnight.

one day before

- Pick up fresh roast or turkey and purchase any perishables, such as salad greens, fresh bread, and seafood.
- Brine the turkey.
- Pick up fresh flowers (or have them delivered).
- Assemble pies, and bake (or wait until the next morning).
- Wash and prepare salad greens and other vegetables, and blanch vegetables for crudité (keep these wrapped in paper towels). Refrigerate all separately, in airtight containers.
- Begin making yeast doughs for rolls and biscuits (some need to be started the next day).

- Prepare side dishes that can be refrigerated overnight, then finished before serving.
- Set the table tonight or first thing in the morning.

the day of

FOUR TO SEVEN HOURS BEFORE

- Remove turkey from the refrigerator, and let it come to room temperature before cooking.
- Set up the bar, if it isn't already done.
- Place flower arrangements.

FOUR TO FIVE HOURS BEFORE

- Chill white wine and sparkling wine.

UP TO AN HOUR BEFORE

- Finish preparing side dishes.
- Bake rolls and biscuits.