Party Planning Checklist

This handy guide organizes a typical party planning timeline--tweak it to suit your event.

How to Use This Guide

- [ ] Start at four weeks ahead if your party falls around major holidays or if you need equipment rentals.
- [ ] Start at two weeks if your plans are more casual.
- [ ] You can even start at one week or less if you're having your pals over for potluck. Just review the list to see if there's anything you should include on your simplified plan.
- [ ] ***Note:*** not everything on this list will relate to your particular party. Polish the silver? Are you kidding me? But it might be nice to remind yourself to charge up your camera and buy ice.

Four Weeks Ahead

- [ ] Create a budget.
- [ ] Write a guest list.
- [ ] Choose a location.
- [ ] Decide on a menu: appetizers, main dishes, side dishes, desserts, beverages.
- [ ] Send invitations (four weeks ahead for major holidays).
- [ ] If it's potluck, assign the dishes.
- [ ] Birthday party? Order the cake if you're not baking it yourself.
- [ ] Need Rentals? Book 'em: plates, cups, glassware, coffee urns, tables, chairs, table linens, serving pieces, etc. (It's especially important to book early for busy holiday seasons.) Arrange for early delivery on party day.
- [ ] Large group? Hire help for kitchen, serving, or bartending.

Two Weeks Ahead

- [ ] Follow the checklist for Four Weeks Ahead
- [ ] Assess serving pieces and utensils if you're not renting.
- [ ] Assemble party favors, if desired.
- [ ] Start compiling party music, games, and other entertainment.

Two Days Ahead

- [ ] Clean house.
- [ ] Purchase perishables such as meat, dairy, and produce.
- [ ] Make sure camera is charged and ready.

- [ ] Wash wine glasses and other glassware if you're not renting.
- [ ] Polish silver. (Optional, of course.)

Party Day

- [ ] Purchase fresh seafood.
- [ ] Buy party ice.
- [ ] Take delivery of rented equipment.
- [ ] Chill beer and wine (if necessary), make punch.
- [ ] Eat something light before guests arrive.
- [ ] Relax. Seriously. A relaxed host makes for happy guests.

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