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Handy Hacks to Take the Stress Out of *Holiday Hosting*

FAMILY FEATURES

Hosting is a big responsibility, especially during the holidays when the pressure is on to create a magical and memorable experience. Planning a menu and decorating for the occasion is just the start.

Hosting also means ensuring all dishes are cooked to perfection and kept warm until serving time, guests' dietary needs are considered and table conversation topics are ready. Then, of course, there's the post-dinner cleanup.

This holiday season, consider these tips to help tackle your hosting duties with grace and create an event you can enjoy, too.

Request RSVPs

Planning a party is even more complicated when you don't know how many guests you'll be entertaining. If you create a guest list and ask invitees to let you know their plans, you'll have a better idea whether you should double your favorite dishes. You'll also know who has special dietary needs and be able to plan a seating chart that puts everyone at ease. Be sure to include a date that gives guests a specific RSVP deadline and plenty of time for you to adjust your plans before the big day.

Meal Prep as Much as Possible

Get as much of the food preparation out of the way ahead of time as you can. Some dishes can be prepared and even cooked ahead of time so you're just reheating, but you can also save a lot of time by organizing ingredients for the dishes that must be prepared the day of the event. A good rule of thumb: If it doesn't have to wait until the day of the party, do it before. That frees up your time so you can handle any unexpected hiccups that arise without piling on more stress.

Simplify the Cleanup Situation

Rely on tried-and-true products that do the heavy lifting for you when it's time to clean up after the meal. An option like Finish Ultimate Dishwashing Detergent cleans dishes in tough conditions, even without pre-rinsing, so you can focus on what matters during this time of year: spending more time with your loved ones. It removes tough stains like grease and cheese, as well as common holiday dishes like apple pie and mac and cheese. An added bonus: Since you don't need to pre-rinse, you'll save up to 20 gallons of water per dishwasher load.

Create Designated Spaces

Guests are likely to arrive with items in hand that need a place to go, like coats, shoes, handbags and gifts. Avoid clutter by determining ahead of time where you want to put these items. If you have a coat closet with space, that's a good solution, but a nearby bedroom may also be an option. Especially if you're hosting a potluck meal, be sure to plan ahead for where each course should go, with appetizer bars, dessert tables and a countertop with protective pads for warm foods.

Send Guests Off with a Parting Gift

A memorable event can be made even more so when guests have a token to take with them. Send everyone home on a happy note with a simple gift like a prewrapped holiday treat. Be sure to tuck these away someplace near the door so they're a pleasant surprise you can access easily when guests begin to make their exits.

Find more ways to tackle holiday messes and make hosting duties a breeze by visiting finishdishwashing.com.



Jalapeno Cornbread Mac and Cheese

Jalapeno Cornbread:
 1/2 cup butter, melted, plus additional for greasing pan
 1 cup medium grind cornmeal
 1 cup flour
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 3/4 teaspoon salt
 1 cup buttermilk
 2 eggs
 1 cup corn
 1/2 cup chopped jalapeno (about 2 large jalapenos)

Mac and Cheese:
 1/2 pound dry macaroni
 2 tablespoons butter, plus additional for greasing pan
 3 tablespoons flour
 2 cups milk
 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
 12 ounces shredded cheese
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 pepper, to taste

To make jalapeno cornbread: Preheat oven to 400 F. Butter 8-by-8-inch baking pan. In mixing bowl, combine cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. In another bowl, whisk buttermilk, eggs, 1/2 cup melted butter, corn and jalapeno. Add half the liquid ingredients to dry mixture, stirring just until

blended. Add rest of liquid and stir until just blended. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake 30-35 minutes, or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Set aside to cool.

To make mac and cheese: Bring large pot of water to boil. Add macaroni and cook according to package directions. Drain under cold water and set aside.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Butter 9-by-9-inch square baking dish.

In heavy saucepan, melt 2 tablespoons butter. Add flour and whisk over low heat 3-5 minutes, making sure not to brown.

Whisk in milk and cook over medium heat, whisking often until mixture thickens, about 5 minutes. Stir in mustard and cheese.

Add salt and pepper, to taste. Add macaroni and stir until noodles are coated with cheese mixture. Pour mixture into prepared pan. Use back of spoon or spatula to even out mixture in pan.

Bake 25 minutes until mixture is bubbly.

Remove from oven, turn oven to broil and place rack on second from top. Break up about 1/3-1/2 of the cornbread into small pieces; place even layer of broken-up cornbread over top of mac and cheese. Put mac and cheese under broiler until lightly browned. Serve immediately with remaining cornbread or make ahead and warm before serving.

Tip: For spicier cornbread, keep some jalapeno seeds intact.

POST-PARTY CLEANING TIPS

1. Don't be afraid to ask for help, especially from your partner or children.
2. Prep your table the night before. Get sparkling dishes and glassware by using a product such as Finish Jet-Dry Rinse Aid, which assists in drying and helping your dishes shine when used in the rinse cycle.
3. Start by collecting trash and clutter. Throw trash away and create piles of items that need returned to their proper places. Remember that taking a few extra minutes to organize things like seasonal decor as you go can help make next year's event easier.
4. Complete each job before moving to the next. Some prefer to tackle a room at a time while others prefer to finish a specific chore, like sweeping the floors throughout the house, before moving on.
5. Be realistic about what must be done before you sleep. Some tasks really do need immediate attention, like collecting and emptying glasses that could be spilled and safely storing leftover food. The rest can likely wait until after you get some rest.



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