

HOW TO THROW A TACKY PARTY

Calling all fellow Domestic Disasters:

If the thought of throwing a party strikes fear and terror in your heart, you are not alone. Often, notions of entertaining are accompanied by nightmares about getting the house clean, making tasty, attractive food, and keeping a crowd—or even a small group—rapt for an entire evening.

I've always had a complex about this, thinking that everyone else's house is decorated with more charm, their entertainment dazzles more, or they make food that's way more innovative than anything I could ever dream up. Please understand: I love having a house full of people; I'd just feel better about it if somebody with some taste did all the work.

Alas, this has never happened and is not likely to ever happen—for me, or for you either. But that's okay, because I have discovered a stress-free way to let the good times roll without any worries about the food, the décor and the conversation flow. All you have to do is host a Tacky Party.

There are only a few guidelines for a gathering of this sort:

1. Spend as little money as possible; whenever you can, use what you already have. I mean it.
2. Worry about *nothing*. Since your objective is to be tacky, whatever goes wrong is part of the evening's theme.

If you yourself are an innately tacky person, you can stop reading now. You most likely are already bursting with ideas for a party of your own. Those of you with a modicum of class may need a few suggestions to get you started:

The Guest List

You can take a couple of approaches here; you could invite

- only the most fun people you know. Imagine it for a moment: all the most lively, entertaining people in your life, all in one room! Of course, if *you* are not particularly lively and entertaining, you'd have to leave yourself off the list. Not good.

- only the most fun-deprived, negative people you know. These people desperately need to cut loose for an evening, and must be taught how. I would consider a roomful of these people a mission opportunity, for sure.
- a mixture of both types, and everyone else you know (recommended). No hurt feelings (about not being invited) = no stress over the guest list.

Invitations

If you're inviting everyone who crosses your path, the only requirement here is to have loads of invitations, and to carry them with you so you can hand them out spontaneously. You might want to

- use leftover invitations from past events. Just cross out "baby shower" or "wedding shower" or "birthday" or "open house" or whatever doesn't fit, and write TACKY PARTY over it.
- let them know what time the party begins. Or not.
- let them know, in no uncertain terms, when they have to be out of the house.
- or let them know they can leave only after they help clean everything up.

Table Setting

Remember, we're spending as little as possible here (read: nothing), so feel free to use

- mismatched, maybe old, paper plates and napkins LEFT OVER from other occasions. (You didn't want to throw them away, but you're pretty sure you won't use them again, because you don't have enough that match. Use them now, when matching doesn't matter!)
- nothing too fresh or too pretty. Plastic works well—plastic flowers, figurines, works of art.
- or nothing. Don't set the table at all if you don't feel like it.

Food

Fellow non-cooks, this is your chance to (at last) have some fun preparing food for a party! Some surefire tacky crowd pleasers might include

- food you have asked them to bring themselves. If this is the case, you cook nothing.
- basically whatever's around. Leftovers from the past couple of days are great. Just microwave (or don't) and throw them on the table.
- anything in a 9 x 13 dish with a piece or spoonful missing.
- any food with the word "product" on the label, such as "pasteurized process cheese product."
- anything in an aerosol can (whipped topping, Cheez Whiz). This can double as a vehicle for entertainment later).
- . any kind of highly processed protein in a can (like potted meat).

Attire

Oh, the freedom of having no worries about what to wear, when you don't have to concern yourself with trying to look good. In fact, looking good takes all the fun out of getting ready. Just tell people to come in the tackiest clothing they own. I've seen people arrive in

- pajamas.
- formals with fanny packs.
- leisure suits.
- parachute pants.
- shoulder pads that could barely fit through the door.
- a T-shirt with a big iron-on decal of Barry Manilow on the front. (Actually, that was my outfit. No offense to Barry.)

You can give prizes for the tackiest clothing, but don't concern yourself with choosing something the recipients will like. Remember: leftovers! We just pulled a few things from the attic we'd received as wedding presents (no shortage of tacky stuff there) and unloaded our "treasures" onto the winners.

Entertainment

My absolute favorite! You can employ an infinite variety of objects and activities to keep your guests occupied, such as

- anything in an aerosol can (see **Food**), such as whipped topping, Cheez Whiz, Silly String.
- karaoke. (This is only tacky if people can't sing...a safe bet for most of us.)
- counterintuitive activities, like going Christmas caroling in April. The neighbors will love it.
- embarrassing games that almost nobody of a certain age can play well, like Twister.
- physical games that involve running and chasing.
- games that involve answering incriminating questions (like The Newlywed Game).
- games that involve taking gifts away from others.
- games from your childhood. For instance, I enjoy bringing out one of the most dated, myth-perpetuating games in the world: The Barbie Game, from my early years. Not only does the object (to be Queen of the Prom) encourage unrealistic expectations in young girls everywhere, the rules are a giant setup for an enormous letdown when preteens get to high school and realize that the rules of this game don't apply in real life. Yo u see, in order to be Queen, you must be popular (the president of a club), well-outfitted (you must have a new dress to get out alive) and have a boyfriend—actually, a *steady* boyfriend. (Preferably Ken, the cutest one. Bob and Tom are sort of C plus boyfriends who are better than nothing, and Poindexter is the poor geeky guy no eleven-year old wants. I play this game differently now, though; Poindexter is my first choice, because I've been around long enough to know that in fifteen or twenty years, he will emerge at a high school class reunion, unrecognized by most, as an incredibly handsome brain surgeon.) Of course, the whole thing is about as superficial and sexist as you can get. And it's a tacky game. But for some wonked-out reason, I *love* playing The Barbie Game even more now than I did then.

Finally, Be Prepared For...

- backlash from your tackiest friends. Once when we threw a tacky party, a couple people came an hour early, just to be tacky. One couple came an hour late, just to be tacky. And one couple brought their kids, which was *really* tacky.
- uninvited guests. Trust me, some people will stop at nothing to celebrate the theme of the evening. Don't be surprised if people bring guests you don't know. Or even guests that they themselves don't know.

But the best thing is, it doesn't matter. There are no social gaffes at this party, because the whole evening itself is pretty much a social gaffe.

And One Last Warning:

If you are a person of exquisite taste who owns nothing tacky, useless or out style, please consider learning the craft from one of your more tasteless friends before you try hosting a tacky party.

Have fun!