



# OUTSIDE AT LAST

## PLANNING YOUR NEXT PARTY

Once the winter is over and we've all gotten over the desire to move out of state, the next major impulse is "Let's party!" Outdoors, of course. Here are some thoughts from local party types about how to put on a rockin' outdoor party.

### PLAN B

Climatologically speaking, Minnesota is a wacky place. This means that for any outdoor party, right after Plan A, you better come up with Plan B. Freak thunderstorms, tornados, excessive heat — if you don't come up with a backup plan, the odds are that the weather gods will enjoy ruining your party.

"It's not just a question of where you hide if it rains, although that's one of the possibilities you have to plan for," says Elizabeth Siegrist, owner of Occasions by Elizabeth, a Twin Cities event-planning business. "What if it's 105 degrees with 70 percent humidity? Where will you store the mayonnaise-based potato salad? Or, if your plan is to grill, who's going to want to hang out by a hot grill in that heat?"

The same is true whether your party is in your own back yard or in a park: shade or shelter from rain and the sun is essential. Siegrist suggests renting an awning or tent, or even cooling units to control the climate a little. "That might seem extreme, but if you're going to the trouble of inviting a lot of people over, you might as well go to the trouble of making sure your party can go on," she says. "The expense of an awning is going to be worth it if it saves the day."

It may sound like a given, but there are people who make the mistake of assuming that a backup plan isn't necessary. "It's sad when people don't have one," says Heidi Andermack, co-founder of Chowgirls, a catering company in the Dinkytown area of Minneapolis. "There are people who don't plan for it and they end up really disappointed."

### OTHER PLANS

Plan B doesn't just mean disaster planning, though. It means thinking about how the weather, whatever it is, might affect your party short of ruining it. For

example, weddings mean flowers, and outdoor weddings mean flowers that can handle the weather. "If you're going to be out in the heat holding a bouquet, you can get the right kind of flower to hold up and not wilt," Andermack says.

The weather also plays a role in food choices, according to Amy Brown of Chowgirls. "Your menu needs to be appropriate to the weather," she says. "If you go with the wrong food for a hot day or evening, it might weigh your guests down. For example, lasagna might not be the best choice for a party in July."

One trend the Chowgirls have seen for outdoor parties is a menu with a variety of salads. "There might be one meat option and then several possible salads, like a pasta salad, a green salad and others," Brown says.

### SUMMER EVENINGS

The best time for an outdoor gathering is after 4:00, during the dusky hours. Unfortunately, that's also prime time for mosquitoes, and any outdoor party has to include a mosquito control plan. Siegrist says that she likes citronella candles the best if they're placed strategically, but she's also a big fan of tiki torches. "I've even been known to bomb or spray the back yard first thing in the morning, although I prefer to go about these things more organically," she says. "If you do use torches or candles, be sure to light them a couple of hours early so you can get a head start on controlling the bugs."

Even the bug control can be part of the ambience, and light is a great way to decorate for an outdoor evening party. Tiki torches, a bonfire, candles and party lights can all work together to create an intimate and romantic atmosphere for your get-together. Just don't forget to light the way to the house, any walkways and the way to the food and beverages.

"When I sit down with a client to do the arrangements, we cover the where, the why, the how many and the backup plan," Siegrist says. "From there, the client can relax. The bases are covered, and whatever happens will be okay because we've done our homework." ■