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FEARLESS FIRST-TIME ENTERTAINING

Try This Foolproof Formula: Don't Overplan, Have Fun and Serve Wine

CHICAGO – Plan to be stressed out when your guests arrive. You must spend a lot of money to entertain. You need to hire a bartender to serve your guests. **Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.**

For many novice entertainers, holiday entertaining can be as daunting as it is delightful – but that doesn't need to be the case. Master Sommelier Alpana Singh says that first-time entertainers need to let go of “entertaining mandates” that paralyze people into avoiding entertaining all together. “So often I tell my friends that they don't need to follow any old-fashioned entertaining model,” says Singh.

Singh's comments are echoed by the rest of her generation. A recent survey of 21-28 year-olds proves that they love entertaining and are doing it in more informal ways. In fact, two-thirds of those surveyed opt for hosting a casual gathering of friends for drinks and light bites. And as they're embracing more casual styles of entertaining, they're making wine part of the party.

“New generations of wine drinkers are learning that there are no rules and are quickly becoming more comfortable serving wine when entertaining at home,” says John Gillespie, Wine Market Council president.

But no matter if your holiday entertaining plans include a casual gathering with friends, an organized dinner party or a large-scale bash, Singh offers a few words of advice, “Have a flexible plan, make it fun – but most importantly, serve wine.”

Along with the Wine Market Council, Singh answers the most often asked questions from first-time fête planners:

- **Where do I start?** First, think about what kind of party you'd like to have. Focus on the theme, size and mood of your party. Maybe a Spanish tapas-style feast sounds like fun. Or feed a crowd simply with an appetizer spread featuring lots of pre-prepared goodies. If you love to cook, go ahead and host a sit-down meal. These basic decisions will help guide your wine plans. Whatever you decide, make sure it's an affair that will allow you to join in the fun, too, not stress out in the kitchen.
- **What beverages should I serve?** Singh says that wine is the perfect beverage solution for first-time entertainers because it's easy and there is something for everyone. Look for food-friendly "crossover" wines that pair well with a variety of foods. Singh suggests Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Sangiovese, Merlot and sparkling wine.
- **What's the best way to serve wine?** Good news: wine serves itself, so you can save yourself the cost of a bartender and don't need to worry about elaborate set-up. Singh likes to invite guests to bring a favorite bottle and sets them out on an informal wine buffet. This is also a great opportunity for guests to sample new wines.
- **How much wine should I buy?** Plan for about two glasses of wine per guest and estimate five glasses per bottle. To determine which kind of wines to buy, use this formula: 60 percent white wine and 40 percent red wine.
- **What about Champagne?** There's no need to get hung up on the formability of a Champagne toast. For a new twist on bubbly, Singh suggests serving an affordable sparkling Spanish Cava or an Italian Prosecco along with the other wines during the meal.
- **Do I need fancy matching glassware?** Don't worry about having enough pieces of stemware to accommodate your guest list. Any glass can be a wine glass. Pick up festive plastic tumblers or goblets in the party aisle of your local market to add a relaxed, carefree attitude to your party. Still feel the need for stemware? Discount retailers often carry basic stemware for less than one dollar per piece.
- **What if there's too much?** Leftovers are one of the best parts about entertaining – that goes for leftover wine, too. Simply recork opened bottles and refrigerate. Your leftover party wine will stay fresh for 3-5 days.
- **Do I have to break the bank?** Absolutely not. Wine doesn't need to cost a lot to be good – there are plenty of delicious wines that cost less than \$10 a bottle. And unless you have a wine connoisseur joining your party, don't feel like you need to open the most expensive bottles to impress your guests.

For more information, tips and wine pairing advice, check out wineanswers.com.