





countdown to midnight

When you **RING IN 2008** with our hour-by-hour party plan, you'll **HAVE JUST AS MUCH FUN** as your guests

It's New Year's Eve. You can't not celebrate. It's a night for raising a toast to the year gone by or joyously ushering in the new one — or both. If you've always gone out to celebrate, this year consider hosting a party at your place. Whether it's an intimate gathering for a few couples or a blowout for 50 of your closest friends, these get-ready tips will ensure that the only thing you'll need to worry about is finding someone to kiss as the clock strikes 12.

PARTY PREP: 11 A.M. TO 4 P.M.

- **Cleaning ... sort of.** Tidy up, but don't worry about dusting and mopping. Your guests won't notice or care — just as long as your bathroom is clean and the food is plentiful. Plus, you'll have to clean after the party, too, so why do it twice? We suggest candles. They not only provide mood lighting, but things seem to look better by candlelight.

- **Sleep in.** Today's a party day. Relax, sleep late! Getting up early will only make you tired and cranky early in the evening, and that benefits no one.

- **Head to the supermarket.** If you haven't already, venture out in the late morning to pick up any last-minute groceries and ice. The earlier

in the day you go, the less likely you'll be to encounter the masses doing the same thing.

- **Start chopping and measuring.** There's a reason cooking shows make it look easy — the veggies are already chopped, and the spices are pre-measured. Do the same, and the actual cooking will be a breeze, plus it makes cleanup easier later.

- **First, then second.** First, poach and refrigerate the pears (see recipe), and prepare the toast points and truffle butter (see recipe) to set aside. Next, mix up any dips, salsa, sauces and dressings. If you're making a salad, toss together the fixings — but leave the dressing until just before it's time to eat. When you're cooking for a group, dips, hors d'oeuvres and salads are perfect, but if you also want a main course, consider something like a ham, roast chicken, enchiladas or lasagna. These main dishes are naturals for a large group — they can be prepared earlier in the day if you choose and baked while you're getting ready.

- **Put on your party face.** Even if you're not leaving home, you should still take advantage of the occasion to get a little glamorous. Schedule a relaxing pedicure for early in the day and be sure to leave yourself time to get cleaned up and





Collect keys when guests arrive. At the end of the night, call a cab or make up the spare room for those who shouldn't be driving.

- **Make it pretty.** Decorate with leftover poinsettias or pine boughs from the holidays, some twinkly white lights and candles, which add a more elegant touch than that “Happy 2008” banner anyway.

- **Spell it out.** You'll inevitably have guests with food allergies or special diet restrictions. Make enjoying your delectable offerings easier by including cards by each dish that list what it is and any special notes such as “meat-free” or “contains tree nuts.”



You don't have to risk your finest china for the party crowd. There are plenty of festive paper and plastic options to serve your guests.

KEEP KIDS OCCUPIED: 8 TO 10 P.M.

There are few things more heartwarming than families ringing in 2008 together, but it's not without logistical challenges: Kids bore easily at adult functions, and parents can't have a good time because they're busy wondering what their little ones are up to. Make a families-welcome party a little easier on everyone.

- **Designate a “Kids' Corner.”** Keep children all in one area of the house, where they can play together. Make it a fun place to be, though—otherwise, they'll feel like they're in time-out. If you have a separate TV-viewing area, screen a few age-appropriate movies and make sure they have plenty of kid-friendly snacks and drinks on hand.

- **Hire a sitter.** Keep little ones out of trouble and ease parents' tensions by hiring a baby-sitter or two. Your friends with kids will be thrilled to attend your shindig when they don't have to worry about finding a sitter on their own.

- **Plan activities.** In addition to a few movies, have materials ready for kids to make a craft project or games and puzzles to keep them occupied. And be sure they have their own hats and noisemakers in case they stay awake until midnight.

dressed up—without rushing—once the main course is in the oven and the rest of your goodies are tucked safely in the fridge.

LAST-MINUTE DETAILS: 6 TO 8 P.M.

- **Break out the party favors.** Noisemakers, paper hats and shiny tiaras add life to the party without breaking the bank. But skip the confetti—you'll regret it more the next morning than that last glass of Champagne. Skip the fireworks too.

- **Set up for serving.** Make cleanup easier with quality paper plates and napkins and plastic utensils. Don't want your guests drinking Champagne out of a paper cup? We don't blame you. Opt for plastic wine glasses—they add a little class without the need for detergent. It will also help traffic flow and encourage mingling to set up several beverage stations away from the food table.

GETTING EVERYONE HOME: 12:01 A.M.

The ball has dropped, the wine's nearly gone and your food, devoured. A success! Not quite yet. Help ensure your guests make it home to enjoy another year.



Lobster Truffle Butter on Toast Points with Edible Gold Leaf

Ingredients:

8 slices of fresh sourdough bread
 3 Tbsp. of melted butter
 2 1½-pound lobsters (cooked and shells removed)
 1 lb. European-style butter (cut into 8 pieces)
 1 Tbsp. of truffle oil
 1 Tbsp. of freshly sliced truffle or truffle peelings
 Salt and pepper to taste
 1 sheet of edible Gold leaf or edible Gold spray (optional)

Toast points: Using a square cutter or a knife, cut the bread into 1½-inch squares. Eight slices of bread should produce 24 pieces. Butter each piece and toast in the oven for 7 minutes at 350 degrees. Set aside and cool.

Lobsters: Slice each lobster tail into 12 evenly sliced medallions. (About ⅛-inch thick) You should be able to get 24 out of the two tails. Set aside in the refrigerator. The claw and knuckle meat will be used in the butter mixture.

Butter: Using a food processor on high, add the claws and knuckle meat from the lobster and the butter. While the butter is mixing, drizzle in the truffle oil. Blend until smooth and creamy. (It should take on an orange color.) Remove from the food processor and put into a large bowl. Using a spatula, fold in the sliced truffles, and season with salt and pepper.

To assemble: Using a knife, spread the lobster butter evenly on each of the toast points. Lay one medallion of lobster on the butter and garnish with a small piece of edible gold leaf or edible gold spray. A little piece of green such as parley or chervil also is a nice touch.

Makes 24 canapés.

- **Confiscate keys when people walk in.** Sure, it sounds a little motherly, but they'll thank you later. Put your spouse or a reliable nondrinking friend in charge of monitoring guests' drinking. Don't give keys back to guests you know shouldn't be behind the wheel. They can stay in your guest room, or you can call them a cab.

- **Have a last call.** A few guests might groan, but just like at a bar, have a cut-off time for serving alcoholic beverages around 11 p.m., and only serve the Champagne toast after that.

- **Make it a slumber party.** Invite guests to bring sleeping bags and make a night of it. Encourage guests to stay the night by offering an omelet breakfast, plenty of coffee and even mimosas from the leftover Champagne when they wake on January 1.

- **Ask everyone to call.** Even when your guests have a designated driver, it's a dangerous night on the roads. If you won't be able to sleep until you know everyone made it home safely, ask all of your guests to call or text message you when they get home. *

Goat Cheese Tartlet with Poached Pears and Honey Ginger Syrup

Ingredients:

2 pears (peeled, whole)
 2 bottles of Riesling wine
 1½ c. of sugar (divided)
 2 cinnamon sticks
 1 Tbsp. whole clove
 1 Tbsp. whole black pepper
 2 oz. apple cider vinegar
 ½ c. water
 2-inch piece of fresh ginger (peeled, julienne)
 3 oz. honey
 24 mini tart shells (2-inch or smaller is best)
 24 oz. goat cheese at room temperature
 3 oz. finely chopped walnuts

Poached pears: Fill a saucepan with the wine, 1 cup of sugar, cloves, cinnamon, black pepper and vinegar. Stir and add the pears. Bring to a boil, then immediately turn the heat down. Simmer for about 20 minutes, and cool the pears down in the liquid in the refrigerator. (This can be done 24 hours in advance.)

Remove one pear; dice it very small and set aside.

Honey-ginger syrup: In a small saucepan, add the remaining ½ cup of sugar, water, ginger and the honey and bring to a simmer for about 5 minutes. (Be careful not to burn.) Cool the syrup down to room temperature before assembly.

To assemble: Using a pastry bag and a star tip, fill the tart shells with one ounce of goat cheese, or just enough to fill the shell. Sprinkle the cheese in the shell with the walnuts and pears, top it with a few julienne pieces of ginger and drizzle with a few drops of syrup. Finish with a sprig of chervil or parsley and serve.

The second pear is great served warm with a little vanilla ice cream.

