

The checklist is what's going to keep this whole party-throwing process a sane one for you. Simply march yourself through each item, and come the day of the party you'll be all set to shine!

I'm one who adores checking off completed tasks, so here, ladies, is a chance to share that oh-so-satisfying experience. Note the "when it's due" column, and take great delight in writing in a date in the "whew it's done" column.

Whew It's Done	When It's Due	Task At Hand
<b>DECISIONS</b>		
	2 months prior	<b>Choose your theme.</b> This sets the tone for all that comes after. Yes, we know it's a birthday party, but what kind? One that piggybacks on a holiday? One that fits in with any and all things related to warm weather? One that reflects a passionate interest of the guest of honor?
	2 months prior	<b>Choose your color scheme.</b> May be as simple as choosing complementary napkins and paper cups, or as elaborate as having the floral arrangements pick up that precious shade of lavender embroidered in your antique tablecloth.
	2 months prior	<b>Determine your date and time.</b> And do make it convenient for you. After all, you're the one doing all the work.
	2 months prior	<b>Make a budget.</b> Before panic starts giving you heart palpitations, we're not necessarily talking intricate spreadsheets here...well, unless you're like a certain someone and get a kick out of them. A ballpark knowledge of how much you'd like to spend and how well that meshes with how much you can actually <i>afford</i> to spend will suffice. Remember to include dollars (or pesos or euros or yuan or cedis) for such items as cake, favors, food, decorations, gift, drinks, and entertainment and venue if needed.
	2 months prior	<b>Figure out the number of guests.</b> Now that you have a budget, you can decide on who gets invited to this shindig. Are you going to carry on womanhood's ever present martyrdom by inviting everyone you've had a conversation with in the past two years, or just those people you really want to see? Remember to think of who the guest of honor would or would not want to chat with as well. Above all, keep the drama to a minimum please; in other words, sworn enemies should probably be invited to affairs held at separate times.
	2 months prior	<b>Settle on a location.</b> Keeping in mind the number of people you're hoping will attend, is this going to be held in your home (outside, inside, family room, rooftop deck), a friend's home (one near a beach or a foreign point of interest would be my choice), a rented venue (banquet hall, art gallery, country club, church basement), or someplace no one has thought of before?

When It's Done	When It's Due	Task At Hand
<b>INVITATIONS</b>		
	2 months prior	Save-the-date announcements—via email or snail mail
	1 month prior	Invitations—via email or snail mail; perhaps include directions
	1 month prior	Provide information on local hotels for out-of-town guests
<b>FOOD &amp; DRINK</b>		
	2 months prior	Choose your caterer—if you're having it catered, you lucky lady, then obviously skip the whole toiling in the kitchen part of this list
	1 month prior	<b>Plan your menu.</b>
		Write down list of food to buy
		Figure out when you need to make what
		Figure out what you can freeze ahead of time
	1 month prior	Hire serving help—once you've set the menu, you'll know if this is necessary
<b>SUPPLIES</b>		
	1 month to 2 weeks prior	<b>Buy them, rent them, or be darn sure you already have them on hand.</b> If renting items, allow more lead time. At the risk of overkill, listed below is every item we came up with as possible requirements for a smashing party. It's all part of the "check it off and you're good to go" mantra. Of course, which of these items you need depends on the type of party you're hosting.
		Plates—entrée, dessert, hors d'oeuvres
		Glasses
		Cutlery
		Napkins
		Serving utensils
		Tablecloths
		Chairs
		Tables—for food, drinks, gifts, dining if a sit-down affair
		Place cards—again, if a sit-down meal
		Tent—if needed
		Decorations—theme dependent

When It's Done	When It's Due	Task At Hand
<b>SUPPLIES cont'd.</b>		
		Camera—perhaps disposables for guests to capture moments
		Camera memory cards and extra batteries
		Music—playlist, band, quartet
		Centerpieces—if other than flowers, buy components now
		Take-home containers, baggies, or aluminum foil for leftovers
		Candles—warming and elegant, good with just about anything
		Birthday candles
		Gift—for guest of honor
		Card—for everyone to sign
		Party favors
<b>CHORES</b>		
	1 week prior	<b>Create seating plan</b> —by now, you should know who's actually coming, so if this is a sit-down event, think carefully about who should be next to whom
	3 days before	<b>Clean house</b>
	1 day before	Buy flowers—whether as centerpieces or decorative accents
		Birthday cake—make it or buy it
		Buy ice for beverages
		<b>Decorate</b>
		Set table—dishes, glasses, napkins, utensils, baskets, serving bowls/platters, serving utensils, trivets
		Set aside place for coats—a bedroom, a closet
	Day of party	Clean bathroom...yet again
		Place extra toilet paper in reach of guests
		Put beverages on ice, as needed
		Uncork wine, as needed
		Put out food
		Take a shower (no time for luxuriating in a hot bath) and get beautiful

