

# Do-it-yourself reception helps keep you solvent

You're getting married and you want an elegant catered reception. But on a limited budget, having the best to make you and your guests feel special isn't easy. Here are some tips.

First, decide on a budget. The money you can spend will determine several things: the amount of food, type and amount of decoration, location, rental and equipment, entertainment.

To begin your selections, consult a few caterers in your area to get ideas for the party. Look at photographs of parties they've catered and ask for a price list and referrals.

During your search, you'll find that some caterers are strictly food handlers and servers. They don't provide party equipment set up for decoration. But others — usually the more expensive ones — do everything from hiring the band to hunting for a location. This type of service can set your mind at ease but may put too much of a burden on your pocketbook.

Once you've decided the general style of your reception, sit down with your price lists and determine which caterer came the closest in price and services offered to meet your needs. To stay within your budget, you'll probably have to decide which services you wish to pay for and which you can do yourself or eliminate. Remember that the more you do, the less you will have to pay.

Obviously you don't want to be washing dishes while your guests are dancing, but there are other ways to cut costs. You may prefer to make a portion of the food yourself, borrow equipment instead of renting, decorate, do the flower arrangements or provide the music yourself. For instance, if you want a luncheon reception, consider slicing meats and making salads, side dishes or relishes yourself. All of these can be made ahead and refrigerated until the party day.

Or consider having a small meal served between regular mealtimes. If guests are invited to a reception held between standard dining times, they usually will eat before the reception. Less food will be needed, but what you serve



Your reception can be simple but elegant.

can be sumptuous. Buffet-style eating is also more social, less troublesome and less costly.

Here is a sample menu for a 2 p.m. reception served buffet style:

- Ribbon sandwiches — can be made up to two weeks ahead and kept frozen.
- Fresh fruit — Cut pineapple, watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew into 1½-inch hunks.
- Hors d'oeuvres — Have a waiter serve four or five types on a platter as people mingle.
- Potato salad — can be made one or two days ahead and kept refrigerated.
- Cake — buying from a supermarket bakery or home baker is less expensive.

• Punch or champagne — Mix for punch can be made ahead and kept frozen. Ask a friend to pour the alcoholic beverage to save money on bartending.

Flowers and music add an elegant touch to any reception no matter what types you use. Inexpensive flowers — mums, carnations, daisies, baby's breath or fern — are as pretty as more expensive ones. For music, tape your favorite pieces to play lightly in the background.

Any way you plan your reception, it should be special to you. And planning something within your budget that is special to your guests is something both you and they will remember for a long time.

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