

## throw a party on the cheap

BY WENDY MANWARREN



### booze

**Buy the cheap stuff. Hide the evidence.**

**BOOST WATERY BEER.** Pour inexpensive canned or bottled brews into glasses, then add a dash of salt to up the flavor. (Not too much—you'll end up with a frothy head.) Float a slice of lime, lemon or orange on top.

**BE A LIQUOR MAGICIAN.** You don't have to be a chemist to turn a throat-scorching vodka into a smoother affair. Just filter it through a water purifier, then serve in a glass bottle or carafe.

**FAST-FORWARD YOUR WINE.**

Transform a less-than-ready wine with the **Perfect Sommelier** (\$40, [thepfectsommelier.com](http://thepfectsommelier.com)). It uses magnets to alter wine's molecules, maturing a bottle in only 30 minutes. And with the amount you'll save on wine, the price tag pays for itself.



### TABLETOP

**Master big style on a small budget.**

**SHOW OFF YOUR WORK.** Don't hide home-baked cookies from view. Leave dessert out as a centerpiece by piling treats on tiered platters. Don't have stands? Just place a plate over an inverted glass bowl.

**BORROW WHEN NEEDED.** Lacking a food processor for pesto sauce or a blender for frozen daiquiris? Borrow missing kitchen equipment from a friend for the night, or get a castaway off [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org). **free**

**MAKE HOSTESS GIFTS EARN THEIR KEEP.** If your guests come toting presents, use the leftover gift bags as decorative vase covers. Place a water-filled vase inside the bag, then trim the stems to match the bag's height. **free**

**DISH OUT NAPKINS.** For cocktail or impromptu parties, skip plates and set out plenty of napkins. Use lasting cloth ones or the lunch-size paper kind.



### food

**Fill some bellies and keep your pockets bulging.**

**LET THEM FILL UP ON BREAD.**

Pinky-up food gets a thumbs-down when you're feeding a hungry crowd. Serve satisfying dishes that pack a punch without sending you into debt. Carbs are inexpensive and always a winner alongside goodies like meats (thinly sliced), nuts (lightly toasted) and cheeses (extra smelly).

**OUR PICK Biscuit-Crusted Sausage-Egg Pie** (page 61), with feta cheese and olives, has a buttery crust and a meaty, cheesy center. For a cocktail party, cut it into bite-size squares.

**SAVE ON POSTAGE and spare guests from keeping track of invitations. Send them online through [socializr.com](http://socializr.com) and invitees can save the event date to their cell phones. You can customize your cards with songs and videos, too. **free****



### STYLE

**Skip the last-minute shopping spree.**

No need to spend a fortune on a new outfit. Instead, get some extra mileage out of your go-to party staples: Disguise repeat offenders using accessories from your closet.

**GALS: LITTLE BLACK DRESS**

- Sling on a wide belt in a bright color or pattern.
- Layer a vest or cardigan on top in a neutral solid or simple print.
- Drape a long, lightweight scarf evenly around your neck (it should fall slightly below your waist).

**GUYS: BUTTON-DOWN AND SLACKS**

- Add a skinny tie. (Yes, they're back in style.)
- Roll up your sleeves to just below your elbows and layer a graphic tee on top.
- Slip on a lightweight blazer.



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**A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS** Entertaining suggestions from: **Alison Hotchkiss**, San Francisco-based creative director of Alison Events LLC; **Nancy Lutz**, senior catering consultant at Affairs to Remember; and **Christine Cameron**, stylist of Style Pill