



BY **ANGELA RANTASHA** OF ALEXANDRIA

Simplify, Sip, Socialize: The New Rules of Easy Entertaining

Somewhere between Pinterest-perfect grazing boards and a living room that looks like a Pottery Barn catalog, there is a magical middle ground called *real life*. And in this beautiful chaos we find the art of easy entertaining, where the vibe is relaxed, the snacks are crowd-pleasers, and you actually get to enjoy your own party.

When I was first married, I *loved* entertaining. I mean, full Martha mode – days of deep-cleaning, curating a homemade feast that would make Ina Garten weep, and buying a mini liquor store's worth of drinks to suit every possible guest preference... and I didn't even own a dishwasher! What I did have was grit, determination, and a dream.

The result? A table full of beautiful food, a mountain of dishes, and one completely fried hostess. My husband, bless him, eventually started dreading company. "It's just too much work," he'd sigh. And he was right. I was doing too much and burning myself out in the process.

That's when I realized entertaining doesn't need to mean over-performing. These days, I've traded six-hour prep days for realistic menus, relaxed vibes, and yes, paper napkins that don't match. I still keep my "hostess with the mostess" street cred, but I've learned to simplify it down to what really matters – great people, good-enough snacks, and a home that feels warm, not perfect.

Tips for Hosting Without Losing Your Mind (or Your Weekend)

Focus on the bathroom, kitchen counters, and wherever people are actually going to be. If you catch yourself wiping baseboards before brunch...STOP! Sit. Sip something bubbly. You've gone too far.

Store-bought apps are not a sin. In fact, Costco is basically my sous-chef now. Pop it on a real plate and no one will know. Or care. You're hosting, not auditioning for *Top Chef*.

Choose one signature dish you really like to make. Your go-to. Your moment to shine. Everything else? That's what charcuterie boards and grocery store bakery cookies are for.

Choose simple, delicious dishes that can be prepped the day before. The goal is to be out of the kitchen *before* your first guest arrives, not waving a spatula and sweating through your blouse while they awkwardly ask if they can help.

"Cozy night in" is a vibe. "Rustic autumnal candlelit forest with a nod to hygge" is a breakdown waiting to happen. Keep it easy, and let your guests fill in the magic.

One crowd-pleasing cocktail. One bottle of red, one of white. A bubbly water with a lime wedge. That's it. You are not running a speakeasy. Unless you want to. In which case... I'll be right over.

Sit. Eat. Laugh. Tell stories. Let someone else refill the chips. Your guests take their cue from you. If you're relaxed, they will be too.

Paper plates? Fine. No centerpiece? No one noticed. Dishes in the morning? Absolutely. You are allowed to enjoy your own party. Radical, I know.

Easy entertaining isn't about cutting corners... it's about cutting stress. It's knowing the difference between impressing people and connecting with them. Spoiler alert: they came for you, not your Pinterest board.

So, light the candles (or don't), serve the cheese, and enjoy the night... because the best part of any party is a *happy host*. *dw*

PREP LIKE A PRO EASY ENTERTAINING CHECKLIST

3-5 days before

- ☐ Send invites out (group text counts, no judgment)
- ☐ Plan menu (one homemade item & outsource the rest)
- ☐ Choose your "clean zones" (shut the rest behind a door)
- ☐ Make a grocery list (don't forget drinks & ice!)
- ☐ Pick a playlist on Spotify that says: "I have my life together"

1-2 days before

- ☐ Grocery shop or order delivery
- ☐ Prep anything that can be made ahead
- ☐ Clean the bathroom (it's gonna get used)
- ☐ Wipe kitchen counters and hide stuff in a drawer or basket
- ☐ Put out serving dishes and platters so you're not rummaging mid-party (exposing all your secrets)

Party Day!

- ☐ Arrange prepared foods on platters
- ☐ Chill drinks
- ☐ Put on *real pants*, or don't it's your house
- ☐ Press play on the music and be the guest you want to be

Easy Entertaining Checklist provided by Angela Rantasha of Sota Cleaning Co.

Angela Rantasha is the owner of Sota Cleaning Co. in downtown Alexandria and is the self-proclaimed Queen of Clean of Douglas County. When she's not with her team providing clean spaces for people to enjoy, you can find her on the patio drinking wine with her friends, paddle boarding Lake Darling, or camping at one of Minnesota's beautiful state parks.