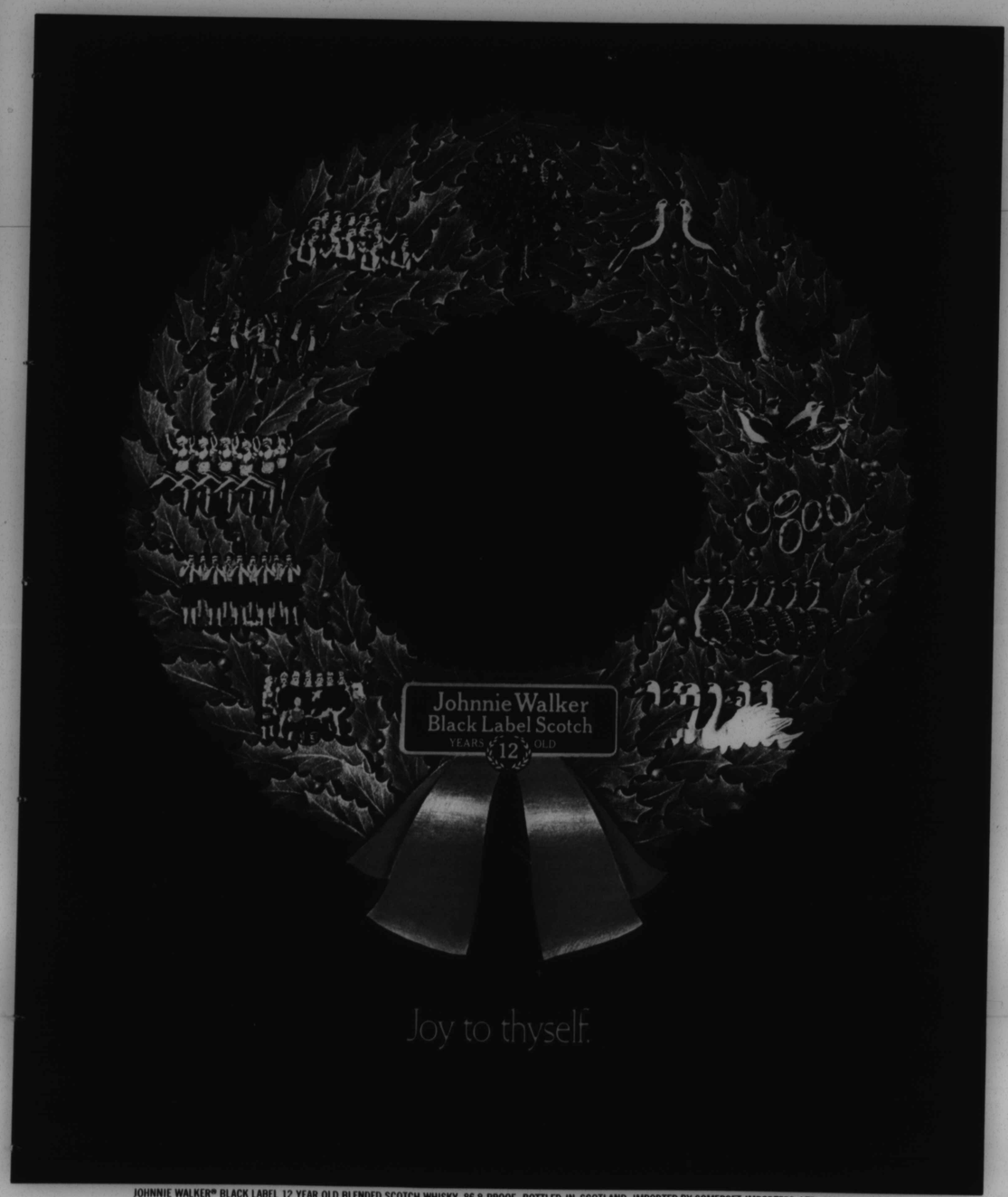

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'Let's Have A Party'

10 Imaginative Holiday Party Suggestions

By Stacey D. Pinder

From Thanksgiving on, parties prevail, for at no other season of the year are people so in the mood for enjoying themselves. Yet in the annual rush of entertaining and being entertained, we often tend to forget that a party does not come with a built-in guarantee of success.

It is only as good as the idea behind it, the food that is served, and the thoughtfulness that spells hospitality.

Customs do go stale, so never be afraid to discard them when you feel they have become outworn. Cold turkey and ham are not the only foods substantial enough to feed a crowd. Roast beef, smoked fish and soul-food dishes serve just as well. Nor does holiday fare have to be elaborate. A good soup or homemade cake can taste wonderful to guests tired of rich food and drink.

A successful party demands careful planning, so every detail should be worked out well in advance. A mingling of guests of all ages also adds to the warmth and delight.

Imagination Counts

The traditions of Christmas are countless and almost any of them could spark a party. But an imaginative little change or flourish made with each repetition keeps a tradition alive. Whether you are planning a late-evening affair for adults or an early-hour feast for three generations, you can assure its liveliness by taking a fresh approach.

Here are suggestions for nine Christmas parties, each inspired by a different idea.

CHRISTMAS EVE PARTY

Have a come-when-you-like Christmas Eve party where guests drop in and out as they choose from nine o'clock on. Serve sherry to sip on, dry roasted nuts to nibble on, and good conversation as the main entertainment.

Later set out the coffee on a long table decorated with greens and candles, which remain as the centerpiece for the next day's family dinner. At eleven heat and serve cinnamon buns. Prepare these ahead in quantity and freeze so there are always enough left over for guests to take home and the family to eat for Christmas breakfast.

POST-MASS BREAKFAST

Catholic celebrants may find intriguing the idea of gathering after Midnight Mass, for a quiet, warm setting of eggs, grits and hot biscuits, garnished by ham, bacon, sausage and mackerel.

This provides a golden opportunity for assembling the more intimate friends with members of the family.

CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

A sit-down breakfast party can become a Christmas Day institution. Invite the same group of friends, jog their memories a week or two ahead by telephone, and add an occasional new face replacing a drop-out.

Begin the party at eleven, get it really going at noon when food is served, and continue with presents and conversation being exchanged until the last guest leaves, probably around four in the afternoon.

The color scheme can be red and green — red and green felt napkin rings, red and green ribbons on the handle of the knife that cuts the coffee ring, and a dashing attire in red and green for the host and hostess.

AFTER-THE-DANCE-BRUNCH

This slightly off-beat party is a Sunday brunch following a charity dance on Saturday night. Invite a dozen friends, comfortably dressed in slacks and sweaters.

The menu can hold for any informal holiday brunch, most of which can be prepared ahead of time.

HOLIDAY BUFFET PARTY

Should you have friends who take a dim view of cocktail parties — or just want a change — your New Year's or Christmas entertaining could take the form of an evening or late-day open house featuring food served buffet style. Since some of the guests may only want to nibble and others may be as hungry as bears, the menu should include both light and hearty dishes.

A suggested menu could include red and white wine, assorted cheeses, and smoked fish for the nibblers, lasagna and ham for the hungry. A green salad, french bread, sweet potato and mincemeat pies and coffee.

MIDNIGHT SUPPER

For a late supper after a holiday party or dance, the menu is light and simple, centering on omelettes that can be made and filled to order whenever guests are ready to sit down and eat. Come midnight, serve steaming consomme on tables set for four, followed by the omelettes, rows of fresh fruit or fresh fruit in giant brandy glasses can stand in as part of the decoration until the moment when the toothpick-pierced fruits are removed and eaten.

Good food, music, colorful decorations should lure your guests and keep them until the cock crows.

NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

Break tradition by giving an unusually early New Year's Eve party — from six to eight-thirty. Many guests will love this innovation because they then have the choice of going on to later parties well fortified by substantial food and champagne or spending the rest of the evening quietly at home without feeling deprived of the customary end-of-the-year celebration.

Set out drinks and a help-yourself collation on red felt-covered buffet tops.

NEW YEAR'S DAY OPEN HOUSE PARTY

This is a double-barreled affair. While it is primarily a "wound-licking" party for the purpose of helping your friends recover from the night before, it is an excellent way also to repay entertainment debts. Whether or not your friends have celebrated on New Year's Eve, they are apt to be at loose ends late the next afternoon.

For those who feel the need of a cool, refreshing drink and a little light nourishment, serve champagne punch. For guests who are hungry and thirsty, have a well-stocked bar and several hearty dishes on the menu — including the soul-stirring peas and rice, collard greens, and good-luck herring.

SOUP AND SPIRITS BUFFET

Wintertime soup and spirits parties are simple and flexible enough to allow for entertaining a lot of people informally.

Hold open house on New Year's Day from three to seven for friends who feel like dropping in for a late lunch or early supper.

Drinks from the bar are followed by two really hearty soups (one the traditional black-eyed pea soup) ladled into cups from chafing dishes at either end of a table set to accommodate buffet tastes.

TWELFTH NIGHT PARTY

In commemoration of the frankincense, gold and myrrh-bearing Three Wise Men, the Twelfth night — January 6 — is a gift-giving day, a party-giving day and an inspirational time to entertain traditionally, yet differently. On this day, when children in Latin countries receive their gifts, give an after-Christmas wind-up party featuring eggnog, fruit cake and assorted cookies.

It's Turkey Time

Turkey time can be any time and freezer-to-table cookery makes preparation simple as can be.

With an assist from the butcher, turkey can be prepared in a way that will be easy on the cook and a delight for the family. Have him cut a 10 pound bird in half lengthwise.

Then wrap it for the freezer. If the bird is already frozen, thaw him just enough to remove the sack of giblets, then wrap for the freezer. Follow directions for wrapping poultry, making sure the cut side of the bird is placed down on the sheet of foil.

To freeze poultry, truss the bird and brush with melted shortening. Follow standard instructions for proper freezer wrapping with heavy duty foil.

When ready to cook, preheat oven to 450 degrees and line a roasting pan with heavy duty foil. Remove the foil from the bird and place in the pan, skin side up. Cover turkey with foil, tucking edges under. Roast for three hours and 20 minutes.

During last 30 minutes of roasting time, remove foil to allow turkey to brown thoroughly. If wings or legs are brown enough, cover them with a small piece of foil to prevent overbrowning.

Once again, to assure desired degree of doneness, insert a meat thermometer when the foil is removed during the browning period.