

# OUTDOOR PARTY CHECKLIST

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**OUTDOOR PARTY RULES:** The morning of. Plan more food and drinks than you think. Always have a rain plan. Position food in shade. Use mesh tents for insect protection. Set up bar away from food table.

## ■ 2-4 Weeks Before

- Set date, time, and approximate guest count
- Confirm outdoor space — check permit requirements  
*Parks often require permits for groups over 25*
- Set a rain plan — backup space or tent  
*'We'll see' is not a rain plan*
- Send invitations — include RSVP deadline  
*Set RSVP deadline 10+ days before the party*
- Set theme or color palette
- Plan menu — apps, mains, sides, desserts  
*Plan for eating across 3-4 hours, not one sitting*
- Plan drink menu — cocktail, beer, wine, NA option  
*Outdoor heat: plan 20-30% more than indoor estimate*
- Check dietary restrictions in guest list
- Book rentals — tent, tables, chairs, linens  
*Rentals book out fast in summer — don't wait*
- Book entertainment — DJ, band, lawn games
- Plan parking — share nearest options
- Plan lighting for after dark — string lights, lanterns  
*Lighting turns a daytime setup into a great evening*

## ■ 1 Week Before

- Chase RSVPs — get a firm headcount  
*Assume 10-15% no-shows, add 10% extra food*
- Use drink calculator to finalize alcohol quantities  
*2 drinks hr 1, 1/hr after, +20% for outdoor heat*
- Order all non-perishable food and pantry items
- Buy all alcohol, mixers, and NA drink supplies
- Order cake or specialty desserts
- Buy tableware — plates, cups, napkins, cutlery  
*Upgrade from cheapest disposables — thin plates buckle*
- Buy decorations — balloons, runner, centerpieces
- Confirm rental delivery is scheduled
- Test grill, smoker, and outdoor speakers  
*Test grill before day-of — don't discover it's broken*
- Confirm plan with any helpers or co-hosts
- Plan day-of cooking and prep schedule
- Create party day timeline — setup through wrap

## ■ 1-2 Days Before

- Mow lawn and clear outdoor space
- Set up tables and chairs — confirm layout
- Hang string lights in daylight  
*Doing lights in the dark before guests arrive = chaos*
- Set up bar area — ice bins, cups, mixers, garnishes  
*Separate bar keeps guests from blocking the food table*
- Make all make-ahead food — dips, salads, desserts  
*Day-of cooking should be as minimal as possible*
- Chill all beverages that need to be cold
- Confirm weather forecast — adjust rain plan
- Set out all serving dishes with sticky-note labels  
*Labels eliminate day-of confusion when you're cooking*
- Set up trash and recycling stations — one per area  
*Two bags per station — parties generate more than expected*
- Put out sunscreen and bug spray stations
- Charge outdoor speakers — set up playlist
- Brief helpers on their roles

## ■ ■ Day Of — Setup

- Buy ice — 1.5-2 lbs per guest for drinks  
*Buy morning of — not night before when it melts*
- Buy fresh perishables — produce, flowers
- Set up coolers — drink and food separate  
*Keep drink cooler accessible, food cooler out of traffic*
- Set up food table — tablecloth, risers, dishes
- Set up drink station — ice, cups, garnishes
- Light/turn on string lights and lanterns
- Start grill or smoker early  
*Charcoal: 30-45 min. Smoker: 1-2 hrs. Start early*
- Put out appetizers 15-30 min before start time  
*Keeps guests happy while mains cook*
- Start playlist before first guest arrives
- Set up lawn games if planned
- Final walk — bathrooms, trash, seating
- Pour yourself a drink — you're ready

## ■ Food & Drink Essentials

- Enough food for full duration — not just one meal  
*Outdoor parties: guests eat across 3-4 hours*
- One option per dietary restriction — clearly labeled
- A real non-alcoholic option — not just sparkling water  
*Make a proper mocktail or lemonade non-drinkers enjoy*
- Enough ice — 1.5 lbs/guest drinks + extra food ice
- Mesh food tents on all food items  
*Insects find outdoor food within minutes*
- Food positioned out of direct sunlight  
*Direct sun: food hits unsafe temps in under 1 hour*
- Serving utensils for every dish — one each
- Extra napkins — 3x more needed outdoors
- Batched signature cocktail or punch bowl  
*Eliminates individual mixing, keeps bar line moving*
- Water stations throughout the space
- Chafing dishes for hot foods — Sterno fuel
- Leftover containers and food disposal plan

## ■ ■ Guest Comfort & Safety

- Shade for all guests — tent, umbrella, canopy  
*No shade = #1 reason outdoor parties break up early*
- Fans or misting fans for hot weather
- Sunscreen out proactively — spray preferred  
*Most guests won't bring their own or ask for it*
- Bug spray — essential for evening events
- Enough bathroom access — 1 per 25-30 guests  
*Consider porta-potty rental for large groups*
- First aid kit accessible
- Kids plan — activities, safe space, kid food  
*Bored kids become the adults' problem in 30 min*
- Plan for drunk guests — rideshare or spare room  
*Outdoor heat + alcohol = hits harder than expected*
- Enough seating for all guests
- Wrap-up signal planned — last round, lights up

## ■ PRO OUTDOOR PARTY TIPS

- Buy ice the morning of the party — buying it the night before results in significant overnight melting.
- Mesh food tents are the most overlooked outdoor party essential. Insects find exposed food within minutes.
- A batched punch bowl or signature cocktail is the most efficient bar setup for parties over 15 guests.
- Position food in shade — food in direct sun on a 90°F day hits unsafe temperatures in under an hour.
- No shade = early party. Guests will quietly leave rather than ask. Tent, umbrellas, or canopy are non-negotiable.

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