



Throw a holiday party for \$99 or less

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From **Ideas That Spark**

While your days may be merry and bright this season, they may also be *expensive*. Your spending has most likely increased -- if not by a load, at least a little. Lessen your expenses while embracing this celebratory time spent with family and friends with the help of a few budget-friendly holiday party suggestions. Here's how to throw a party this season for under \$99.

Holiday Party Saving Tip No. 1: Make a main dish ... and encourage guests to bring sides, salads and desserts. A potluck affair is fun for all and cuts not only the cost, but party prep time too. Lasagna is a relatively inexpensive dish and it goes a long way --depending on the size of your pan, it can serve up to 10 people easy. It's a simple meal to dish out and serve to comingling party goers -- no knife required. Lasagna is also a crowd pleaser, as you can bake meat-lover and vegetarian options. The cost, (on the high end) for two pans that serve a total of about 20 people, is **\$30**. And that's including the purchase of disposable trays for those who don't have reusable ones handy.

Holiday Party Saving Tip No. 2: Serve sangria ... or a holiday punch. Adding in mixers and fruits will extend the lasting power of your adult beverages. A mixed drink can also add a touch of festive flair by highlighting seasonal fruits and garnishes like cranberries, cinnamon sticks or thyme sprigs. Larger bottles of wine of 1.5 liters, will get you more bang for your buck. A standard-label Merlot or Chardonnay runs around \$12 per bottle and yields 10 glasses each (depending on your pour!). Pick up two of these larger bottles -- one red and one white as a party-pleasing pair -- plus garnishes and mixers (\$10) and you'll be able to serve 20 people for about **\$34**.

Holiday Party Saving Tip No. 3: Style strategically ... by embracing the holiday decorations you've already set up. Twinkle lights go a long way in setting a festive atmosphere; arrange strands that didn't make the cut around interior doorways, staircase rails and along the backs of serving tables. Light a few candles in seasonal scents to further embrace the holiday ambiance. Further utilize the holiday decorating you have already done by creating a conversation place around the tree. Also, arrange a few spare ornaments (or those with broken hangers) around the dessert or drink table and play holiday tunes from your DVR or an online radio station. The total cost for disposable serving sets (for those who want to cut cleanup time), an extra strand of lights and a few seasonal candles is about **\$20**. Not bad for a party's worth of seasonal décor!

Holiday Party Saving Tip No. 4: Have a gift exchange ... buying for one beats purchasing favors for everyone. Set a spending limit at **\$10** and let guests know they'll be partaking in a white elephant gift exchange. Each person brings along one wrapped gift and adds it to the pile around the tree, table or sitting area. You then determine a picking order by drawing numbers; this game works best with six or more people. The first uses their turn by picking a gift from the pile. The catch: On later turns, each person gets the choice of "stealing" any unwrapped item or choosing a wrapped one from the gift pile. When a player's gift is stolen, they'll pick a replacement gift from what's left. It not only will count as a festive takeaway, but also as a game to entertain guests.

Holiday Party Saving Tip #5: Send a virtual thank you ... or create a thank you album on Facebook featuring the best pictures of your guests from the bash. Creating an album on the popular social networking site is **free** and many online e-card companies have free templates; try [E Greetings](#) or [American Greetings](#). Your guests will appreciate the sentiment and will love flipping through the top moments of the night.

By following the above guidelines, your holiday party will total in at \$94 -- leaving five bucks to spare from your \$99 budget!

Caitlin Ultimo is a writer and editor who specializes in parenting and family-driven content. She is a former editor at [Parenting.com](#) and has written about family, finance, lifestyle, health and nutrition for Parents magazine. She is a frequent contributor to [Ideas That Spark](#).

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