

# Creative Entertaining



Feel free to disregard the barrage of entertaining ideas that are currently taking up space on your vision boards—Author Rana Florida has proffered insight for any event you're sure to host throughout the year! Whether you're planning a dinner party for friends, or hosting family for the holidays, Rana's new book *Creative Entertaining* is full of the most relevant tips and tricks for aspiring and experienced hosts alike.

I grew up in a big Jordanian family in the suburbs north of Detroit. Every night, my mother would clear away the homework my five siblings' and I had piled up on the kitchen table and serve us a gourmet Mediterranean feast, whipped up in minutes and perfectly presented.

Even on weeknights, fresh herbs topped most dishes, and the scent of toasted pine nuts filled the air. On special occasions, she would lay out a hand-stitched sequined tablecloth that visiting family had brought over from Amman and add stylish touches like carved watermelon bowls and rose-cut carrots to the spread. Those occasions might have been special, but they were far from rare. A week hardly went by that friends and family didn't gather in our house for food, conversation, and laughter.

A Sunday feast was tradition for as long as I can remember. I don't know how she did it, but even with just a moment's notice, my mother could entertain a group of 20 or more,

effortlessly and efficiently. She didn't need caterers or florists—she had my sisters and me pitch in by picking flowers, vegetables, and fresh herbs from the garden and helping out in the kitchen.

All of my aunts shared her talent for hospitality and taught me that one of the nicest things you can do for people is cook for them. The food they served was always fresh and delicious and the presentation gorgeous and chic. The crystal chandelier was dimmed just right, the music festive but unobtrusive, and the place settings just right.

I learned from a young age that our heritage as Jordanians was to be welcoming and warm. No matter who the guest, everyone is feasted like

royalty. I assumed that was how every family entertained. My mother's brisk efficiency in the kitchen and elegance at the table and my father's welcoming manner rubbed off on me.

Now, as an adult, those weekly Sunday gatherings are a cherished memory of a bygone era. Our lives today are "crazy busy." Most of us freak out at the thought of entertaining—with all the responsibilities that work and family throw our way, the thought of whipping up a dinner party at home presents a daunting task, to say the least. Cooking dinner for 10 guests... are you mad?! Whether it's the hefty price tag associated with caterers, getting the menu just right, meeting everybody's dietary restrictions, or



choosing the right mix of company, the stress of entertaining can keep us from enjoying our own occasions—if we even have them at all.

But we should never be too busy for what really matters in life—opening up our homes and spending time with loved ones. So I’m constantly seeking excuses to gather friends and family for a festive feast. I don’t look at it as work: It’s so much fun to get off my computer and put the emails, conference calls, and meetings on hold to start planning, prepping, and making! I feel transported back to my fifth-grade art class, where I lost myself completely for a few hours in the process of creating. I loved that feeling, of being lost in time, of free flow. In positive psychology, flow is defined as “being fully immersed in the exercise at hand and feeling energized and focused, while fully enjoying the process of the activity.” Cooking, art, design, and creativity capture my attention, motivate me to work harder, and energize me to be more productive. The hallmark of flow is a feeling of spontaneous joy while performing a task.

All distractions and stress are washed away, and imagination is piqued. Being creative is one of the most pleasurable experiences in the world. Using our hands to form dough or mix ingredients and experimenting with art, design, and décor are at the heart of creative entertaining. Putting together a festive feast for friends with new recipes, spices, and herbs, transforming an ordinary dinner table to an exotic escape, or dabbling in mixology with cocktails from a far-flung locale can bring so much joy.







But most of us have forgotten how much fun it truly can be. Creative Entertaining will show you that entertaining at home doesn't have to be expensive, time consuming, or difficult. Done right, it can be deeply satisfying and, yes, fun. Entertaining at home is more personal, more relaxed, and more intimate than meeting people in a restaurant, and

you can personalize everything—from lighting to music to the menu—all to your liking.

Doing it right is the key. Red plastic cups, BYOB, and paper plates are not an option unless you're a college freshman hosting a dorm party. While I'm not a classically trained designer, events planner, or chef,

I am an avid student of all three. I love dabbling, mixing and matching, and checking out the latest fashions in design, décor, art, and the newest culinary trends. And, as my siblings know all- too-well, I will be the first to tell you if your entertaining is not up to par. My philosophy is simple: If you're not going to entertain well, don't bother entertaining at all!



## Essential List to Stock Your Bar

### Spirits and Liqueurs

Gin  
Tequila  
Vodka  
Dark Rum  
Light Rum  
Bourbon  
Brandy  
Whiskey  
Scotch  
Amaretto  
Limoncello  
Triple Sec  
Dry and Sweet Vermouth  
Orange and Lemon Bitters  
Coffee Liqueur

### Mixers

Lime Juice  
Lemon Juice  
Pineapple Juice  
Tomato Juice  
Orange Juice  
Cranberry Juice  
Grapefruit Juice  
Pomegranate Juice  
Seltzer  
Perrier  
Ginger Ale  
San Pellegrino

### Nice To Have Around

Mint  
Basil  
Rosemary  
Cilantro  
Ginger  
Fresh fruit  
Celery  
Cinnamon  
Cocktail Onions  
Nutmeg  
Olives  
Salt  
Sugar  
Whipped Cream

