

THE THANKSGIVING BUFFET



BY SHARON SARGEANT

PLANNING EXPERIENCE



I'm honored that you've chosen this Holiday Meal Planning Guide to help you create a season filled with joy, comfort, and delicious food—without the financial stress. The holidays are a special time for gathering with family and friends, sharing laughter, and celebrating the traditions that make this time of year so meaningful.

With years of experience in planning heartfelt celebrations and family gatherings, I created this guide to make your holiday meal planning simple, affordable, and stress-free. Inside, you'll find practical tips for organizing your menu, stretching your grocery budget, and preparing dishes that bring warmth and flavor to the table.

Whether you're hosting a big family dinner or a cozy get-together, this guide will walk you through each step—from choosing recipes to managing your shopping list—with thoughtful suggestions for saving time and money.

Let's begin this journey together, creating a memorable Thanksgiving and Christmas season that fills your home with love, laughter, and the comforting aroma of home-cooked meals—all while keeping your budget intact.

Sharon Sargeant

Copyright © 2025 The Party Planning Experience
THE BUDGET FRIENDLY HOLIDAY MEAL PLANNING EXPERIENCE

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed at the address below:
Encore Portfolio LLC
4393 Kevin Walker Drive #1164
Montclair, VA 22025

Published in 2025 by Encore Portfolio LLC
Authored by Sharon Sargeant
Editing by Edward Sargeant

SECTIONS

- 01 HOLIDAY MEAL PLANNING
- CALENDARS
 - TIMELINE
 - GUEST LIST

page 1-5

- 02 MEAL PLAN
- MENU
 - SOUTHERN STYLE MEAL
 - SHOPPING CHECKLIST
 - BUFFET LAYOUT

page 6 -10

- 03 ENTERTAINMENT
- DIGITAL MUSIC
 - PHOTO LIST
 - SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

page 11-13

- 04 PLANNING YOUR GATHERING
- DAY BEFORE SCHEDULE
 - DAY OF SCHEDULE
 - FINAL CHECKLIST
 - GROCERY LIST WORKSHEET

page 14-18

SECTIONS

SECTION

1

HOLIDAY MEAL PLANNING

The holidays are meant to be a time of joy, laughter, and togetherness—but for many families, they can also bring stress with the planning, preparation, and coordination that go into hosting. Between organizing menus, choosing recipes, decorating your space, and preparing for guests, it's easy to feel overwhelmed before the first pie hits the oven.

This book was created to help you plan your Thanksgiving and Christmas meals with confidence, creativity, and care. Inside, you'll find practical meal plans, shopping lists, and recipes designed to bring ease, flavor, and tradition to your holiday table. You'll also discover tips for reducing waste, repurposing leftovers, and making the most of what's already in your pantry.

Whether you're hosting a crowd or preparing a cozy meal for two, this guide will show you how to serve dishes that sparkle with holiday spirit. After all, the heart of the holidays isn't found in elaborate ingredients or complex menus. It's in the laughter shared around the table, the stories retold year after year, and the love that fills the room.

So, grab a cup of cocoa, pull up a chair, and let's plan a holiday feast that warms both your heart and your home.

THE TIMELINE PARTY EXPERIENCE

FOUR WEEK PLAN

WEEK ONE

01

Timeline
Budget
Guest List

WEEK TWO

02

Shopping
Plan for Guest

WEEK THREE

03

Party Coordination
Fine Tune

WEEK FOUR

04

Purchase Final Items
Plan the Buffet
Happy Holidays!

JAN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

FEB

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

MAR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

APR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

MAY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

JUN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

JUL

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

AUG

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

SEP

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

OCT

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

NOV

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

DEC

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

GUEST LIST

NO.	NAME	PHONE NUMBER
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		

GUEST LIST

NO.	NAME	PHONE NUMBER
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		
26		
27		
28		
29		
30		

SECTION

2

MEAL PLAN

In this section, we'll help make your holiday meal planning a little easier by guiding you through the process of preparing a warm, Southern-style feast that brings everyone together. From choosing the right dishes to organizing your kitchen helpers, thoughtful planning ensures your holiday table is filled with love, flavor, and tradition.

Whether you're known for your cornbread dressing, sweet potato casserole, or perfectly seasoned green beans, working with family and friends to share the cooking and setup helps lighten your load. The goal is to create a joyful, well-organized celebration where guests can relax, laugh, and savor every bite of good Southern cooking.

This section includes a planning sheet for jotting down recipes, grocery lists, and helping hands, as well as sample menu options and a checklist to guide you through each step of your holiday preparation—from the first shopping trip to the last slice of cake.

SOUTHERN STYLE MEAL

This page gives an old standard Southern Style Menu that is often used for these events. The food should be served by “helping hands” and there should be a drink station with cups of ice and tea/lemonade already poured. This drink station should be at a separate table to keep the good buffet line moving.

ITEMS

UTENSILS

- sterno serving sets
- two sterno per dish
- water pans
- food serving pans
- foil
- serving utensils
- condiments

PAPER PRODUCTS

- plates (dinner and dessert)
- drinking cups
- forks, knives, spoons
- napkins

TIPS

- Purchase gallon water jugs to place homemade tea in after cooling
- precut desserts and create a dessert and coffee station during dinner time
- create the drink station separate from the food so that things don't bottle neck in the buffet line

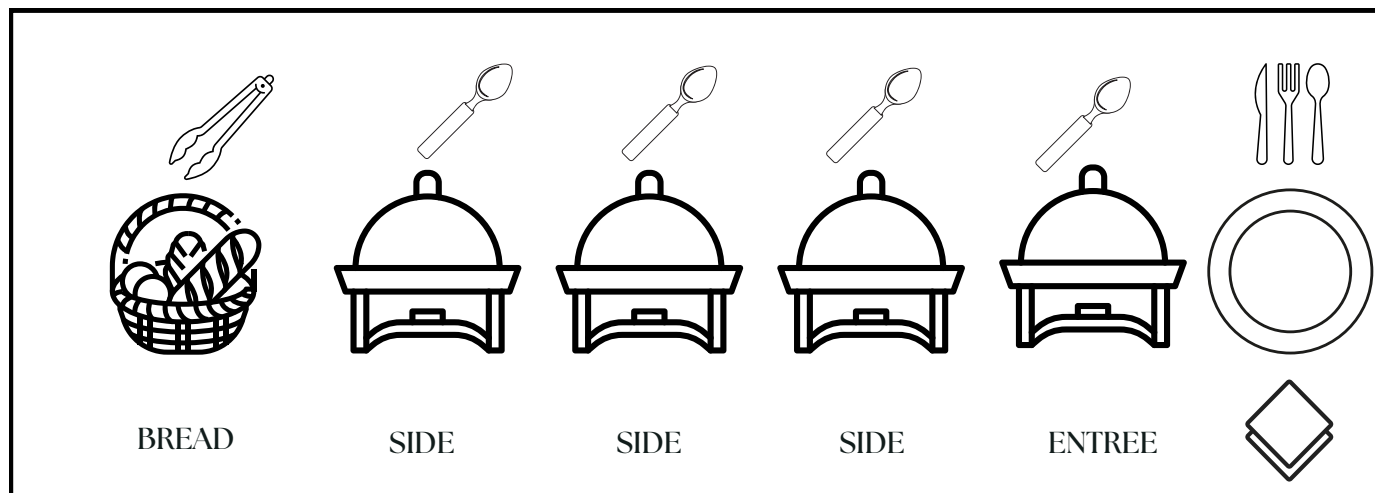
MENU

- Baked Turkey w/Gravy
- Ham
- Cornbread Stuffing
- Macaroni and Cheese
- Sweet Potatoes
- Collard Greens
- Cranberry Sauce
- Rolls
- Tea with lemon slices
- Yellow Cake with Lemon Glazed Icing
- Sweet Potato Pie

HOLIDAY BUFFET LAYOUT

This is a sample chart to show you how to organize and plan for your buffet table. Go to the thrift store and find a few unique items for food display. There is a blank worksheet provided for you to use to set up your buffet.

ITEMS	SERVING DISH CONTAINER	UTENSILS
ENTREE #1	CHAFING DISH	TONGS
ENTREE #2	CHAFING DISH	TONGS
SIDE	CHAFING DISH	SPOON
SIDE	CHAFING DISH	SPOON
SIDE	CHAFING DISH	SPOON
SIDE	CHAFING DISH	SPOON
BREAD	BASKET	TONGS
UTENSILS/NAPKINS	CADDY	----
PLATES	ON BUFFET TABLE	----
DESSERTS	READY TO PICK UP ON DESSERT PLATES	PLACE ON A SEPARATE TABLE
BEVERAGES	READY TO PICK UP CUPS WITH ICE	PLACE ON A SEPARATE TABLE



9

SHOPPING CHECKLIST MENU

Use the checklist below to create a shopping list for the menu given. This is not an exhaustive list of all seasoning items that you may use. Please see suggested recipes and season according to your dietary needs.

SIDES

- ☐ sweet potatoes
- ☐ brown sugar
- ☐ butter
- ☐ celery
- ☐ sugar
- ☐ collard greens
- ☐ smoked turkey necks
- ☐ bouillon chicken (Better Than Bouillon)
- ☐ salt and pepper
- ☐ stove top stuffing (add extra stuff)
- ☐ onions
- ☐ macaroni (Patti Labelle's recipe)
- ☐ munster cheese
- ☐ sharp cheese
- ☐ mild cheddar cheese
- ☐ monterey jack cheese
- ☐ half and half
- ☐ velveeta cheese
- ☐ eggs
- ☐ vegetable oil
- ☐ bag of cranberries (follow bag instructions)
- ☐ hawaiian rolls or Mrs. Shubert's

ENTREES

- ☐ Turkey (thaw, brine and season days before)
- ☐ Ham (glaze recipe included)
- ☐ lemons
- ☐ cooler for ice
- ☐ sugar
- ☐ ice

DESSERTS

- ☐ cakes
- ☐ pies
- ☐ cake and pie serving utensils

DRINKS

- ☐ tea (lipton's bags)
- ☐ lemonade (4C)
- ☐ lemons
- ☐ cooler for ice
- ☐ sugar
- ☐ ice

SERVING AND PAPER PRODUCTS

- ☐ serving utensils - tongs and spoons (disposable)
- ☐ chafing dishes (disposable)
- ☐ chafing dish racks
- ☐ sterno cans (two for each set)
- ☐ matches
- ☐ tables clothes (disposable)
- ☐ cups
- ☐ dinner plates
- ☐ dessert plates
- ☐ forks and knives
- ☐ napkins
- ☐ centerpieces - use fresh flowers (see tutorial)
- ☐ plastic gloves for serving
- ☐ foil
- ☐ ziploc bags

SECTION

3

THE ENTERTAINMENT

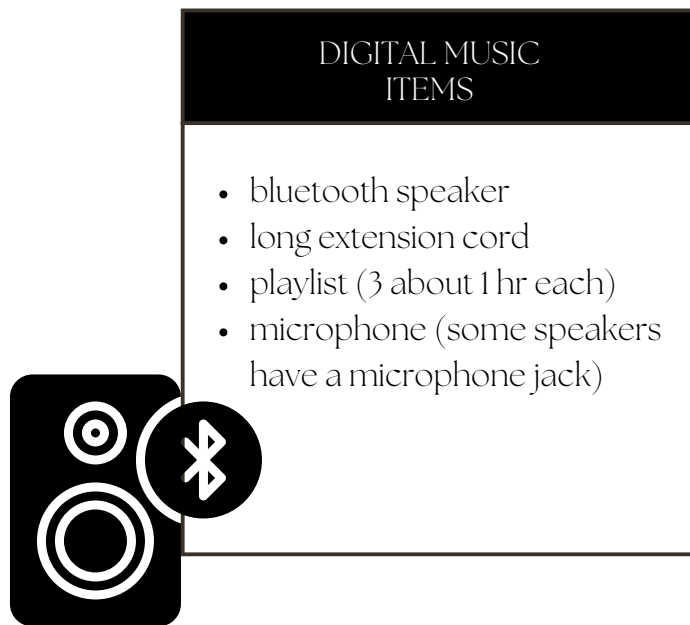
"No holiday gathering is complete without a little fun and laughter! Set the tone with a festive music playlist that keeps the energy bright from start to finish. Mix in timeless classics like "Silent Night" and "This Christmas" with upbeat favorites such as "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" or "All I Want for Christmas Is You." For a Southern twist, add a few soulful holiday hits or jazzy instrumentals that pair perfectly with good food and warm conversation. You can even invite guests to share their favorite holiday song or take turns being the "DJ" for the evening.

Keep the celebration going with lighthearted games and activities that bring everyone together. Try a holiday trivia challenge, a Christmas carol name-that-tune contest, or a fun "gift wrap race" where teams compete to wrap boxes the fastest. If your group enjoys laughter, set up a holiday photo booth with props like Santa hats, reindeer antlers, and festive signs. For more sentimental moments, encourage guests to share a favorite holiday memory or tradition. These simple entertainment ideas add joy, connection, and a touch of playful spirit to your gathering—making it one your guests will remember long after the last slice of pie is gone.

THE DIGITAL MUSIC EXPERIENCE

This information will assist you with getting your digital music organized for your special event.

- You will begin by creating a music playlist for this event on your platform of choice
- If you have Spotify there is a starter list of songs under “The Party Planning Experience”
- Name your playlist (Example: Thanksgiving Songs 2025, Holiday Songs 2025, etc)
- TIP: If you borrow a Bluetooth speaker make sure it has all of the parts when you pick it up. Make sure that you pick it up early enough to learn the system and how you will connect it to your phone’s system.



HELPERS

NO.	NAME	DUTIES	PHONE
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

SECTION

4

PLANNING YOUR GATHERING

This section is designed to help you manage all the thoughtful details that go into hosting a smooth and memorable holiday gathering. From setting the schedule to organizing your kitchen helpers, a little preparation goes a long way toward creating a stress-free celebration.

Inside, you'll find planning worksheets to help you outline your menu, shopping list, and cooking timeline—so you can enjoy more time with your guests and less time in the kitchen. These tools make it easy to keep track of what needs to be prepared, who's bringing what dish, and when each item should go in the oven.

We've also included a "Last-Minute Tips" checklist for those final touches—like setting the table, warming the rolls, brewing the tea or coffee, and making sure serving utensils and extra seating are ready.

Additionally, you'll find a simple "Things to Do" list that covers common hosting tasks, such as confirming your guest count, preparing to-go containers for leftovers, and setting up a cozy space for conversation and laughter.

Whether your gathering is large or small, these planning tools will help ensure your holiday meal runs smoothly, stays within budget, and is filled with warmth, flavor, and good company.

DAY BEFORE SCHEDULE

8:00 am

9:00 am

10:00 am

11:00 am

12:00 n

1:00 pm

2:00 pm

3:00 pm

4:00 pm

5:00 pm

6:00 pm

7:00 pm

DAY OF SCHEDULE

8:00 am

9:00 am

10:00 am

11:00 am

12:00 n

1:00 pm

2:00 pm

3:00 pm

4:00 pm

5:00 pm

6:00 pm

7:00 pm

FINAL CHECKLIST

HELPER

[illegible]

FOOD

[illegible]

MUSIC

[illegible]

THINGS TO DO

[illegible]

GROCERY LIST

[illegible][illegible]

THE PARTY

Thank you for purchasing “THE PARTY PLANNING EXPERIENCE” guide book. There are many digital themed books available for you to purchase from our collection. Please take a look at what we have available now on the website below! We appreciate your loyalty and patronage.

PLANNING
EXPERIENCE



www.thepartyplanningexperience.com

BY SHARON SARGEANT