

THE ULTIMATE MARDI GRAS HOUSE PARTY

All the beads, masks and foods you need for an authentic Mardi Gras Party

Bring the spirit of the Big Easy home for a celebration that will get family and friends to come marching in. For a festive house party, follow these quick tips and tricks to help capture the spirit of Mardi Gras – no matter where in the country you are.

Eat, Drink and Be Merry.

The centerpiece of a real Mardi Gras celebration is the menu. Zatarain's offers authentic New Orleans-Style foods that are one-pot favorites and perfect for serving to guests at a party. Start with a mix like jambalaya, gumbo, dirty rice or red beans and rice and customize to your taste buds' content – try adding chicken, shrimp, ham or New Orleans-Style andouille sausage. Also, don't forget to serve a signature Mardi Gras cocktail in a bright festive glass – the Hurricane and the Bloody Mary are two of the most popular, but the Sazerac is another traditional drink making a comeback as well.

Deck the Halls – Mardi Gras style.

No party is complete without festively colored decorations. Hang beads or streamers from the ceilings or light fixtures in the traditional Mardi Gras colors of purple, green and gold, representing justice (purple), faith (green) and power (gold). And of course, pass out plenty of beads for your guests to wear to get in the festive mood.

Let Them Eat Cake.

Wrap up your delicious meal with the traditional Mardi Gras dessert - a King Cake. Decorated with sugar sprinkles in purple, green and gold, the dessert is baked with a tiny trinket, usually a plastic baby, inside. The person who receives the piece of cake with the trinket is considered the king or queen of the party and is expected to host next year's Mardi Gras festivities.

All That Jazz (and more).

New Orleans is considered the birthplace of jazz, so be sure to play music from native son Louis Armstrong and other musical legends like Earl King or the Hawketts who hail from the Crescent City. Whether you hire a local band for a full-on performance or play CDs for background music, New Orleans has a sound all its own that incorporates a mixture of horns and bass and snare drums. Mix up the soundtrack by including Cajun and Zydeco music.

Who Was that Masked Man?

Though it's technically illegal to wear a mask out in New Orleans, that law is lifted from dawn to dusk on Mardi Gras. Encourage guests to wear costumes like most Mardi Gras revelers do in New Orleans. Jesters, queens and kings are favorites. Create your own masks with feathers, sequins, glitter and anything else festive. Then have your guests vote on which design is the best mask.

Dozens of Doubloons.

Doubloons are small metal coins, which are often dipped in color, and have become a time honored tradition in New Orleans that dates back to 1959. The coins are often distributed from parade routes and are themed, making them collectables over the years. Scatter your own doubloons on tables for an easy centerpiece and encourage your guests to take them with them at the end of the party.

Fun for the Whole Family.

Mardi Gras celebrations are traditionally held among families and friends in their own neighborhoods beyond the French Quarter. Help children decorate wagons and strollers, and lead your own parade around the neighborhood. Have the kids throw beads, doubloons and small candy to their friends. Also, visit www.zatarainsmardigras.com to download fun games, learn to make your own floats and masks and, of course, gather recipes for authentic New Orleans-Style cuisine to make the party complete. Finally, become a Zatarain's fan on Facebook and follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/myzatarains.