



14

PARTY ESSENTIALS



EMMA KELLY FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

THE PERFECT SUMMER GARDEN PARTY

CREATING AN AL FRESCO FEAST FOR THE SENSES

In the first instalment of a three-part summer-entertaining series, Toronto food guru **Jane Rodmell** shares her expert tips for hosting an outdoor fête

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

For more than 25 years, Jane Rodmell has been serving up delicious fare at her pioneering gourmet food shops, All the Best Fine Foods, in Toronto. An experienced chef and the award-winning author of the cookbook *All the Best Recipes: 300 Delicious and Extraordinary Recipes*, Rodmell believes that fine food is not unlike high fashion. Prepared by hand in small batches and with the best ingredients, her meals are as scrumptious as they are stylish – a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach. Sharing food with others has long been her passion and, when it comes to throwing summer garden parties, Rodmell makes it a breeze by carefully planning everything from the guest list to the ingredients well in advance. Here are some of her top tips.

GETTING STARTED

Decide from the outset that you are going to join in and have fun. Keep things manageable. If you're planning a large event, get outside help. Whether you're doing it solo or with the help of a caterer, though, plan the basics – the date, the duration, the number of guests – long before show time, Rodmell advises. In particular, look at your garden or outdoor space and make a site plan, asking such questions as: What are the best spots for setting up a bar and laying out food? Do I need to order glassware, plates, cutlery or chairs? Where will the seating areas be? If you're planning to use a barbecue, check the propane tank to make sure there's enough fuel or that you have enough charcoal. Also, give some thought to other necessities, such as ice supply, bug control and cleanup. Finally,

have a Plan B in place in the event of rain: If you think you might need a tent, order one at least three weeks in advance to ensure that one is available.

SETTING THE SCENE

Take your theme and colour scheme from the flowers and plants in your garden, Rodmell says, adding that floral arrangements and centrepieces should complement table linens. Source music to suit the occasion. And offer a welcoming cocktail – something cool and sparkling – to guests as soon as they arrive, she notes.

FOOD AND DRINK

Select food and drink that are seasonal, colourful, fresh and light. Keep in mind that guests

will probably be mingling with a glass in hand, so choose food that is easy to both serve and handle, Rodmell says. Put out a few small bowls of savoury snacks that will stay tasty out of doors throughout the party: Crispy cheese straws, olives, mixed nuts, savoury shortbreads and bread sticks are all safe bets. For the bar, set out plenty of glasses, lemon and lime wedges, bottles of still and sparkling water, great beers, both red and white wine and more ice than you think you'll need in advance. If mixing drinks, have the ingredients for the makings of standard summer cocktails always at the ready.

RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Starters might include a shooter glass or small cup of chilled soup (such as watermelon with cucumber confit) or a couple of bite-size eats (like sweet pea crostini topped with mozzarella).

A food station that includes summery antipasti – semi-dried cherry tomatoes, wood-roasted artichokes, roasted peppers, French-cured olives, a charcuterie platter, a terrine, a cheese assortment with sliced baguettes or crisp breads – are both easy to assemble and popular.

As a summer feature dish, seafood is always a hit, but make it a simple one: Try lobster-salad sliders, ceviche, oysters on the half shell or marinated mussels. For tasty hot items off the barbecue, think seafood brochettes, spicy chicken satay, mini burgers with condiments or a spicy sausage combo.

As for items that can be served warm but pre-prepped in the kitchen, think mini hot beef-tenderloin sandwiches or small savoury tarts.

THE ESSENTIAL

Kick your garden party up a notch with these plastic stemless wine glasses by U.S.-based Govino. Originally created for professional wine tastings but now sold as sets for parties, "they're both elegant and shatterproof – nearly impossible to break," Rodmell says.

\$14.95 per box of 36 wine glasses through www.govinowine.com.

