

Hosting A Super 'Big Game' Party On A Budget



Big brands are paying upwards of \$5 million for 30-second Super Bowl ad slots, and the city of San Francisco is forking over \$4.8 million to host weeklong festivities leading up to the big game. But when the two top NFL teams compete on Feb. 7 in Santa Clara, California, for Super Bowl 50, thankfully you'll be shelling out considerably less than that to hold your Big Game party.

Super Bowl parties are among the most inexpensive to host. Besides the traditional chicken wings, tortilla chips and guacamole, and beer—the most important must-haves are adequate seating and a big-screen TV to watch the game.

The most widely watched sporting event of the year last year drew an estimated 184 million viewers to see winning team the New England Patriots take on the Seattle Seahawks. According to the National Retail Federation's [Super Bowl Spending Survey](#), viewers spent an average of \$77.88, up from \$68.27 the previous year. That covered everything from game day food and new televisions to athletic wear and decorations. Food and beverages accounted for nearly 80 percent of the total of \$14.3 billion in spending.

Hosting or attending a Super Bowl party in someone's home was the most popular option. Only 5 percent of viewers opted to watch the game in a restaurant or bar, where loud noise can detract from the game-watching experience.

So if you're planning to host a Super Bowl party for family and friends, how can you avoid going over your budget? Below are some ideas for throwing an inexpensive event that will still be fun and entertaining.

Keep It Casual

Set expectations with guests that your event will be low key and casual. After all, it's the game (and the commercials) that will be the star of your event. Nearly half of viewers in the NRF survey say that the game itself is the most important part of the day, followed by nearly one-third saying that the most important parts for them are the commercials and hanging out with friends and family.

Stress in your invitation that you're just hosting a casual get-together to watch the game. No fancy invitations are required: a simple email or e-vite with time, place, directions, and other details will do. And make sure you ask guests to RSVP so you'll have an idea of how many people plan on attending. That way you'll know how much food to buy—and won't overspend for guests who won't attending.

Make It a Potluck

People love sharing, and this goes double when it comes to sharing favorite dishes with family and friends. Asking each guest to bring a dish will not only create an interesting array of food and beverage offerings, it will significantly reduce your expenses.

You might say in your invitation that you'll provide one hot main dish (such as chili or soup) and snacks (such as cheese and crackers or raw veggies and dip) so you'll have something to serve in the very unlikely event a majority of your guests show up empty-handed. But in all probability, once you ask guests to bring something, you'll be inundated with food and beverages.

And don't worry about asking people to sign up to bring a specific type of dish (such as a beverage, snack, entree, or dessert). For some mysterious reason, potlucks always seem to turn out. You may be buried under an avalanche of chips, guacamole, salsa, and beer for a while—but that's a good problem to have since you can always eat the leftovers or give leftovers to guests.

If one of your guests has a special recipe (such as spicy chicken wings or a football-shaped cake) that you think could be the star of your party, you might reach out privately and ask them to bring it. Once the teams are decided, you can ask people to use the colors of their favorite team in the food they bring (or their serving dishes) to up the fun factor.

In light of people's food preferences (vegetarian, vegan, low-carb, low-fat) and food allergies (gluten, lactose, nuts), it's also a good idea to ask guests to label the dishes they bring accordingly. A small card indicating the dish is vegan, vegetarian, or gluten-free, or containing nuts can go a long way to making sure your guests enjoy themselves and don't ingest anything that won't agree with them.

Buy in Bulk

Whatever food and beverage items you plan to supply for the party, watch for sales and try to buy in bulk. Your local retailers are gearing up for the Super Bowl and will have an abundant supply (and probable sales) on Super Bowl staples such as avocados, tomatoes, salsa, chips, carrots, celery, chicken, and beer.

Watch for the circulars that show up in your mailbox, and take a trip to the local supermarket to see what they have on sale. Now might be a good time to visit a big-box outlet such as Costco and take advantage of savings by buying in bulk. You can always use the party leftovers to feed your family in weeks to come.

Seating Options

You'll want to make sure you have adequate seating for guests, but you don't need to go overboard and rent chairs. Clear extra pillows and cushions that might reduce the seating capacity of your TV-adjacent sofa and chairs, and place them on the floor to create comfortable nearby viewing areas.

If your seating options are skimpy, don't worry. Many people like to stand up to watch the game, freeing themselves for circulating or enthusiastic cheering when their team scores. And if you must bring in extra seating, ask a friend or family member if they can bring over a few folding chairs.

Decorations

It's fun to spruce up your home with banners, balloons in team colors, or football-shaped trinkets. Definitely feel free to unleash your inner decorator for your Game Day bash. But your friends are really there for the game, and in all likelihood, they won't remember your decor. It will be the fun they had, the nail-biting moments of the game, the moments of triumph and defeat as they watch their favorite team struggle for dominance. And thankfully, moments like that cost nothing.

If you must decorate, dig out decorations you have on hand or visit the dollar-store so you won't break your budget. And as with everything, less is more. A strategically placed banner or a few balloons will go a long way to add a spirit of festivity to your gathering.