



Wet and Wild!

During hot Texas summers, a cool pool party will make a big splash

BY GINA WHITTINGTON / PHOTOGRAPHY BY STACY SODOLAK

There's just something about being around a swimming pool with friends that eventually leads to good times. For example, in the 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*, James Stewart and Donna Reed's characters are dancing the Charleston on a high school gym floor that covers a swimming pool. They are so caught up in the crowd's hoots and hollers that they fail to notice that someone has flipped a switch that slowly starts separating the floor's two halves, revealing the pool. With a few more steps, the couple moves and shakes right into the water—in which they *keep* dancing. The crowd starts jumping in and an all-out pool party ensues.

While that moment might not be one to emulate, clear



skies and scorching summertime temps in swimming pool-friendly Austin create ideal environments for bashes. As for planning, it's best to take it one toe at a time.

The Scene

Plan for the party to start in the late afternoon—around 2 p.m.—to make sure guests aren't in the sun too long, and can enjoy the sunset. A playlist of sunny-vibe tunes should be set as background music. Artists such as The Beach Boys, Bob Marley and Jack Johnson are all safe bets.

Several seating options—for indoors and out-



Poolside party must haves include, opposite page, plenty of seating, Stix's Summer Elixir, and, clockwise from top, spicy garlic wings, pool floats, colorful invitations, tilapia tacos and sunscreen.



The timeline

6 WEEKS OUT
Choose the perfect date for the party, making sure VIPs will be in town and not on summer vacation. Compile an invite list and order bright and festive invitations.

4 WEEKS OUT
Send out invitations, and have guests RSVP a week prior to the party.

3 WEEKS OUT
Plan the food menu and schedule a pool cleaning for the week of the party.

2 WEEKS OUT
Start shopping for pool toys, sunscreen and towels.

WEEK OF
Shop for food, clean the house and get the pool professionally cleaned.

NIGHT BEFORE
Stock restrooms with all needed amenities and make sure the weather report calls for clear skies. (If rain is coming, take the party indoors and screen classic beach films.)

DAY OF
Fire up the grill and start cooking! Skim the pool to make sure it's debris-free.

30 MINUTES PRIOR
Have signature cocktails ready to go and the first round of food coming off the grill.

PARTY TIME!
Make guests feel comfortable by leaving the front door open—if possible—or use signage to direct people to the pool area. Food and drinks should be ready and easily accessible.

SPECIAL THANKS:
Michelle and Thomas Bryant for the use of their home; Stationery, Couture Ink, coutureinkstudio.com; Catering, Third Base Sports Bar, thirdbaseaustin.com; Design and Event Planning, CLINK, clinkevents.com

doors—is recommended, as is having various beverages on hand, including plenty of water. Acrylic or disposable cups are a must. Broken glass in the pool will end a party immediately.

Adding bright flowers to landscaping, new accent pillows to pool furniture and tiki torches to the yard will help create a cool and inviting party atmosphere.

The Bites

Poolside grub should be simple items that are easy to eat. Think grilled hot dogs or tacos. It's also a good idea to have a spread of chips, nuts, vegetables and cookies that will last the duration of the party. Two runs of the grill will likely be needed, as most people build up an appetite after splashing around for a few hours.

Must Haves

Beach Towels—Always keep more than enough around. Pros match towels to outside décor, like the pool tile. Roll up and place in galvanized tin tubs around the pool edge.

Sunscreen—A no brainer! Make sure plenty of sunblock is available, including baby-friendly products, various SPF strengths and lip treatments.

Pool toys and games—Floats, noodles, water guns, volleyball and basketball keep pool parties hopping. Designate the shallow end of the pool as the activity area and let guests loose.

Shaded seating—Have an area where people can take breaks from the sun and heat. Opening patio umbrellas and providing big floppy hats for guests will prevent the party energy from waning.



RECIPES

Stix's Summer Elixir and Chicken Diablos

Chicken Diablos

Yields: 8-10 servings

- 20 Peppadew peppers
- 1 1/2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 10 slices raw bacon
- 5 bamboo skewers
- 1 cup Mae Ploy sweet chile sauce

Drain peppers, set aside. Cut chicken in cubes, and bacon slices in half. Place a chicken cube in each pepper, wrap with bacon; run through with a skewer, making sure the bacon is wrapped tightly. Place 4 on each skewer, spaced evenly.

Grill skewers on medium-low heat, turning regularly (approximately 10-

12 minutes). Remove from heat, slide stuffed peppers into a bowl. Pour Mae Ploy sauce over and toss.

Spicy Garlic Wings

Yields: 8-12 servings

- 4 lbs. buffalo wings
- 1 cup Frank's Original Wing Sauce
- 1 tsp. fresh, minced garlic
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp. butter

Grill wings on medium heat, away from flames, about 12 -15 minutes, turning frequently, until wings are crispy and golden brown. Meanwhile, place butter

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in a small saucepan with garlic and cook on medium. When garlic gets aromatic, add black pepper and cook 15-20 seconds. Add lime juice and Frank's sauce. Bring to a boil and remove from heat.

Place wings in a bowl and toss with sauce.

SOB Burger (South of the Border)

Yields: 8 servings

- 2 lbs. ground chuck
- 1 Tbsp. Montreal steak seasoning
- 1 Tbsp. minced garlic
- 1 cup canned black beans, drained
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. garlic salt
- 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
- 8 small Kaiser rolls
- 1/4 head iceberg lettuce
- 8 slices jack cheese
- 8 slices cheddar cheese
- 4 oz. pickled jalapeños
- 1 cup guacamole

Place meat in a bowl, sprinkle with steak seasoning and minced garlic. Gently mix together. Form 8 quarter-pound patties with straight, tall edges. Arrange on a plate, wrap loosely and chill.

Put the black beans in a food processor with garlic salt and cumin. Pulse to begin blending. Scrape the sides down with a rubber spatula and repeat. While blending on low, add olive oil in slowly, then blend until smooth.

Grill burgers on high heat, 3-4 minutes per side, flipping once. When almost ready, place 1 Tbsp. of guacamole on each burger, topped with 1 slice of each cheese. Lightly toast rolls on the grill and remove burgers and buns.

Spread 2 Tbsp. of black bean puree on bottom bun

halve, followed by julienned iceberg lettuce. Put burger on top and add 1 Tbsp. of guacamole and 4-5 jalapeno slices.

Tilapia Tacos

Yields: 8 tacos

- 4 tilapia filets
- 2 Tbsp. Cajun seasoning
- 8 flour or corn tortillas
- 1 cup ranch dressing
- 2 oz. pickled jalapenos
- 1 bunch cilantro
- 1 cup shredded carrots
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 4 oz. shredded green cabbage
- 2 oz. shredded red cabbage
- 1 tsp. salt

Crush the garlic clove and place in a saucepan with the vinegar and salt. Bring to a boil and remove from heat. Place carrots in a bowl and pour over the hot vinegar mix. Wait 5 minutes, then drain and chill the carrots. Chop the cilantro, adding half to the carrot mixture and the remainder in a blender with the ranch dressing and pickled jalapenos. Blend until smooth.

Sprinkle Cajun seasoning over tilapia filets and grill for about 3-4 minutes per side. Remove and place on a plate.

Warm tortillas and assemble tacos by placing 1/2 of a tilapia filet on each tortilla. Sprinkle with green and red cabbage, pickled carrot cilantro mix, and drizzle with jalapeño cilantro ranch.

Stix's Summer Elixir

- 4 oz. pineapple juice
- 1/4 oz. Midori liqueur
- 1 oz. orange juice
- 1 oz. vodka

