

cup of cheer

This annual eggnog-theme party is filled with tempting treats and hands-on fun for all ages.

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WHAT FUN!

Holiday crackers (goodies inside a cardboard tube covered with paper) entertain young guests.

NATURAL BEAUTY
The party decor starts with the easy elegance of pine garlands.

With its built-in bench and large reclaimed-wood table, the breakfast nook makes an ideal cookie-decorating spot.



Much like its signature drink, the Lekakos family eggnog party is an annual tradition everyone looks forward to—one that’s as unfussy as it is festive. On the first Sunday of December starting at 2 p.m., neighbors and friends drop by the Chevy Chase, Maryland, home, eager to catch up before holiday chaos begins. “The first weekend in December seems to still have a sense of calm about it,” Charlotte Palmer Lekakos says. When she, her husband, Chris, and their children, CiCi and Charles, moved into their 1938 Tudor in 2006, they had a holiday open house to start meeting neighbors, and a tradition took hold.

To keep the fete from adding to holiday stress, Charlotte, who owns Willard and Palmer Design, an interior design firm, uses simple decorations. “It’s so effective to just use fresh greenery and accent it with a little bit of red and white,” she says. Pine garlands frame windows and doorways, and she arranges greenery and seasonal fruit, including clementines and pineapples, in assorted vessels. “I love to pull out serving dishes, silver pieces, and china,” she says.

Though CiCi and Charles are teens now, the party continues its youthful nod with decorate-your-own gingerbread cookies and eggnog sundaes. “One of the best things around here is that, for a limited time, you can get eggnog ice cream in the grocery store,” Charlotte says. And having her children help behind the scenes—Charles hangs garlands and CiCi bakes dozens of cookies—is now the sweetest part of this festive affair.

The kitchen island, *above left*, turns from workhorse to buffet space atop an easy-care linoleum floor. “The floor is so much fun,” says Charlotte, shown with daughter CiCi. “I call it my Burberry plaid.” The built-in hutch, *opposite*, was designed for a collection of vintage pudding molds inherited from her mother. During the party, the hutch also holds help-yourself treats.

AT HOME WITH Charlotte Palmer Lekakos, interior designer in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

DECORATING STYLE “Cozy and Tudor but with a modern edge to it.”

ENTERTAINING APPROACH “It’s unpretentious and unscripted. Mixing the old and the now.”

SUPPLY SOURCE “Etsy has shops with charming paper goods and packaging.”





**10 SURPRISING
WAYS TO USE
EGGNOG**

See [BHG.com/
EggnogIdeas](http://BHG.com/EggnogIdeas)
for recipes for
eggnog muffins,
pancakes, pie,
and more.



Party plan

For a get-together that's stress-free, do most of the work ahead. This is Charlotte's schedule:

3 WEEKS BEFORE Assemble a gingerbread house centerpiece like the one on page 70. Look for a local class where you can make one, or use a kit (see BHG.com/ShopGingerbread for our picks).

2 WEEKS BEFORE Invite your guests (Charlotte recommends Paperless Post for easy managing of replies), and order garlands from a Christmas tree supplier. Charlotte asks for garlands to be made, then picks them up a few days later.

1 WEEK BEFORE "The weekend before, we pull out our Christmas boxes," says Charlotte, who rotates decorations instead of trying to use them all every year. Pick up pineapples and clementines from the grocery store and arrange them throughout the house. Make and freeze gingerbread cookies and dog biscuits.

1 DAY BEFORE Organize easy-to-heat canapés (Charlotte likes mini quiches) and make punch.

MORNING OF Make eggnog. Put spiced nuts in cups, and chill drinks. Fill frosting bags, and set up cookie stations. The only thing left is to heat food just before people start arriving. ■

Cookies decorated at the party are sent home in boxes lined with pretty paper, left, making them gift-ready. Guests also take home party favors of homemade dog biscuits, above left, in honor of Izzy, the family's dog. The foyer, above, leads guests directly to the heart of the party in the kitchen.