

5 Tips for Throwing an Outdoor Movie Party



Last week I hosted a cozy outdoor movie party with my friend Beth in her small but charming backyard. You may be daydreaming about hosting your own movie party, and I say go for it! The great part about this idea is that it's so flexible! It can accommodate a movie night, or a fun outside family video game tournament. It's perfect for a garden party where friends and acquaintances can mingle or add an interesting twist to the standard game-watching party during the Super Bowl. In whatever creative way you make this event your own, here are my top five tips for making sure it's a success.

1. RECRUIT HELP TO FIGURE OUT YOUR TECH SET-UP. I borrowed both the screen and the projector from a friend, and with the growing popularity of home projectors in place of televisions, chances are you know someone who has

a projector you can borrow, too. If not, eBay or Craigslist will have used projectors perfect for outdoor movies at discounted prices. If you feel uncomfortable with those options, a brand new inexpensive projector will cost you around \$100 at your local electronics store. A flat white wall will work as a cheap screen, as will a white sheet, painter's tarp, your garage door or even the side of your house!

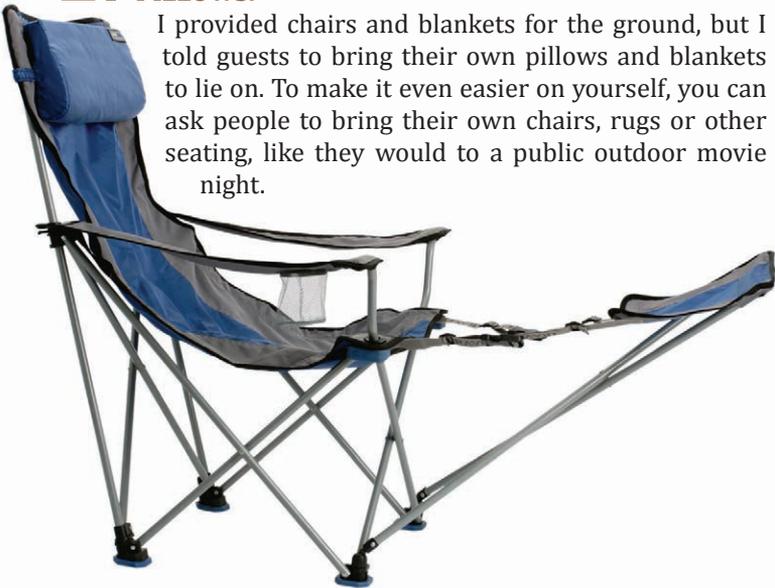
I was lucky enough to host the party with the help of a DJ, who set up one speaker in front of the screen and one speaker behind the audience, so we didn't have to blast the volume of the front speaker. You could use your indoor speakers or a few smaller portable speakers for the same effect. Again, this is a great time to ask around and borrow equipment from friends.

You may need to invest in a power strip and extension cords depending on the set up of your space. You will want to make sure that all cords are out of the flow of traffic of your guests or secured in some way so that there won't be any casualties either to people or technology.

Whatever your set-up, make sure to test it before the party, giving yourself enough time to fix any issues that arise.

2. HAVE GUESTS BRING THEIR OWN BLANKETS AND PILLOWS.

I provided chairs and blankets for the ground, but I told guests to bring their own pillows and blankets to lie on. To make it even easier on yourself, you can ask people to bring their own chairs, rugs or other seating, like they would to a public outdoor movie night.



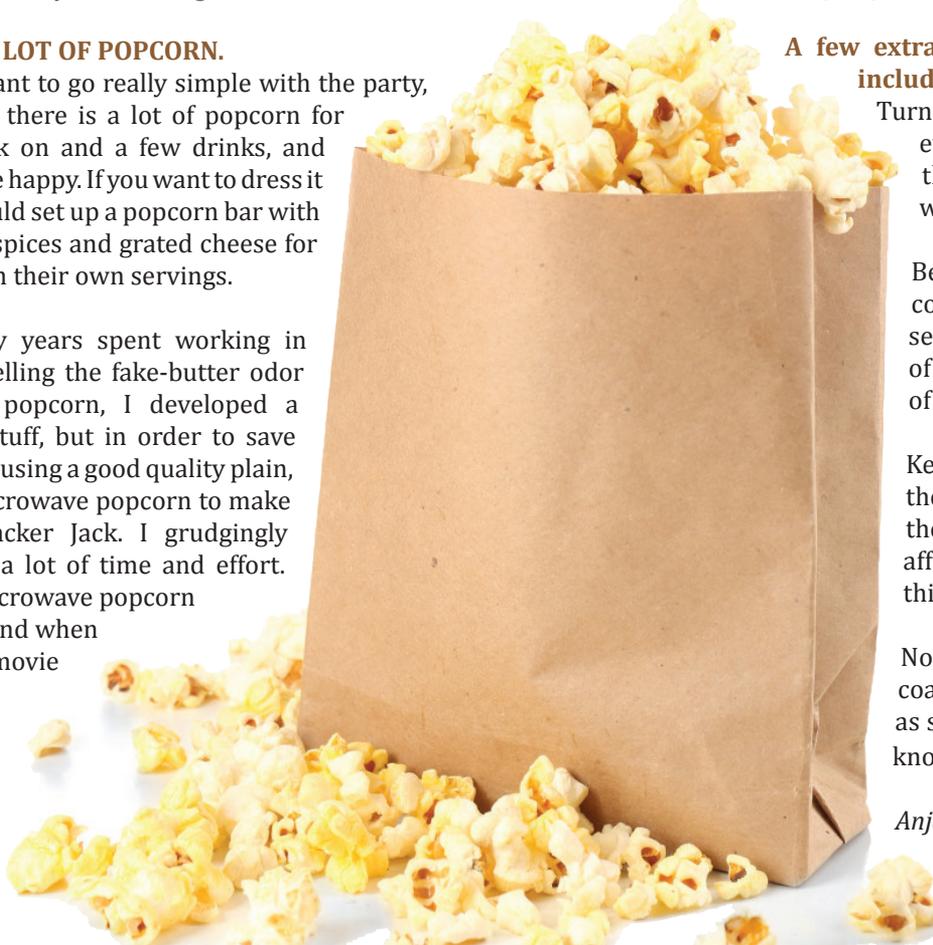
Depending on the nighttime weather in your area, you may also need to remind people to bring bug spray or layers of clothing to keep away the evening chill.

3. MAKE A LOT OF POPCORN.

If you want to go really simple with the party, just make sure there is a lot of popcorn for people to snack on and a few drinks, and everyone will be happy. If you want to dress it up a bit, you could set up a popcorn bar with different salts, spices and grated cheese for guests to season their own servings.

After too many years spent working in offices and smelling the fake-butter odor of microwave popcorn, I developed a hatred of the stuff, but in order to save time I ended up using a good quality plain, unseasoned microwave popcorn to make homemade Cracker Jack. I grudgingly admit it saved a lot of time and effort. Bottom line: microwave popcorn can be your friend when prepping for a movie party.

Popcorn is a good example of a finger



food, which is the only thing you should be serving at an event like this. It will save you money because you won't have to buy utensils, and time because a simple meal yields a simple mess and the clean-up will be much easier. Other good examples include chips and dip, finger sandwiches, wings, jalapeno poppers, trail mix, tarts or quiches—basically anything you can eat with your hands. Don't forget to get a few desserts as well, such as brownies, cookies and cupcakes.

4. BE RESPECTFUL OF YOUR NEIGHBORS.

If noise from your yard travels easily, your neighbors will probably appreciate a warning before the party and a start time soon after the sun sets, so the party doesn't run too late. I'd also recommend staying away from horror movies with a lot of screaming or action movies with incessant explosions.

5. PICK A CROWD-PLEASING MOVIE.

Speaking of choosing a movie, it's a good idea to go with something that will make most of your friends happy. Obviously, you know your crowd better than I do, but just to give you a few more ideas, here are the movies that were also in the running for our party:

Star Wars
Pee-Wee's Big Adventure
The Princess Bride
Coming to America
Indiana Jones

We ended up going with *E.T.*, but I think any of the above would have been great for a crowd of nostalgia-hungry people born in the late '70s and early '80s. Always think about the age and interests of the majority of your guests and cater to that.

A few extra tips for ultimate success include:

Turning off your sprinklers if this event will be on the lawn; that's a surprise your guests will not be excited about.

Being aware of weather conditions, and having a plan set in case the unpredictability of the outdoors gets the better of your event.

Keep all electronics away from the barbeque, if being used, the pool, and any pets with an affinity for destroying expensive things.

Note that the projector is not a coaster and should not be used as such. Be sure that your guests know the same. 🌳

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