

Baby's Bash

The first of many birthdays is all about color, fun food and controlled chaos

BY GINA WHITTINGTON

There's a Jerry Seinfeld stand-up routine that goes, "The thing about birthday parties is that the first birthday party you have and the last birthday party you have are actually quite similar. You know, you just kind of sit there ... you're the least excited person at the party. You don't even really realize that there is a party."

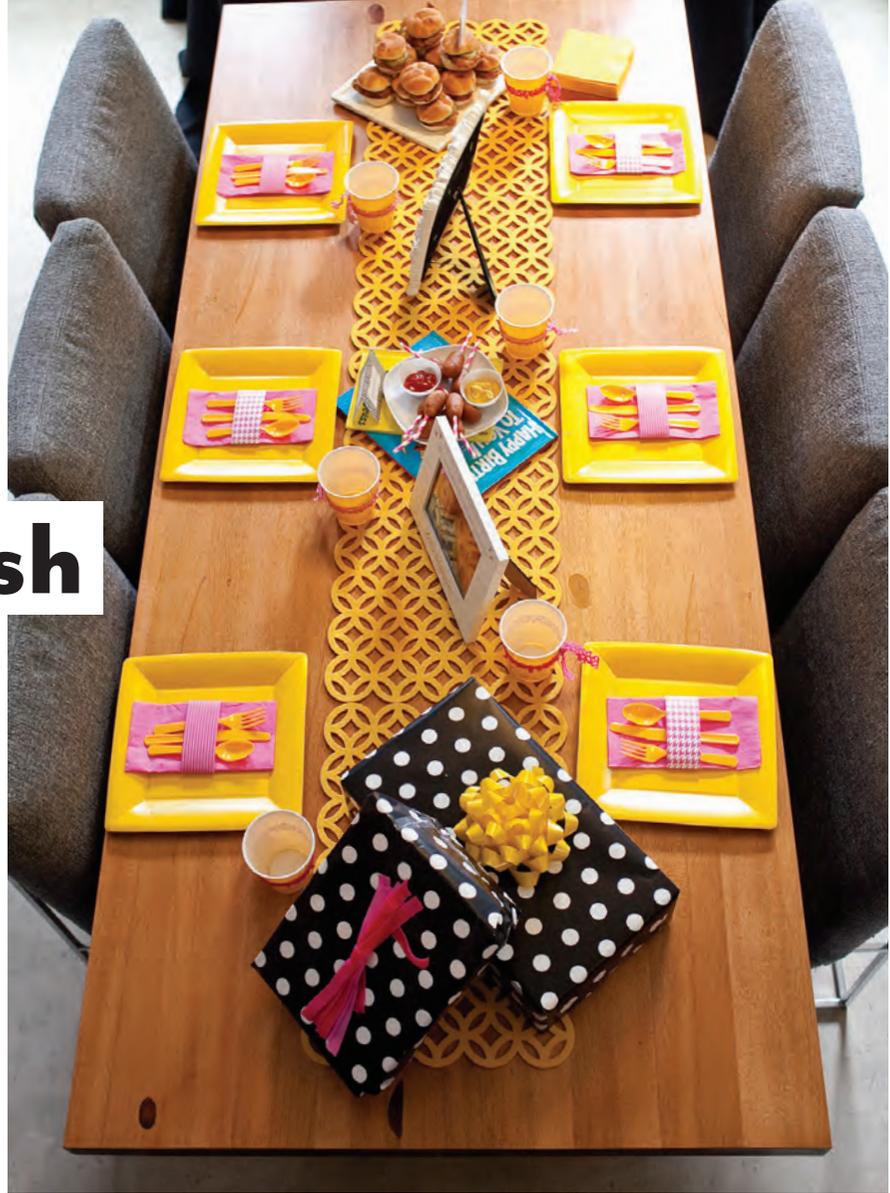
True as this may be, it doesn't mean that your favorite one-year-old can't have an all-out bash. Yes, the first birthday party is a monumental occasion your wee one won't remember, but no need to get bogged down. After all, it's a party!

THE FOOD

Tip: A one-year-old's birthday is not a time to break out your fine china and crystal. Think simple food that kids and adults will love. You can't go wrong with mini chicken sliders. But don't forget that many kids will want their sandwiches served plain, so arrange to have sauces and toppings on the side.

French fries are always a crowd-pleaser, but try offering a healthier option like sweet potato or eggplant, and jazz it up with truffle salt. Fruit plates, vegetable crudités, chips and dips, corn dogs and burgers are must haves.

Also, edible party favors are the way to go. Set up a cupcake bar where guests can pick the flavor of cake, frosting and topping of their choice. >>



Make plates, cups and cutlery all one color, then add pop with printed napkins and colorful treats.

Decorate with framed photos, and have a “smash cake” for your baby to make a mess of.



THE LOOK

Decorating for a one-year-old can be difficult. Rule one: Don't ask for their opinion, because A) they don't understand and B) you won't listen to their choices anyway. Head to your favorite party supplier and find disposable plates, napkins, cups and cutlery that create a unique, colorful theme for the party. Find inspiration in your child's favorite outfit, the pet name you call them, their favorite story or colors in their room. Can't decide? Go for the classics: anything Dr. Seuss, *Where the Wild Things Are* or *Winnie the Pooh*.

THE FUN

Having fun things to keep kids entertained is a must. Make one room just for the kids and have toys for all ages available. Set up a snack bar where kids can pick plenty of their favorite treat—fruit, nuts, goldfish. If the weather is nice, bubbles, confetti, water guns and silly string are also perennial hits for outside activities.

For a unique gift idea, have guests bring a book instead of a greeting card

for your baby, then have each guest write a personalized note inside so your child can read it for years to come.

Also, ask guests to bring gifts unwrapped, so you don't have to spend time unwrapping presents, and since a one-year-old won't be much help. This cuts waste down significantly, too.

And if you don't want guests to bring gifts, suggest a donation to a local children's charity in the name of your child.

THE CAKE

Seeing your baby dive into a cake is going to be the highlight of the entire party. First, play it safe and go with white frosting. Food coloring in frosting can end with very irritated skin and an inconsolable baby. Second, don't use fondant. Fondant is rolled sugar paste, and while it looks gorgeous, it can be hard for babies to dig into.

Third, make sure there's a cake just for the baby. This is called a “smash cake” and should be a smaller version of the cake you serve to guests. Finally, make sure the candle flame is out of reach of tiny grabbing hands and be sure to help blow it out.

HOSTING DUTIES

8 WEEKS OUT

Pick the date of the party and make a guest list. Make sure to include your family, even if they are out of town. And keep in mind that your friends with kids will want to bring them. If your guest list gets too big, have an earlier start time for family only and have friends come later, when the family is heading out.



6 WEEKS OUT

Send invitations. Make sure you save a couple for yourself to remember the occasion.



4 WEEKS OUT

Plan your menu and have your shopping list ready. Decide on a theme and what party favors you'll have.

Hire a photographer or ask a skilled friend or family member to capture the moments.



3 WEEKS OUT

Order your cake and schedule a time to pick it up. It's better to pick up the night before. Just make sure to get instructions about refrigeration and thaw time.



2 WEEKS OUT

Shop for all decor items and party favors, and start any craftwork.



WEEK OF

Shop for food, clean home and arrange it for the party.



DAY OF

Have food ready 30 minutes before guests are scheduled to arrive, assign an empty table space for gifts and have a pen and paper ready to jot down everything your baby receives.



Mini corn dogs



Chicken sliders

BABY BITES

MINI CORN DOGS

- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 cup white sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 egg
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons whole milk
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- 2 16-ounce packages all-beef hot dogs
- toothpicks

Preheat oil in a deep saucepan to 375°F.

In a medium bowl, combine cornmeal, flour, salt, pepper, sugar and baking powder. Stir in egg and milk. Add buttermilk slowly.

Cut each hot dog into thirds. Pat hot dogs dry with a paper towel and insert toothpicks into cut hot dogs. Dip hot dogs in batter until well coated.

Fry 4 to 6 corn dogs at a time for 1 to 2 minutes, or until lightly browned.

SWEET-POTATO FRIES

- 4 sweet potatoes cut into large French fries
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon lemon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1 pinch salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Pour the water into a microwave-safe dish and line the potatoes on top. Cook in the microwave on high for 5 minutes. Drain liquid and toss potatoes with all spices and olive oil. Arrange fries on a baking sheet in a single layer.

Bake for 30 minutes, turning once, or until fries are crispy on the outside.

WHOOPIE PIES

- 2 cups packed brown sugar
- 3/4 cup unsalted butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 egg white
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 3 tablespoons boiling water
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups quick cooking oats
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 3/4 cup shortening

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Lightly grease baking sheets. Cream butter with the brown sugar until light and fluffy. Slowly beat in the eggs and mix well. Mix in the salt, cinnamon, baking powder, boiling water, baking soda and flour. Stir in the oats.

Spoon cookies onto the greased baking sheets. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Let cookies cool, then make sandwiches from two cookies filled with Whoopie Pie Filling (below).

WHOOPIE PIE FILLING

Beat egg white. Mix in the milk, vanilla extract and 1/2-cup powdered sugar. Beat in the shortening and remaining powdered sugar until light.

CHICKEN SLIDERS

Yield: 4 sliders

- 3 cups peanut oil
- 1 egg
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 boneless/skinless chicken breasts, halved
- 4 Hawaiian buns



Sweet-potato fries

- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- pickle slices

Preheat the peanut oil to 400°F in a pressure cooker.

In a small bowl, beat the egg and stir in milk. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, sugar, salt and pepper. Dip each piece of chicken in the milk and roll in flour mixture until covered. Drop all 4 in cooker.

When steam starts shooting through the pressure release, set timer for 3 minutes.

While chicken is cooking, spread butter on the face of each bun and toast in a toaster until golden.

When chicken is done, remove from oil and drain on paper towels. Place two pickles on each bottom bun, then top with chicken and top bun.

CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES

- 1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder, sifted
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg, room temperature

- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla paste (or extract)
- 1/2 cup hot water
- 16 cupcake liners

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Line 16 cupcake wells with cupcake liners.

If any wells remain, add 2 tablespoons of water to each to keep heat absorption even.

In an electric mixer, mix the flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt. Add remaining ingredients, adding hot water last. Beat smooth.

Pour batter into the cupcake cups. Bake 17 to 20 minutes, or until a toothpick stuck in the center comes out clean.

Transfer to a wire rack to completely cool before icing.

PINK CREAM CHEESE ICING

- 1/2 pound unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 pound cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar, sifted
- gel pink food coloring



Cupcake



Whoopie pies

For best results, use an electric mixer to blend together the cream cheese, food coloring and butter until well combined. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and then add the powdered sugar. Blend again until smooth and ready to serve. Pour into a pastry bag and apply to cooled cupcakes.

SPECIAL THANKS

Stationery: Eclectic Images, eclecticimagesphotography.com
Floral Containers: Merveille, www.merveilleevents.com
Catering: Third Base Sports Bar, thirdbaseaustin.com
Cupcakes: The Cupcake Bar, thecupcakebaraustin.com
Design and Event Planning: CLINK, clinkevents.com