

# *Y'all Come Over*

Charming Your Guests with New Recipes,  
Heirloom Treasures, and True Southern Hospitality



REBECCA LANG

*Rizzoli*



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# Guest on the Road

Graciously hosting a party is an achievement. Being a well-mannered guest is nonnegotiable. Hosting your own parties is the best way to learn firsthand of the importance of being a really good guest. You become a guest the minute you receive an invitation, so your response sets the tone as a most gracious addition to the party. Your host has prepared for you to come over to relax, enjoy food and drink, and spend time with friends. Conducting yourself in a way that reflects a little of the hospitality that is being shined upon you is a gift to your host. If there is ever any detail of attending a party that is questioned, do what is easiest for your host.

## RVSP Not Optional

You must, with absolutely no exceptions, RSVP to the host. Everyone's life is busy and time is short but it still has to be done. Letting the host know if you can come or not should be done as soon as possible from the time of receiving the invitation. Never tell the host you might be able to attend or you might drop by. Maybes are worse than not RSVPing. The only two choices are yes or no. If the response is a yes, you must attend. The host has prepared for you in time and expense, so please be respectful of that. To spare your reputation, avoid adding a "plus one" at the last minute or bringing a guest who wasn't invited. The invitation should be clear if guests are welcome. If the invitation doesn't say, look to see how the invitation was addressed. If children are welcome, the invitation should say so. If children aren't mentioned, it's generally a good rule to find a sitter.

## BYOB

Accepting a request for BYOB and arriving with libations in hand has been around for decades. Those four letters are the easiest way for partygoers to know it's time to bring their own bottle. There are occasions where that is appropriate, like a cookout or tailgate, and those when it's best to leave your personal potion at home. A cocktail party or dinner party should provide all you will need.

If the host asks you to bring your own drinks, of course, do so. If she didn't ask, you're showing the host you don't trust her wine choices and bar-stocking skills. Everyone has been to parties where the wine was terrible. If it happens to you, just sip and smile.

## Potluck Manners for the Guest

When attending a potluck, the host should give you an idea of which dish you should bring to the party. It may be something as simple as a "vegetable side dish" or "a chocolate dessert." If she doesn't, then ask, and keep to your assignment. Even if it's not something you love to make, stick with what the party host asked for.

Be as self-sufficient as possible when taking food to someone else's house. Any dish brought to the party should be delivered in the serving dish. Even take your own serving pieces, if possible. Arriving at a party and then asking a host for a platter creates just one more thing she has to do. Also, send a text earlier in the day if you'll need to use the oven (and at what temperature) for a quick reheat. See page 27 for tips about potluck manners as a host.

## Be a Pro at Parking

Be on your best parking behavior. There's nothing like waking up the morning after a party and finding tire ruts around your driveway. When you're parking, make sure the neighbors' driveways are clear and the mailman can still get to mailboxes up and down the street.

## Timing is Everything

The magic window of arrival is between on time and 15 minutes late. If you do arrive early and realize what time it is, do not get out of your car. Take time to ride around the neighborhood or do anything that will keep you from going to the door early. When you sense the party is winding down, leave. Wearing out a welcome is no one's intention.

When the host says the food is ready, either get in line at the buffet or sit down to eat. It's awkward to keep asking guests to please eat your food. I always appreciate when a friend jumps up to start the line so that other guests feel more at ease being one of the first few to eat.

## Table Manners Extras

- ⇒ The only items that should be around a place setting on a table are those that are needed for eating. Y'all know this, but it is not good manners to have a phone on the table at any time. If the phone needs to be nearby for babysitters that might call or for emergencies, turn it on vibrate and tuck it under your thigh or in your pocket. If you need to answer the call, excuse yourself from the table to step away.
- ⇒ Try to avoid leaving lipstick on cloth napkins. If you can discreetly blot your lipstick before sitting down to the table, it will save a bit of stain-treating time for your host.
- ⇒ For sit-down parties, napkins are on the table in the beginning of the meal and should not make an appearance there again. When you get up from the table for seconds or for any other reason, leave your napkin in your chair, not on the table.
- ⇒ Keep your attention on those around the table and be interested in the conversation happening around you. If your closest neighbors at the table are difficult to engage with, do your best to start a conversation that includes friends farther down the table.
- ⇒ If you get confused about which bread plate is yours or have a fear of drinking out of your neighbor's glass, reach under the table and form an OK sign with both of your hands. The left hand is a "b" to help you remember your bread plate is on your left. The right hand is a "d"; a clue that drink glasses are on the right of your plate.



### Spills: Alert Your Host

If you spill anything at all, let the host know at once and apologize. There's no amount of apologizing that is too much to offer the host after you have a spill. Offer to help clean the spill as well as to pay for professional cleaning.

## Hostess Gifts Are a Must

Never arrive at the door of a party without a little token of thanks. It doesn't need to be anything elaborate but it should be memorable. Whenever I see good hostess gifts at gift shops, I buy a few and keep them on hand so I'm never without a stash of gifts. A few of my inexpensive favorites:

- ⇒ Luxury soap
- ⇒ Nice dish towels
- ⇒ Outdoor insect-repellant candles
- ⇒ Coffee beans
- ⇒ Homemade preserves or pickles

Also be sure to include a little tag with your name on the gift in case you need to leave it on the counter while the hostess is busy.

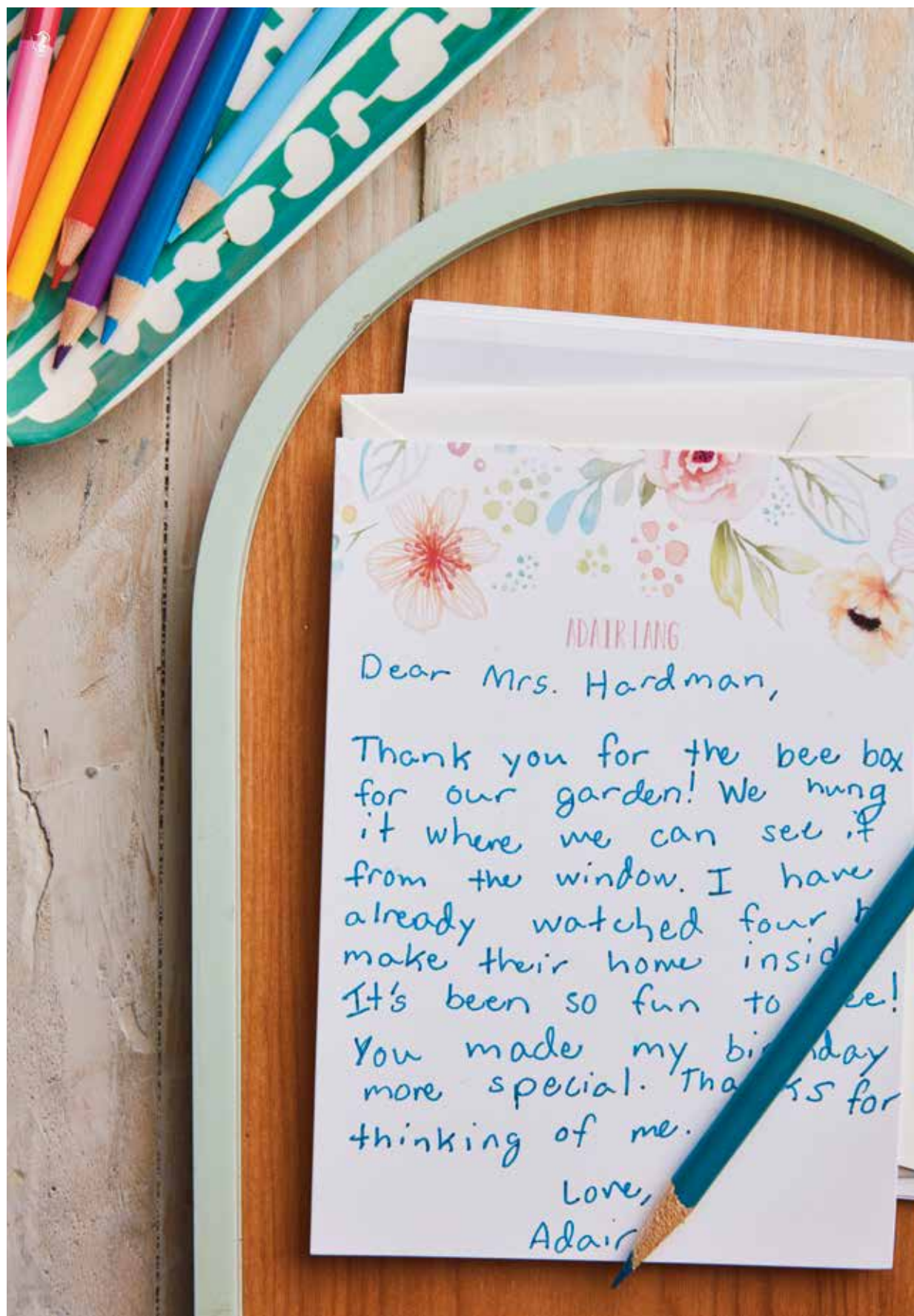
Many people bring wine as a gift to a party. The hostess is not obligated to open the newly gifted bottle of wine. Most likely, wines have been chosen in advance that work with the food and the crowd. Consider the wine a gift that will be enjoyed later when the hosts have time to sit and relax in the upcoming days.

Bringing a bud vase with blooms from your yard is always appreciated. The flowers should be in a vessel that is part of the gift. Never bring flowers straight from a store to a party that the hostess has to transfer to a vase.

Sometimes you might like a more extravagant gift for a truly ample sign of appreciation. Sending flowers to the hostess the day after a party is the epitome of gratitude. There is nothing like the florist driving up on a random day.

A beautiful coffee-table book, on a subject the host is interested in, needs only a ribbon tied around it to be impressive at the door. For an evening gathering, think about gifting something that can be served for breakfast the next morning. A coffee cake or breakfast casserole (with baking instructions included) in a nonreturnable dish is about as thoughtful as it comes.





## Party-Pleasing Children

When a gathering is family-friendly and children are invited, the responsibility for the children is on the parent, not the host. As a good guest, you should have well-behaved children. It's a great time for children to practice their manners and looking adults in the eye when talking. Most parties will have activities or something to occupy the little people so the adults can unwind for awhile. Just keep an eye on how yours are doing. One thing I find especially helpful when having over families is when the children all help to clean up any toys or games they used while at our house. If children are especially young, fix their plate for them. Small children and buffet lines or family-style serving often don't mix well.

## Staying Overnight

Attending a party out of town often requires an overnight stay. If you're lucky, the host will offer the guest room so you can have an extra dose of hospitality. A few simple things will ensure you will be invited to stay again:

- ⇒ Ask the host if you should strip the sheets off the bed before you depart.
- ⇒ Make the bed when you leave (no matter if you took the sheets off or not).
- ⇒ Leave a goodie for the host to find once you're gone. My sister has stayed with us countless times and still leaves a gift in the guest room.

## Thank-You Notes

I wrote more thank-you notes while I was growing up than I can remember. My sister and I always had stationery and we were expected to put it to good use. I complained then, but I'm grateful now. There is no substitute for a handwritten thank-you. Emails and texts simply do not equal the charm of pen and paper. Most people now receive very few thank-you notes so the ones that arrive in the mailbox are a real treat.

### Keys to the Best Thank-You Notes

- Mailed within three days
- Minimum of two paragraphs with at least three sentences each
- Personal and legible handwriting
- Try to avoid stationery pre-printed with "Thank You"



### No Gifts Requested

When an invitation requests no gifts, it really does mean no gifts. Do not bring one.