

editor's note

LAST WEEKEND I was talking to my friend Jeremy, and he said something that I've been thinking about ever since. Jeremy produces big events for big companies and explained that, in the world of event planning, there are basically three qualities: *good, fast, and cheap*. When producing an event, you can guarantee clients that they will get two of those things. But they cannot have all three. And the two that they choose always eliminate the third.

Good, fast, and cheap, I have decided, applies to nearly everything you might do or make in your own life. For example: the school uniforms I used to sew for myself, because the school-issued green herringbone fabric was just too polyester and awful? Cheap and good, but not fast. The gorgeous patio wall that a miraculously talented mason is building in my backyard at this very moment? Fast and good, but not cheap. The thousands of plastic goody-bag toys that seem to fill my house, left over from bygone birthday parties? Definitely fast and cheap—but so, so not good.

Think about it: The good, fast, and cheap model applies to so many situations.

But perhaps not every one. Take summer entertaining, *Real Simple*-style. As we began brainstorming “Keep Calm and Party On,” the story that starts on page 102, everyone involved had the following monologue running through her head: *How can I throw a party—a really fun party!—in the heat of summer and, uh, basically make as little effort as possible? Oh, and not spend much money, either. And did I mention that I can't take half a week off to plan the party? So it has to come together quickly. And remember: It has to be really fun. For the guests. And for me!*

In other words, we wanted the trifecta: good, fast, and cheap. Jeremy might say it can't be done, but with this collection of casual-cookout kinds of ideas, I think we may have just pulled it off. Turns out all you need is a few shortcut cocktails, a jerry-rigged iPod sound system, and—last but certainly not least—a piñata.

And if you want a party for 1,000 people, with a fancy tent and a live band and all manner of wonderful bells and whistles? Well, then Jeremy's your man.

Kristin van Orman



For more of Kristin's ramblings on matters both big and small, check out her book, *Just Let Me Lie Down*. Or read her blog, *Adventures in Chaos*, at RealSimple.com.