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Pitcher perfect

DRINKS
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One thing I cannot have people assume about me is any aptitude I might possess as a host. I know this is something people get very flustered and serious about. Food suffers a death of functionality in favour of aesthetic beauty. Overthought cocktails require spec sheets to make and a three-step lesson on how to drink. This is curation to the point of performance, exhaustion, even combustion (think Beverley Moss of *Abigail's Party*).

I want none of it. None of it! If I am going to make an effort, it will be because I am a guest

in your home and I want you to feel appreciated and lovely. If you are coming to my house, please assume I have had a busy day, got in the door half an hour ago and I am doing my best.

As a drinks writer, folks might assume (incorrectly) that I have a home bar set up. I don't have the space for one. But one thing I do have space for is a jug. And into this jug is where I will pour a maximum of four ingredients, give it a stir, and then serve. Disclaimer: measurements here are vague and often eyeballed.

A Twinkle is bright enough to be summery and with a name festive enough to be served at Christmas. Fill your jug with ice and add a bottle of champagne (or your preferred sparkling wine), 200ml of vodka or gin and 120ml of cordial. (These recipes are so short and simple I fear this column may be a short one.)

For a twist on your classic sangria, add to your jug of ice a bottle of fruity orange wine. I prefer to use one that's a bright, transparent orange. Proceed as normal, then when it comes to the end, chuck in fruits of choice, you can be pretty artistic with this: strawberries, lemons, oranges, apples, mint leaves. And that's all the brain power you need to use for the evening.

For something a little stronger, a peach rum punch is a fab option if you have a garden and a bunch of friends who don't (can I come over too?). Add a bottle of rum to the jug with ice and 250ml of peach juice, the juice of eight limes (the shells of which you can throw in, too, if you fancy), grenadine to taste and sliced peaches and strawberries. Maybe a teaspoon of grated ginger, if you like a kick.

Nigella Lawson is the elected president of the low-effort, maximum-impact dinner party, and I think of her cocktail recipes and how she uses prosecco as her main mixer. In the summer, she mixes two bottles of prosecco with 250ml of St Germain and two cans of posh lemonade. At Christmas, it's one bottle of prosecco, 125ml of cherry brandy and 500ml of ginger ale. As before, just stir and serve.

And if you want to make things even easier, you might not even need a jug, just a drawer in your freezer. While everyone is still fanatic about freezer martinis, give this one a try. If you have a bottle of vodka or gin, pour off about 200ml to use later and add 75ml of water, dry vermouth and olive brine to taste, and hey presto! Ready-to-go martinis for guests that you can lob next to your frozen dumplings.

If you're prone to hosting stress, it's worth remembering that anyone worth inviting over to your house is here for you, not a world's-best level cocktail. If they are, book them an Uber to Duke's and spend the rest of the evening in the company of true friends. ●