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earlier, bring it back to temp, and then sear for when your guests come. It's also important to choose menu items that are easy to cook on the day you're entertaining. I like to do things that can feed the masses with a few good sides. You might want to smoke a big piece of brisket or some ribs, for example. Something like this you can get onto earlier in the day, then all you need are a few good sides and you're ready to go," he explains.

"Also, choose things that are quick to cook. For example, prawns are an easy one. You can marinate prior, and then char them and have them hot to go. It's all about planning ahead to reduce the stress."

What are some key pointers to set the scene for fun?

Derek says it's important to remember dinner parties aren't always about the food. "For me, the kitchen is a huge part of entertaining for the evening. Without a doubt you'll still be preparing some last-minute things when your guests arrive," he notes. "Make sure your kitchen is open and invite people to congregate there and make conversation. Have a nice array of beverages ready to kick-start the evening."

Derek says entertaining is all about sharing the meal. "Choose dishes that allow people to interact and pass food around," he says. "Also have a big range of sauces and condiments on hand, and if you've got something that's extra hot, it's always fun to watch somebody try those (warning: have some milk on hand)," he laughs.

"Finally, always have some background music to help set the tone. And last but not least, don't strive for perfection. Your best evening is always when everyone is having fun, feeling relaxed and is in a stress-free environment."



Above Sambal Coconut Lime Grilled Prawns. derekclau.com.au
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