How to Plan Backyard Games for a Twenty-Person Block Party

Family Life · about 10 minutes · 2026-11-09

Run a mixed-age backyard game afternoon with three stations, a twenty-minute rotation, adaptive rules, and a thirty-minute teardown.

Things you will need

- 25-foot tape measure and 50 feet of string
- 25-pack of traffic cones and a roll of flagging tape
- Lawn chalk or flour spray for lane lines
- Four pool noodles plus a box of tent stakes
- Two cornhole boards or a plywood pair you cut
- Eight to ten bean bags and a bucket for them
- Ten burlap sacks or old pillowcases
- Two whistles and three clipboards with markers
- Ream of cardstock for printed clue cards
- Ten-gallon water jugs, two 10-pound ice bags, paper cups
- Pop-up canopy 10 by 10 feet and four weights
- Broad-spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen and one repellent
- Wide-brimmed hats and a spare UV-blocking sunglass pair
- Stocked first aid kit plus two instant cold packs

Map the Space and Clear the Hazards

1. **Measure the Lawn and Set a Game Footprint**
   Mark two separate rectangles with string and stakes: a play strip at least 30 feet long and 20 feet wide with no obstacles inside it, and a food-and-shade zone of roughly 25 by 40 feet, which allows about 50 square feet per guest for twenty people sitting and standing.
2. **Mark Boundaries With Soft Trip-Safe Edging**
   Boundary lines must be visible from a running height and harmless to land on, so mark lane edges with lawn chalk or a spray-flour line and place traffic cones every eight to ten feet around the perimeter, which costs about $15 for a 25-pack.
3. **Walk the Ground for Sprinkler Heads, Roots, Holes**
   Do the hazard walk the evening before and again that morning, slowly and at foot level with a flashlight on the first pass, then flag every pop-up sprinkler head with a cone and a $6 roll of flagging tape, because a sunken head shears a shoe and a running foot lands on metal.
4. **Check the Weather Twice and Set a Rain Trigger**
   Read the National Weather Service forecast for your zip code the night before, again at breakfast, and set a written go-or-no-go call three hours out so neighbors and teenagers are not guessing.
5. **Tell Neighbours the Schedule Two Weeks Out**
   Hand-deliver a note to the eight houses closest to the lawn with the start time, the end time, your cell phone number, and one line about what the noise will be like.

Set Three Stations and Pick Games by Age Band

6. **Sort the Guest List Into Three Age Bands**

   Before you choose a single game, split the names into under-7, 7-to-12, and 13-and-over, then write what each band can realistically do.

7. **Run Three Stations Simultaneously on Fixed Rounds**

   Set four rounds of 20 minutes of play with a five-minute changeover, which fills 100 minutes and leaves the rest of the afternoon for food and free play without dragging.

8. **Load Relay and Sack Races Into the Open Strip**

   Put the fast games where the ground is flattest and longest.

9. **Choose a Capture-the-Flag Variant With No Tackling**

   Play the mixed-age version: two teams, one flag each on a soft cone, tagging by one hand only, and a frozen player freed by a teammate touching their arm.

10. **Set One Cornhole Lane Everyone Can Share**

    Cornhole is the station that lets a seven-year-old and a seventy-year-old compete honestly, and it needs the least grass.

Add the Hunt, the Water, and Fair Scoring

11. **Write Printed Clues Anyone Can Follow**

    Build a scavenger hunt of 12 to 15 clues on cardstock, about $8 for a ream, and keep it running 25 to 35 minutes so it finishes inside the party rather than haunting the teardown.

12. **Run Water Games Only When Heat Warrants Them**

    On a genuinely hot day, water play is cooling rather than decoration: a hose set to gentle spray, a sponge relay where teams carry soaked sponges overhead, or a sprinkler run at the end of the last round.

13. **Score Placement Points on One Shared Sheet**

    Give each station the same four-point award: four points to the winning team, two to second, one to third, plus one participation point for every player who completed the round, so a team that loses still earns something.

14. **Buy Prizes Nobody Is Embarrassed To Collect**

    Make every child a same-tier winner: one grab bag each, filled with three or four items at $1 to $2 apiece, roughly $40 for twenty guests, drawn from a dollar-store bin of stickers, hops, bracelets, bubbles, and chalk.

15. **Give Teenagers a Referee Card and Real Authority**

    Two teenagers as station referees plus one floater is the staffing that keeps adults eating.

Hydrate, Protect, Include, and Pack Away

16. **Set a Water Station Rule Under Shade**

    Put the water table under the canopy, and make one rule stick: everyone fills a cup before starting a round, and every player carries it back at the end.

17. **Put Sunscreen and Repellent at the Door**

    Tape a tray by the back door with broad-spectrum sunscreen, SPF 30 family bottles at about $10 each, and a repellent whose stated protection time covers how long people will actually be outside, per the EPA guidance on choosing a repellent.

18. Adapt Rules So Kids With Limited Mobility Play

Ask parents privately, a week ahead, what would make their child's evening work, then change the game rather than benching the child.

19. Stock a Kit and Learn the Heat Red Flags

Keep one sealed kit on the shade table with plasters, wound dressings, gauze and tape, sterile wipes, finger splints, tweezers, gloves, an instant cold pack, and rehydration salts, rebuild it after every event using our home first-aid kit guide, and let a parent dose their own child's acetaminophen or ibuprofen rather than doing it yourself.

20. Teardown in Thirty Minutes With a Checklist

Print the pack-down list and split it into three ten-minute blocks with two people per block, since an unplanned teardown is what runs to midnight.

Sources

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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/Plan-Backyard-Games-for-a-Block-Party. Corrections: https://www.howcompa