Go bright and bold! Throw a lively fiesta with these colorful ideas for decor and spicy south-of-the-border recipes.

“Fiestas are a big deal here in Texas. I’ve put a modern spin on the traditional fiesta decor for my backyard summer gathering with friends. Instead of the saturated tissue paper flowers and paper banners often associated with a fiesta, I’ve recreated these with unexpected materials like yarn and cupcake wrappers.

I love simple DIY projects that make a big impact and each of the party decor ideas I’ve incorporated uses inexpensive or thrifted materials. I also love casual entertaining with minimal last minute prep. The make-your-own Mexican pizzas are the perfect al fresco dish that you can heat on the grill in minutes for your guests. Pair that with a yummy pitcher cocktail and portable desserts that you can make in advance, and you’ll maximize your time enjoying the fiesta with your guests rather than being in the kitchen!”

MEET HAELEY

Haeley Giambalvo is the founder of Design Improvised—a blog focused on easy home decor and entertaining projects that make a big impact. Almost all the projects on her blog can be completed in less than an hour for $20 or less. Haeley is particularly passionate about any crafts involving pom-poms or balloons. Her idea to combine the two to make pom-pom balloons was the best decision she ever made! Her work has been featured by numerous magazine websites, Apartment Therapy, and BuzzFeed, among others. Haeley is a business consultant turned DIY blogger and mom to Stella, 5, and Hazel, 3. She lives in San Antonio, TX.
YARN GARLANDS

You’ll need:
- Bulky yarn in various colors (Lion's Brand Hometown USA yarn was used for this garland in Syracuse Orange, Key Lime, New Orleans French Berry, and Portland Wine)
- Jute twine

Steps:
1. Working with one color at a time, cut a 25 pieces of 22-inch lengths of yarn. These 25 pieces will make up your first banner.
2. Unroll a couple feet of the jute twine and begin tying the yarn strands to it, leaving at least a foot of twine on each end for hanging. Fold each length of yarn in half, position it under the twine, then fold the loop of the yarn over the twine.
3. Pull the ends of the twine through the loop of yarn. Pull taut.
4. Repeat with the remaining 24 pieces, spacing them closely together to form one-color banner. Repeat this process with the other colors to create as many different-color banners as you want on your garland, leaving a couple inches of space between each color.

EMBELLISHED DROP CLOTH

You’ll need:
- Tablecloth
- Painter’s drop cloth (large enough to cover table surface)
- Wide rickrack ribbon in various colors
- Fabric glue
- Measuring tape

Steps:
1. Lay out the drop cloth on the table and trim any excess if needed for best fit. Find the middle lengthwise of the tablecloth using a measuring tape and mark with a pencil at each end of the tablecloth.
2. Run a length of rickrack down the center lengthwise of the table. Add a generous bead of fabric glue to the back side of the rickrack and press in place, being careful to keep the rickrack straight as you work your way down the center of the tablecloth. Trim the ends.
3. Repeat by adding another length of rickrack on each side of the middle rickrack; let dry completely.

Note: You also can sew on the rickrack as an alternative to using fabric glue.
CUPCAKE WRAPPER FLOWERS

You’ll need:
- Cupcake wrappers in various colors and patterns
- Small baking cups
- Medium-size pom-poms
- 16 gauge florist wire
- Hot-glue gun and glue sticks
- Scissors for Daisy Variation, right

Steps:

1. For each flower you will need three cupcake wrappers and one small baking cup. Flatten each cupcake wrapper by pressing it down with your hand.

2. Adhere two cupcake liners together in the center using hot glue, then adhere the baking cup.

3. Pinch the cupcake wrappers with your fingers to form a flower shape.

4. Hot-glue three pom-poms in the center to finish.

5. Flatten another cupcake wrapper and adhere the florist wire to the back side with a generous dab of hot glue for the back side of the flower and the stem.

6. Adhere the layered flower to the stem.

CUPCAKE WRAPPER DAISY VARIATION

After step 1, Make petals on each of the cupcake wrappers by cutting a slit every three or four ridges apart on the cupcake wrapper.)
MOCHA TRES LECHES CAKE

6 eggs
⅔ cup milk
⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1-⅓ cups all-purpose flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1-½ cups granulated sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla
tablespoons instant espresso coffee powder
1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
⅓ cup whipping cream
⅓ of an 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
1 cup powdered sugar
1-½ cups whipping cream
Chocolate jimmies (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Separate eggs, placing egg whites in a very large bowl and yolks in a small bowl; set aside. In a small saucepan heat the ¾ cup milk over medium heat until simmering; remove from heat. Whisk in cocoa powder (mixture will be thick); set aside to cool.
2. In a small bowl combine flour and baking powder; set aside. Beat the egg whites and salt with an electric mixer on medium speed until frothy. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until soft peaks form (tips curl). Slowly add granulated sugar, beating until stiff peaks form.
3. Add egg yolks to the beaten whites and beat just until combined. Add flour mixture and cooled chocolate mixture alternately to the egg mixture, beating well after each addition. Add vanilla and beat just until combined.
4. Pour batter into an ungreased 13x9x2-inch baking pan, spreading evenly. Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Transfer cake to a cooling rack and cool completely in the pan (about 1 hour).
5. In a medium saucepan combine evaporated milk and espresso powder. Heat over medium heat, stirring constantly, until espresso powder has dissolved. Remove from heat. Stir in sweetened condensed milk and the ⅓ cup whipping cream.
6. Using the tines of a long fork or a wooden skewer, poke holes all over the top of the cake. Pour espresso mixture evenly over the top of the cake.
7. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl beat cream cheese with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth; beat in powdered sugar. Add ¼ cup of the whipping cream and beat until combined. Add the remaining whipping cream and beat until soft peaks form.
8. Pipe or spread whipped cream mixture over cake and refrigerate 3 to 24 hours, covering cake after topping is set. If desired, sprinkle with chocolate jimmies.

Haeley's Styling Tips:
Everything tastes better in a Mason jar! Serve guests individual mocha tres leches cakes in festive yarn-wrapped Mason jars. You can make them in advance of the party, and you don’t have to spend time cutting and serving the cake during the party. Cut Mocha Tres Leches Cake into cubes and fill the Mason jar ⅔ full. Pipe or spoon the whipped cream mixture on top and, if you like, finish with sprinkles.
Tlayuda con Chorizo (Mexican Pizza with Chorizo)

1 teaspoon olive oil  
½ cup chopped onion (1 medium)  
6 cloves garlic, minced  
Pinch salt  
2 teaspoons chili powder  
1 teaspoon ground cumin  
1 15-½ ounce can black beans, undrained  
3 tablespoons water  
4 12-inch flour tortillas  
2 cups shredded Oaxaca or Monterey Jack cheese (8 ounces)  
4 ounces cooked smoked chorizo, thinly sliced  
2 cups mesclun or shredded cabbage  
1 cup salsa  
½ cup snipped fresh cilantro  
1 fresh jalapeno chile pepper, stemmed, seeded, and thinly sliced * (optional)

1. Place a pizza stone on the bottom rack of the oven. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.
2. In a small saucepan heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic, and salt; cook 3 minutes or until onion and garlic are tender. Stir in chili powder and cumin; cook 1 minute more. Remove from heat; stir in beans and the 3 tablespoons water. Transfer mixture to a food processor or blender. Cover and pulse with several on/off turns until bean mixture is spreadable but still chunky, adding more water if necessary to make a spreadable mixture.
3. Working with one tortilla at a time, evenly spread a thin layer of the bean mixture onto tortilla. Top with ½ cup of the cheese and one-fourth of the chorizo. Transfer topped tortilla to the pizza stone. Bake 4 to 5 minutes or until cheese is bubbly and edges are crisp.
4. Transfer tlayuda to a cutting board; let cool 1 minute. Top with ½ cup of the mesclun or cabbage, ⅓ cup of the salsa, 2 tablespoons of the cilantro and, if desired, a few chile pepper slices. Repeat with remaining ingredients to make four tlayudas total. Cut each tlayuda into wedges before serving.

Haeley’s Styling Tips:
1. Arrange a variety of fresh toppings, such as salsa, cilantro, mesclun, queso fresco, avocado, and lime slices, in colorful small bowls.
2. Display the topping bowls on a pretty tray, such as this large wicker tray lined with pom-pom trim (just add a couple small dabs of hot glue to hold the trim in place).
3. Prepare the pizzas by spreading a layer of black bean mixture, sprinkling on cheese and chorizo, and heating on the grill for a few minutes until bubbly. Allow your guests to add their own fresh toppings and enjoy!

Pisco Sour Drink

1 cup pisco (South American brandy) or white rum  
1 cup guava nectar  
2 teaspoons superfine sugar  
¼ cup lime juice  
Angostura bitters  
Ice  
Lime wedges  
Mint leaves

1. In a glass pitcher combine pisco, guava nectar, sugar, and lime juice. Add a few shakes of Angostura bitters; stir well to dissolve sugar. Divide mixture among four glasses. Add ice; top with a lime wedge and fresh mint. **Makes 4 servings.**

Haeley’s Styling Tips: Make a pitcher of this refreshing cocktail and set it, out along with lime wedges and mint to allow guests to serve themselves. Colorful drink stirrers and unbreakable acrylic wineglasses make for fun outdoor party fare. Create a beverage station by setting out colorful bottles of fruit soda and sparkling water in addition to the pisco sours.