



Setting a Thanksgiving Table

If you are hosting dinner this Thursday, take a little time beforehand to ask yourself: How many guests will I be serving? How will I seat them? How many place settings and serving pieces do I have available? Does anything need to be cleaned or shined? What else might I need to add to make the table complete?

Consider whether you want your guests at one long table, or in smaller groups. The 'kids table' is the most common solution to splitting up large groups, and until a certain age, small children often prefer to eat at a kid-friendly space of their own. If you have a large group, card tables, a plywood tabletop extender, or kitchen bar seating can be used, too.

We will be serving fourteen, give or take a few, this Thanksgiving. After covering the long table with a cream embossed tablecloth, I may layer it with a patterned one for extra color. I plan to use a set of eight colorful holiday plates, another partial set of everyday white, and a few generics in off-white. I usually lay the plates in an alternating pattern, and use a variety of cloth napkins in coordinating colors, as well. A clear wine glass or tumbler can be set at each seat, and add salt and pepper shakers to each end of the table. Feel free to mix things up, for few of us have complete settings for a large gathering, and the combinations add a sense of creative informality to the table, as well.

Although our entertaining is relatively casual, I enjoy using place settings. In years past I have attached each name tag to a small box of chocolates or written the guest names on a colorful autumn leaf. This year, I purchased inexpensive glass ornaments in fall colors, and will attach each with a personal name tag to assign everyone a place at the table. Place cards also give you the opportunity to encourage the quiet to sit next to the gregarious, the left-handed at the end, or those with limited mobility at the more accessible spots, for example.

Take out all your large bowls, platters and various serving pieces now, and determine what they will be used for. Shine the silver and have everything ready and set aside, so that you won't be rummaging through the cupboards looking for a gravy ladle at the last minute.

A simple centerpiece can add color and a touch of the season to your table. Keep arrangements low enough to see across the table, and consider using natural items like pumpkins and gourds, a few small flower arrangements, a variety of candles in coordinating holders, or all of the above. Sprinkle the center of the table with fall leaves,

acorns, evergreen, berries or pinecones. Weave some thick decorative ribbon through the arrangement for added texture, sparkle or color.

Before the big meal, I plan to provide my guests with strips of paper on which they can jot down an expression of gratitude, which will be read aloud after dinner. During these trying financial times, it's a perfect opportunity to appreciate what we have.

And if you're not the hosting the feast this year, simply be thankful for that.

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