



CREATIVE ENTERTAINING

By Rana Florida

GIVING THANKS TIPS

Thanksgiving entertaining doesn't have to be a stressed-out ordeal. The real focus should be on gathering family and friends for a festive feast and an opportunity to reflect and to give thanks.

There are so many amazing ideas, from cocktails to food to tabletop décor that will work for both the intimate dinner and the big family gathering alike. But the key to keeping it stress-free is to keep it stylish, yet simple.

The key to enjoying your holiday is to do most of the work before your guests arrive. Set the table a few days before your gathering. Also save yourself the time, the lines and the hassle by ordering your groceries online.

For the table display, start with a plain tablecloth in white, silver, gold or even burlap for a rustic chic look. Add simple elegant plates and glasses—less is more. Keep cutlery simple, but be sure to use a full set.

Floral is where you can get really creative and punch up the design. Settings should be in odd numbers: three arrangements for a table of 8, and five settings for a larger grouping. Simple orange tulips, deep violet roses, or purple hydrangeas look festive and sophisticated.

Use fruit or seasonal vegetables as accents. Fill elegant silver bowls with little oranges, scatter small white pumpkins and gourds along the table for an impressive, colorful display. Interesting leaves, such as Magnolia leaves, can be even more striking than blooms, and they're almost always less expensive. Gather branches and acorns or pinecones from your backyard and arrange into modern, organic vignettes.

Let dessert be your decoration, with easy settings you can get at the grocery store, such as chocolate-covered caramels with sea salt from France, grapes cascading over cake stands on beautiful pedestals and footed plates, stylishly arranged plump clementines, and beautiful red seckel or Bartlett pears.

Mix high and low candles to set the mood. Scatter votive candles down the table with a few candle sticks in gold or silver for brilliant accents. Make sure the candles are unscented so they don't compete with the aroma of the food.

Try to get most of the cooking completed the morning of the event and serve appetizers and the main course on beautiful platters adorned with magnolia leaves, cranberries, rosemary or orange wedges.

Ambiance is key, so be sure to clean up the clutter and set the mood with low lighting, a crackling fire and jazz or classical music.

Setup a simple bar and a cheese platter so guests can help themselves.

Save a few minutes before your guests arrive to sit back with a drink and think about what your thankful for. Then be ready to welcome your guests with a festival cocktail using seasonal such as syrups, spices, edible flowers, or fruit.

Most of all have fun!