

## **Quick Tip Series: Tasteful Tabletops**

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### **Use runners!**

Runners have a myriad of uses from consoles, to buffets, dining tables, to breakfast nooks and even the bar more. They add mood, softness, color, and pattern. They also protect tabletops. They are designed to run off the ends of the table and look silly when too short. They can be used either lengthwise or across the width of the table for a different effect. If you want to use them instead of placemats or a tablecloth you just need to have one for every two settings.

### **Keep it low!**

While large stunning arrangements and collections mid-table can be very impressive, they are also usually removed for any entertaining as they obscure the view of the other person or interfere with buffet food arrangements. Be practical and enjoy your centerpiece for events, keep it low and if the table is rectangular or oval, keep it oblong as well. You can default to florals, but these days there are so many other possibilities.

### **Collage elements!**

Mix glass, metallics, ceramics and more in creating a tablescape of personal interest and decorative aesthetic. Start with a large flat bowl in the center and add taller candleholders or glass cylinders with floating candles at the top perhaps. Layer and vary your heights for dramatic effect.

### **Have a theme!**

This makes it easy, whether you have an occasion like a birthday, anniversary, Oscar Night, holidays or a theme like Poker Night, Hawaiian Luau, or Mardi Gras. You can also theme it with color, and do an all black and white tabletop, or an all gold and silver, or an all red. The key with an all color scheme is to keep the variation high in texture, size, and shade.

### **Refresh seasonally!**

We all get lazy and can forget to change our tabletop arrangements. If nothing else go for a seasonal change and include appropriate elements. On a dining table this might include fall fruits and vegetables in an Autumnal display, gold and silver pieces through the winter holidays, pastel colors and soft floral for spring, and a bolder joyous collage of collectibles during summer.

### **Party ware for every event!**

Entertaining can be easy if you have the right pieces. Consider collecting a diversity of party pieces that make serving a variety of dishes easy. You'll want a chip and dip or two, a tiered tray or two for small bites and desserts, a range of bowls for salads and sides, and 2-3 platters at least for meats and main dishes. Yes, coordinated pieces does give a cohesive look and keeps the focus on the food, not the dishes.

## **Provide the right serving pieces!**

There is nothing more frustrating than trying to dish something onto a plate without the right utensils. That means that when you have a buffet and someone has a plate in one hand, salad needs tongs, not a decorative salad set that requires two hands. Pasta noodles require tongs also, very tough to wrestle it onto the plate with a mere fork or spoon. Provide small knives or spoons for dips, no one wants to stick their chip in necessarily where they don't know who else's chip went before.

## **Use placemats for casual dining!**

So few seem to use placemats anymore and it is truly a delightful way to add color, pattern and fun to a table even for casual daily dining. Keep at least three sets on hand, and make them festive. Skip the vinyl unless you do have a family of messy ones. Cloth are easily laundered, and often you can get rattan, mother of pearl, lacquer, and woven that really make a statement.

## **Use tablecloths and toppers for formal dining!**

This protects the table and adds elegance to any event. Consider a collection of toppers over one or two tablecloths. Toppers are smaller, can be layered and mixed readily. You can also branch out and use shawls, throws, and even winter wraps as wonderful toppers.

## **Candle magic!**

- **Banish scented!** There is nothing less inviting than patchouli scented roast beef, or sandalwood scented potato salad. Ditch the scented candles when the food comes out. It overwhelms and collides with the inviting aroma of good food.
- **Votive glows!** Use votives and tea lights liberally across a tabletop either buffet or sit down. One at each place if sit down and if buffet, scatter these among the dishes being served. It adds sparkle and warmth.
- **Tapered elegance!** Tapers are lovely and elegant, be sure to get dripless and watch your heating and ventilation air flow carefully to avoid a mess later. Avoid colored and stick with white, ivory, gold, or silver. It is the candelabra or candleholders that you want to notice, not the candles themselves.
- **Cylinders/Blocks for long use!** Cylindrical candles and block candles come in such a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and even colors that there is always one to fit the occasion. These burn longer, less mess, and have more presence than tapers. They are truly sculptural in effect. You will want to use a holder, but it can be as simple as a small plate.

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