



Holiday  
Decorating

# Creating a Beautiful Holiday Table

The holiday table is more than a place to enjoy a meal — it's often where families gather to share stories, celebrate traditions and create memories.

A thoughtfully decorated table doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. According to Better Homes & Gardens, a few carefully chosen elements can transform an everyday dining space into a festive setting that welcomes guests and encourages conversation.

**Start with a foundation.** A tablecloth, runner or place mats establish the overall style and color palette. Traditional reds and greens remain holiday favorites, but neutral linens accented with evergreen sprigs, gold or silver touches, and natural wood elements create an elegant look that works throughout the season. Layering textures, such as linen runners with woven chargers or cloth napkins tied with ribbon, adds warmth and visual interest.

**The centerpiece.** The centerpiece is the focal point of the table, but it shouldn't overwhelm the meal or block conversation. The Chicago Botanic Garden recommends using natural materials such as evergreen boughs, pine cones, magnolia leaves, winter berries or small potted plants to create seasonal arrangements. Candles add warmth



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and ambiance, but they should be placed where they won't interfere with serving dishes or guests' sight lines. Battery-operated LED candles offer a safe alternative while providing the same cozy glow.

**Place settings.** Another opportunity to personalize the table is with the place settings. Cloth napkins folded simply or secured with ribbon, sprigs of rosemary or cinnamon sticks add festive charm. Handwritten place

cards can make guests feel especially welcome, while small favors such as wrapped chocolates, homemade cookies or ornaments provide thoughtful keepsakes that double as decorations.

**Dishes.** White dinnerware serves as a versatile backdrop for colorful foods, while glassware and metallic flatware reflect candlelight beautifully. According to Southern Living, mixing family heirlooms with modern pieces creates a col-

lected look that feels welcoming rather than overly formal. Vintage serving bowls, inherited china or handmade pottery often become conversation starters around the table.

**Edible arrangements.** Fresh seasonal foods can also become part of the decor. Bowls of clementines, pears, pomegranates, apples or walnuts provide vibrant color while remaining practical. Fresh herbs such as rosemary,

thyme and sage add fragrance and can be tucked into napkin rings or scattered throughout the centerpiece.

**Final touches.** Leave plenty of room for serving dishes and comfortable dining. Avoid overcrowding the table with decorations, and keep centerpieces low enough that guests can easily see one another. Good lighting, comfortable seating and thoughtful details often have a greater impact than expensive decorations.

# Decorate with Natural Greenery

Fresh greenery has long been a hallmark of holiday decorating, bringing the beauty and fragrance of the outdoors inside.

Whether incorporated into wreaths, garlands, centerpieces or swags, natural evergreens add timeless charm while connecting today's celebrations with centuries-old traditions.

## THE APPEAL

According to the National Christmas Tree Association, evergreen plants became symbols of hope and enduring life because they remain green throughout the winter. Today, fresh boughs from fir, pine, spruce and cedar continue to be popular choices for decorating both homes and outdoor spaces.

Each type of greenery offers a different look and texture. Fraser fir branches are prized for their strong needles and long-lasting fragrance, while cedar drapes gracefully over mantels and doorways. White pine provides a soft, feathery appearance, and spruce adds a rich blue-green color and sturdy branches for wreaths and arrangements.

## SEASONAL TOUCHES

Simple greenery can become a striking display with a few seasonal accents.

Tuck pine cones, cinnamon sticks, dried orange slices,



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magnolia leaves, holly berries or velvet ribbon into garlands and wreaths for added color and texture.

Fill glass vases with evergreen clippings, winter berries and curly willow branches, or arrange fresh greens around candles to create an elegant centerpiece.

The Chicago Botanic Garden recommends mixing several types of foliage to create arrangements with greater depth, texture and visual interest.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Natural decorations also provide opportunities to decorate sustainably. Instead of purchasing new artificial decor each year, homeowners can gather fallen pine cones, evergreen branches from routine landscape pruning or seedpods from the garden. Dried hydrangea blooms, ornamental grasses and winterberry branches can also add a natural, seasonal touch. Before collecting greenery outdoors, be sure you have permission to

do so and avoid removing materials from parks or protected natural areas.

## DECORATING TIPS

To help fresh greenery last longer indoors, make a fresh cut across the stems before placing them in water whenever possible. Misting arrangements occasionally and keeping them away from fireplaces, heating vents and direct sunlight can help reduce drying. Wreaths displayed outdoors generally stay fresh

longer because of cooler temperatures.

Safety should always be part of holiday decorating. The National Fire Protection Association advises keeping fresh greenery well-watered and removing it once it becomes dry and brittle, since dried plant material can ignite more easily. Never place fresh boughs directly against candles, fireplaces, portable heaters or other heat sources, and always use flame-resistant decorations around open flames.

# Do It Yourself Holiday Decor

Creating a festive home for the holidays doesn't have to mean spending hundreds of dollars on new decorations.

With a little creativity, everyday household items, natural materials and a few inexpensive craft supplies can be transformed into beautiful holiday decor. According to Better Homes & Gardens, some of the most inviting holiday displays combine handmade projects with treasured decorations collected over the years.

**Start by taking inventory of what you already own.** Baskets, lanterns, glass vases, cake stands and serving trays can all become seasonal displays with the addition of ornaments, greenery or candles. Rearranging decorations from one room to another can also give familiar pieces a fresh look without spending a dime.

**Nature provides many affordable decorating materials.** Pine cones, evergreen branches, magnolia leaves, acorns and seedpods can be incorporated into wreaths, centerpieces and mantel displays. Dried orange slices and cinnamon sticks add color, fragrance and texture to garlands and table arrangements. Before gathering natural materials, always obtain permission if collecting from private property or public spaces where removal is



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allowed.

**Create a holiday centerpiece.** Fill a wooden bowl or decorative tray with fresh greenery, pine cones and battery-operated candles for an arrangement that works throughout the season. Mason jars wrapped with ribbon or twine become charming candle holders or vases for evergreen sprigs and winter berries. According to the Chicago Botanic Garden, mixing different textures of greenery creates arrangements that ap-

pear fuller and more natural.

**Handmade ornaments are a budget-friendly tradition.** Children and adults alike can create salt dough ornaments, paper snowflakes, dried citrus ornaments or popcorn and cranberry garlands. These simple projects become keepsakes that often return to the tree year after year. Handmade decorations also make thoughtful gifts for teachers, grandparents and neighbors.

**Holiday textiles can make for inexpensive decorating.**

Tie velvet ribbon around cloth napkins, drape a festive throw over a chair or add seasonal pillow covers instead of purchasing entirely new pillows. Even wrapping empty boxes in attractive paper and ribbon can create decorative displays beneath the tree or on shelves.

**Shop secondhand.** Thrift stores, resale shops and holiday craft fairs often offer gently used ornaments, serving pieces, wreaths and vintage decorations at a fraction of their original cost. The

Environmental Protection Agency encourages reusing and repurposing household items whenever possible to reduce waste and extend the life of everyday products.

Perhaps the best budget-friendly decorating tip is to focus on a few areas rather than trying to decorate every room. A welcoming front entry, a beautifully decorated tree and a festive dining table often create more impact than scattering decorations throughout the entire house.

# Traditions Around the World

Holiday decorations tell stories that reach far beyond lights and ornaments.

Around the world, families celebrate the season with decor that reflect their history, faith and cultural traditions. While customs vary from country to country, many share a common purpose: bringing people together and creating a welcoming home for family and friends.

In Germany, many holiday decorating traditions that are now common in the United States have deep roots. According to the German National Tourist Office, Advent wreaths made with evergreen boughs and four candles mark the weeks leading up to Christmas. Christmas markets fill town squares with decorated trees, handcrafted ornaments and illuminated displays, while homes often feature wooden nutcrackers, pyramids with spinning candle-powered figures and handcrafted ornaments from regions such as the Ore Mountains.

In Mexico, colorful decorations accompany Las Posadas, a nine-day celebration that commemorates Mary and Joseph's search for shelter. Homes and churches are decorated with luminaria — paper lanterns or candlelit bags that line walkways — along with poinsettias, evergreen garlands and the familiar star-shaped piñata. According



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to the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, these decorations symbolize hospitality, hope and community.

In Italy, the Nativity scene, or presepe, often takes center stage. Families may spend years adding handcrafted figures and buildings that recreate the story of Jesus' birth. While Christmas trees are common, elaborate nativity displays remain one of the

country's most cherished decorating traditions.

Throughout Scandinavia, simplicity and natural materials play an important role. Decorations often feature evergreen branches, straw ornaments, candles and hand-made paper stars displayed in windows during the long winter nights. Red, white and natural wood tones create warm, cozy interiors that reflect the Nordic concept of

comfort known as hygge.

In Japan, Christmas is celebrated as a largely secular holiday centered on seasonal beauty, gift-giving and festive illumination. Cities and shopping districts are known for elaborate winter light displays, while homes are often decorated with Christmas trees, wreaths and sparkling lights influenced by Western traditions. According to the Japan National Tourism Organiza-

tion, winter illuminations have become one of the country's most anticipated seasonal attractions, transforming parks, gardens and city streets into dazzling displays that draw millions of visitors each year. Although Christmas is not a national religious holiday in Japan, the emphasis on light, beauty and spending time with loved ones has made holiday decorating an important part of the season.

# Trends for the Season

Holiday decorating continues to evolve, but one theme remains constant: creating warm, welcoming spaces for the holidays.

This season's decorating trends embrace everything from nostalgic heirlooms to natural greenery, proving that the most memorable holiday homes are those filled with personality rather than perfection.

**Meaning.** One of the biggest trends is decorating with meaningful pieces collected over time. According to Better Homes & Gardens, homeowners are increasingly blending vintage ornaments, family heirlooms and handmade decorations with newer purchases instead of striving for perfectly coordinated displays. Quilted tree skirts, embroidered stockings and handcrafted ornaments evoke memories while adding warmth and texture to holiday decor.

**Nature.** Nature also continues to influence holiday decorating. Fresh evergreen garlands, wreaths, pine cones, dried citrus slices and branches bring seasonal beauty indoors while complementing nearly every decorating style. Many designers recommend layering natural materials with warm white LED lights to create a cozy atmosphere from Thanksgiving through the New Year.

**Color.** Traditional holiday colors remain popular, but decorators are expanding the palette. Alongside classic reds and greens, deep burgundy, forest green, champagne gold and muted metallics are appearing in everything from ornaments to table settings. Frosty whites, soft silvers and icy blues create elegant winter displays, while earthy greens and natural wood tones lend a re-



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laxed, organic feel to the home.

**Texture.** Design experts also note growing interest in layered textures, combining velvet ribbons, knit throws, linen table runners and woven baskets to create inviting spaces. According to Pinterest's annual trend forecast, consumers are increasingly choosing decor that reflects their own personalities rather than following a single decorating style.

**Trees.** Holiday trees are becoming more individualized as well. Rather than

decorating with matching ornament sets, many families are choosing themes built around travel souvenirs, favorite hobbies, handmade crafts or collections accumulated over the years. Large ribbon bows, oversized ornaments and decorative picks help fill trees while adding visual interest without requiring hundreds of ornaments.

**Table.** The dining table is also taking center stage. Instead of elaborate centerpieces reserved for one special meal, decorators are creating simple seasonal

displays that can remain throughout the holidays. Candles, evergreen sprigs, pine cones and bowls of fresh citrus make inexpensive centerpieces that are both attractive and practical.

**Sustainability.** Perhaps the strongest decorating trend is sustainability. Repurposing existing decorations, shopping secondhand, choosing durable ornaments and incorporating natural materials all help reduce waste while creating homes that feel authentic and uniquely personal.

# Lighting and Curb Appeal

Holiday lights have a way of transforming neighborhoods into festive winter landscapes.

From simple and elegant to bright and colorful, a well-planned outdoor display can welcome guests while showcasing your home's architectural features. The key is balancing creativity with safety and energy efficiency.

## GETTING STARTED

Before hanging the first strand of lights, take a step back and look at your home's natural focal points. According to the National Association of Landscape Professionals, outlining roof lines, highlighting entryways and accenting trees or shrubs often creates a more polished appearance than covering every available surface with decorations. Repeating a consistent color palette or lighting style throughout the display also helps create a cohesive look.

## LIGHTING

LED holiday lights remain the top choice for outdoor decorating. The U.S. Department of Energy notes that LED holiday lights use up to 75% less energy than traditional incandescent bulbs and can last up to 25 times longer. They also produce less heat, making them a safer option for decorating trees, shrubs and roof lines.



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## KEEP IT GREEN

Natural greenery can soften outdoor displays while adding seasonal charm. Fresh wreaths, evergreen garlands and winter planters filled with pine, cedar, spruce, holly or magnolia leaves complement holiday lighting beautifully. Add pine cones, decorative branches, red berries or weather-resistant ribbon for extra color and texture.

The Chicago Botanic Garden recommends using a variety of evergreen textures to create arrangements that remain attractive throughout the season.

## AROUND THE HOUSE

Walkways and entrances deserve special attention because they create guests' first impression.

Lanterns, lighted pathway stakes or illuminated planters can guide visitors safely to the front door while adding warmth and curb appeal. A simple wreath, seasonal doormat and decorative containers filled with winter greenery often make just as much impact as elaborate lighting displays.

## SAFETY

Safety should always come

first. The National Fire Protection Association recommends using only lights and extension cords rated for outdoor use, inspecting strings for damaged wires before installation and avoiding overloaded electrical outlets.

Secure lights with insulated clips rather than nails or staples that can damage wiring. Outdoor extension cord connections should be elevated off the ground and protected from rain or melting snow.

When decorating trees, avoid placing heavy ornaments on small branches that

could break under the weight of snow or ice. If using a ladder, choose one tall enough to reach your work comfortably, place it on stable ground and have another adult nearby to assist.

## ENERGY SMART

Timers and smart plugs make outdoor decorating more convenient while reducing electricity use. Programming lights to turn on at dusk and switch off before bedtime ensures the display can be enjoyed without wasting energy.

# Small Space, Big Holiday Spirit

You don't need a large home to create memorable holiday decor.

Whether you live in an apartment, condominium, townhome or cozy cottage, thoughtful decorating can bring festive cheer without making a space feel crowded. The key is choosing decorations that maximize visual impact while preserving everyday function.

**Focal points.** Start by identifying one or two focal points instead of decorating every available surface. According to Better Homes & Gardens, concentrating holiday decor in a few carefully chosen areas creates a polished look and helps prevent small rooms from feeling cluttered. A decorated entryway, fireplace mantel, dining table or bookshelf can establish a festive atmosphere without overwhelming the space.

**The tree.** A full-size Christmas tree isn't the only option. Slim-profile trees, tabletop trees and potted evergreens offer the same holiday spirit while taking up much less floor space. Some homeowners decorate small rosemary topiaries, Norfolk Island pines or other living plants that can continue growing after the holidays. Wall-mounted wooden trees, hanging ornament displays and decorative branches arranged in large vases also provide creative alternatives where floor space is limited.

**Think vertically.** Wreaths, garlands and hanging ornaments draw the eye upward and leave valuable floor and counter space available for everyday living. Doorways, windows, stair railings and open shelving provide opportunities to display greenery, ribbon and lights without adding bulk. According to the Chicago Botanic Garden, natural materials such as evergreen branches, magnolia leaves



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and winter berries add seasonal color while maintaining a light, organic appearance.

**Multipurpose decorations.** A bowl of ornaments can serve as both a centerpiece and storage. Decorative baskets can hold extra blankets while contributing to the holiday color scheme. Lanterns filled with pine cones or ornaments become attractive displays that are easy to move when entertaining guests.

**Lighting.** Strings of warm white LED lights draped across bookshelves, windows or headboards create a cozy atmosphere without requiring addi-

tional decorations. Mirrors placed near holiday lights help reflect light throughout the room, making smaller spaces feel brighter and more open.

**Holiday hues.** Color can make a surprising difference as well. Rather than introducing numerous competing colors, choose one or two accent shades that complement your existing decor. Metallic ornaments, glass decorations and natural wood accents blend easily into most homes while providing seasonal sparkle.

**Less is more.** Perhaps the most important decorating principle is restraint. Leave room for guests to

gather, meals to be shared and daily routines to continue. A handful of meaningful decorations — a favorite ornament collection, a fresh wreath or a beautifully decorated tabletop tree — can create just as much holiday magic as an elaborate display.

**Storage.** The National Association of Productivity & Organizing Professionals recommends selecting decorations that nest together or fit into stackable storage containers, making them easier to organize and protecting them for future seasons. Labeling storage bins by room or decorating theme also simplifies setup the following year.