



DECORATING TIPS

SETTING THE STAGE

Even the expert table-top gurus agree that formal is not like it used to be. Today, there aren't so many rules, only guidelines. Tabletop themes are a way to show your own personal style, let your creative juices flow, and highlight items that you love from around the house or garden. Make your tabletop into your own piece of temporary art. Let your tabletop decorating reflect who you are and what you love. And lastly, and this is a hard one for some people, try to add touches to create a "look" without overdoing it with too much of one thing. Create your "signature" style, and break it up with something unexpected. Here are some tips to get you started.

- A table setting should enhance, not dominate...or look dwarfed on your table. The very best tables have a few well-chosen pieces. Only put out what you need. Just as a quick refresher... line flatware up with the bottom of the plate and the blade of the knife always faces in. Water glass goes directly above the knife with wine and other glasses arranged to the right.
- Be sure you have a good basic set of bowls and plates in a single color. This will allow you to create different looks by adding flowers, napkins and other details. Or use a set of smaller patterned plates for one course...just be sure that everyone gets the same plate. Be creative. From this very simple beginning, based on the theme or occasion of your event, you have some important (but fun!) decisions to make.
- Perhaps the best way to think about dressing a table is to think about how you dress yourself. You might wear something casual, relaxed and comfortable for say an outing with friends and maybe something more formal, tailored, or sparkly for an evening on the town. Every woman knows that a wardrobe starts with some classic, basic pieces and then you spend the rest of your life defining your style by adding accents and accessories. Table top decorating isn't so different. So, by adding a whimsical decorative accent plate and some brightly colored napkins a place setting starts to take on a more casual look. Yet, adorned with more traditional plates, more formal stemware, a few more pieces of flatware and a fine linen napkin... now we are talking about an occasion for a nice dress!
- Maybe you have a set of fish knives or iced-teaspoon from you grandmother that you've never used...what are you waiting for? You can either plan your meal to include fish or tea...or create a new use for them. Think of them as tools rather than only serving a distinct purpose. Same goes for your glassware-serve fruit in a stemmed glass or soup in your favorite mugs. Or use your glassware as a decoration and don't serve anything in it at all. These days tableware doesn't always need to play by the rules.

- Try giving your table more depth with a longer colored tablecloth under a shorter white one. The right napkins can also add great color and texture. Use them to pull out the details in your tablecloth, or highlight a color in your flowers or candles. Of course there is an infinite variety of opportunities with napkin rings or ties. Just be sure your color is distributed evenly around the table and balanced with breaks of white plates or tablecloth.