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A Formal Affair

Hosting your first fancy fete? An entertaining expert tells you how.

by Aimée Morgan

Lynn Rosen, author of *Elements of the Table*, shares easy tips that will help you set your table like a pro.

1 Choose a tablecloth in a pattern or color that complements your tableware; don't limit yourself to the traditional ivory linen. For example, I'm using an African blanket I found at a museum shop, because it matches my china perfectly. Just make sure your cloth hangs straight, 12" over each side of the table.

2 An individual place setting is called a cover. Put your dinner plate in the center of each, with the soup bowl on top (if you're serving that course). And to be sure there's enough elbow and serving room, allow 18" to 20" between every setting.

Table Touches

■ Set napkins on top of the dinner plate, to the left of the fork or decoratively in the water goblet—but never underneath the silver, which should not be touched until it is used.

■ Use the best of what you have. If you don't have enough settings of one pattern, alternate them with your everyday china. This also applies to your serving pieces. Be creative and your table will stand out.

■ Place cards are an extra touch that alleviate those awkward moments when guests are finding their seats.



HOT TIP:
Don't be intimidated: Once you understand the basics, you can tailor your table setting to suit specific meals and courses.

TABLE TALK
Riverside Park dinnerware, Arctic Lights and Cheers stemware and Stanton flatware, all by Mikasa.

3 An all-purpose knife, a large dinner fork, a smaller salad or dessert fork, a large soup or dessert spoon and a smaller spoon for coffee or tea comprise the standard American flatware setting. Knives and spoons go to the right of your dinner plate and forks to the left, with the main-course utensils closest to the plate. Flatware for additional courses, such as salad or dessert, is placed on the outside. Pieces of silver should be placed a half-inch apart, one inch from the table's edge and lined up evenly with the bottom of your plate. The idea is that as the meal progresses, guests will utilize the outside service first and work their way in.

4 Place your water goblet above the tip of the knife and arrange the other stemware to the right in a row. For example, if you are serving both champagne and wine with your meal, place the champagne flute next to the goblet, followed by the wineglasses—red first, then white.

5 Cocktails are not traditionally served at a formal table. However, it's acceptable to break the rules. For instance, if you have a guest who prefers a vodka martini to the pinot grigio, simply remove the unused wineglass and let him enjoy his martini. After all, your most important consideration is the happiness and comfort of your guests.



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