8 easy holiday centerpiece ideas for the dining table

The holiday season is a great time to make any home a bit more merry and bright. Most individuals let their personalities show through their home decor, and holiday decorating is just as personal as decorating throughout the rest of the year.

The main living areas of a home get the most decorating attention, with a Christmas tree or menorah taking a prominent position in the front window. Garlands, candles and other accoutrements also may dress up spaces. However, when it comes to holiday hosting, attention also should be given to the dining table - which can benefit from a festive centerpiece.

Premade centerpieces are undeniably attractive, but adding a homespun touch can be a fun creative pursuit and become a family tradition. Explore these eight simple ideas to dress up your holiday table.

1. Frosted pine cones: Take advantage of a crisp winter's day to venture into a forest or park that is rich with evergreen trees. Gather pine cones from the forest floor and, if possible, a few evergreen boughs. Give the pine cones a touch of winter whimsy with a little faux snow in a can or even white paint. Nestle the boughs and pine cones into a wide-mouthed vase or bowl in the center of the table. Individual pine cones can later be turned into place cards for seating guests.

2. Holiday thanks: Cut many strips of paper roughly 6 inches in length from various colored pieces of paper to match the holiday theme. When guests arrive, ask them to write a favorite holiday memory or two, or what they're thankful for. Twirl the paper strips around a pencil to curl them, and then place the curlicues into a decorative bowl in the center of the table. Later in the evening, the host or hostess can read some of the sentiments.

3. Magical forest: Use green and silver conical party hats to turn a table or sideboard into a veritable evergreen forest. Arrange them on a blanket of faux snow or white confetti. 4. Freshly cut: Select attractive flowers in vibrant holiday hues from a florist or even the supermarket floral section. Cut the stems and place them into an unusual display container, such as holiday themed mugs or a punch bowl.

5. Glass baubles: Who says ornaments should be exclusive to the tree? A crystal or glass cake stand can be transformed into an icy delight when topped with silver and clear glass ornaments.

6. Birch wood: The crisp white coloring of birch bark is right at home with holiday decor. Go stark with pieces of the cut wood in varying heights intermingled with white candles that mimic the shapes and scale of the wood.

7. Fruit and vegetables: If guests are coming over and the race is on for a fast centerpiece, look no further than the kitchen. Lemons, artichokes, pears, or pomegranates look festive in a bowl interspersed with some greenery and baby's breath.

8. Cornucopia: The horn of plenty can be customized to any holiday. Purchase a horn in wicker or woven grapevine and fill with flowers, fruit and greenery, or even painted gourds or miniature pumpkins.

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