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How to Set Your Holiday Table

If you're hosting a Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Seder dinner, know how to set a holiday table. A great table setting enhances your formal or casual — but definitely festive — atmosphere. Understanding how to set a dinner table is essential during the holiday season, and is also important for hosting any formal dinners. (To *set a table* means to properly place dishes, flatware, and drinkware.)

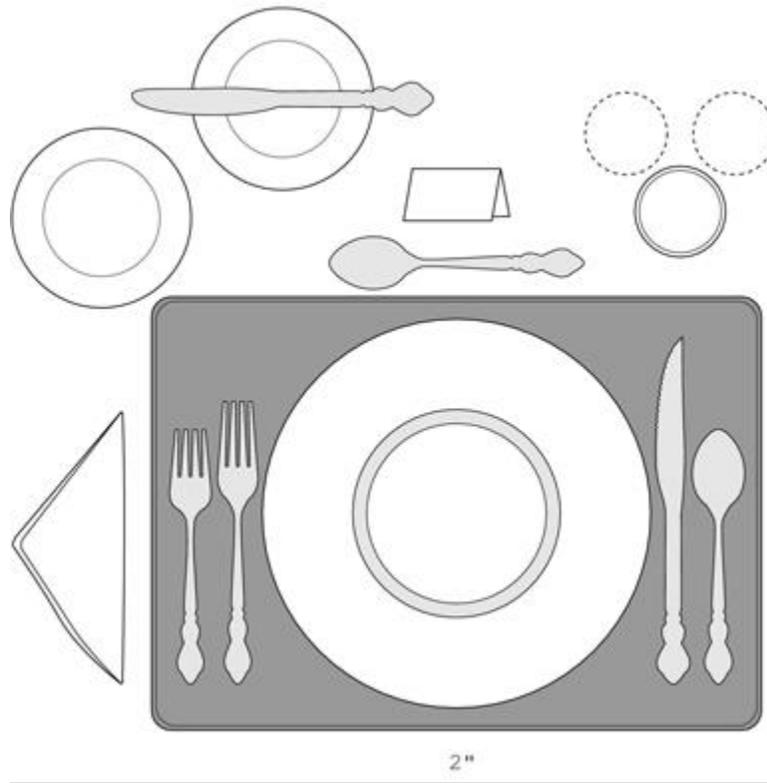


Keep your table settings simple for dinner parties: Keep utensils, glassware, and dinnerware to a minimum. Don't set out a plethora of utensils unless your guests will actually need them during the course of the meal. Setting out lobster forks when you're serving turkey will just confuse everyone. You don't need the additional clutter, and guests need to feel comfortable that they're using the right forks.

Casual table setting

Most holidays shared between family and friends are perfect for dining casually yet stylishly. Casual table settings allow people to feel at home and are perfect for less formally decorated holidays. Although you can always go all out for any holiday, a casual table offers guests an opportunity to graze at the buffet, filling their plates as often as they like, or scrape every last drop of delicious soup from bowls.

This is an example of a simple table setting to use if you want to serve a salad, soup, bread, a main course, and a beverage for dinner. If you serve coffee and dessert, you can place these items on the table right before serving them.

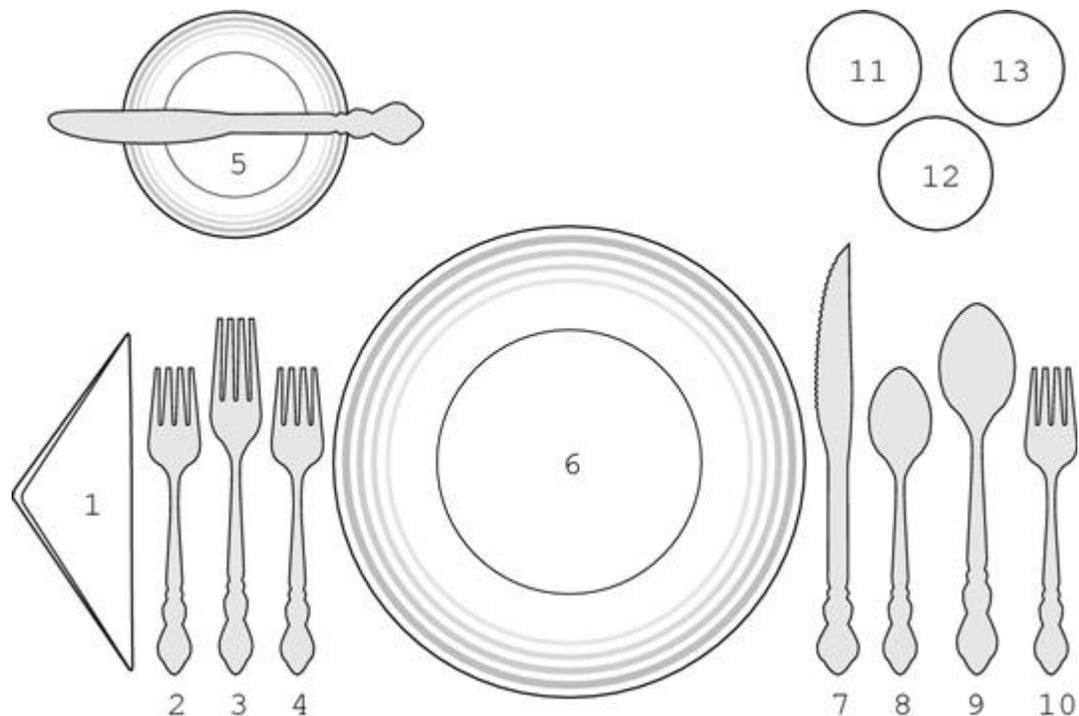


An informal place setting can add style to your dinner party.

- Place dinner plates approximately 2 inches from the table's edge and center them squarely in front of each chair.
- Put soup bowls on top of the dinner plates.
- Salad plates go above the forks to the left side of the dinner plate.
- Position bread plates slightly above the salad plate closer to the dessert fork.
- Flatware should be laid out in the order that guests will use it: Work your way from the outside in. Forks belong on the left of the dinner plate; knives and spoons go to the right. Knife edges should always face the dinner plate. Butter knives should be laid flat on the bread plate with the cutting edge, again, facing in the direction of the dinner plate. Dessert forks or spoons can be placed horizontally at the top of the dinner plate.
- Place water glasses above the dinner knife. Optional red and white wine glasses or champagne flutes are staggered around the water glass.
- Napkins go to the left of the plate, inside a drinking glass, or in the center of the plate.
- Place cards (perfectly optional) work best placed above the dessert utensil, centered with the plate.

Formal table setting

If you're hosting a Passover Seder or a Christmas dinner, you may opt for a more formal table setting. For a full-blown formal dinner party, you can add more detail to your place settings as needed: The following list corresponds to the numbers in the illustration.



A formal place setting has many pieces; add or delete them according to your menu.

- Napkin (1)
- Salad fork (2)
- Dinner fork (3)
- Dessert fork (4)
- Bread and butter plate, with butter knife (5)
- Dinner plate (6)
- Dinner knife (7)
- Teaspoon (8)
- Soup spoon (9)
- Cocktail fork (10)
- Water glass (11)
- Red wine glass (12)
- White wine glass (13)



Proper table settings do not need to include every utensil. All sorts of utensils are laid out in this example table setting, but don't add them to your table unless you intend to use each piece with a course you're serving for dinner or dessert.