

Published November 13th, 2019

Prepping for a perfect Thanksgiving

By Amanda Eck



Photo provided

Can you believe we are just weeks away from the holidays? This year I am in charge of cooking for Thanksgiving. God help us! But with these great tips I am hoping to pull off a successful and satisfying holiday feast. (But I'm buying some frozen pizzas just in case!)

Decorating a beautiful Thanksgiving table is only part of the equation for a festive gathering. You'll also need to know where you'll seat everyone. Confirm your guest list and finalize your menu. Does anyone have special dietary needs? Do you need to rent or purchase a folding table and chairs for extra seating? Do you need a children's table? Who will you seat at each table? Do you have enough silverware, dinnerware, glasses and linens for everyone? Do you have any items that need cleaning or replacing? Does any silver need to be polished? It's so much easier to figure all of this out ahead of time!

If you're planning to host overnight guests, you'll be so glad if you take the time during these weeks prior to Thanksgiving to give your home a thorough cleaning. If you devote the time and energy to cleaning now, you'll be in a better position to give your home a quick once-over right before the big day. Cleaning out your freezer now will make room for any dishes that you can prepare ahead and freeze. Bonus - you'll already have room in your freezer for after Thanksgiving leftovers!

Many items can be made ahead and frozen - pie crusts, rolls, homemade stock and more. Just think how glad you'll be to only have to pull your already prepared dish from the freezer when you're ready to start cooking.

Things you should do to prepare for the Thanksgiving holiday:

Two weeks before:

Clean out your freezer to make room for the turkey and any dishes you can prepare ahead of time and freeze.

Beat the crowds and shop for nonperishable foods now.

Pick up alcohol and nonalcoholic beverages.

Plan your table setting and guests seating.

Decide what serving dishes you will need and have them washed up and ready.

Shop for dishware (Costco is great for bulk plastic ware, or HomeGoods and even the Dollar store for inexpensive dishes and glassware).

Purchase frozen piecrust before all that's left are the broken ones (don't ask me how I know this).

Do any deep cleaning now because the closer it gets to the day the less time and energy you'll have.

One week before:

Shop for heartier vegetables like potatoes, carrots, butternut squash, etc.

Wash and iron any linen if you plan to use them.

Shop for candles or any other tabletop decor.

If you are having little ones over, think about purchasing some games or fun trinkets from the Dollar store to have at the kid's table to keep them busy before dinner is served.

Ask for help! Reach out to other guest and assign them a side dish or ask if they would be willing to help with meal prep or clean up after the meal.

If you are having out of town guests, prepare the guest bedroom with fresh linens, towels, soap, etc.

Do your normal weekly cleaning- mopping, dusting, vacuuming, etc. now and you'll only need to do a quick once-over the day before the big day.

Three days ahead:

Clear out space in the refrigerator to defrost the turkey.

Set the table. I like to have my tables set and my serving dishes out days before the event so that I can focus on my guest the day of.

Use Post-it notes to place on serving dishes so when you have others helping you the day of you won't be bombarded with questions of "where should I put the potatoes?"

Two days ahead:

Purchase fresh flowers for centerpieces or for the front entry to welcome guests.

Make pies or any other dishes that can be kept in the freezer or fridge.

If you haven't set the table, do it now. You may have to eat in the living room or on portable tray tables, but it is worth it not having to stress the day of.

One day before:

Start to make sides that will reheat well, like casseroles or creamed onions. Prep garnishes, toppings, salad greens and stuffing ingredients. Cook soups and let cool before storing in the refrigerator if you didn't freeze any options in advance. If your stuffing recipe calls for stale bread, cut the bread now and set the cubes on a baking sheet to dry out. You can go ahead and make your pies, especially Ree Drummond's Pecan Pie that needs to cool overnight for a natural do-ahead dessert.

Thanksgiving Day

Our family tradition, after our Thanksgiving meal, is to go around the table and say what we are thankful for in the past year and what we are looking forward to in the year to come. It's a great way to end the meal in an inspirational way and the kiddos love being a part of it as well.

Take 10 minutes before guests arrive to meditate or think of all the things you are grateful for. Yes, the holidays for many can be stressful: Aunt Bertha who always complains about the meal or Cousin George who just can't seem to keep quiet about politics, or the moody teenager who sits crossed-armed at the table glaring at everyone; at the end of the day they are all still family and we are grateful they are here on this earth with us.

I hope these tips help you stay on top of your holiday gathering. And from our family to yours, Happy Thanksgiving!



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As the Owner and Principal Designer of Lamorinda-based Amanda Carol Interiors, Amanda Eck believes your home's interior should be both approachable and well- appointed. She often asserts, "Beauty is a necessity." With a distinct sense of style that mixes contemporary and classic design she fashions spaces that are both elegant and inviting. Her design aesthetic is inspired by anything visual but especially fashion, architecture and art. Visit <http://amandacarolinteriors.com> for more design ideas.

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