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## EC951 Making the Most of the Meal Hour

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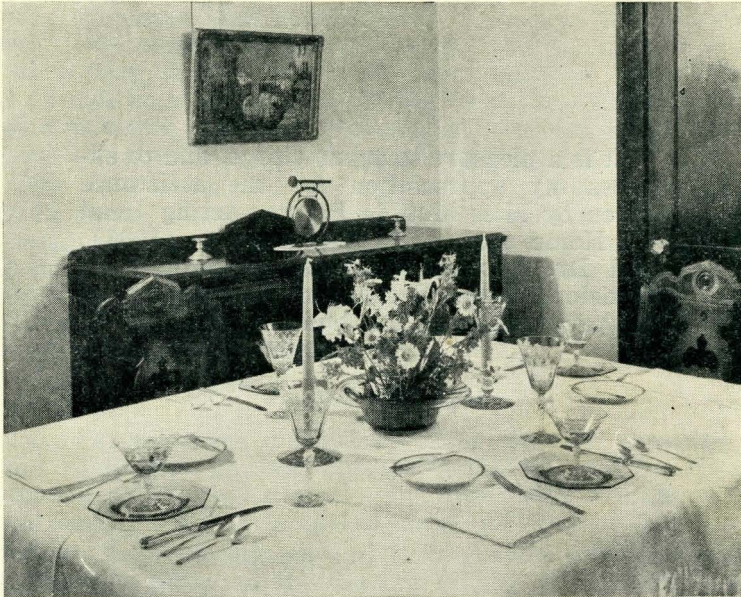
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## Making the Most of the Meal Hour



Inviting, isn't it?

The University of Nebraska Agricultural College Extension Service  
and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating  
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln



It is a pleasure to acknowledge, and to express my appreciation for the assistance given by Miss Matilda Peters, Acting Head of Home Economics Department (1931), and Dr. Rebekah Gibbons, Head of Food Division, Home Economics Department, in the preparation of this bulletin.

FLORENCE J. ATWOOD

## Making the Most of the Meal Hour

By FLORENCE J. ATWOOD

Our grandmothers tell how the family gathered around the fireplace in the evenings for a social hour. In modern life, because of the attractions outside the home, the family table seems to be about the only place where the whole family is together. For this reason the meal hour should be interesting and pleasant and the table as clean and attractive as possible. This also helps to make for good digestion.

Every homemaker is anxious to have her family well-fed and at the same time she wishes to know the details of correct service so that her family may learn at home how to be at ease on all occasions. In the ideal family, table service, table manners, and table conversation are the same, whether there are guests or just the family group.

The color scheme should never be the means of making an ill choice of foods, but if one wishes to carry out a particular color on special occasions, it adds to the attractiveness of the table to do so. If the desire is to have red and green predominating, the center piece would be chosen with this in mind and might be a small red geranium, a few rose buds, small fern, or poinsettia.

### Laying the Table

A meal has three distinct divisions, namely; choosing the food, cooking it, and serving it. In this circular we are considering an imaginary meal—one with foods well chosen and well cooked and are discussing the service only.

Rules for table setting and table service are not uniform. Authorities differ in the placing of the forks, salad plates, and in the use of right or left hand service. The table setting and service given below are accepted by good authorities. The service is also followed in teaching the food classes and is used in the home management house at the University of Nebraska.

The freshness of the linen adds charm to the meal. The table cloth is more attractive if laundered with only a middle crease and then rolled or carefully folded to avoid more creasing. The middle fold of the cloth runs lengthwise down the middle of the table between the covers of the host and



hostess. Most table cloths fall about nine inches below the edge of the table. This distance should be the same at the ends also. Doilies or luncheon sets save laundering and may be used for breakfast and luncheon. The aim is always to make the table attractive, for "the day has long since passed when a groaning board alone is held the acme of dining table perfection. Less food and more artistry in it and its serving is the rule of the day."

A bowl of flowers, a low growing plant, or a dish of fruit makes an attractive centerpiece. Flowers may be arranged more easily in a low bowl, if it is filled about one-fourth full

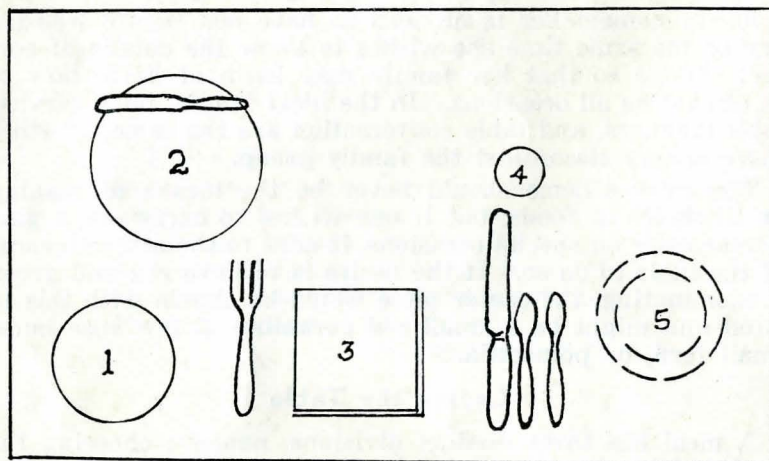


FIG. 1.—Individual cover for dinner

- |                            |                |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Salad plate             | 3. Napkin      |
| 2. Bread and butter plate  | 4. Water glass |
| 5. Beverage cup and saucer |                |

of clean sand. A flower "frog" serves the same purpose. For special occasions, some people like to use candle sticks; plain glass, pewter, or silver usually being preferred. On a large table, four are used, but if the table is small, two are sufficient. The candlesticks may be placed at the center, near each corner, or in some other definite balanced symmetrical form.

The individual cover consists of the silver, china, glassware, and napkin used by each person. Twenty inches is the minimum space and thirty the maximum space that is allowed for each cover. The dinner plate, silver, and napkin are placed

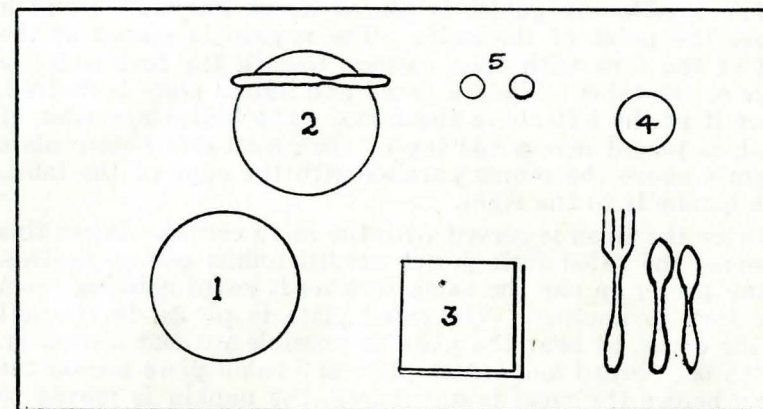


FIG. 2.—Individual cover for luncheon  
(No knife needed)

- |                           |                |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Salad plate            | 3. Napkin      |
| 2. Bread and butter plate | 4. Water glass |
| 5. Salt and pepper        |                |

equal distance from the edge of the table, usually one inch. This is called the plate line. If the table edge is rounded this rule must be modified, because the pieces of silver must be parallel to each other.

The dinner knife and fork are placed next to the plate, the knife to the right with the cutting edge toward the plate and the fork on the left with tines turned up. If no knife is used, the fork is placed at the right in the place of the knife because the fork will be used in the right hand if there is no knife. The spoons are placed beyond the knife, the one to be used first on the outside, and the one to be used last nearest the knife. If a cocktail fork is used it is placed at the extreme right. All other forks are placed at the left of the dinner fork in the same order as the spoons.

The pieces of silver are placed close together without crowding. This gives the cover a compact appearance and makes it a unit. The pieces of silver are limited to not more than three on one side of the plate. However, a fourth piece may be used if the cover is very wide or the piece of silver is small. If more silver is needed it may be brought to the table on a tray, which is covered with a doily. This is placed with the right hand to the right of the cover just before the course, for which it is needed, is served.



The tumbler or goblet is placed about one half an inch above the point of the knife. The napkin is placed at the left of the fork with open corners toward the fork and the edge of the table. When a bread and butter plate is desired, place it at the left above the forks. The butter spreader, if used, is placed across the top of the bread and butter plate slightly above the center parallel with the edge of the table. The handle is to the right.

Often the salad is served with the main course. When this is done, the salad fork is not needed unless one so desires. Many prefer to use the same fork as it saves shifting from one fork to another. The salad plate is placed to the left of the cover, as near the plate as possible without crowding. When both bread and butter plate and salad plate are on the table before the meal is announced, the napkin is moved to the center of the cover.

Individual salt and peppers may be placed in front of each cover, or salt and pepper shakers may be placed between two covers on a line with the water glasses. Bread, butter, jelly, relishes, etc., are placed symmetrically within easy reach, not too close to the middle of the table. The accompanying silver is placed on the table at the side of the dish with the handle toward the person who is responsible for passing it.

If the meal is served by the host and hostess, the host serves the meat, potatoes, and vegetables. He remains seated while carving the meat. When the beverage is served at the table by the hostess, the pot is placed to the right of the hostess on a tile with space enough between the pot and the hostess's cover to allow room for a cup and saucer so that she may conveniently pour the beverage. Cups and saucers are placed at the left of the cover with handles of the cups turned toward the hostess left. Cream and sugar are placed in front of the hostess with the handle of the pitcher toward the right and the sugar spoon or tongs beside it. The cream is usually to the right of the sugar bowl. If the hot beverage is served from the kitchen with the main course, the cup and saucer are placed at the right with the edge of the saucer a few inches in from the plate line and at the right of the spoons. In this case the cream and sugar are passed at the table.

The meat platter is placed in front of the cover laid for the host and the vegetable dish to the right and the warmed plates between his knife and the fork. The carving set and

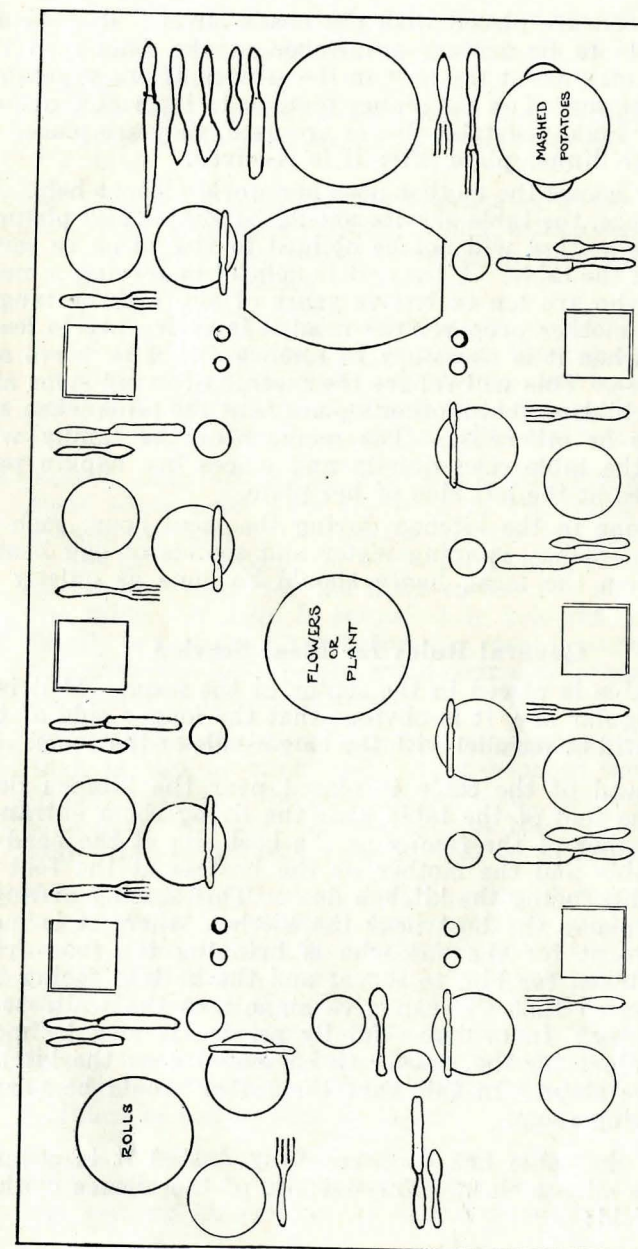


FIG. 3.—Informal dinner service  
Table laid for meat course



serving spoon are placed with the host's silver. If a second vegetable is to be served, a member of the family to the host's left may assist the host in the service of one vegetable. This may be served on the dinner plate or in individual dishes. When individual vegetable dishes are used, they are placed in front of the dinner plate after it is received.

In many homes the mother does her work without help. In such instance, the table service should be simple and planned so that the mother will not be obliged to rise often to serve the ones at the table. A tea cart is helpful in serving a meal. Children who are ten or twelve years of age may be taught that when mother prepares the meal it is their duty to leave the table when it is necessary to remove dishes or serve another course. This will relieve the mother of many steps and teach the children that mother's place is at the table when she has guests or otherwise. The member of the family who waits on the table rises quietly and places her napkin partially folded at the left side of her plate.

Work done in the kitchen during the meal hour, such as scraping of dishes, running water and sounds of egg beater detract from the meal, hence should be done as quietly as possible.

#### General Rules for Meal Service

1. The table is placed in the center of the room. If it is a rectangular one, it is obvious that the longer side of the table will be parallel with the longer side of the room.
2. The head of the table is placed near the kitchen door and the foot of the table near the living room entrance. The father of the family or the host sits at the head of the table and the mother or the hostess at the foot of the table facing the kitchen door. This seating arrangement places the host near the kitchen where it is most convenient for the one who is bringing the food from the kitchen for him to serve; and the hostess facing the kitchen so that she can give signals to the waitress if necessary. In ordinary family service it may be more convenient for the mother to be seated near the kitchen to save steps. In this case the father would be nearer the living room.
3. After the table has been carefully dusted it is covered with a silence cloth. The purpose of the silence cloth is four fold:

- (1) To protect the table cloth from the heat of the dishes.
- (2) To prevent noise at the table from the handling of the dishes.
- (3) To save the table cloth from wear which would result if the linen were in contact with the edge of the table.
- (4) To add to the attractive appearance of the table cloth. This is plainly evident when comparing the linen which is over a hard surface to that which is over a padded surface.

The silence cloth may be heavy cotton "felt" or a quilted pad which is sold for this purpose. An asbestos cover is an ideal protection from hot dishes, but because it can not be laundered and because the edge of it wears the table cloth, it should be covered with the cotton padding.

4. Before announcing any meal the chairs are placed with their edges even with the edge of the table, the water glasses are filled three-fourths full and the relishes placed on the table. Except for very formal occasions the bread, butter and foods for the main course are also placed on the table. If soup is served it is brought in after the family is seated or just before the meal is announced. In this case, the food for the main course is brought in after the soup dishes are removed.
5. Guests are seated according to congenial partners, rather than by age or rank. The most honored lady guest is usually seated at the right of the host; the most honored man guest is seated at the right of the hostess. A man and wife are not often seated next to each other.
6. When the plates are served at the table, the service usually begins with the hostess and continues at her right in order, then at her left, continuing down that side of the table. The host is served last. At the beginning the host states for whom the plate is intended. This avoids confusion. It is not good taste to serve a guest and then to ask her to pass another plate past hers. Begin with the hostess, serve in regular order around the table regardless of age or sex.
7. Dishes containing foods which are placed on the table, such as bread or relish, are passed to the left, each person serving himself as the dish reaches him.



8. If a waitress is assisting with the service, she may offer one or all of the vegetables or other foods to which guests help themselves at the left of the guests. The waitress places the beverage from the right with the right hand. Other foods which do not admit of choice are placed from the left with the left hand.
9. In waiting on a table one is watchful of the wants of the guests. The water glasses are kept filled. Do not lift the glass from the table when filling it. If the covers are crowded, take hold of glass well down towards the bottom and draw to the edge of the table, then fill and replace. Use a napkin to catch the drip when refilling cups or glasses.
10. The host takes a second serving of something so that the guests may feel free to do so if they desire. If the host is serving, he carves a few portions of meat before asking anyone to be served a second time.
11. Removing dishes. Either right or left hand service is correct. (Directions for left hand service are given here.) However, the same order of serving should be kept throughout the meal. Dishes containing foods such as the platter and vegetable dishes, are removed first, then the bread plate, relish dishes, etc.  
In removing individual covers, begin with the hostess. First, stand at her left and remove the main course plate with the left hand, transfer it to the right hand, which is held behind the hostess, then remove the salad plate, place it quietly upon the dinner plate and then remove the bread and butter plate. Remove the cover of the person seated at the right of the hostess and so on around the table. Remove salts and peppers and any unused silver on a small tray covered with a small doily.
12. The table is crumbed just before the dessert is placed. A napkin and plate are used to remove the crumbs. The waitress works at the left of each cover.
13. The dessert may be served by the hostess, host, or from the kitchen. If served from the kitchen, two services are brought to the table at a time. The one in the left hand is placed from the left in front of the hostess, the other is transferred from the right to the left hand and placed before the person seated to the right of the hostess. If the hostess is serving the beverage, the dessert service

may begin with the person to her right and the hostess is served last.

### Rules for Table Etiquette

Table etiquette is so closely related to table service that a few general rules are given. Many times one's conduct at the table is one of the most trying of social functions. This is because correct table etiquette is not understood or because it is not practiced at home until it becomes a habit.

1. An invitation to a meal should be acknowledged with acceptance or regrets. When one has accepted an invitation, he should arrive at least five minutes before the stated dinner hour, not much earlier. When the hostess announces that the dinner is served, the announcement should be answered promptly.
2. In taking one's place at the table, stand at the back of the chair and be seated from the left side.
3. The hostess gives the signal to be seated at the table. The men remain standing until all the ladies have been seated. Sit in an erect position with the feet on the floor directly in front of the chair. Do not lounge or rest elbows or hands on the table. The elbows are kept close to the sides while using knife, fork, or spoon.
4. The napkin is removed from the table as soon as grace has been said, or after the hostess has removed hers if no grace is to be said. If a large dinner napkin is used, it is kept folded in half and spread across the lap. It is used for the fingers and lips only. At the close of the meal, it may be partially folded and placed to the left of the cover.
5. The plate is not moved about while sitting at the table. The soup plate should never be tipped while eating from it. Other dishes should not be set on the dinner plate after food has been served on it.
6. The knife is held with the end of the index finger just beyond the handle. Only the portion of food which is to be eaten immediately is cut off at one time. After the knife has once been used, it is kept on the upper right hand side of the plate for the remainder of the meal.



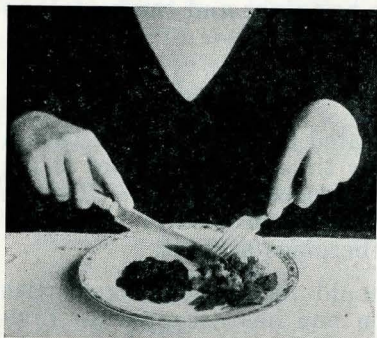


FIG. 4.—Correct way to hold knife and fork when cutting foods

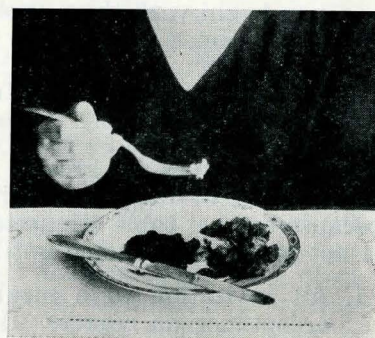


FIG. 5.—Correct way to hold fork. Spoon is held in the same position. Position of knife when not in use.

7. The fork is held by the handle in the same manner as the knife. It is used for carrying dry foods and many semi-solid foods to the mouth, also for cutting foods which are easily separated as lettuce and omelet. In carrying foods to the mouth only a small portion is carried on the fork with tines turned up. When cutting food with both knife and fork, the small portions may be carried to the mouth with the fork in the left hand. When this custom is used, the tines are turned down, using the fork as a pick. When not in use, it is placed on the plate parallel to the knife.
8. Use a fork rather than a spoon whenever possible. For buttered vegetables use a fork. Creamed vegetables may be eaten with a spoon. A fork may be used for brick ice cream, if desired.
9. A fork is used to eat cake which has a soft frosting. However, no fork needs to be used if the cake can be handled without soiling the fingers. Do not use a spoon to eat cake.
10. An ice served with the meat course is eaten with the dinner fork. This means that the ice must be frozen hard and served just after all plates are served. If the hostess has provided a spoon, use it. The spoon must be left on the dinner plate when not in use.

11. The spoon is used for liquid foods. These foods should be taken noiselessly from the side of the spoon. With soups, the spoon is dipped away from one to avoid the drip. After the spoon has been used to sweeten the beverage or to test its temperature, it is placed on the saucer and left there.
12. Only a small portion of bread is buttered at one time. The bread is broken before being buttered. It is either placed on the bread and butter plate or on the dinner plate.
13. Beverages should never be cooled by pouring a portion out in the saucer or blowing on a spoonful. When partaking of it the mouth should be free from foods and it should be taken quietly.
14. Masticate foods noiselessly with the mouth closed. Never attempt to talk while masticating foods.
15. One general rule for all eating is not to hurry thru any part of the meal.
16. Foods are accepted with "Yes, thank you," or "if you please" and refused with "No, thank you." Learn to eat and enjoy all foods. Food prejudices often inconvenience one when eating at public places and the hostess is often embarrassed because some guest refused her food because of a personal dislike for it.
17. The guests at a meal, like the food, should be well chosen. Oftentimes the social hour is marred because all guests are not congenial. The hostess should lead in the conversation but should not monopolize it. The conversation should be on a pleasant topic. Gruesome accidents or sickness should never be table talk. Children should be happy and never quarrelsome.
18. When leaving the home where one has been entertained, the guest always shakes hands with the hostess and expresses his or her pleasure for the hospitality extended. Children should be taught this courtesy early in life.

### Banquet Service

Banquet service follows the rules for formal service. The number of waiters or waitresses depend upon the number to be served. However, one waiter or waitress should not be responsible for more than eight or ten guests.



Often it is desired to have the banquet served in a comparatively short time. In such a case, time may be saved by having two or more waiters or waitresses work together. When such a plan is followed, the first waiter or waitress removes the soiled dishes from two covers of the first course and a second one follows with two filled plates for the second course. This waiter in turn removes the soiled dishes from two more adjoining covers and carries them back to the place for soiled dishes. The first waiter has returned with two plates for the cover just cleared by the second waiter. This order continues until the quota of guests are served. It is advisable to have a captain for each group of waiters to keep an eye on each cover to see that every detail has been carried thru.

Steps are often saved by placing the table with the open end toward the door thru which the waiters pass. Steps saved means time conserved.