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## EC55-903 Setting the Table

Ethel Diedrichsen

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# Setting the Table



EXTENSION SERVICE  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
COOPERATING  
W. V. LAMBERT, DIRECTOR



# SETTING THE TABLE

Compiled by Ethel Diedrichsen  
Extension Nutritionist

Good food demands a gracious setting. Part of every homemaker's job is to provide that setting for every meal every day. Your table appointments need not be expensive. They should be chosen and combined with taste and imagination. Simplicity is the keynote for blending silver, linen and china into beautiful backgrounds that make good food taste better.

## That Uncluttered Look

The wise woman forgets confusing definitions and works with good taste for that uncluttered look which is the mark of a fine table whatever its period and style. Like the artist, she follows principles of balance, proportion, contrast, and unity.

**BALANCE** means exactly what you would expect--the placement of objects to achieve equilibrium. All the heavy serving equipment should not be crowded at one end nor should all the color be concentrated in one spot. After you set your table, think carefully of your menu, then move centerpieces, candlesticks and incidental serving dishes until you achieve balance.

**PROPORTION** in table setting refers to the shape and size of table and to the size relationship of the table appointments. A small dainty table calls for a simple delicate centerpiece, a few flowers floating in a silver or crystal bowl rather than a massive arrangement that overshadows everything else.

**CONTRAST** in shape, size, color, and texture gives your table eye-appeal and breaks monotony. For example, the delicate lines of a graceful silver pattern stand out sharply against a rough, nubby cloth or table mat. Count on your food for some fine bits of color contrast. But don't go too far. Too many colors or shapes or patterns destroy that sense of tranquillity which every good table should possess.

**UNITY** speaks for itself. It means that sense of "oneness", which is bound to be yours if your table has correct balance, proportion and contrast. Judge for yourself. Does your table have a single clear but repeating theme like a good melody or does it come apart in a series of jangled notes?



## The Supporting Cast

**TABLE COVERINGS--** Variety in shape, size, color and pattern is almost endless. Mats are in particularly high favor and have almost replaced the tablecloth in many homes.

Color and texture strike other high-style notes in table settings. The always-correct white damask has many exciting, new running mates in rich glowing colors which are correct on both formal and informal tables. Heavy, rough fabrics and nubby materials are found in both cloths and mats--and then, for unusual texture, we have rattan, bamboo and plastics which simulate all kinds of weaves and appliques.

When the ready-mades fall short, the up-to-the-minute homemaker improvises with lengths of yard goods--upholstery or dress fabrics--which have just the color or texture she wants.

**FLATWARE--** Design in flatware is related to the use of the various pieces, to balance, to contour and to shape. The present trend is toward forks with shorter tines, spoons with rounded bowls, salad forks with cutting edges. Pieces are made to stack more easily. In some patterns there are fewer pieces than in most traditional sets. In these each piece was designed to serve more than one purpose.

Silver, silverplate, and solid alloy require periodic polishing with a good paste or creamy liquid silver polish, using a soft cloth or sponge. Polish lengthwise with long, gentle strokes. Do not allow silver to become badly tarnished. It makes the cleaning job harder. Wash well in hot, soapy water, rinse and dry thoroughly after polishing.

Stainless steel is nontarnishable and needs only a minimum of care. It does not rust or corrode in normal use.

**CHINA** can be had in infinite variety. A profusion of traditional types-- Floral, banded, pictorial designs-- is matched by an equal number of contemporary designs, and pottery is right up front with fine bone china as a correct choice for formal service. As in linens, rich color is characteristic of much china and pottery designed for today. Plates may be square, oval, irregular, and are often made without a center well. Cups, bowls, pitchers are likely to be wide and low, with a kind of plump look. Decorative design is used with a light hand, sometimes in an off-sided motif to emphasize shape. Instead of buying "sets" of dishes, many hostesses now use a different service for each course.

**GLASSWARE** too has developed in all directions. Some glass patterns are coordinated with particular china patterns. Rainbow colors from delicate pastels through rich rubies and emeralds are available in plates, tumblers and stemware. When choosing glassware, it is helpful to be able to recognize these signs of quality: sparkle and clarity, smooth edges, minimum of flaws and air bubbles and perfect formation. When tapped, high-quality glass has a clear bell-like ring. Decorations should be well designed and executed. Good balance and proportion are important.



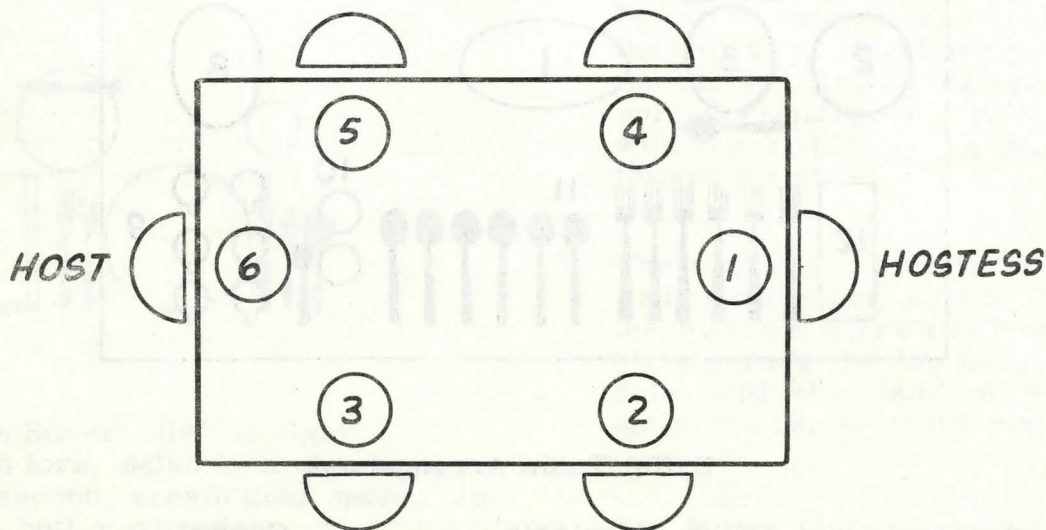
**DECORATIVE ACCESSORIES**--centerpieces and other accessories give you real scope for your creative talents. Candles, flowers, fruit and figurines have always been favorite table decorations. But the modern homemaker uses many unusual things as well to add interest to her table--teapots and pitchers to hold flowers or greens, salad bowls, and bread trays for fruits or vegetables.

Often, on modern tables, the decoration may be off to one side of the table, or in several places. It may take the form of tiny, individual ornaments--one for each place setting. There is almost no limit to what may be used as long as it does not interfere with conversation or the serving of the meal.

## Which Style is Your Style?

The way you serve--whether you do it yourself or have help--is another vital ingredient of a successful meal. Service must be smooth and efficient with a minimum of fumbling. It must be speedy enough to insure hot and cold foods remaining hot or cold. Formal service may be either Russian or Banquet Service. Informal service includes the Family or American, the Compromise Service and the Buffet. Any of the four may be used strictly according to rule, but do not hesitate to modify the service if it seems necessary for your family or your type of entertaining.

**RUSSIAN SERVICE.** This is seldom used except on strictly formal occasions. Servants are required because all food is served from the kitchen. Service plates are used so that guests are never without a plate before them. A waitress places the individual plates for the course before each guest. Platters of food are passed by the waitress and each person serves himself to the course that is offered. A variation is Banquet Service in which the waitress replaces an empty plate with a filled one for the next course.



Order of Serving when the Host Serves Entire Main Course.

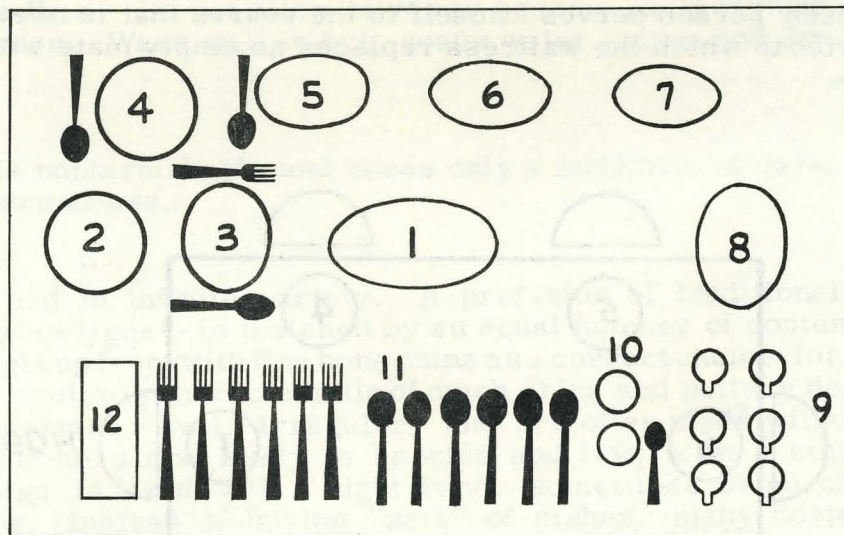


**ENGLISH SERVICE.** In the English Service all food is served in courses at the table by the host and hostess who give their personal attention to the preferences, needs and wishes of their guests. Filled plates are passed to the guests by a servant.

**FAMILY or AMERICAN SERVICE.** For this simple intimate type of service, there is no maid and the entire service is carried on by members of the family. Food is placed in bowls or dishes on the table. The food is passed and each person serves himself and passes the food on to the next person.

**COMPROMISE SERVICE.** This is compromise between the English and Russian Service. It is perhaps the most practical for the modern American home. Individual plates of soup, salad and dessert may be served from the kitchen. The meat is carved and is served along with the vegetables by the host. Other foods such as bread, butter, jelly and pickles are passed from guest to guest around the table. The hostess usually serves the beverage and sometimes the dessert.

**BUFFET SERVICE.** Ideal for entertaining large groups when space and assistance are at a minimum. Buffet Service may be as formal or informal as you wish. All food, plates and silver are arranged on a table so that guests may help themselves. Sometimes the main dish and beverage are served by someone stationed at the table. Guests take their plates to whatever seats are available or to card tables or the dining table. These tables may be set with the necessary silver, napkins, water glasses, or guests may carry those items from the buffet table as needed. In very formal buffet service, used mainly at wedding receptions and similar occasions, guests are seated, and food brought from the service table by waiters.



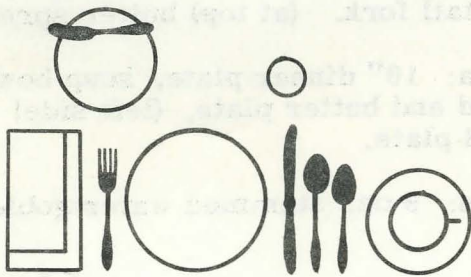
Buffet Table Arrangement

- |                |                   |                      |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Centerpiece | 5. Vegetable      | 9. Cups              |
| 2. Plates      | 6. Rolls          | 10. Cream and sugar, |
| 3. Main dish   | 7. Relish plate   | and spoon            |
| 4. Vegetable   | 8. Coffee service | 11. Silver           |
|                |                   | 12. Napkins          |



## Review of Basic Table Setting Rules

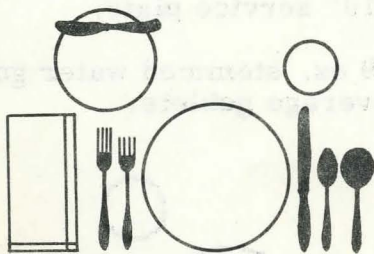
The basic rules of table setting are simple and help to make eating comfortable and fun. After the rules are memorized and table-setting becomes automatic, you can improvise, using different sets of china or inexpensive earthenware, new colors in cloths, unusual flower arrangements. You can be as creative as you like with your table setting as long as you observe the simple rules which were developed to make your guests feel at home and at ease.



**Breakfast Silver:** (left to right) - Luncheon fork, luncheon knife, cereal spoon, teaspoon. (At top): butter spreader.

**China:** 8 1/2" breakfast plate, bread and butter plate, cup and saucer.

**Glass:** 9 oz. water tumbler.



**Luncheon Silver:** (left to right) - Luncheon fork, salad fork, luncheon knife, teaspoon, cream soup spoon, (at top) - butter spreader.

**China:** 8 1/2" luncheon plate, bread and butter plate.

**Glass:** 9 oz. footed water tumbler.

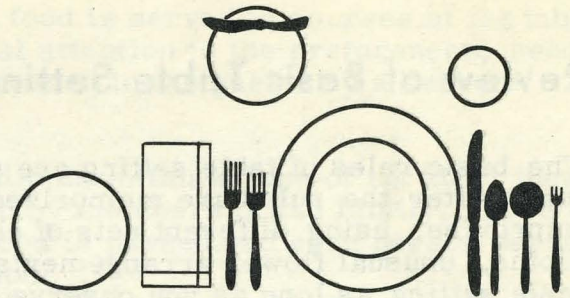
Just a little practice will make it easy for you and your family helpers to serve everyday or company meals quickly and correctly. Here are some guides to remember:

1. Linen should be spotless; crystal, china and silver gleaming.
2. Allow 24 inches if possible for each place setting or "cover", with each cover set exactly the same. Overall effect of settings should be symmetrical and orderly.
3. Handles of silver and the rim of the place plate should be about an inch from the edge of the table.
4. An accepted way to place silver at each cover is in the order of its use from the outside in. Forks (except the cocktail fork) are at the left of the plate. Knives (except the butter spreader) and spoons are at the right, with the knife cutting edge always toward the plate.
5. The cocktail fork is placed at the extreme right, next to the spoons, the butter spreader on the butter plate across the top or at the right side, with the blade on the rim and out of the center of the plate.
6. The butter plate is placed above the fork, the glass above the knife. Place individual salt and pepper containers above each plate or between two place settings. If you have only two sets, place them at either end of the table.



7. The napkin is usually placed next to the forks at the left of the plate. It may be placed in the center of the place plate for a formal dinner unless the first course is in place when guests come to the table.
8. Place serving silver beside the dish of food, not in it.
9. Place the coffee cup and saucer to the right of the knife and spoons and one inch from the edge of the table.
10. The salad plate may be placed in several places:
  1. Left of the forks and napkin and one inch from the edge of the table.
  2. At the tip of the fork if there is no bread and butter plate.
  3. In place of the cup and saucer if no hot beverage is served.
11. Candles add cheer and coziness to your meal. They are never placed on the table unless they are lighted. When they are used, candles should be tall enough for guests to see each other without looking into the light of the candle.
12. Make the dining room comfortable by adjusting lights and ventilation. Place chairs around the table with front edges even with the edge of the table.
13. Salad may be put on the table before the meal is announced. Bread and rolls go on the table just before the meal is served, or, if hot, they are brought in immediately afterward.
14. Fill the glasses three-fourths full of cool fresh water. Pour milk or other beverage just before the meal is announced, immediately afterwards, or when you serve the dessert.

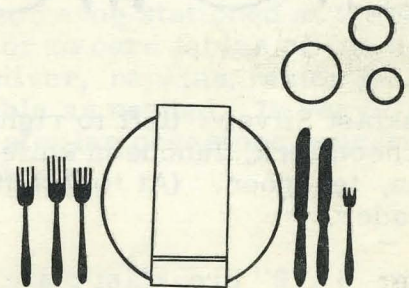
Appreciation is expressed to the Gorham Silverware Company for information used in this circular.



Dinner Silver: (left to right) - Luncheon fork, salad fork, luncheon knife, teaspoon, cream soup spoon, cocktail fork. (at top) butter spreader.

China: 10" dinner plate, soup bowl, bread and butter plate, (left side) salad plate.

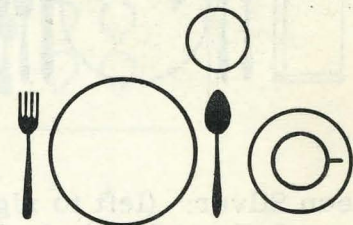
Glass: 9 oz. stemmed water goblet.



Formal Dinner Silver: (left to right) - Entree fork (luncheon-size), dinner fork, salad fork, dinner knife, entree knife (luncheon-size), cocktail fork.

China: 10" service plate.

Glass: 9 oz. stemmed water goblet, other beverage goblets.



Dessert Service Silver: (left to right) - Dessert fork, dessert spoon.

China: 8" dessert plate, cup and saucer.

Glass: 9 oz. stemmed water goblet.