

1974

EC74-2036 Selection and Care of Dinnerware

Magdalene Pfister

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selection & care

of
Dinnerware



EC 74-2036



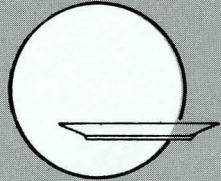
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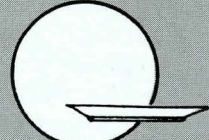
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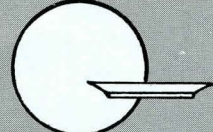
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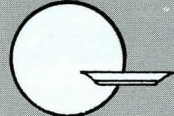
DINNER 9 OR 10 IN



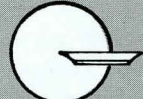
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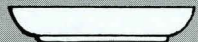
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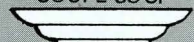
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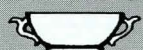
BREAD AND BUTTER



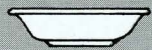
COUPE SOUP



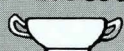
RIMMED SOUP



CREAM SOUP



LUG SOUP



BOUILLON

Extension Service
University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Agriculture Cooperating with the
U.S. Department of Agriculture and the College of Home Economics
J. L. Adams, Director

SELECTION AND CARE OF DINNERWARE



Magdalene Pfister
Extension Specialist (Home Furnishing)

What kind of dishes to buy? This is a question that brides, singles, and established homemakers ask. Should their dinnerware be china, earthenware or one of the space age products like melamine or Pyroceram (glass ceramic)? Which pattern, shape and texture?

Selection of dinnerware is an important decision. The kind you select should give enjoyment each time it's used. By learning about the various types available you will make wiser choices and know how to care and store it properly.

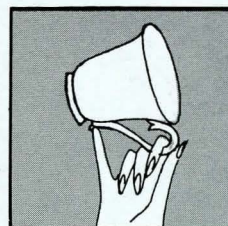
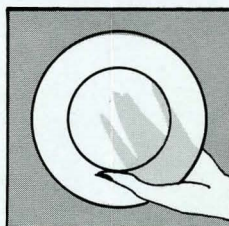
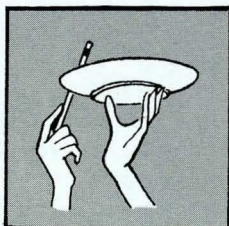
TYPES OF DINNERWARE

Most dinnerware is ceramic, that is, made of earth materials such as clay, sand and feldspar. Refinement increases as one goes from pottery, to earthenware, to ironstone, to stoneware, to china and to porcelain. And there are grades within each type.

Some authorities divide dishes into two principle types: china and earthenware. China is more expensive but is tougher and will not chip as easily. If chipped it will not stain or craze.

On the other hand, earthenware is decorated with underglaze colors that are more resistant to wear because of better thermal expansion properties. It is not likely to crack. The earthenware made in England and in America is usually cream colored. It is fired at a higher temperature and has a harder glaze than Mexican or Italian products which are made from red or buff burning clays covered with colored glazes. The Mexican or Italian products chip more readily and will absorb moisture and grease.

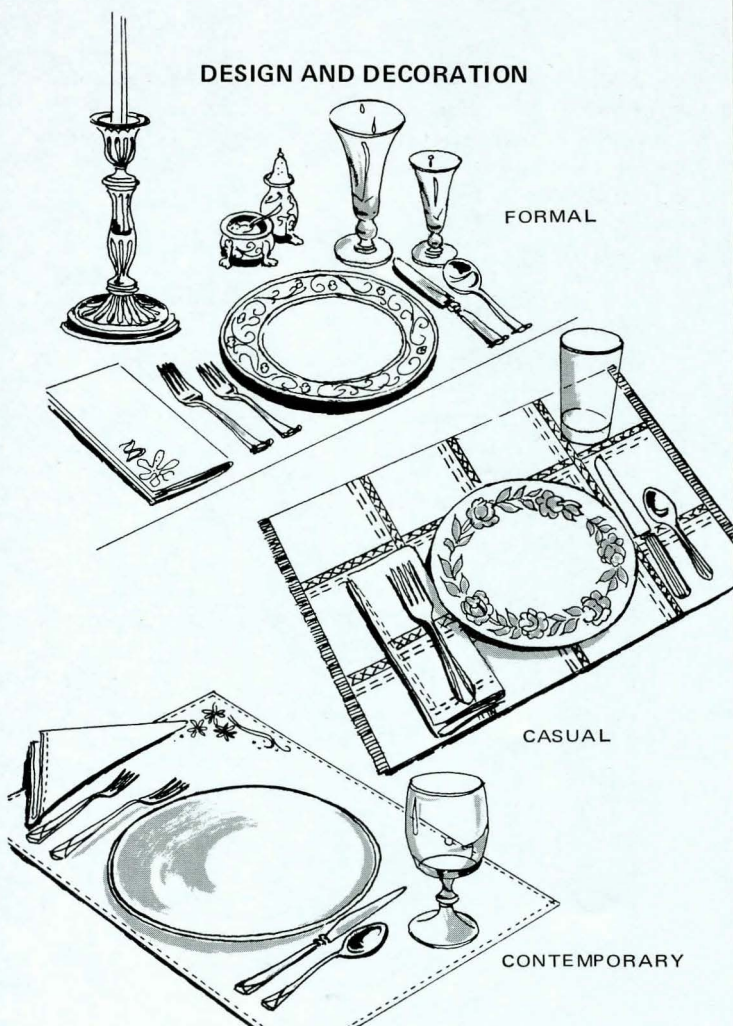
Most dishes are "semi-vitreous." Vitrified means that they are fired at high temperatures to become glasslike. Semi-vitreous ware, sometimes called semi-porcelain, is quite durable and fairly inexpensive. If you tap a semi-vitreous plate lightly, it won't ring like true china or porcelain.



TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DINNERWARE

Type and price range	Characteristics	Advantages	Disadvantages
POTTERY Low to medium	Coarse and semitranslucent, quite porous. Thick and heavy. Bold. Rustic. Colorful. Peasant pottery from Europe and Mexico.	Variety of color, design and texture. Lends itself to many informal settings. Sometimes "Oven-proof."	Breaks, chips and discolors. Glazes craze from heat and use. If poorly glazed, moisture collects on bottom of pieces. Often poorly designed and decorated with harsh colors.
EARTHENWARE Includes: Ironstone Stoneware Medium	Porous. American pottery semi-vitreous. Informal, opaque, most decorations sealed under the glaze.	Variety of color. Durable when top quality. Colors impervious to detergents.	Shows scratches because high gloss and glaze may be rather soft. Chips more readily than china.
MELAMINE Low to medium	Molded plastic.	Variety of color and design. Resists breakage.	May crack and stain. Roughened by spot removers. Light weight causes spilling. Noisy.
BONE CHINA Medium to high	(First made in England) More cream colored than porcelain. Semi-translucent.	Strong and durable, attractive	Softer than vitrified. Shows scratches.
PORCELAIN High Also called: Fine china Vitrified ware	Made of hard paste. White or bluish-white color. Translucent. Striking with pencil results in clear, bell-like tone. Broken edges are sharp, pointed.	Strong and durable. Resists scratching, chipping and staining. Variety of weights. "Germ-free" hard finish. Non-absorbent.	Breakable. Costs too much for average family. Duty increases cost of imported porcelain.
METALS Medium to high	Silver Pewter Stainless steel	Unbreakable. Keeps food hot. Stores easily. Usually serving dishes.	Easily dented, scratched and water spotted. Silver and pewter tarnish.
GLASS Low to high	Transparent, shows some foods well.	Variety of color and design.	Breakable. Not as versatile as porcelain or china.
PYROCERAM Medium to high	Ceramic glass.	Freezer to range to table.	Limited styles and patterns

DESIGN AND DECORATION



You will want to choose a shape and pattern you like that coordinates with other tableware and fits the atmosphere or decor of your home. Dinnerware patterns may be divided into three categories: casual or country, formal or classic and versatile contemporary.

The simple, sturdy, informal type looks well with provincial furnishings (including Early American and some contemporary). Patterns are simple and stylized. Emphasis is placed on color, weight and pattern. Earthenware and ironstone fall into this class.

Formal or classic patterns relate to traditional periods of decor that were popular in the 18th Century. Patterns have wreaths, ribbons, scrolls, garlands, scenic patterns and all-over florals. They are generally more ornate and often are decorated with gold or platinum.

The versatile contemporary patterns have little decoration. They adapt well to a variety of decorating styles.

Choose the shape of dishes appropriate for their purpose. Cups and saucers should be simple in outline, well shaped and attached to a broad base. The well of the saucer should be deep enough to hold the cup properly. Cups and soup bowls will keep liquid hot if they are not too shallow or too broad at the top. Cup handles should be easy to grasp, fit the finger and follow the shape of the cup.

Plates traditionally have had a rim. This serves as a frame for food and a place to put the knife and fork. The coupe plate is a contemporary shape without a rim. You will find other shapes such as narrow rim shape and edges scalloped, fluted or embossed.

Gold decoration may be "coin gold" or "luster gold." Luster gold does not wear as well and should cost less.

HOW MANY DISHES?

The amount of dinnerware can be determined by the type and amount of entertaining done, the space available for storing and the size of family. If dishes are held in a dishwasher until a full load can be run, you may need more.

Two sets of dinnerware, one for special occasions and one for everyday is ideal. But if your budget allows only one set to begin with, a very plain white or off-white is a good choice. Then tablecloths or mats can set the mood.

Dinnerware may be purchased as small "starter sets," by the place setting or by the individual piece from "open stock."

Many people begin with a "starter set" with a minimum of 16 pieces. This includes four each of dinner plates, cups, and saucers and bread and butter or salad plates.

Larger sets include items such as sugar bowl and creamer, platters, fruits, vegetable dishes and gravy boat.

Dishes bought by the place setting is a good way for a bride to acquire her dinnerware as gifts from family and friends. A place setting is service for one person usually consisting of dinner plate, dessert or salad plate, sauce dish or bread-and-butter, cup and saucer.

To buy dishes "open stock" means buying individual dishes or by the dozen. Usually open stock patterns are available for 5-10 years. It may be well to buy some extra pieces for replacement. However, other patterns can be found to harmonize.

Dinnerware can be bought by the complete set, and at times this may save money. Sets for 4, 6, 8 and 12 persons are the most usual.

Usually less expensive tableware is sold in sets, high price in open stock and the middle range either way.

GRADES AND STANDARDS

The quality of dinnerware is graded according to degree of perfection.

"Selects" are perfect in every feature.

"Run of the kiln" may have defects but these are scarcely noticeable.

"Second grade" have minor defects that won't affect the durability or usefulness.

"Culls or lumps" are dishes with noticeable defects.

Check for defects. Look for cracks, crazing, scars, crookedness of plates, thickness and uniformity of glaze.

Is the dish crooked or warped? A dish with a "walled edge," an edge thickened and rounded on the underside, will resist chipping.

The decoration should be centered and free from defects.

The glaze should cover the whole piece evenly (except the foot or bottom rim).

WHAT PRICE?

The cost of dinnerware depends upon the kind and quality of ingredients, the amount of handwork, the shape and decoration and by whom and where it was made. If the dishes are imported, duty adds to the cost. Some plain designs cost more because a defect is more noticeable. An elaborate design can conceal defects.

Since shopping for dishes is not done frequently, it is important to shop carefully and determine your taste preferences. Collect and compare manufacturers, descriptive leaflets and shop in different stores for greater selection.

CONSIDER THESE

Dinnerware is used so often that the decision of what to buy is an important one. The following considerations should help you with your choice.

Cost

Will the purchase fit into the budget?

Will replacements be expensive if dishes are chipped or broken?

Is the price reasonable enough if friends and relatives are to be giving it as a gift?

If the budget won't permit two types of dinner sets, is the one selected suitable for everyday use and for special occasions?

Care and Storage

Is it free from ridges in which food can cling, making it hard to wash?

Can it be washed safely with standard household soaps and detergents?

Can very hot water be used without danger of fading or cracking?

Can it be washed in an automatic dishwasher? Some metal trims are eventually destroyed by high heat.

Availability

Is it open stock so that replacements or additions can be made?

If the pattern is taken off the market, can suitable companions be made that will harmonize in color, design and shape?

Design and Shape

Are the shapes of the pieces pleasing and practical?

Are dishes easy to handle?

Is the cup handle firmly attached and comfortable to grasp?

Does the cup balance well so that it will not tip when filled or empty?

Pattern and Color

Will food look appetizing on it?

If chipping occurs, is the pattern far enough from the edge so it will be less noticeable?

Is color applied evenly?

Does the color and pattern allow you to mix and match for variety?

Durability

How break resistant is it?

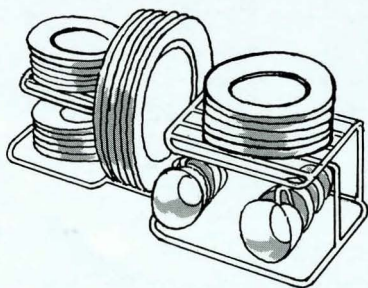
Is it free from imperfections?

Will it chip easily?

If chipped will it absorb grease and food?

Will decorations wear off, fade or discolor?

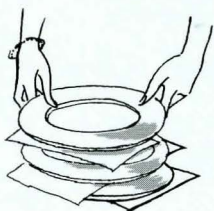
CARE AND STORAGE



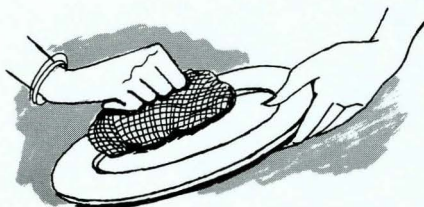
On the whole, china is stronger than earthenware and its pre-20th Century cousins. Designs are prone to scratches and fading however, because for technical reasons they are applied over the glaze. These overglaze decorations may be affected by certain foods, harsh abrasives and improper cleaning methods as well as by careless handling. On the other hand, earthenware decorations are usually underglazed and virtually invulnerable; the main consideration in its care is gentle handling because it chips easily.

Careful handling of dinnerware is good insurance for longevity. Fine china should be stacked with protective separators between plates. Leave ample space between stacks. Cups with gold handles should not be hooked for storage. Dishes should be warmed only in a warming oven or under hot water.

To safeguard dishes, watch the method of scraping and stacking. Acid foods may change the color of fine china if left on the plates for long spells. Immediately rinse or soak these that have been exposed to acidic sauces, dressings and fruits. Use a sponge, paper towel, cloth or rubber scraper to remove leftovers and food particles.



DO NOT STACK



DO NOT SCOUR

Avoid using steel wool or abrasive powders. Undiluted liquid detergent will usually wipe out stubborn stains. If not, try a weak solution of bleach and water. Dark streaks from knife blades are sometimes eliminated with silver polish. If this doesn't work, lightly rub with burnisher's putty being careful to avoid metal decorations. The putty may be purchased from china and hardware stores.

All dishes can be washed by hand. Wash glasses, silverware, dishes, cutlery and pans separately and in that order. A cushiony mat or dishpan is good insurance against breakage. A soft brush is useful for coaxing food particles from fluted or raised designs. Use clean suds as often as necessary to help prevent a filmy buildup. Wash just one or two pieces at a time. Water temperature bearable to the hands is suitable for tableware. Rinse in hot water and air-dry in a plastic or rubber-coated rack. Finish drying with a clean dishtowel.

Melamine, although especially resistant to breakage, deserves a few comments on its care. Never use abrasive scouring pads, cleansers or chlorine bleaches. These will scratch or mar the surface making future cleaning difficult. Don't let tea or coffee stand in the cups even though new melamine is more stain resistant. Light stains can be removed with baking soda. For dark stains use a remover which is sold as coffee pot or teapot cleaner. Keep melamine away from direct heat. While it will not melt or burn, it can be charred or scorched.

Some dishwashers have a china setting which allows a shorter, more gentle washing action. Load the racks carefully to avoid jostling: china against china equals possible scratches on the overglaze patterns. When using the special setting you can't expect good results if dishes have dried food particles. Also, pots and pans that need vigorous scrubbing will not come clean in the same washload. It takes only a few minutes to run the dishes through a pre-wash cycle for satisfactory washing results later. A note of caution: use only detergent products recommended for machine use. Any other cleaning agents may be harmful to the equipment.

Though advances are being made to make gold and platinum permanent, it is much better to handwash elaborate or heavily gilded dishes unless the manufacturer offers assurance of safety in the dishwasher. Remember, the water temperature, type of detergent, force of washing action and inherent fragility of design all combine in varying degrees that make for a precarious situation. Most melamine and the Pyroceram, as well as other underglaze tableware, are unaffected by machine washing.