

★ Gloss How-To: Set the Table for a Dinner Party

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Whenever I cater parties for friends or family, I'm a well-oiled machine. Nothing can come between me and perfection and I love every minute of the stress that accompanies dinner for twenty people.

Yet, when I invite my own friends over for dinner, it seems that no matter when I start planning, prepping, proofing or preheating, I'm frantically trying to shower, serve and sauté (and not always in that order) before guests arrive. It seems that the last thing I manage to get to is always setting the table.

Kelley Moore, a Seattle-based lifestyle expert, recently launched her web series, *So Much Moore*, to

help fulfill her mission of empowering and inspiring people. Each week, Moore sets out to help enhance the lives of individuals through design and entertainment, whether it's throwing a lavish prom for a friend who never had one to helping a couple throw an urban rooftop party.

Even better, Moore gives tips for those who want to re-create her soirees at home. So, if you're like me, and can never seem to get your place settings straight, read on. Moore is here today to tell us all how to set the perfect table for a **dinner party** – without the stress.

Tip #1: Layer textures for interest. Use woven runners, metallic chargers or lacquer boxes as risers. The mix of different heights and textures will add visual interest and draw your guests in. Remember to keep the color palette the same though, or select one of the textures in a contrasting color for that pop of color.

Tip #2: Don't be afraid to mix high and low cost pieces. One of my favorite things to do is mix my heirloom china with inexpensive finds from thrift stores, or modern sleek pieces from stores like CB2 and Ikea. Buy your basics inexpensively and raise the impact of your table by adding a select few high-end pieces. Nobody will know!

Tip #3. Step away from the flower arrangement! "I adore fresh flowers," Moore said. "But sometimes it is more interesting to **set a table** that incorporates interesting items in the center." Use a collection of modern vases in a monotone palette adding a sculptural element. If you want to add a floral arrangement incorporate a small pave (tight and low arrangement of flowers) in a monotone palette to keep it looking elegant.

4. Forget the napkin ring! Instead, take the road less-formal and purchase inexpensive white cotton napkins. You can select a word that represents each persons personality, use transfer paper to iron on each word, fold the napkin with the word facing up and let your guests figure out which place setting is theirs. Another fun conversation starter is to print out **funny** vintage pictures out of random people, trim to a square to fit on top of the napkin once it is folded, weave a ribbon through to tie it around the napkin, and during dinner have each guests come up with a funny story about who that person might have been. You would be surprised how creative people get and how much laughter will ensue.

5. Give yourself time to connect with your guests. Moore suggests setting the table earlier in the day. "It gives me time to be even more creative mixing and pulling in unexpected items," she said. "Without having to worry about what's going on in the kitchen."