

Flanking doorways and the fireplace with preserved juniper trees will make a large room feel more intimate. Potted topiaries like these are also a chic alternative to a traditional Christmas tree.



OPENER AND THIS PAGE, LEFT: ROEY YOHAI FOR THE LITTLE FLOWER SHOPPE IN RIDGEWOOD, RIGHT (2): SHUTTERSTOCK



Coordinate your food with your color palette for added impact and elegance.

WINTER *whites*

THIS YEAR, CURB THE URGE TO USE THOSE SAME OLD RED AND GREEN HOLIDAY DECORATIONS. THESE ENTERTAINING IDEAS WILL HELP YOU BREAK OLD HABITS AND EMBRACE A NEW PALETTE

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Tis the season to be jolly, and setting the tone for such a sentiment is all about creating great atmosphere. When it comes to holiday decorating, the hardest part is staying away from the expected. Resist the temptation to use all of your saved decorations from years past. Instead, try something new: Pick a color palette and stick to it. What doesn't fit the bill goes back to the attic or gets a fresh coat of paint. This year, think white. White is the epitome of modernity, elegance and balance. Mixing snow white with traces of green, black and silver is on trend and très chic.

To bring greenery and life into your dining room, New Jersey florist extraordinaire Anne Miller of The Little Flower Shoppe in

Ridgewood recommends hanging an oversize wreath. Decorate it with items found in nature such as pinecones, acorns and berries to enchant guests. Flank the hearth and doorway with preserved juniper topiary trees for an instant dose of warmth and intimacy.

For your holiday table, choose crisp white linens and layer them with a wide, black ribbon or runner down the center of the table and across at each place setting. This will add dimension to the table and visually anchor each setting. When it comes to flatware, glassware and china, you don't need to have the best; you just need to know how to use what you've got. Don't be afraid to mix like-colored pieces—whites with off-whites, stainless steel with silver and mercury glass »



Adorn the table with a few beautiful objects, like these antique silver pheasant salt and pepper shakers.



or crystal with glass. Place your white china on a clear, silver or white charger—layering adds dimension to the table. To add sparkle, use clear glassware and stemware and mix styles to vary the height and look. For centerpieces, Miller says to keep the botanicals simple and seasonal. The velvety texture of Vendela roses and silvery grey Tillandsia is warm and wintry and helps create the mood for a luxurious cold-weather soiree. For an intimate dinner party, keep the arrangements under 12 inches high so as not to disrupt the festive repartee.

Bring the black-and-white theme from your mailed invitation through to the place card and menu—it's really chic and your guests will appreciate the detail. Keep the design simple and modern, and make things easy for yourself by having

your local stationer do them for you. Place a menu on top of each napkin, then wrap the napkin and menu with ribbon or a paper strip that matches the invite (as pictured at right). Top it all off with a fresh artichoke to add unexpected texture, dimension and a punch of color.

Lastly, make sure the lighting is just right—if you don't have dimmers on your fixtures, just use candles (always unscented around food) aided by the glow from an illuminated room nearby. Cluster large mercury glass pieces and other silver objects together to bring a little sparkle to darker areas of the room. Carry elements of this onto your table by way of mercury glass votives and a few small silver objects, and you'll have plenty of sparkle to go around during this festive season. +

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE (TOP CENTER AND BOTTOM LEFT): ROEY YOHAI FOR THE LITTLE FLOWER SHOPPE IN RIDGEWOOD

TOP LEFT: © LOUPE IMAGES/SANDRA LANE. TOP RIGHT: © LOUPE IMAGES/MARTIN BRIGDALE. BOTTOM RIGHT: SHUTTERSTOCK

1 THE LITTLE THINGS

Something simple like a sachet full of lavender or a bag of homemade cookies makes a nice gift for your guests. Tie it off with a ribbon and an ornament and place it on their chairs.

2 GET CENTERED

A dramatic flower arrangement is a great way to wow your guests. You can bring your

own vases to the florist and have him or her create arrangements that work for your table. If flowers are out of the budget, cluster like-colored objects of varying heights in the center of the table.

3 KEEP IT COMING

Always keep your guests' water and cocktail glasses filled—your service is very

important and much appreciated. For great champagne and sparkling wine ideas, see page 68.

4 PUT IT ON PAPER

Despite the multitude of e-mail and Web-based invite options these days, it's a nice gesture to send guests a printed invitation to your party. Use the same style in your

place cards and menus to create a consistent theme.

5 EASY DOES IT

Food, especially desserts, that you can prepare beforehand (or buy) will save you time. French macarons are always an elegant supplement to your homemade desserts, and they come in a multitude of colors to fit any theme.