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How To Streamline Your Thanksgiving To-Do List

What's not to like about a day dedicated to eating lots of great food and spending time with those closest to you? That being said, the prep work can feel overwhelming and so can accommodating a lot of people in your home. As such, there is no better time to let go of any perfectionist tendencies and make things easy on yourself so you can truly enjoy this special day. Here are some tips to streamline the process:

#1 - Check Your Oven's Temperature
Make sure your oven is "turkey ready." It's easy to check yourself. Set the oven thermostat to 350 degrees and place an oven thermometer in the oven. It's considered accurate if it reaches temperatures between 325 and 375 degrees. It's possible to adjust the thermostat knob or to recalibrate the electronic range control if the oven is not reaching the right temperature. Or, call your local appliance repair shop. (If you have a home warranty, this is likely covered.)

#2 - Sensible Cleaning
Lighten your load by cleaning only the parts of your house that guests will be using. This is not the time for deep cleaning - afterall, things will just get dirty again after having all those people and you have enough on your plate to think about.

When cleaning, focus on these areas:

• Make a space in the entryway area for guests' coats and belongings.

• Clean the bathrooms, including mirrors, and stock the bathroom with extra toilet paper. Provide clean hand towels.

• Spruce up the yard. Rake the leaves the day before your guests arrive, and if time allows, showcase fall flowers, like chrysanthemums.

#3 - Clean the Dishwasher Filter
Filters protect the pump and motor seals. Many dishwashers have a filter located under the spray arm, near the bottom of the appliance. The filter can get clogged with sediment from hard water, food residue, or detergent build-up. It's important to check the condition of the filter to make sure it is intact, has no holes in the screen, and is free of debris.

#4 - **Prepare Your Kitchen**
A week before Thanksgiving is a great time to make sure your dishes, serving platters, glasses, coffee cups, etc., are cleaned and ready for your table. Wash tablecloths and napkins if necessary. Use sticky notes to plan what dish will be going onto what platter.

#5 - Get Festive
Get into the mood of Thanksgiving with a little autumnal flair. Hang a harvest wreath on your front door, display pumpkins indoors and out, and indulge in a few potted fall flowers near the front door.

Streamlined prepping can help you find time to enjoy the good food and people who have gathered in your home to spend a special day with you.

November Calendar

11/2 - Daylight Saving Time

11/11 - Veterans Day

11/27 - Thanksgiving Day

November is National Gratitude Month

Homeowner Tips

Best Time to Plant Spring Bulbs

There is nothing quite as cheerful as seeing daffodils and tulips coming up in early spring. November can be an ideal month to plant. Average planting times for spring bulbs are:

September to October — Zones 4, 5
October to early November — Zones 6, 7
November to early December — Zones 8, 9
Late December to early January — Zone 10

To find your planting zone, go to:
www.planthardiness.ars.usda.gov

smart moves

Transform Your Lighting Without Breaking the Bank

#1 - Layer your lighting: Fine tune your lighting by ensuring that there are several different height levels of light. For example, something overhead, one on the floor, a table lamp, and possibly something decorative like a lava lamp or candle. Do the same with your bulb colors by intermixing warm and cool bulbs.

#2 - Swap out light shades: Add new life to your current lamps by swapping the shades. Opt for wicker or organically shaped cloth for a unique look. Match a lamp shade to your accent wall for a fun punch of color.

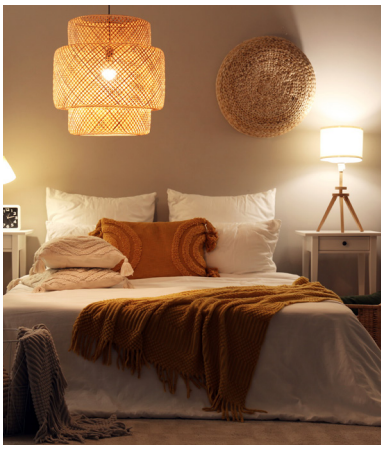
#3 - Add a floor lamp: Transform those dark corners with a stylish floor lamp. There are plenty of inexpensive options on the market.

#4 - Jewelry for your lamps: Swap out the finials on your lamps. Go for stone accents, which add a natural, upscale touch. Check out Etsy or eBay for great deals.

#5 - Transform dated overheads: Go to TulipShades.com to view a fun assortment of overhead lighting covers that will change the look and feel of dated overhead lighting.

#6 - Use a variety of materials: Mix up the look and feel of your lighting by choosing light sources made from a combination of materials: wicker, cloth, ceramic and glass.

#7 - String lighting: Use string lighting as accent areas in your home and to add a soft, star-like glow to dark areas. Strung lighting in bedrooms can add a romantic, magical touch.



Pumpkin Bundt Cake

Move over, pumpkin pie. This recipe honors everything we love about pumpkin and is quick, easy and delicious. (Author tested and loved!)

INGREDIENTS

Nonstick cooking spray

1 box spice cake mix

3 eggs

1/2 cup canola oil

1 cup water

1 15 oz. can of pureed pumpkin

2 cups powdered sugar

1/2 cup whole milk

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix the eggs, water, and oil together then add the cake mix. Mix well.

Liberally spray a bundt pan with oil and pour in the cake mixture. Bake for 35 - 40 minutes. Let cool fully. Release the cake from the tin and place the cake on a platter of your choice.

Mix together the powdered sugar and milk until smooth and thick. Add more or less sugar or milk as needed for icing consistency. Drizzle onto the top of the cake. (Serves 8-10 people.)