

Poinsettias Are Predictable

SO, FOR THAT MATTER, ARE THE STRESSES OF THE SEASON.
WHY NOT LET THE EXPERTS IN ENTERTAINING AND
DECORATING HELP YOU AVOID THEM?

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Italian candied orange
and Amaranone cherry
ricotta pie garnished with
blackberries from Puff 'n
Stuff Catering in Orlando.







HOLIDAY HOSTING CAN be an overwhelming task. So we've rounded up a team of local experts in catering, event planning and home design to show you how to entertain in grand – but not necessarily extravagant – style, and decorate in designer style, in half the time.

THERE IS HELP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

One obvious strategy to minimize holiday stress is to find an expert to share the load, and it may not be as expensive as you think. Hiring an event planner allows you to focus on guests rather than logistics, says Jamie O'Donnell, founding partner of Phoenix Event Planning Group in Orlando. Plus, she adds, professional planners are able to negotiate favorable vendor rates because of their relationships.

"A common misconception is that event planners increase your budget," O'Donnell says. "Direct vendor relationships and expert guidance can allow a planner to allocate your funds more effectively and help you create an affordably luxurious event – from entertaining to decorating."

Entertaining is all about food and drink. If you want to spend less time in the kitch-

en and more time with family and friends, a variety of options are available – including full-service catering companies, prep kitchens, private chefs and bigger grocery stores such as Publix, where you can pick up a fully cooked holiday meal.

Some caterers won't even commandeer your kitchen. Puff 'n Stuff Catering, for example, will set up a prep area in your garage, allowing the kitchen to remain an uncluttered gathering area.

"If your family's coming in from out of town, consider a formal dinner," says Warren Dietel, owner and president of the catering company, which has been family owned and operated in Orlando for more than 30 years.

"Sit-down dinners don't always have to be formal," he adds. "You can easily pull off a mixer with heavier hors d'oeuvres served by chefs at stations around the room. It keeps the party flowing, but keeps guests from being hungry."

If you enjoy preparing the holiday meal yourself, O'Donnell suggests making as much of it as possible the day before guests are expected. Also, she says, use dishwasher-safe plates to save time and clean-up.

"Pre-make beverages and serve in crystal pitchers, which is a beautiful touch," O'Donnell notes. "But the best part is that it saves you from running back and forth to the kitchen, tending guests."

Another time saver is renting dinnerware rather than buying new. There's typically a party store

nearby. Rates are reasonable, and you don't have to worry about storing all-new, holiday-specific china year-round.

A COLOR SCHEME FOR YOUR THEME

It's easy to go overboard with your holiday palette, but most experts suggest sticking to two or three colors. "That doesn't mean you have to be conservative," says Chris Shackelford, sales leader and designer for Pier 1 Imports in Winter Park Village. "Don't be afraid to stretch outside of your comfort zone."

Beyond the traditional red and green, a wide variety of color combinations are ideal for giving your home a holiday feel. Trends are turning toward metals and sophisticated color combinations such as silver and blue. Mixtures playing off the luster of gold are especially popular among the experts this year.

"Mesh gold with sepia tones, and don't be afraid of blacks, blues and silvers that evoke a snowy feeling," Shackelford says.

Shirley Krauklis of Annabelle Hart in College Park suggests weaving platinum and gold. O'Donnell recommends in-

This elegant holiday table setting (left), designed and catered by Puff 'n Stuff Catering, includes a contemporary centerpiece from Orlando's Flourish Floral Productions. It includes green and purple orchids, purple moon shadow carnations, deep purple stock flowers and hanging amaranthus with puffs of trachelium. The couture ornament collection at Pier 1 Imports at Winter Park Village features flocking, (right and top), glitzy jewels, glitter or beads.



Casual can still be elegant, as demonstrated by this hand-painted angel figurine (below) from Pier 1 Imports at Winter Park Village. A traditional collection of holiday ornaments and wreaths (right) is on display at Annabelle Hart in College Park.



fusing a non-traditional pop of color, such as bright turquoise, purple or fuchsia mixed with either silver or gold.

SETTING OFF THE TABLE

Once you've chosen your color scheme, Shackelford says the main focal point should be the dining room table, where family and friends will gather to enjoy fellowship and a generous holiday meal.

"Don't skimp on linen napkins," Shackelford says. "Napkins are the easiest way to make a table luxurious. For

each place setting, use two high-quality linen napkins – one print, one solid – secured with a festive napkin ring."

Chargers, he maintains, are a place-mat's best friend: "They add an elegant pop to any place setting. Experiment with textures and colors, but be sure to stay within your color scheme and your level of formality."

O'Donnell has a few table-design tricks up her sleeve, too: "Tie napkins with holiday ribbon; make place-card holders from ornaments; use a gold fabric tablecloth for simple elegance; dress up solids with a festive runner and fill clear cylinder vases with colored glass ball ornaments to serve as a centerpiece."

She also suggests giving your buffet

HOLIDAY DINNERS TO GO

Get out of the kitchen and into the celebration with holiday meals elegantly catered, or prepped and ready for pickup by some of Central Florida's finest caterers and meal-assembly kitchens:

CATERERS

ANTHONY'S CATERING

Orlando; 407-854-3305
anthonycatering.com

CATERING BY PATTI CACES

Apopka; 407-844-0409
patticaces.com

LEVAN'S CATERING

Orlando; 407-854-7949
levans.com

PUFF 'N STUFF CATERING

Orlando; 407-398-6308
puffnstuff.com

RUTH'S CHRIS STEAK HOUSE CATERING

Orlando; 407-622-2444
ruthchris.com/catering

TIM WEBER: THE COORDINATOR

Orlando; 407-649-9190
thecoordinatorinc.com

TWO CHICKS AND A POT

Central Florida; 321-750-1377
twochicksandapot.com

MEAL-ASSEMBLY KITCHENS

DINNER A'FARE

Windermere; 770-662-3001
Winter Park; 770-662-3001
dinnerafare.com

LET'S EAT!

Winter Park; 407-539-0064
Altamonte Springs; 407-339-2665
letseatdinner.com

MAGICAL MEALTIME

Orlando; 407-354-5393
magicalmealtime.com

SUPER SUPPERS

Winter Springs; 407-695-1777
supersuppers.com

dimension by adding highs and lows, covering stacked books with a tablecloth and displaying food and centerpieces. Decorate the buffet with pine garland wrapped in white lights and tea candles dressed with wired ribbon.

USE COMMON SCENTS, NOT PLASTIC SANTAS

Shackelford has seen his fair share of mistakes by holiday decorators who aimed for a sophisticated, elegant look, but over-shot it by a mile: "The biggest mistake people make is throwing tchotchkes all over the place. Snowmen, penguins and plastic Santas have no place in a luxury home for a sophisticated dinner party."

Making guests feel welcome as soon as they walk in the door can be accomplished with more subtlety. One way is to layer the interior of your home with inviting, often nostalgic, holiday aromas, such as cinnamon, pine or fresh apple. Decorative candles, reed diffusers, pot-pourri, sachets and scented tassels can serve as ornamentation.

Illumination is also important for creating ambience. Candles are a great way to acknowledge the spiritual side of the holidays. Francia Fusik, certified interior designer and owner of All in One

Dress up existing décor, such as these penguin cocktail shakers and platinum martini glasses (right), with a gold lacquer serving tray, snowflake silver bells and glitzy poinsettia tree clips. All from Pier 1 Imports at Winter Park Village.





Add contemporary flair to traditionally styled place settings (left) with a gold, beaded runner, red stemware, a unique charger and double napkins in an amaryllis napkin ring. Contemporary, designer styles also include boldly colored, flamboyantly feathered dove tree clips (below). All from Pier 1 Imports at Winter Park Village.



Adding a wreath on your front door – such as this traditional version made from blooms and berries (bottom) – is a quick and easy way to welcome your guests. From Pier 1 Imports at Winter Park Village.

Decorating Solutions in Dr. Phillips, uses candles and lights to help create a warm and inviting atmosphere. But she recommends caution over tradition if small children or pets are present. Battery-powered candles, she notes, can offer the same elegant ambiance as an open flame, without all the worries.

excellent for making wreaths and accenting floral vase arrangements.

This year's designer trees are peppered with faux glittery poinsettia tree clips in shades of green, blue, purple and yellow, along with brightly colored feathered doves, a couture item this season as well.

There are many ways to incorporate flowers, garlands and other natural design elements into your holiday décor, says O'Donnell. The point is to keep it simple and elegant. Lee Forrest Design, Petals by Design and Flourish Floral Productions are well-regarded Central Florida florists for holiday décor.

THE POWER OF FLOWERS

Flowers are key visual cues for the season, but not necessarily the kind you might expect. Shackelford says poinsettias are not only poisonous as plants, but predictable as decorations. He prefers what he calls "the new poinsettias" – red magnolias and amaryllises. Eucalyptus leaves and berry branches are also

QUICK HOLIDAY DECORATING TIPS

A few other simple things can give your home a holiday facelift in a matter of minutes. Here are some ideas:

- **Haul out the fine china.** Stately pieces you already have can be festooned





with holiday ornamentation and set the stage for any luxury holiday theme.

- **Hang a wreath on the door.** Try a simple ribbon wreath or paint a magnolia-leaf wreath red, gold or platinum for a timeless classic you can use year after year.

- **Outfit your foyer.** Transform your foyer with simple yet elegant decorations that complement the color scheme, style and theme of your home.

- **Swag the chandelier.** Use an evergreen garland punctuated with red magnolias. Staircases can be embellished with garland, flowers, pinecones, sprigs of wild berries and cinnamon sticks for a little holiday aroma.

- **Plan around existing décor.** Pick colors and styles that complement what already exists, including furniture, painted walls and wallpaper. Shackelford says gold enhances a wide variety of shades and prints. Fusik recommends gold, or red and gold for traditional or formal rooms. But if the room has silver accents, she suggests using silver and white.

Other ornamental alternatives favored by designers include ivy, ferns, magnolia leaves, beads, pearls, yellow star sprays

and silk oak leaves dipped in gold, copper or silver. Fusik says sprays coupled with branches are very popular as centerpieces this year.

One way or the other – whether you call in the pros or prefer a do-it-yourself holiday – you can find a way to dovetail the strategies and the spirit of the season. ●

Desserts and décor help define the season. Puff 'n Stuff Catering offers French almond custard cake and wild-berry tartlets (above), while traditional holiday figurines and home accents can be found at Gingersnap Station in College Park (below).

