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Guests at Home

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Guests

at

Home

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Guests at Home

By Ruth B. Amidon
Extension Nutritionist

FAMILY ATTITUDES

Sharing, giving, and accepting the hospitality of the table has from ancient times had much meaning and significance in the lives of all peoples.

Extending an invitation to dine has in the past and still may signify the desire to end hostilities. Accepting such an invitation confirms the acceptance of the overture. If avowed enemies sit at the same table it may even be a sign of a truce. Yes, food and the customs surrounding it have always had great significance in our lives.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies . . . my cup runneth over; surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life . . .

Age of Change

We are living in an age of change from the rural, small town type living with the good willed, personal interest of neighbors to a hustle bustle, aloof, impersonal city type living. The atomic and space age is rapidly changing both rural and city lives. We recognize there are advantages of this coming age. But we adults, who know the values of the more leisurely living of our childhood, know the feeling of se-

curity, solidarity, and rightness of meals together. In these days an empty place at the table was keenly felt.

Recall the smell of homemade bread, good brown pot roast, and apple pie. Recall the silence of grace almost ending in the chatter of children and giggling of teenagers interspersed with family discussion to topics of the day. Contrast that with frozen dinners hurriedly heated and silently eaten from trays before the TV with only a few members of the family at home.

Folk used to sit and visit after a heavy meal. Even in the rush of harvest time men stretched in the shade, and rested and visited a bit. Women relaxed and visited while the dish water heated on the stove.

Now mother alone, or with one helper, easily serves a meal for 10-15 people with food from the freezer purchased or prepared days ahead. Afterward dishes are efficiently stacked into the dishwasher and mother and the children, if they are home, dash away to club, church or other activities. With each person on a different time schedule there are not enough people together at the table for a good conversation.

We adults have the responsibil-

ity of taking the good from the past and adjusting it to new conditions. Many of us can't have the whole family together for every meal.

Late to bed, late to rise, rush to work, to the bus, or to school—a skimpy breakfast or no breakfast—is this the picture at your house? Isn't breakfast worth saving? Physically, mentally, spiritually, wouldn't the day go better for a calmer start? If you and your family did some planning couldn't you take the worst of the rush out of the early morning?

Inflexible school or work schedules may keep part of the family away or hurry their noon meal. There may be little chance to save this meal. After school activities for children, late afternoon meetings for adults, and evening ballgames and meetings cut the evening meal hour short. Could a choice of activities be made or some more or less unbreakable dates be set for meals? Does the evening meal always have to be at the same hour? A glass of milk an hour before a late meal should hold the hungry one. A planned bed-time snack should make an early dinner hour possible.

Nothing upsets some people so much as tampering with their food habits, including the time they eat—but which is more important eating always at the same set-time or eating together?

Does your 9-year-old know his best friend better than he knows his sister? Could your 12-year-old give a better account of what his teacher thinks about some important subject of the day than your opinion of

the same? How can a person know the standards, feel the unifying support, and the respect of his family if they are never together? Forethought, planning, and some insistence would make it possible to take advantage of mealtime for regular family assembly.

Standards Are Absorbed

As soon as a child is born he begins to absorb and adjust to the patterns, standards, attitudes, and habits of his family. Here parents begin the real pattern of their family life. Children unconsciously absorb these patterns and are not fooled by what the parents say their standards are. If you won't eat something you dislike, you will have little success getting junior to eat any food that he doesn't like.

Surveys and conferences of teenagers consistently show that they value their parents' opinions but are more influenced by their example than their verbal instruction.

Fortunate is the youngster whose parents can send him off to the first camp with the assurance "you are already familiar with and will have no trouble eating any food ordinarily served at these places." The teenager who goes to his first big social affair understanding that basic politeness and manners are his second nature will not be embarrassed. Any unfamiliar superficial rule can be quickly picked up by watching the hostess. These things are not learned by eating an orange on the way out of the house, gulping a bowl of soup from the corner of the kitchen cabinet, or when the family eats one at a time and on the run.

Since practically all social contacts have to do with eating together, good manners and a knowledge of etiquette with relation to eating situations are important marks of culture. We have discussed only the importance of establishing good manners in the family. If members of the family practice good manners with each other they will have proper consideration for a guest. Special occasions such as birthdays, with each in turn as honored guest at the table, provide excellent opportunities for even young children to learn to be an appreciative guest, which is just as important as being a gracious host.

It is not the purpose of this leaflet to discuss or itemize what good manners are or to point out rules of etiquette. If you wish to study them secure the 4-H leaflet, "Mealtime Manners."

Good manners are based on consideration for and kindness of others and are marks of culture in any society. Manners are more absorbed than learned. Some rules of conduct change with time, with the community, the social group, and the country. These rules can be quickly learned, whereas ingrained good manners are the true gauge of a person.

TABLE SERVICE

In the **English Style Table Service** the food is served at the table by the host and hostess. The plates may be passed at the table or by a servant. This is more orderly and hospitable service than passing all the main dishes from person to person.

Russian Service is a more formal style used for banquets and other meals where large groups are served. In strictly Russian service all food is served onto the plates in the kitchen and placed in front of the guests by servants. Other food is also served to each guest by servants.

Combination Service is probably the most useful in American homes. It is a combination of English and Russian styles with American adaptations. The main dishes are served at the table. The host serves the meat and one or two vegetables. The hostess may serve one vegetable or salad and the beverage. Soup, salad, and bread may be already on the table when the meal is served. Usually, the first course is removed and dessert is served from the kitchen. (The dessert may be served from the table.)

The styles of table service described have been the ones recognized by etiquette books for many years. Recently, rearrangements of the first three under different names are appearing.

Continental Service is a formal type service. In this service all food is served from the side table or tea cart not from the dining table. Servants either place a filled plate before each guest or bring the serving dishes to the guest who serves himself.

American Service (Family Style) has previously not been dignified as a style of service. It is the most informal style and does very well for picnics or if only two people are eating together. It lacks dignity and often lacks orderliness, especially if

a number of children are at the table. In this style of service all the main course (sometimes the dessert also) is placed on the table and passed from person to person. The main course is generally cleared away and the dessert served either from the kitchen or from the table.

The method of serving can be nicely done but it's very informality may foster selfishness (taking the best) by the children, passing by food without taking any, and reaching across the table. Typically too large a variety of food is served at one time. If this style is used the food should be placed on the table so that it will be passed in an orderly way, first meat then potatoes, etc. and come back to rest in its starting place.

Of the styles most commonly used in American homes, the author has found, after more than 25 years experience with the Combination Style and even longer with the American Family Style, that the Combination Style has more to recommend it. When dad serves the food with discrimination and consideration of the individual needs and he himself sets a good example, many food problems and poor food habits are forestalled.

Most parents do not realize how much influence their example does have on the children. A family should have certain patterns and standards that none of them would violate. Good manners learned at home will relieve youngsters of a great deal of tension and probable embarrassment when away from home.

Buffet Service is the easiest way to serve the most people in the smallest space with the least help. It can be used for a wide variety of occasions and served in a variety of ways. The food is placed on a buffet, side table, or the dining table and usually people help themselves. The host, the hostess, or a friend may serve the main dish or beverage if desired. The beverage may be served at the same table or at another table. The main course dishes are cleared away and replaced by dessert and beverage service. People may eat standing or sitting around the room. Trays or small tables may be used for convenience and silver and linen may be placed there.

Buffet service can be used for full meals or for refreshments. It may be very informal with a colorful cloth or mats, wooden bowls, and bright dishes for family gatherings, community or club meals, or parties indoors or out, or very formal with your best linen, silver, and crystal for weddings, golden weddings, and receptions.

Table settings for buffet serving can be arranged for any food you wish to serve.

- (1) Service may be from one or both sides of a table. A centerpiece may be placed where it is most convenient and most beautiful.

- (2) Place the food in the order in which it should be served so the flow of the traffic is in a direct line.

- (3) All food and beverage may be placed on the same table or the

beverage service may be at a side table.

(4) Food should be prepared and arranged in a way that is easy to serve and carry.

(5) The host may serve the main dish or carve and serve the meat. The hostess may serve the salad or beverage. They may ask someone to help with the serving, especially if there are a large number of people and they wish to be free to replenish dishes and see that guests have everything needed.

turbed by occasional accidents. These may be less frequent if the height of the chairs are adjusted to the child and the atmosphere of the meal is congenial and relaxed.

Be careful of the inexpensive table service that you choose, for some of it is hard to care for. Cheaply made stainless steel may rust; plastic, especially the thin kind, will crack and warp or melt if exposed to fairly high temperature. Even some good plastic will scratch and stain. Using inexpensive things should contribute to easier care but should not mean careless care.

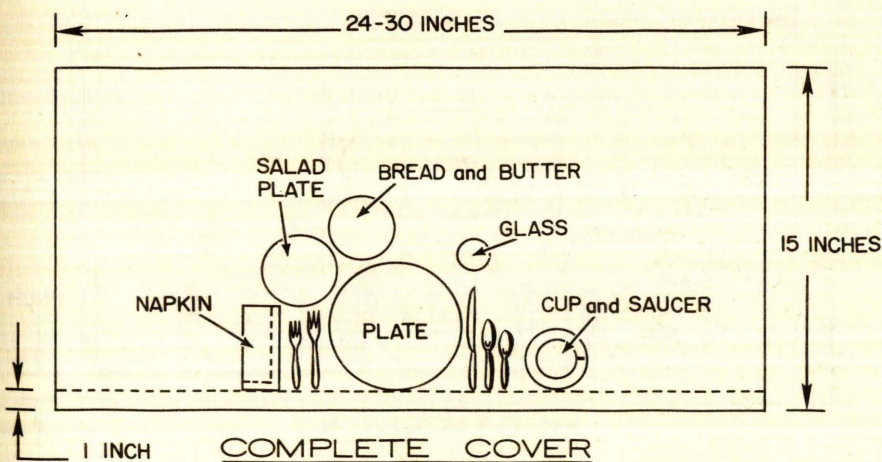
TABLE APPOINTMENTS

With even the least expensive table linens, dishes, and flatware, if tastefully chosen, sparkling clean, and nicely arranged, you can have a very pretty table. It is common sense to use inexpensive, easily cared for things for everyday if there are young children and mother does her own housework. The serenity of the meal is not so dis-

TABLE SETTING

Regardless of the type of service used there are generally accepted practices for table setting.

The cover for dinner (always for formal dinners) is a table cloth over a silence pad. This cover should fall 10 inches over the edge of the table. For other meals of the day luncheon cloths and place mats are



appropriate and attractive on a nicely polished table. They may even be used for fairly formal luncheons. We have to face the reality of our modern life that requires us to be rid of anything that necessitates extra effort. Using a table cloth, cloth napkins, and special dishes not only for special occasions but also just for the family at least once a week is good training for the children and good for family morale. We do need to dress up occasionally. Children are thrilled by anything considered special, particularly if they are part of it and are allowed to help.

Table decorations should be low or such that they do not obstruct the view across the table. They should be appropriate to the season, occasion, and in keeping with the other appointments of the table. Candles should be lighted but their light should not shine in anyone's eyes.

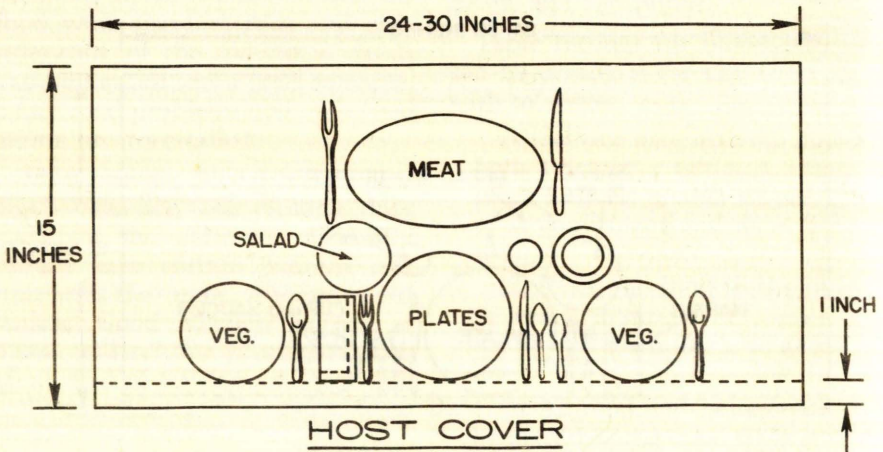
Candles are ineffective and out of place in a brightly lighted room; but in a dark room, if their light is not sufficient, some auxiliary lighting should be provided. In summer the heat of candles may seem just too much, but in cooler weather their warmth and air of festivity adds to the warmth of our fellowship. Children delight in their ceremony.

The placing of the items of the **individual dinner setting** (cover) is shown in the diagram.

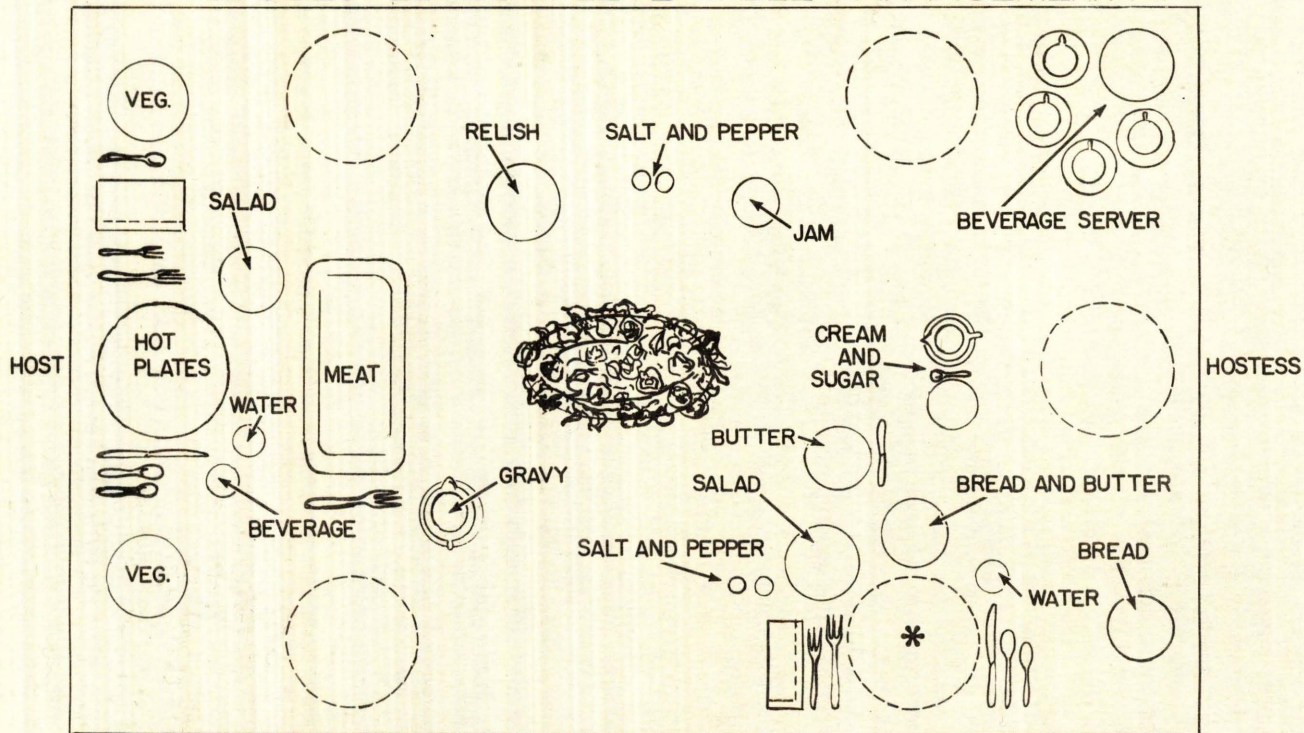
Napkins may be folded rectangular, as shown, or square. Fancy folds may be used for special occasions. The open corner of the napkin should be toward the plate at the table edge.

More or less silver may be used as needed. It is placed in order of use from the outside in.

Bread and butter plates and salad plates are used as needed.



SUGGESTED COMPLETE TABLE ARRANGEMENT



*NOTE - ALL PLACES ARE SET AS THIS ONE BUT NOT SHOWN TO AVOID CONFUSION

Luncheon and Breakfast Cover

Dishes, silver, and napkins are placed similarly for the breakfast and luncheon covers. Place only dishes and silver that are needed and in the order used.

The host's cover is set the same as all the others but food service items are added. Hot plates are set in front of him, the meat plate above the cover, and vegetables to the right and left as convenient. Serving silver is placed to the right and left according to the general rules for placing silver. The host's cover may need to be rearranged somewhat to make the serving more convenient.

If the dining table is too crowded, a small side table or tea cart may be used by either the host or hostess for the serving dishes.

Hostess Cover

Beverage service is placed at the right of the hostess in such a way that it is convenient for her to pour. Cream and sugar is in front of her place. Bread and butter may be at the hostess' left.

A vegetable in a side dish or salad may be served by the hostess. In

this case cream and sugar may be placed for another person to start passing.

Placing Other Dishes

Individual salts and peppers are placed in front of each cover. Place larger salts and peppers between covers.

Since food is passed to the right, place food so it will follow around the table in an orderly fashion. For example place butter where it will follow the bread.

Place gravy, relish, jell, butter, etc. near a cover so that it can be easily reached. Place appropriate serving silver beside these dishes. The hostess will then ask the nearest person to start the dish or that person may ask the hostess permission to start it.

Who serves what and where it is placed may differ with the occasion or the convenience of the individual family.

If the hostess must also be waitress she may sit at the most convenient place rather than at the end opposite the host. If someone else serves as waitress the hostess may wish to sit facing the kitchen door.

Published and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, by the Cooperative Extension Service of the South Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, John T. Stone, Director, U. S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

25M-10-62-File: 10.3.3.4-10633