



CHRISTMAS DINNER PLANNER

checklist

Somewhere between the gravy and the pumpkin pie, you may have found yourself offering to host Christmas Dinner. Now what to do? Don't worry. You've got this. If we can give any advice, it's this—give yourself one of the best gifts possible—the gift of advance planning. It is one surefire way to make it possible for you to host a delicious dinner, make it a festive gathering and enjoy yourself at the same time.

LATE NOVEMBER

Break out the decorations. With Thanksgiving behind you, it's time to put up the tree and dust off the Christmas décor. Aim to have your halls decked before December 1, so you can focus on all the other festivities and to-dos of the season. And while you may start with your current décor inventory, it's nice to add a few decorative elements to freshen up your holiday look.

Make your meal plan. Pull out the cookbooks and find some inspiration for your Christmas dinner. Will it be a formal, elegant affair or a casual buffet? Do you need to plan for a gaggle of toddlers or a bunch of teens? Draft up your Christmas dinner menu and then from there create several grocer lists—one for non-perishable items and another for the fresh items you will need closer to the big day. Need a few ideas for the menu? Check out some of our favorite Christmas dinner recipes.

Order the main dish. If a turkey, ham or Christmas goose is on the menu, then be sure to order or purchase it ahead of time and pop it in the freezer. Knowing you can check the main dish off your list will surely reduce some stress.

Consider seating arrangements. You don't have to worry yet about who sits next to whom, but you do need to make sure you have enough chairs and tables to accommodate everyone on your guest list. Now is the time, far in advance, to be asking to borrow, or arranging for rentals.

ONE WEEK AHEAD

Stop the chill. Time to take that main dish out of the freezer so it will have plenty of time to defrost. Allow one day of thawing for every five pounds of meat.

Shop the first list. Remember that list of non-perishable ingredients you made a few weeks ago? Now is the time to get it out and head to the store. It may even take a few trips to a few different places to get everything you need. Plan ahead if you need to locate special ingredients.

Check your supplies. Reference that meal plan of yours and then cross check it against your kitchen and servingware inventory to make sure you're not short on the necessities. If you plan on making three pies, but only have one pie plate, then you'll need to add that to your list. From baking pans to silverware to Dutch ovens, think about all the things you'll need to make your Christmas dinner happen.



- Make a game plan. Map out the cooking timeline on Christmas day. Look too overwhelming? See where you can make ahead dishes to alleviate the stress factor on the big day.
- Clean out the fridge. Everyone from your mother-in-law to your next-door neighbor will have their nose in your fridge. Skip the stress and give it a good cleaning a week ahead of time to clear space and rest your conscious.
- Fill the downtime. The last thing you need is a bunch of bored kids; prep some creative activities that can help fill the time whenever you need to keep them busy and out of the kitchen. Get them some colorful dinnerware sets all their own in whimsical styles that keep any snack or meal merry and bright.

THREE DAYS AHEAD

- Fill the downtime. The last thing you need is a bunch of bored kids; prep some creative activities that can help fill the time whenever you need to keep them busy and out of the kitchen.
- Prep the table linens. Pull out the special table linens, napkins and dining chair slipcovers and see if they need some TLC. Maybe some spot cleaning or ironing to get them ready for the big day.
- Make the big grocery store trip. This is the trip where you will buy all your perishable items. Be sure to double-check your list before you head out the door. Don't forget to pick up some disposable plastic containers to send home leftovers with your guests.
- Clean the house. Take time to give the house a good cleaning now, then you will just need to do a touch up the night before. Give special attention to the guest bathroom.
- Chill the drinks. If you have an extra refrigerator, load it up with beverages so that they will be chilled and ready on Christmas day. If you live in a colder climate, save on fridge space and put drinks in a cool garage or back porch. Keep an eye on the temperature—you don't want anything to freeze overnight!

THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

- Prep ice. Think now about prepping for beverages. When someone asks what they can do to help out, send them to the store for several bags of ice. It's an easy task that should yield no surprises.
- Make your make-ahead dishes. Identify those dishes that can be made ahead of time (and might even taste better after the flavors have a day to mingle), and prepare them today.
- Do a last-minute clean sweep. A quick vacuum/sweep and dusting should be all you need to make sure everything is ready for tomorrow.
- Set the table. Put it all out there, from the table linens to tablescapes and Christmas decor to elegant place settings. Don't forget the glassware and take time to give glasses a last-minute polish so they shine beautifully.

CHRISTMAS DAY

- _____ Refer to your meal timeline as a cooking guide throughout the day.
- _____ Put on the music in the background early in the day; it can easily be forgotten if you wait.
- _____ Designate a space for coats and purses.
- _____ Light candles or turn on battery-operated candles.

All your advance planning will pay off. Remember, this celebratory day is all about family and friends, so if unexpected things happen or the day's schedule goes astray, take a deep breath and improvise. And from our Country Door family to yours, we wish you a very Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas

Wishing you a happy and joyful holiday.

