SERVING THE FAMILY MEAL

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Altho Shakespeare said “Now good digestion wait on appetite and health on both” many years ago, we are just now realizing the final importance of a quiet and pleasant meal time. In our hurried and busy lives we find that meal time is often the only occasion for the family to be together, and perhaps the only opportunity to enjoy the association of family and friends. Because we do sometimes lead rather a harried existence, it is fundamentally important that we relax and enjoy ourselves at meal time. The place of eating, the appointments of the table and the manner in which the meal is served are all important.

Family Meal Time an Index to Real Refinement.—The style and manner in which a family conducts itself at meal time is in a way an index to its standards of living. Refinement and genuine courtesy or a lack of it are evident in one’s table manners. Elaborateness or an effort to make a display in entertaining at meal time is not at all necessary nor even good form. It is consistent everyday practise of simple courtesies and the wholesome cheerful atmosphere of the most ordinary meal which marks the family of culture and refinement.

Coverings for the Dining Table

Style in table appointments is no less important in housekeeping than style in clothing. Of the many changes in the home brought about by the war, one of the most important had to do with table linen. The scarcity of the flax fiber together with other conditions caused a considerable increase in the cost of all linens. The first cotton damasks did not prove particularly satisfactory as to appearance or laundering and so there came about in many homes the custom of the almost constant use of luncheon sets. Unfortunately in many cases this discarding of the table cloth was taken as an indication that the use of bare tables was also advocated.

While measures of this kind naturally lessen household labor in the laundering of table linens, one should consider carefully the effect upon the family of any considerable let-down in table appointments.

Since the attractive appearance of the table and surroundings of the family meal is being emphasized in this bulletin, let us consider the advantages and disadvantages of each of the following points:

1. Use of table without any covering or with the use of small doilies only.
2. Use of luncheon sets.
3. Use of regulation table cloths.
4. Use of sets of oilcloth or sanitas.
Use of Table Without Covering.—A table used with no cloth or only small doilies under the plates must be in excellent condition to present a good appearance. Moreover if the table top is in perfect condition as to finish or polish and if hot dishes are always placed on asbestos mats or protectors, a bare table may be used successfully. It will be necessary however, to give a table used in this way great care in order that the top may at all times present a good appearance for a top marred by hot dishes is not only unsightly but often unsanitary as well. The legs of a table used without a cloth hanging over the table edge should be as carefully finished and polished as the table top.

Use of Luncheon Sets.—The principal advantage in the use of luncheon sets is supposed to be that they are easier to launder than table cloths. This is true insofar as the size of the separate pieces goes. On the other hand one is inclined to change them more frequently, not only on account of cleanliness but often to obtain new color effects, and so perhaps they do not receive proper respect in their use.

The napkins too, which accompany luncheon sets, are apt to be small and inadequate; in fact they are frequently so small and have to be changed so often that the supposed advantage of less laundering does not hold.

The materials of which luncheon sets are made has much to do with satisfaction in their use. Luncheon sets made of linen of a good quality are generally satisfactory in laundering but many linen luncheon sets in which the cloth and napkins are both of a good size

Fig. 1.—Good designs for luncheon sets of linen or cotton.
and attractive pattern, are of such a poor grade of linen that after laundering they present a sleazy and uninviting appearance.

A cloth needs sufficient body in itself to lie well. This is particularly true in the use of lunch cloths for it is rarely possible on account of the wide variation in sizes of lunch cloths to use a pad with them. Some cotton materials are excellent for luncheon sets, among them Indian Heads and some of the suitings. The closely woven un-bleached domestics altho widely used for the purpose, are not satisfactory as they become gray and are difficult to launder. Lunch cloths made of flour or sugar sacks while easy to wash are often so soft that they do not lie flat and smooth on the table. Three lunch cloths with suitable hand-embroidered designs are shown in Figure 1.

Use of Table Cloths.—Notwithstanding the popularity of luncheon sets we hear every now and then that full-sized table cloths are coming back into favor. A cloth which covers the table entirely should always have a pad underneath. The purpose of this pad is not only to protect the table top and permit dishes to be placed anywhere on the table but to prevent the noise of dishes and silver. It also gives a richer effect to the linen.

Table cloths need no longer be of linen damask, for cloths of plain or mercerized cotton damask in beautiful designs are now available at moderate cost. These cloths also launder exceptionally well. Each housewife must be her own judge as to whether it is better economy for her to use luncheon sets or table cloths.

Fig. 2.—Two attractive designs for sanitas meal sets.
Use of Oilcloth Sets.—Luncheon sets of oilcloth or sanitas seem favorites in many homes, especially where breakfast nooks or dinettes are used. The advantage of these materials was at first held to be that they could be so easily wiped clean with a cloth.

The style in oilcloth has changed greatly and now in addition to the pure white we have a wide range of choice in a variety of plain colors and figured effects. Then too, in addition to the smooth surface of the oilcloth, we now have pebbled surfaces and embossed effects. These two latter types cannot always be cleaned satisfactorily with a damp cloth. They frequently need scrubbing with a soft brush and neutral soap. As a rule these sets are more satisfactory in the shape of mats of different sizes and shapes than in lunch cloths, on account of the difficulty in folding.

Sets of oilcloth or sanitas may be purchased ready-made in attractive designs, or if one is clever they may be stenciled or decorated.
at home. Some attractive designs for sanitas sets are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Many people object to the use of oilcloth and sanitas because of the frayed appearance of the edges. There is generally less trouble with frayed edges on the better grades, but one secret of preventing a frayed appearance is to use a sharp knife or very sharp scissors in cutting when making sets at home. While one occasionally sees sets of oilcloth finished with bias tape, this finish is not advised.

**Dining Room vs. Kitchen for Eating**

The dining room is logically the place for dining or eating but many homes are finding it only an occasionally used room. The popular breakfast nook or corner of a kitchen is often so much more convenient that the busy woman, who does a thousand things besides serving meals, feels that she deserves this simplified form of meal service. However, the family has a right to eat among attractive surroundings, if for no other reason than the desirable effect upon digestion. If it is difficult to have an orderly kitchen when the meal is served, then it is wisest to have a dining-room meal where all are away from the confusion and odors of cooking.

The place for eating should be well ventilated, clean, with sunlight if possible or at least plenty of light. Wherever the family eats, that place should be pleasant enough that one is at ease when

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*Fig. 4.—A cheerful corner of the kitchen showing a table set for serving family style.*
an unexpected guest drops in at meal time. The corner of the kitchen shown in Figure 4 is attractive since the outlook is cheerful and the kitchen large.

Dishes and Table Appointments

Colorful dishes are far more popular than white at present. Provided linen and dishes harmonize in color and design, the attractiveness of color is beyond question. Very inexpensive dishes may be secured in pleasing design, as is shown in the illustration. These dishes, for one place or cover, cost only 35 cents, while the 50-inch lunch cloth with 4 napkins of cream-colored linen, novelty weave, with an orange stripe, was purchased for $3.75. Since the dishes are of flowered design in orange, yellow and black, a plain cloth or one with an inconspicuous design is preferable.

Plain colors in glass are popular, especially for salad plates and goblets. The difficulty lies in obtaining a harmonious effect when color is so popular in both linen, china and glassware. Too much color is as serious an error as too little.

Everyday Dishes May Be Attractive.—Again in choice of dishes for everyday, the family deserves consideration. Nicked and cracked dishes are both unsightly and unhygienic. The "best" dishes will no doubt be more expensive than everyday ones, but those used daily

![Fig. 5.—One cover, or place, showing position of silver, glass and dishes for a luncheon, supper, or informal dinner.](image-url)
need not lack in attractiveness. The dinner set which lacks enough small plates may be supplemented with glass plates in a harmonizing color, as these are appropriate for salad or dessert.

**Setting the Table**

One place, or a cover, correctly set, is shown in Figure 5. Allow at least 20 or 24 inches for each person at the table and 30 inches if possible. All silver and dishes should be 1 inch from the edge of the table. The cutting edge of the knife is always turned in. Spoons and knives are generally at the right and forks at the left. We usually mark the cover with the dinner knife and fork, although some people like to observe strictly the rule to put the silver used first at the outside, and so in order toward the plate. This method reverses the order of the salad and dinner forks from that shown in the illustration.

Silver to be used with dessert is usually brought in with that course since it is considered poor form to display a great deal of silver on the table at one time. A bread-and-butter spreader may be placed across the upper right hand side of the small bread-and-butter plate, with the blade turned in.

**Serving Silver.**—When a table is correctly set, all serving silver is placed beside the dish for which it is intended, never in it. This means that the jelly spoon is beside the jelly dish, and parallel with other silver on the table, the gravy ladle is beside the gravy boat, etc. Carving knife and fork are at right and left of the place reserved for the platter.

**Salad and Bread-and-Butter Plate.**—There is a great deal of discussion as to the correct place of the salad plate. It is most frequently seen above the forks, although the most convenient place is directly above the dinner plate. If a bread-and-butter plate is used, its place is above the forks, and the salad plate then naturally goes between the bread-and-butter plate and the water glass. Many hostesses now prefer the salad plate nearer the center of the cover since there is less difficulty in eating the salad than when one must reach entirely across the dinner plate.

The napkin is usually placed at the left of the forks with the open edges at the lower right hand corner, and the folded edges along the top and outer left sides. It may be placed directly in the center of the cover, especially if the table is rather crowded.

**Eliminate Unnecessary Dishes.**—Nothing is more disturbing than to be continually passing dishes. Salts and peppers should be conveniently placed, allowing a pair to each two persons when possible. The most attractive tables are those which have a minimum number of dishes, but these contain food carefully selected and nicely prepared.
Center Decorations.—A center decoration helps the attractiveness of the table if the decoration is low enough that it does not obstruct the view across the table and if it is appropriate to be in proximity to food. A few flowers arranged in a bowl or a small basket, a small potted plant in a holder or a pleasing arrangement of fruit may be used. Artificial flowers or decorations must be very carefully selected. They must be of such finish that they can be easily cleansed, such as nicely made crystal or waxed flower-like decorations.

Use of Candles.—Tall candles may be placed in low holders or shorter ones in holders of medium height, the color being in keeping with flowers and other table appointments. If candles are put in a cold place at least 24 hours before they are to be used, they will burn with a slow steady flame.

Style of Serving

Some methods of meal service do not concern the average Western home since they require skilled waitresses or elaborate methods of serving. The Russian, or formal method of serving everything from
the side, and the English method of serving with the help of a wait-
ress will not be discussed here.

Combination Method of Serving.—The most ideal method is per-
haps a combination of family service—where the host or hostess serves
the main course at the table, with help by other members of the family
in serving dessert. If there is a first course of soup or cocktail, it may
be on the table when the meal is announced, if care is taken that the
family is seated immediately. When there is no preliminary course,
the food may be on the table when the family is seated, and then
served immediately by the host or hostess.

A Wheel Tray Simplifies Serving.—The use of a wheel tray
greatly simplifies serving without a waitress. The tray is placed at
the left of the hostess and has on it the course to be served following
the one which is on the table when the guests are seated. For a two-
course dinner, dessert in appropriate dishes is on the top of the
wheel tray. When the first course is finished, the serving dishes for
the first course and the plates used by the family and guests are
passed to the hostess, who places them on the lower shelves of the tray.
Dessert dishes are then passed along the table and no one need arise
from the table during the entire meal.

Serving Family Style.—Family service eliminates frequent pass-
ing of dishes of food. For this style of service, the dinner plates are
placed directly in front of the person serving, usually the host, or
father. The dishes of food which he is to serve to family and guests
are placed above his place and to one side, with serving silver at his
right or at the side of the bowl or platter. Figure 4 shows a table cor-
rectly set for family service.

If a beverage is served at the table, the cups and saucers are
placed at the right of the hostess, above the tile for the tea or coffee
pot. They should never give a stacked appearance. The cream and
sugar bowl are placed in front of the hostess where she can either serve
each cup as it is poured, or start passing them.

If the host or father is serving plates he asks that the first plate
be passed along the right side of the table, to his wife, who sits at
the opposite end of the table. The next plate is passed to the next
person farthest along the table on the right and so on until all are
served. Then plates are passed along the left until those are served.
This method avoids confusion and re-passing.

The plate which the host is serving should never be lifted from
the pile of plates until it is ready to be passed. Dinner plates and
serving dishes for warm food should be warmed before putting them
on the table.
Everyday Serving.—Many homes feel that they cannot take time to always have the main course served by the host or hostess. Then food is all placed on the table to be passed, each person helping himself. Altho this form of serving is never as attractive as the family style, yet if the suggestions given below are carried out it may be quite convenient.

Pass Food to the Right.—Confusion is avoided if food is always passed to the right. The one nearest the dish is expected to put the serving silver in the dish and start passing it. Some people observe the rule of always passing the dish to the one on the left who helps himself and returns it to the one starting the dish. It then continues around the table to the right. If this rule is not understood, however, it is wisest to always pass to the right.

As Few Dishes to Pass as Possible.—The wise housewife will have few dishes to pass, both to save herself and to simplify meal service. More than one relish, such as olives, pickles, and radishes can all be attractively arranged on one plate by marking sections with celery, lettuce, or other garnishes. A pleasing effect is gained by serving a dark and a light jelly in the same glass dish. A platter may contain the accompanying vegetables as well as meat, altho large heavy dishes of food must be avoided when all is to be passed.

Thoughtfulness of the Other Person.—With this type of service, family members learn to look after their own wants and sometimes grow careless in thinking of other's wants. At a certain girls' boarding school they had the ruling that no girl should ask for any article of food until she had first offered some dish to her neighbor or had looked after some one else's wants. While a rule of that sort had its disadvantages, the girls learned one essential rule of true courtesy—to forget themselves and think of the other person.

General Rules of Serving

Some general rules of serving apply to every form. The whole group should be seated at the table together as nearly as possible. Many women find it is a good plan to announce a meal at least five minutes before it is entirely ready since not until dinner is actually called do father and the boys do the last few things necessary for being presentable at the table.

Serve the hostess first. She sits at one end of the table opposite the host. Guests are usually seated at the right of the host and hostess, a woman guest next to the host and a masculine guest beside the hostess.

Left-hand Serving.—Forms of serving vary greatly in different localities. To serve and remove from the left is perhaps the most widely practiced here. If the person serving is carrying two filled
plates, she will place the plate in her left hand from the left side of the person being served. The plate in the right hand is transferred to the left hand and in turn placed from the left before the next guest. It is extremely awkward to place dishes from the left with the right hand. If it is difficult for younger members of the family to use the left hand in placing dishes, they should approach and place from the right, using the right hand.

When a Waitress Passes Food.—Food which is offered to a person seated, such as a plate of rolls, is always presented from the left side, so the guest may reach easily with the right hand. If the guest is known to be left-handed, then the dish is offered from the right side.

Remove Serving Dishes First.—In removing one course before another is to be served, always remove the dishes in which the food was served before removing individual plates. This rule is frequently violated, but a table looks more attractive if everything connected with one course is removed before the next is brought on. This means

Fig. 7.—Spoons should rest beside the cup and sherbet dish, never in it. The family member, at the left, folds her napkin when the meal is finished. The guest, at the right, leaves it only partially folded.
that meat platter, vegetable dishes, bread plate and butter dish, even salt and pepper shakers are removed first, then individual covers.

A table may be crumbed before the dessert course, using a tray or a folded napkin and plate. Never crumb except where necessary.

In filling water glasses, do not touch the glass if possible. If the table is crowded the glass may be moved toward the edge of the table by taking hold of it near the bottom, but never lifted from the table. Fingers of waitress or guest should never touch the surface or rim of a glass or any serving dish. A goblet is held by the stem, a glass by its lower half.

Always wait until all are thru before removing any dishes. The hostess gives the signal as to when to start eating a course placed before guests by picking up her own silver.

Children enjoy the privilege of waiting upon the table. Provide for their use small and light-weight pitchers to pour. See that dishes are not too full or not too heavy. A light-weight tray is very useful both when children or adults serve. Let the children help decorate the table and help prepare special dishes of food, such as cinnamon apples and radish roses.

The guest in a home managed without help feels uneasy if the meal seems to require a great deal of running to the kitchen and serving on the part of the hostess. It is better form to let a few details of perfect service go, allowing young members of the family to assist rather than attempt an elaborate meal with the hostess busy and hurried.

**Table Manners**

H. I. Philips says—"Some people are born with etiquette, some people achieve etiquette and some people go on eating with a knife all their lives." A few rules given below may be helpful in acquiring etiquette.

If necessary to pull the chair out, use the right hand and sit down from the left side of the chair. Women and girls have an especially warm spot in their hearts for the men and boys who thoughtfully assist them in being seated at a table. There is no better place to practise courtesies to women than on mother at home.

The napkin, which is taken from the left after all are seated, is unfolded to half its full size if a large one, or entirely unfolded if small luncheon size. A marker of some sort is necessary for napkins used by members of the family, who fold their napkins when the meal is over. The guest for one meal leaves his napkin partially folded at one side of the plate, but not back in the original creases as tho it were to be used again, as is shown in the illustration Figure 7.
Soup should be sipped quietly from the side of the spoon. Dip the spoon away from you as shown in Figure 8, never toward you. Eat quietly and without haste.

Conversation and pleasantness at the table are things which distinguish our meal time and make occasions to be remembered. If hands are sometimes idle, the mind will be more active and the digestive system less likely to be overburdened. Let your lap hold your hands at least occasionally.

After food is served on individual plates it is cut or divided into convenient-sized servings to eat, but only as it is needed. Of course, it is labor saving to cut all the meat at once, to butter the whole slice of bread at one time, and to mash a nicely browned potato and lovely croquette to a shapeless mass before starting in to eat, but it is an insult to both the food and to the adult’s skill in handling a knife and fork.

Silver and dishes are not to be used as playthings or weapons. If you talk with your hands, be sure that the fork or spoon are not used to aid the gestures.

The plate and saucer are meant as resting places for silver which has been used. The hostess will be spared uneasy moments if the knife and fork are always across the plate at the upper right hand side, except when not in use. They rest very nicely in this fashion when the plate is passed back for the second serving—never remove them from the plate. In repose, the cutting edge of the knife is turned in and the fork has tines up. Spoons are always placed as
nearly flat as possible when in a resting position. As shown in Figure 7 the spoons are beside the coffee cup and sherbet dishes. They are never upright, even for a few seconds, since it looks awkward and may cause accidents. It is permissible to leave the spoon in rather flat soup plates rather than to transfer it to the plate beneath.

The fork, a much abused instrument, is intended only as a means of conveying food to the mouth and to aid in cutting or dividing food. The English or continental custom of keeping it in the left hand both to assist in cutting meat and to convey food which has been cut, to the mouth, is practised in some sections of this country. This method is correctly shown in Figures 9 and 10. The fork is then held with the tines down and with the forefinger of the left hand extended along the back. To grasp it about the middle is unsightly and inconvenient; when correctly held the handle will be well within the palm of the hand, tines down. When the fork is used in the right hand, as for vegetables and food not cut, the tines are up.

Seeds, small bones and other unedible parts of food may be removed from the mouth with the fork.

A knife is held in the right hand and only by the handle. In cutting meat, use a steady cutting movement across the food, not a tearing motion managed with the fork and knife together.

It is not considered necessary to leave some food on the plate
for politeness' sake. While it is in bad taste to clean up the plate painstakingly, yet it is equally poor taste to be fussy, to habitually leave food untouched or barely pick at the food served. We sometimes speak with pride of our food dislikes, it is not to our credit but our misfortune.

Fingers are used to convey food to the mouth in some instances. Whole asparagus tips which are not covered with sauce, French artichokes, strawberries with hulls on, corn on the cob, and many types of fruits are eaten with the fingers.

The fleshy portion of the artichoke leaf and the edible part of the asparagus stalk may be dipped into a sauce or dressing, the other part being discarded. Corn on the cob should be broken into short enough lengths that it can be managed with one hand.

The old saying of "In Rome, do as the Romans do" applies somewhat to table manners. While one need never violate any standard principles of table etiquette, yet to decide whether or not to use the fingers in eating fried chicken, for example, may be determined by custom and common sense. When in doubt, follow the example of the hostess.

Accidents are sure to occur occasionally at the best of regulated tables. If a mishap can be ignored or easily corrected, it should be done without calling the attention of the others to it. If a glass of water is spilled or a piece of silver dropped, the hostess can sup-
ply the clean silver and take care of the excess moisture as quietly as possible.

It is said that the perfect hostess saves her guests embarrassment by following suit on any small error or blunder her guest may make. She plans to still have some food left when the others are finishing, since it is embarrassing for one to finish alone.

Pleasing or good manners save us and others embarrassment and confusion, but the finest manners are not those learned in a book on etiquette. The fundamental rules of good manners, as one writer puts it, are to

- Be natural.
- Forget yourself.
- Use your common sense.
- Take your time.
- Don’t get rattled.
- Make the best of it.
- Ask anybody.