

Story by Carol Voegal, featured in
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RUSTIC table settings for a group

No season offers more variety for entertaining than summer. Whether serving a lakeside lunch after a morning of canoeing or a barbecue supper on a city terrace at dusk, the well-organized host or hostess should have a stash of accouterments handy to suit the right occasion.

This should not be a problem considering the range of tableware available in the stores this season. Interestingly, many tabletop designs are drawing on popular home-furnishings materials. It is not surprising, for example, to find a faded chintz, more commonly used as a summer slipcover, fashioned into a full-skirted tablecloth and a set of

matching napkins. Or an ikat fabric similar to a floor covering made into placemats.

Suitability is perhaps the most important aspect to consider when shopping for the table. Since life in the summer tends to be informal, there is no need to worry about polishing silver or readying the good china and crystal. Less delicate

porcelains, flatware and glasses can be found in a vast number of colors and styles.

Putting it all together, however, can often be tricky. One sound rule to follow is: Keep the basics simple. Plates, for instance, should be chosen in solid colors or subtle patterns that will not fight with food or flowers. And flatware should be in classic styles. From there, it is easy to build a wardrobe of accessories in more adventurous patterns and textures. A well-laid table, after all, is not so terribly different from a well-decorated room. Once a dominant color scheme has been decided upon, a selection of complementing accessories that can be mixed and matched at whim can be worked out.

This is even true when planning the most impromptu occasions. Last-minute picnics or clambakes undoubtedly call for sturdy, portable gear, but these, too, come in snappy designs. A line of tinware, complete with serving platters and a coffee service, can be found in solid black with a red trim. Team it up with a bright red ice chest, a collapsible grill, a set of chunky stainless steel and several brightly colored blankets to spread out on the sand or grass, and there will be little else needed.

Parties in the backyard may call for



Using commonly found items such as herbs, plants, linens, and even mismatched china, glasses and silverware can add a unique and casually crafted look to each place setting.

something slightly more elaborate. But even then, carefully mixing the utilitarian and the decorative can often produce a memorable and individual look - pairing a wicker basket with a tin casserole and hot pink placemats, for instance. And oversize glass jugs designed with spigots make serving sangria easy for large crowds.

Flowers during the warmer months should be as simple as the meal itself. No fancy arrangements are necessary - just a bunch of whatever is in bloom carefully displayed in a plain vase or crock will do. Sometimes, however, when a bit more formality is called for, there is nothing better than an old-fashioned tea party, with tea served on a table covered in linens and lace with Victorian china and a silver tea set. There are few better ways to while away a hot afternoon. ❖

