Homes & Gardens

Town Tribune Weekly Guide To Fall Living

What Guests Notice During the Holidays



It's always anxiety-inducing to host, and no time of the year is more high-pressure to do it in than the holidays. If you're worried about the state of your home or how guests will find it, don't stress too much.

"Welcoming guests to a clean, tidy, and organized home is not only thoughtful—it makes guests feel special and considered," interior designer Emily LaMarque says.

We spoke with three experts to learn what guests always notice when they enter your home for the holiday: focus on tackling these spots instead of the whole house before guests arrive and you'll be golden.

Entryway:

An entryway is a home's first impression, so this area is of utmost importance for making guests feel welcome.

"A clear path, and a designated place for coats and bags help guests feel welcome immediately. Clear shoes and packages from the entryway, and put stray belongings in a temporary basket to sort through later," says organizing pro Sarit Weiss. "Shoes, packages, or oversized decorations crowding the entrance can make arriving feel chaotic."

If this is where you keep keys, shoes, mail, or any other items that can contribute to visual clutter, move them into a closet or cabinet for the evening.

"Clear up the entryway so that you create a calm and uncluttered first impression," LaMarque says.

"Do you have room in your coat closet for the outwear of your guests? If not, and you have to put them in another room, make sure that room has been straightened out as well so that guests see a neat room when they retrieve their coats," professional organizer Sharon Lowenheim says.

Seasonal Décor:

'Tis the season to be festive, but that doesn't have to mean your space is overflowing with wreaths and garlands.

"Decorations covering every surface leave little room for drinks or plates. Decorate while leaving room for people to use the space," Weiss says.

And this doesn't just go for seasonal decor, either. Take a second look at your bookshelf and consider if it may feel overwhelming to a visitor.

"Do what you can to make your books look orderly since that will make guests feel more at ease in your home," Lowenheim says.

Lighting:

Lighting is often touted as one of the most important aspects of designing a home, and it is especially true for when you're hosting guests as well.

"The ambience that lighting creates is so important. Creating a warm and glowy space with candlelight, table lamps, and dimmers is much cozier than cold, overly bright overhead lighting," LaMarque says.

Strike a good balance by providing multiple light sources from lamps, sconces, and candles.

Scents:

Speaking of candles, never underestimate the power of nice scents to create a welcoming environment. This is especially powerful in the winter when the holidays come with so many seasonal scents.

"Guests appreciate a fresh-smelling home. Light some candles or set up a reed diffuser with scents of the season," Lowenheim suggests.

Leave your home for a while, even just 20 minutes, and then come back—you should be able to smell any odors upon return (it's easy to become noseblind when we spend so much time at home). Address whatever the source of the smell is, then light your preferred candle.

Living Room Layout:

Most American living rooms center the TV. Though it's not a bad thing, it can stifle conversation if all the furniture is arranged in a way that makes it difficult to mingle.

"Before your guests arrive, make sure that the seating is arranged in a way that people can easily socialize," Lowenheim says.

Do a trial run through your own



living room and see what might be missing. Are surfaces too cluttered? Do you have somewhere to set down your drink? Can you see dust bunnies under the TV console when you're seated?

"Before guests arrive, prioritize the places they'll touch, sit, and set things down," Weiss says.

Clutter:

"Guests notice clutter in areas where they need to act: shoes blocking the entrance, belongings covering seats, or counters with nowhere to set anything down," Weiss says.

Clear these areas by putting away anything that does not need to be out.

"Grab a laundry basket and do a lightning-quick job of straightening up any loose ends such as mail, shipping boxes, kids toys, and discarded clothing items. Tuck everything away in a bedroom or closet to be sorted later," LaMarque suggests for the last 30 minutes before guests arrive.

Cluttered Surfaces:

Not only will guests notice clutter, they'll also be able to notice if there's something they can't find. Make sure countertops only have what they should: hand soap and lotion on the bathroom counter, drinks on the kitchen counter, small decor pieces and coasters in the living room.

"A clearly arranged drink station or serving area helps guests find what they need and feel comfortable helping themselves," Weiss says. "These touches create a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere without requiring every corner of the home to be perfect."

Guest Bathroom:

There are few things worse than having to tell your host they're out of toilet paper or tissues, so don't put your guests in that position. Make sure the bathroom is clean and tidy, and that guests can find anything they might need.

"At the very least, make sure the bathroom that guests use is tidied up. Clean off toothpaste splatter, put the toilet seat down, ensure there is extra toilet paper in the bathroom, and provide plenty of clean, dry hand towels," LaMarque says.

Manage unpleasant odors with a candle or automatic air freshener, take out the trash, and make sure towels are hanging neatly.

Inviting Details:

"Include a few thoughtful, personal touches in your home," LaMarque says. "A beautifully styled coffee table tray, fresh flowers on a console table, or a thoughtfully set dining table create an intentionally visual moment in the room that helps guests feel welcome and invited."



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