

Set A TOP TABLE

WHATEVER YOUR TASTE OR BUDGET, A BEAUTIFUL TABLE IS EASY TO ACHIEVE AND WILL MAKE GUESTS FEEL WELCOME AND SPECIAL.

SELECT A SHADE

For many people, Christmas is their opportunity to go all-out with their reindeer plates, Santa cups and snowman napkins. If that's your style, go for it. If you prefer something a little more understated, there are plenty of choices available. First, decide on a colour scheme. Red and green are customary, but for something a little different, why not try blue and gold or pink and silver? Stick to two complementary colours and you can't go wrong. For the fashion-conscious, pretty pastels are right up to date and, if you're confident, you can mix prints and patterns.

DECORATE AND CELEBRATE

When it comes to decoration, you're only limited by your imagination. For a centerpiece, there are traditional choices such as flowers, wreaths and fruit bowls, but a bowl filled with a mix of shiny and matte Christmas baubles adds a dash of modern elegance. Just don't use anything too high, so everyone can see each other over the top of it!

DREAM OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS

Even though you live in the southern hemisphere, you can still have a white Christmas, albeit one with an Aussie twist. Gardenias, jasmine and frangipanis are among the many beautiful white flowers you can use to decorate your table. To take the Aussie theme one step further, a centerpiece of native flora such as bottlebrush, wattle

and eucalyptus will be a feast for the eyes and the nose. And for a beach-themed table, scatter about some small baubles in silver and pink and add a centerpiece of a white platter filled with seashells and starfish. It's the perfect look for an outdoor table setting.

FIRE IT UP!

Candles are another popular choice for centerpieces – just remember to keep them away from anything flammable! If using candles, consider these tips:

- arrange candles in a circle or oval and secure to the table with Blu-Tack to avoid accidents

• use a selection of silver and crystal candlesticks, in a variety of heights

- an odd number of candles adds visual interest
- a large clear bowl filled with water and floating tea-light candles can add a magical touch.

GET PERSONAL

Think about adding little extras like handwritten place cards with guests' names or even personalised crackers. While the store-bought variety are fine, you can also make your own. Just get a hollow cardboard tube – save them up when you finish a roll of paper towels – and fill with little gifts like small soaps, toys or instant scratchies. You can buy cracker snaps from craft stores – just thread through the middle, wrap the tube in Christmas paper and twist each end. Your guests will love them.

TIP

Roll or fold

Napkins can be folded elaborately, slipped into napkin rings or simply draped over the edge of wine glasses.

