

Wow Thanksgiving Dinner Guests on a Budget

Entertainment guru offers stress-free hosting tips

Author of the article:

Linda White • Postmedia Content Works

 Published Oct 02, 2026 •

 3 minute read



Bring the outdoors in to decorate your Thanksgiving table. EATERTAINMENT EVENTS AND CATERING

We independently select everything we recommend. Buying through us may earn us a commission, which supports our work.

Grocery bills may be soaring but if you're hosting Thanksgiving dinner this year, you can still throw an unforgettable occasion without breaking the bank. From setting a budget to going potluck, there are lots of way to stretch your grocery dollars.

"Thanksgiving can be an expensive time to entertain, especially given that the size of the group you are hosting is typically larger and can include family, friends and even a few last-minute additions," says Sebastien Centner, event planner and owner of Eatertainment Events and Catering.

One of his tips is to create dishes that use inexpensive ingredients but are still sure to satisfy. He offers additional tips on how to wow your guests without breaking the bank.



Event planner Sebastien Centner. EATERTAINMENT EVENTS AND CATERING

Bring the outdoors in. Use fallen leaves, pinecones and branches to create seasonal bundles of décor for your table. Decorate with flowers that you might later pot outside, such as chrysanthemums. Group mini gourds, acorn squash and eggplants – which can be used later in recipes – with a few candles.

Re-use items from around the house in interesting ways. “For example, we have these beautiful antique glass bottles that we have used for serving water or pre-batched cocktails, but we’ve also placed battery-operated string lights in them and used them for centrepieces instead of candles,” Centner says.

Another idea: serve soup in teacups. That reduces the size of the portion – though you can offer refills – and is also conducive to the portion of the gathering where people might not be seated.

Create a batched welcome cocktail. Batched cocktails are ideal for Thanksgiving because they can serve a large group without the host needing to mix drinks all night. “An inexpensive red or white wine or cider can be turned into a great fall sangria or even a mulled warm cocktail,” he says.

“Mulled cider is a cozy classic and deserves to stay just that, but we have a little trick to elevate it by giving it a sweet and crunchy twist. Mix the ingredients in a pot and leave to simmer on low heat for one hour. Before pouring, rim the glasses with caramel and crushed pecan.”



Find fun activities for the whole family. “Typically, Thanksgiving is a time with lots of kids of all ages involved in the celebration and with us, we always found it was good to have something to keep them busy,” says Centner. His suggestion: set up a chocolate bark activity that kids can enjoy with parents leading. Chocolate bark can be made earlier in the day or as guests arrive.

Here’s how: melt milk, dark or white chocolate in a double boiler or microwave and pour onto baking sheets lined with parchment paper.

After two to three hours in the fridge – just in time for dessert or post-dinner snacks – let the kids add their own ingredients, from dried fruit and nuts (check for nut allergies first) to candy and dried cereal.

Keep kids engaged at the table. Use a chalkboard paper runner on the table with small jars of chalk spread around. Consider pre-drawing names at place settings in lieu of traditional place cards.

Set the tone for the table

Hosting Thanksgiving dinner this fall? “The centrepiece is where the mood begins,” says Anne-Marie Baril, design and brand director at Bouclair.

“This Thanksgiving, tables are leaning into richer colour, tactile materials and a little more contrast. Think warm browns and earthy neutrals paired with deeper greens, soft black, or unexpected pops of colour. Layer in wood, glass, ceramic and textured finishes to give the table that collected, lived-in look we love.”



A table runner sets the colour story to your Thanksgiving dinner table. BOUCLAIR

The secret to a centrepiece that makes an impression isn't a table full of décor, Baril advises. Rather, a few well-chosen pieces, layered thoughtfully, can do all the work. She offers five key elements to bring your Thanksgiving centrepiece together:

- Start with a foundation. A table runner sets the colour story, while a tray gives your arrangement a defined place to come together.
- Give it height. Bring the eye up with pieces in different sizes and shapes. A taller vase or decorative stem can instantly change the feel of the whole arrangement.
- Bring in nature. Let greenery do some of the decorating for you. Bare branches, evergreen stems and nature-inspired accents add texture and an effortless seasonal feel.
- Set the mood. Place candles at different heights to create depth, then add a diffuser for another layer of atmosphere.
- Make it yours. Add something unexpected. Mix in a favourite piece, play with contrast or move things around until it feels right. There's no need to make it perfect. The most memorable tables have a little personality.