

sanctuary
table

7 Hosting Tips for this festive season



As we enter the festive season, our homes begin to carry a different kind of energy, a gentle invitation to gather, slow down, and share life with the people we love.

Some friends call me the Black Martha Stewart, and honestly, it makes me smile every time. I admire the way she teaches, equips, and elevates even the simplest moments into something beautiful. But thinking about her always brings me back to another Martha, the one in scripture, who became so busy preparing and hosting that she almost missed the moment unfolding right in front of her.

It is easy for those of us who love beautiful tables, warm food, and a full home to fall into that same rhythm. We pour ourselves out so completely that we forget to sit, breathe, taste, laugh, and actually enjoy the gathering we created.

This guide is a gentle reminder not to lose yourself in the doing. Whether hosting comes naturally to you or feels a little intimidating, these pages are here to help you prepare with ease and intention, so opening your home becomes something joyful instead of overwhelming.

My hope is simple: that this season, you savour the moments just as much as the people you are hosting.

Peace and love.

Dawn



Start With the Feeling You Want To Create

Most gatherings fall apart long before the first guest arrives, simply because the host never paused to ask, “What do I want this day to feel like?”

Feeling is the foundation.

It’s the difference between a rushed meal and a meaningful moment.

Do you want your gathering to feel peaceful and slow, or playful and full of laughter? Do you envision soft music and candlelight, or something more upbeat and social? When you know the feeling, everything else becomes easier. The menu, the décor, the music, the pacing of the day, even the way you prepare your home, starts flowing in one direction.

When I hosted my Thanksgiving “Merry Thanksfriends,” the intention was simple: warmth and belonging. That guided everything, from my choice of menu to how early I started prepping to the softness of lighting in the dining room. Your intention becomes your compass.



Plan Your Menu Early and With Awareness of the Season

Planning your menu early is not just about organisation. It's about hosting with intention, clarity, and ease.

Start by considering:

- The season, because seasonal foods taste better, cost less, and are easier to find.
- Your energy, because not every season of your life can handle a 12-dish extravaganza.
- Your budget, because good food does not have to be expensive.

Once you have those anchors, choose recipes that will:

- Hold well in the oven
- Be prepped ahead
- Compliment each other
- Allow you to enjoy your guests, not just feed them

Look at what is in season before building the menu. Broccoli, asparagus, berries, warm spices, certain herbs, even bread availability can shift depending on the month. When you plan ahead, you avoid driving from shop to shop searching for something that's nowhere to be found.

And always add one thing you know how to make well. It grounds you.

Set Your Budget First

Budget is not the enemy of beauty. It is the architect of good planning.

Before buying a single thing, decide:

- How much you are willing to spend
- Where you want the money to go
- What matters to you most

Some seasons call for simple gatherings. Other seasons allow for more indulgence. Both are holy.

When you set your budget first, your menu and décor naturally follow. You can choose ingredients that stretch well, plan sides that are hearty and affordable, and make smart decisions that honour both your home and your bank account.

A joyful gathering is only joyful if you aren't drowning in regret afterwards.



Prep Over a Few Days

Most hosting stress comes from trying to cram two days of work into six hours.

Spread it out.

Three days before

Chop vegetables, clean herbs, prepare doughs, pre-make sauces, marinate proteins that need long flavour development.

Two days before

Start baking, prepare salads that improve overnight, organise platters and cutlery, and buy any last-minute fresh items.

One day before

Set the table, decorate the entryway, iron napkins, place candles, prepare drinks stations, prepare puddings or desserts that need to set.

On the day

Finish only what must be cooked last. Warm everything else gently. Create ambiance. Shower, breathe, centre yourself. Hosting is an energetic experience. How you feel sets the tone.

When you treat hosting as a slow build instead of a sprint, you show up present instead of frazzled.

Set Up Your Space With Flow and Thoughtfulness

Great hosting is not about perfection. It is about removing friction.

Think through:

- Where guests will drop bags
- Where drinks will be served
- How to prevent crowding in the kitchen
- Which dishes will stay warm
- How you will serve food without bottlenecking
- Where your guests will naturally gather

At Sanctuary Ekhaya, we believe in sensory design.

Use textures, soft lighting, calming scents, warm colours, and comfortable seating to ground your guests before they even taste the food.

A good flow turns a gathering from stressful to seamless.



Know What Should Be Cooked First and What Should Be Cooked Last

This is the secret weapon of every good host.

Cook first:

- Dishes that improve overnight
- Sauces, curries, soups
- Slow-cook meats that need time to become tender
- Desserts that require chilling
- Baked goods that hold well

Cook last:

- Roast potatoes
- Crisp vegetables
- Fresh greens
- Anything that wilts, melts, or loses texture

You honour your guests when you honour the food.

Host Well, Not Hard

Your guests didn't come to your home to watch you sweat (unless it's just a hot flush!). They came for you.

Do whatever makes your load lighter:

- Set up a self-serve drinks station
- Put snacks out early
- Delegate two small tasks
- Clean as you go
- Use your oven to warm, not cook everything
- Have one "quick rescue dish" in case something goes wrong

And remember this:

You don't have to do it all.

You don't have to perform.

You don't have to be perfect.

A soulful gathering is not about flawless execution. It is about presence, connection, laughter, and the memory that remains long after the plates are cleared.





Hosting is a gift, not a performance. As you step into this season, may these pages give you the confidence to prepare well, the freedom to simplify where needed, and the space to enjoy the moments unfolding around your table.

Here's to full hearts, warm homes, and gatherings that feel good for everyone, including you.

Merry Christmas everyone,

Dawn



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