



CROWDED HOLIDAY — When the holidays arrive, decorations, trees and presents can make homes seem even more cluttered. This can make it especially challenging for holiday hosts who want to open up their homes for festive gatherings.

Holiday entertaining requires some creativity when hosting in compact spaces

People who live in compact homes or apartments may find space is at a premium during regular times of the year. When the holidays arrive, decorations, trees and presents can make homes seem even more cluttered. This can make it especially challenging for holiday hosts who want to open up their homes for festive gatherings.

Even if space is at a premium, all it takes is a little ingenuity to entertain successfully.

1. Put nonessential furniture and other decor away. It's impossible for would-be holiday hosts to move all of their belongings out of their homes to create entertaining space. But hosts can certainly cut down on clutter. Check out the flow of a room and then move pieces around as needed to open up floor space. Push tables or large pieces of furniture up against walls. Swap out armchairs for folding chairs. Stow knickknacks in bedrooms or in closets.

2. Put benches and wide

ledges to use. Narrow benches, such as those common to picnic tables, can seat three or four comfortably. Do not discount deep window ledges as potential seats, as these areas can be made more comfortable with pillows or cushions.

3. Collapse tables after meals. If a sit-down dinner is the goal, set up tables accordingly. Then break down the tables afterward to free up more space. Serve small desserts that can be easily transported from room to room.

4. Use islands and countertops. Tables can take up valuable space. When entertaining a lot of guests, set up an all-purpose counter island and add barstools. This can be an area for food prep, eating and entertaining.

5. Create conversation areas. Encourage guests to spread out by setting up intimate spots in various rooms. This way guests won't feel the need to congregate in the same space. Bistro tables in a den, a few floor pillows in front of the fireplace and

stools by a kitchen island will create conversation areas.

6. Expand outside, if possible. Rent a tent that can be warmed with a space heater. If your home has a closed-in porch or patio space, cover screens with insulating plastic to create a comfortable added room.

7. Skip a sit-down meal. Large tables take up a lot of space, so serve a buffet, tapas or passed hors d'oeuvres so guests mix and mingle rather than sit down at one large table.

8. Use all available surfaces. Invest in some sturdy serving trays that can be placed on television stands, upright speakers, ottomans, or even wooden crates. This will increase the amount of room you have to serve and store items.

9. Spread out refreshments. Avoid bottlenecks in common areas by putting food, beverages and other items in various locations. Fill up the kitchen sink with ice and make it an oversized beverage cooler.

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