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THE Christmas PLANNER

IS 'LESS STRESS' AT THE VERY TOP OF YOUR CHRISTMAS WISH LIST? FOLLOW OUR ACTION-PACKED PREP GUIDE TO ENSURE YOUR BIG DAY IS EASY-BREEZY AND ENJOYABLE FOR EVERYONE

WORDS VANESSA KEYS

THERE'S NO DOUBT the pressure of planning the perfect Christmas Day can be a little overwhelming. There are all the practicalities to consider – mouths to feed, guest rooms to prepare, kids to entertain. Then there are the touches that turn a regular day into the most magical time of the year: homemade decorations, serving up Nan's pudding and sharing gifts with loved ones. The earlier you start, the more achievable – and relaxed – it all is. Here's our go-to guide for the best Christmas Day yet.



PHOTOGRAPHY (THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) CATH MUSCAT X 2, IBEN & NIELS AHLERIG/IMAGENCY.DK (OPPOSITE) FERNANDO BEDON/RBA

4 weeks to go

PLAN YOUR MENU

"I love to get inspired by a visit to my local fresh produce market to check out what's abundant and what's in season," says HB food director Imogene Abady. "Then, I flip through magazines, cookbooks and create a Pinterest board so I can plan the look of my feast."

FINISH YOUR ONLINE SHOPPING

Leaving gift-buying until the last minute can mean no one-of-a-kind presents, warns Alexis Teasdale, founder of The Festive Co. "You also need to allow for shipping and the crazy-busy postal services," she says. "I always find treasures on etsy.com, hardtofind.com.au and notonthehighstreet.com."



"START *wrapping* A FEW EXTRA SMALL gifts FOR UNDER THE TREE, JUST IN CASE YOU HAVE *unexpected* VISITORS" ~ HELEN PETROU, HB PICTURE EDITOR



CHAT TO YOUR BUTCHER AND FISHMONGER

It pays to visit your go-to butcher and fishmonger in person – and well in advance. Their advice may sway your menu decision and inspire you to serve something different on the day.

MAKE A LIST, CHECK IT TWICE

Organisation queen Rebecca Mezzino from Clear Space Organising Services uses the four-week mark to crack out a new notebook and start making lists. "Keeping your lists in one place means you'll feel totally in control when things get busy," she says.

TEST OUT THE GUEST ROOM

Expecting any overnight guests? Before they arrive, consider sleeping in your guest bedroom to try it out. This gives you time to fix the frustrations that you never knew existed, such as buying new blinds or investing in a mattress topper.

BRING THE OUTDOORS INDOORS

Greenery shouldn't stop with your Christmas tree. "Plants bring a fresh, beautiful vibe into your home," says interior stylist April Xing, owner of vintage store Tiki La La. She suggests giving any new purchases four weeks to settle into their new surroundings. >

DECLUTTER YOUR DECORATIONS

Guilty of hoarding decorations that will never see the light of day? Amy Revell of Simply Organised uses this time to recycle or donate any that have been ignored for the past three years. "This way you'll only have things you love going forward," she says.

2 weeks to go



DEEP CLEAN YOUR KITCHEN

Now's the time to clean out your oven, scrub the stovetop and sort through supplies in the pantry and fridge to check expiration dates. Make a list of what you need to replace so you'll be stocked and ready to go when it's time to start prep. Test out small appliances to make sure they're in working order.

GET THE BARBECUE READY

Give your barbecue a good clean and make sure that it's set up in a safe area with plenty of workspace. Stock up on bottled gas and barbecue wipes from Bunnings – they're great for keeping it looking good between big clean-ups.

BEAT THE SUPERMARKET RUSH

Two weeks out is when television chef Justine Schofield likes to shop for non-perishables, beating the crowd. "Before you go, check the pantry to ensure you don't double up on ingredients such as herbs and spices," she suggests. "Shopping now also means you're likely to get the exact ingredients you need."

"I PLAN TO COMBINE MY GRANDMA'S old plates AND GLASSWARE WITH COLOURFUL tablecloths, SERVIETTES AND PLACEMATS" ~ CHEF AND TV HOST JUSTINE SCHOFIELD

GET CRAFTY WITH THE KIDS

If you have small children, shelve the precious ornaments for a few years and embrace kid-friendly decorations. "Make pompoms, string them into bunting and drape all over the tree," says event stylist Alexis Teasdale. "Fake flowers also look amazing. Add paperclip hooks to easily slip them onto branches."



Choose your table theme
Your centrepiece is the heart of your table, so it pays to prep early. For chef Justine Schofield, knowing how much space you have is key. "Lay your table and do a trial run," she says. "I like to use different-shaped mason glasses (all quite small) and fill them with native flowers and foliage."



PREP YOUR LINEN

"I love the opulence of table linen and fabric napkins at Christmas time," says *HB's* Imogene. "Once I've confirmed the number of guests, I make sure I have my tablecloths and napkins laundered so they're pressed and ready for the big day." >

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1 week to go



Hide oversized gifts

Struggling to wrap oversized gifts? "Take a photo of the gift and wrap the photo in a box along with instructions on where to find the present," says Vivienne Anthon, expert gift wrapper and founder of Daily Wrap. "You could even give treasure hunt-style directions to where the gift is hidden."



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PREPARE YOUR SERVINGWARE

Once your menu is set, it's time to work out how and what to serve it on. "I like to dedicate a sideboard where I start placing the servingware, dinnerware, glasses and cutlery for use on the day," says HB's Imogene. "I use Post-it notes to write the name of each dish on the servingware and I give everything a polish at the same time."

DONATE UNWANTED TOYS

"The week between the end of school and Christmas Day is a great time to declutter toys with your kids," says professional organiser Amy Revell. "Help them donate toys that they've outgrown and create space for any new toys. This creates a lovely opportunity to talk about the spirit of Christmas and helping those less fortunate."

CLEAR THE DECKS

Start to think about the weather. "If you have an outdoor table, invest in a large umbrella to keep the area cool," says interior stylist Aimee Tarulli of Archer Interiors. "Add some outdoor bean bags to create an informal break-out space where your guests can relax and unwind after a big lunch."



STOCK THE BAR

"It's far better to have more booze than to run out," says Virginia Selleck, sommelier and founder of Magnum & Queens. "Prepare to get the party started with a bubbly, or greet guests with a cocktail. This year, try something light and fresh such as The Ruby, with Campari, Escubac, freshly squeezed grapefruit and juice from a lime."

REFRESH YOUR SPACES

Give your bathroom a quick zhooosh. "Add some new hand towels, a special pump soap and, in the days leading to Christmas, a little bunch of flowers," says Amber Clohesy from Down To The Woods. "I love Ashley & Co's soap, and Mud's tear vase is the perfect size for a bathroom. This makes your bathroom special for guests, but is also a cheeky Christmas gift to yourself." >

the day before



SET THE TABLE

It's always a nice idea to lay the table the night before – it takes way longer than you think. Kids about? Leave off the glassware and throw a sheet over it all so it remains safe from little hands.

BUY YOUR BLOOMS

Get the pick of the bunch by visiting your local flower market on Christmas Eve. "The best flowers are available from 5am," says *HB*'s Imogene Abady.

PLUG IN AND RECHARGE

"Stock up on batteries and put all your devices on charge," says event stylist Alexis Teasdale. "There's nothing like not being able to play with new toys to really bring down the festive mood."

SAVOUR THE SEASON'S SEAFOOD

Chef and restaurateur Guillaume Brahimi recommends heading to the fishmonger on Christmas Eve to pick up the freshest catch. "This gives you enough time to prepare it before the big day," he says. To keep seafood at its very best, "Wrap your fish in Chux cloths to keep it dry," suggests Lennox Hastie, chef and owner of Firedoor restaurant in Sydney.

RECYCLE AND RE-USE

"Gift wrapping is like Christmas fare – you have to plan for leftovers," says expert gift wrapper Vivienne Anthon. "Have a box ready for paper, plus a basket for ribbons. Store re-usable paper in long cardboard cylinders." *HB*

PREP THE DRINKS STATION

"Make sure your bubbles, white and rosé wines are in the fridge chilling and ready to be cracked," says *Magnum & Queens'* Virginia Selleck. "Wash and polish wine glasses and decanters, and cut up limes and lemon slices for cocktails. If your cocktail recipes need freshly squeezed juice, do this ahead of time and store in the fridge."

LIGHT THE WAY

Just after the sun sets on Christmas Eve, allocate 30 minutes to test your lighting. "Whether you're using candles, tea lights or fairy lights, it's a great way to see what will work as day turns to night and make last-minute touches," says *HB* food director Imogene Abady.



Get guest-ready

Put the final touches on the guestroom: fresh linen, a carafe of water, a spare phone charger, a hairdryer and extra toilet paper in the bathroom, and a note with the wi-fi password on the bedside table.



PHOTOGRAPHY (THIS PAGE) MALCOLM MENZIES/81MM.COM (OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) CHRIS WARNES X 2, ARMELLE HABIB

"DO A FINAL RUN-THROUGH
of the day AND THEN GET SOME
WELL-DESERVED REST FOR
A beautiful CHRISTMAS"
~ *HB* ACTING EDITOR KATRINA O'BRIEN