NOVEMBER

AT HIDDEN & SEEN

A slower, richer kind of November.



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Keepsakes for What Matters Most

Meaningful ideas to remember, celebrate, and pass on.

BEFORE EVERYONE ARRIVES

WHEN THE HOLIDAYS FIND YOU HERE

THE NOVEMBER READING EDIT

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FROM THE EDITOR

A Slower, Richer *Kind of November*

Dear friend,

November has a way of arriving with a list. Groceries to buy, rooms to ready, people to gather, and somewhere underneath it all, the quiet pressure to make everything feel like a holiday.

This issue is a small invitation to set the list down for a moment.

Inside are the things we kept returning to as we put these pages together: a serving piece with a story behind it, a name written by hand at each place, a welcome prepared before anyone knocks. None of it asks for a bigger budget or a more perfect house. Most of it asks only for a little time, given ahead, to the people you love.

We also made room for the years that don't fit the picture. If you are coming to the table this month carrying something heavy, "When the Holidays Find You Here" was written with you in mind. You do not have to pretend.

Hidden & Seen is for the women who are tired of hurrying, and for the ordinary moments that turn out to matter most. Every page here was made with that in mind.

So pour something warm. Read slowly. Keep what helps, and leave the rest.

Quietly yours,
Christina

FOUNDER & EDITOR

P.S. Make the rosemary–orange salt this week, and keep one jar for yourself.



Roasted delicata, brown butter, sage & maple-pecan crumble, for the Thanksgiving table.

FROM THE KITCHEN

This Month *at the Table*

Cider-Braised Chicken

with apples, shallots & crispy sage

Brown Butter Pear Cornmeal Cake

with salted maple cream

FOR THE THANKSGIVING TABLE

Roasted Delicata Squash

with brown butter, sage & maple-pecan crumble

Recipes begin on the next page.

FROM THE KITCHEN · RECIPE

Cider-Braised Chicken

with Apples, Shallots & Crispy Sage

There is enough apple here to taste the season, balanced with shallots, mustard, and a little cider vinegar to keep the sauce savory. The chicken cooks with its skin above the liquid, while thick apple wedges soften around it. A few crisp sage leaves finish the pan. Bring it to the table with mashed potatoes or a loaf of bread for the sauce.

PREP	COOK	TOTAL	SERVES
20 minutes	Approximately 1 hour 10 minutes	Approximately 1 hour 30 minutes	6, with side dishes

What You'll Need

FOR THE CHICKEN AND CIDER SAUCE

- 6 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs, approximately 3 pounds total
- 1½ teaspoons fine sea salt, divided, plus more to taste
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 medium shallots, peeled and halved lengthwise through the root
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 cup plain, unsweetened, nonalcoholic apple cider
- ¾ cup low-sodium chicken stock
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 fresh thyme sprigs
- 2 medium firm apples, such as Pink Lady or Honeycrisp, cored and cut into 8 wedges each, skin left on
- 2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar, plus more to taste

FOR THE CRISP SAGE AND FINISHING BUTTER

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 12 fresh sage leaves, washed and thoroughly dried

The Simple Method

01 Prepare the Chicken

Heat the oven to 375°F. Pat the chicken thoroughly dry. Season with 1¼ teaspoons of the salt and all the pepper.

02 Brown the Skin

Heat the olive oil in the braiser over medium heat. Working in two batches if needed, place the chicken skin-side down and cook for 7–9 minutes, until deeply golden and it releases readily. Turn and cook for 2 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Leave approximately 1 tablespoon of fat in the pan and carefully discard the excess.

03 Brown the Apples

Add the apple wedges to the pan and cook for 3–4 minutes, turning once, until lightly golden on their cut sides. They should still be firm. Transfer to a separate clean plate.

04 Soften the Shallots

Add the shallots cut-side down and cook for 3–4 minutes. Turn, add the garlic, and cook for 30 seconds. Reduce the heat if the browned bits begin to darken excessively.

05 Build the Sauce

Pour in the cider and scrape up the browned bits. Stir in the stock, mustard, thyme, and remaining ¼ teaspoon salt. Bring to a gentle simmer. Return the chicken and its collected juices to the pan, skin-side up. The liquid should come partway up the meat, leaving the skin exposed.

06 Braise Gently

Transfer the uncovered pan to the oven. After 15 minutes, tuck the browned apple wedges around the chicken. Cook for another 15–25 minutes, until the apples are tender and the chicken reaches at least 165°F in its thickest part, away from the bone. For softer thigh meat, continue toward 175–185°F if needed, checking that sufficient liquid remains.

07 Crisp the Sage

While the chicken cooks, melt the butter in the small skillet over medium heat. Add the dry sage leaves in a single layer, working in batches if necessary. Cook for approximately 30–60 seconds, turning gently, until crisp. Transfer the leaves to a paper towel. Remove the butter from the heat when it smells nutty and shows light golden flecks. Reserve it.

08 Finish the Sauce

Transfer the chicken, apples, and shallots to a warm serving dish. Discard the thyme stems. Simmer the pan juices on the stove for 3–6 minutes, until lightly reduced. If already concentrated, skip reducing; if too thick, loosen with a splash of stock. Remove from the heat and stir in the vinegar and reserved sage butter. Taste before adding more salt or vinegar.

09 Bring It to the Table

Return the chicken, apples, and shallots to the pan. Spoon sauce around the chicken, keeping the skin uncovered. Scatter over the crisp sage immediately before serving.

Christina's Note

Leave the pan on a trivet in the middle of the table and put the bread within reach. The apples and shallots are part of the meal, so give everyone a spoonful of each along with the chicken.

EQUIPMENT

Wide, approximately 12-inch oven-safe braiser or deep skillet · Tongs · Small skillet · Instant-read thermometer · Wooden spoon · Clean plate

A Few Things That Make This Easier

Choose the right cider. Use plain, nonalcoholic apple cider, without added sugar or mulling spices. Apple cider vinegar is a separate ingredient and cannot replace the cup of cider.

Keep the skin above the sauce. This preserves the browned surface. Pouring sauce over it will soften it.

Add the apples partway through. Browning gives them flavor; the shorter oven time helps them keep their shape.

More Notes for the Cook

Watch the butter. Golden flecks are welcome. Black flecks and an acrid smell mean it has burned and should be remade.

A simpler finish. Skip frying the sage and stir 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh sage into the sauce before it goes into the oven. Finish with the butter off the heat.

Serve with. Mashed potatoes, creamy polenta, or crusty bread, with a sharply dressed green salad.

Prepare ahead. Measure the liquids and prepare the shallots the day before. For the best skin and apple texture, cook the dish on the day of serving.

Leftovers. Refrigerate promptly in shallow containers within two hours and use within three days. Reheat with a splash of stock until the chicken reaches 165°F. Add freshly crisped sage if desired.

About the timing. The times are estimates and depend on the size of the chicken and the capacity of the pan.

FROM THE KITCHEN · RECIPE

Brown Butter Pear Cornmeal Cake

with Salted Maple Cream

Brown butter gives this golden cornmeal cake a nutty depth, while pears soften across the top as it bakes. This generous version is made in a 10-inch springform pan for a thicker slice. Serve it with softly whipped salted maple cream, spooned alongside just before eating.

PREP	BAKE	COOL	TOTAL	SERVES
35 minutes, including butter cooling and whipping cream	Approximately 50 minutes; check from 40 minutes	Approximately 1 hour, including 15 minutes in the pan	Approximately 2 hours 25 minutes, including cooling	12 to 16

What You'll Need

FOR THE CAKE

- 20 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for the pan
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup fine yellow cornmeal
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 cup whole-milk Greek yogurt or sour cream
- ½ cup whole milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 to 3 ripe but firm pears, cored and thinly sliced

FOR THE SALTED MAPLE CREAM

- 1 cup cold heavy whipping cream
- 3 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon fine sea salt

The Simple Method

01 Brown the Butter

Melt the butter in a light-colored saucepan over medium heat. Continue cooking, swirling occasionally, as it foams and then begins to smell nutty. When the milk solids at the bottom turn deeply golden, immediately pour the butter into a heatproof bowl, scraping in all the browned solids. Let cool for 10 to 15 minutes. Do not strain or discard the solids.

02 Prepare the Pan

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 10-inch springform pan at least 3 inches deep and line the bottom with parchment. Set the pan on a baking sheet. A pan of these dimensions holds approximately 16 cups to the rim, with about 10½ cups available below the two-thirds line. Actual pans vary, so check yours before filling.

03 Mix the Dry Ingredients

Whisk together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder and kosher salt.

04 Mix the Wet Ingredients

In another bowl, whisk the granulated sugar and eggs until smooth and slightly lighter. Whisk in the yogurt, milk and vanilla. Slowly whisk in the cooled brown butter, including all the browned solids.

05 Make the Batter

Fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients just until no dry streaks remain. Do not overmix. Spread the batter into the prepared pan, keeping it below two-thirds full and allowing room for the pears. If your pan cannot accommodate it, bake excess batter separately in a buttered oven-safe dish; begin checking that smaller portion earlier.

06 Add the Pears

Arrange the pear slices on top only, overlapping them lightly across the surface. Do not fold fruit into the batter or press it down. Use 2 to 3 pears, the original fruit quantity, not twice that amount. Keep the filled pan no more than two-thirds full.

07 Bake

Bake at 350°F, beginning to check around 40 minutes. Christina's cake took approximately 50 minutes in an oven that tends to run cool; use the doneness cues rather than the clock. The edges should be golden, the center set and spring back lightly, and a tester inserted into cake rather than fruit should come out with a few moist crumbs but no wet batter. Allow additional time if needed. If the top browns before the center is ready, loosely tent it with foil.

08 Cool the Cake

Cool in the pan on a rack for 15 minutes before releasing the springform ring. Continue cooling until cooled or barely warm before slicing, allowing approximately 1 hour total cooling time, or longer if needed. Do not serve the maple cream against hot cake.

09 Whip the Salted Maple Cream

In a chilled bowl, whip the cold heavy whipping cream, maple syrup, vanilla and fine sea salt together until soft peaks form. Keep refrigerated until serving.

10 Bring It to the Table

Serve slices of cooled or barely warm cake with the salted maple cream spooned alongside just before eating, rather than spreading it over the whole cake.

Christina's Note

When I made the pear version, I doubled the batter in my 10-inch springform pan to get the thickness I wanted. The pears stayed at the original quantity because they sit on top. That is the version you'll find here, with maple cream alongside.

EQUIPMENT

10-inch springform pan, at least 3 inches deep (approximately 16 cups capacity to the rim); fill no more than two-thirds full · Light-colored saucepan · Heatproof bowl and mixing bowls · Whisk and rubber spatula · Parchment paper · Baking sheet and a small oven-safe dish for any excess batter · Cake tester or skewer and cooling rack · Chilled bowl and hand mixer or whisk for the maple cream

“Brown butter gives this golden cornmeal cake a nutty depth, while pears soften across the top as it bakes.”

A Few Things That Make This Easier

Fine cornmeal matters. Use fine yellow cornmeal. Coarse cornmeal can make a delicate cake noticeably gritty.

Choose firm-ripe pears. Very soft pears can release too much liquid. Keep the fruit at 2 to 3 pears and arrange it on top only.

Keep the browned solids. The deeply golden milk solids carry the brown-butter flavor. Transfer them with the butter and remove it from the hot saucepan promptly so it does not continue cooking.

Check the pan. This doubled batter needs a deep 10-inch springform pan. Use one at least 3 inches deep and never fill it beyond two-thirds, including the fruit. Pan capacities vary; bake any excess separately rather than overfilling.

About the timing. Begin checking at 40 minutes. Approximately 50 minutes was Christina’s result in a cool-running oven, not a guaranteed baking time. A set center, light springback and a tester without wet batter are the deciding cues.

Prepare the cream. Keep the bowl and cream cold, stop at soft peaks and refrigerate until serving. Spoon it beside each slice of cooled or barely warm cake.

Store separately. Keep the unfrosted cake covered at cool room temperature for up to 2 days, or refrigerate for up to 4 days. Refrigerate the maple cream in a covered container and use within 2 days. Refrigerate cream promptly and do not leave it out for more than 2 hours. Gently whisk if it settles.

FROM THE KITCHEN · RECIPE

Roasted Delicata Squash

with Brown Butter, Sage & Maple-Pecan Crumble

Golden roasted delicata finished with nutty brown butter, crisp sage, and a maple-pecan crumble.

PREP	COOK	TOTAL	SERVES
15 minutes	30–35 minutes	45–50 minutes	6 as a side

What You'll Need

FOR THE SQUASH

- 3 medium delicata squash, approximately 2½ pounds total
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ¾ teaspoon fine sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE MAPLE-PECAN CRUMBLE

- ½ cup pecans, finely chopped
- ⅓ cup plain panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
- ⅛ teaspoon fine sea salt

FOR THE BROWN BUTTER AND SAGE

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 10 fresh sage leaves, washed and thoroughly dried
- 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar

The Simple Method

01 Prepare the Squash

Heat the oven to 425°F with racks in the upper and lower thirds. Line two baking sheets with suitable parchment. Scrub and dry the squash. Trim the ends, halve lengthwise, and scoop out the seeds. Cut crosswise into approximately ½-inch half-moons, leaving the skin on.

02 Season and Spread Out

Toss with the olive oil, salt, and pepper. Divide between the baking sheets in a single layer, leaving space between pieces. Crowding will encourage steaming rather than browning.

03 Roast Until Tender

Roast for 25–35 minutes, turning the slices and switching the trays between racks after approximately 15 minutes. The squash is ready when the flesh is easily pierced and the undersides have browned. Remove individual pieces earlier if needed.

04 Make the Crumble

Meanwhile, melt 1 tablespoon butter in the skillet over medium-low heat. Add the pecans and panko. Cook for 4–6 minutes, stirring frequently, until fragrant and lightly golden. Reduce the heat to low, add the maple syrup and salt, and stir for 30–60 seconds to coat. Transfer immediately to a plate, spread out, and let cool. It will become crisper as it cools. Do not leave it in the hot pan.

05 Crisp the Sage and Brown the Butter

Wipe the skillet clean. Add the remaining 3 tablespoons butter over medium-low heat. Once melted and gently bubbling, add the thoroughly dried sage leaves. Turn carefully and cook until crisp, approximately 30–60 seconds. Lift onto a paper towel. Continue cooking the butter, swirling, until the milk solids turn golden brown and smell nutty. Immediately pour into a heatproof bowl to stop the cooking.

06 Balance the Butter

Let the browned butter cool for approximately one minute, then carefully stir in the cider vinegar. It may sputter slightly. Include the golden browned solids; discard and remake if the butter has turned black or smells acrid.

07 Finish Just Before Serving

Arrange the warm squash on a platter. Spoon over the brown butter mixture, scatter with the maple-pecan crumble, and finish with the crisp sage. Serve promptly, with any remaining crumble alongside.

Christina's Note

Put the squash on a wide platter so the topping reaches more than the first few servings. Keep a little crumble back for anyone who would like another spoonful.

EQUIPMENT

Two large rimmed baking sheets · Parchment rated for 425°F · A sharp knife · A spoon · A large mixing bowl · A medium skillet · A small heatproof bowl · A serving platter

A Few Things That Make This Easier

Leave the skin on. Delicata's thin skin softens during roasting. Scrub it well first.

Use two trays. Space allows the cut surfaces to brown.

Keep the maple syrup out of the roasting pan. Adding it to the crumble gives sweetness without exposing it to the full roasting time.

More Notes for the Cook

Prepare ahead. Cut and refrigerate the squash up to one day ahead. Make the crumble on the day of serving and keep it covered at room temperature once completely cool. Add the butter, crumble, and sage just before serving.

Sharing the oven. For the best result, roast after the main dish comes out to rest. Keep the squash uncovered briefly if waiting to serve; covering traps steam and softens the edges.

Gluten-free option. Use gluten-free panko and check ingredient labels.

Without pecans. Replace them with chopped pumpkin seeds; check all ingredients for the needs of your guests.

Leftovers. Refrigerate within two hours and use within three days. Reheat the squash on a baking sheet at 375°F until hot throughout. Store remaining crumble separately to preserve its texture.



COMING SOON · FROM HIDDEN & SEEN PRESS

Salt, Sip & Sustain

A different kind of cookbook.

Nourishing recipes, simple ingredients, and everyday rituals for finding pleasure at the table while caring for the body.

A NEW BOOK IN DEVELOPMENT

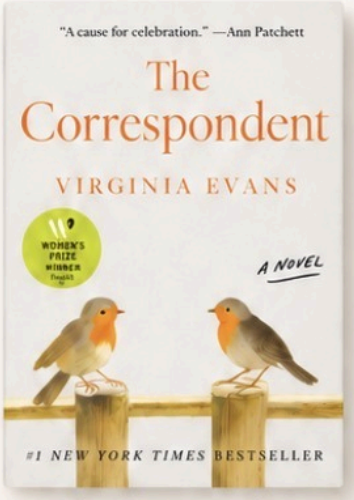
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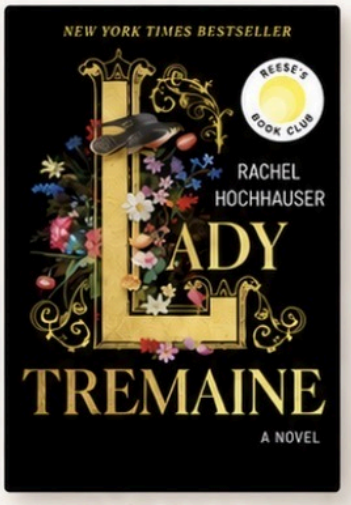
ON THE NIGHTSTAND

The November *Reading Edit*

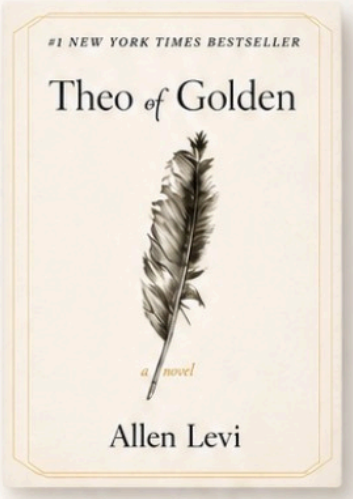
Six novels worth your evenings.



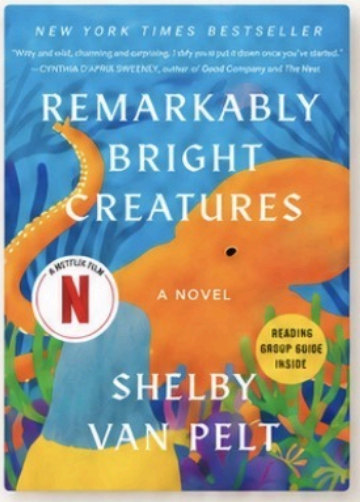
The Correspondent
VIRGINIA EVANS



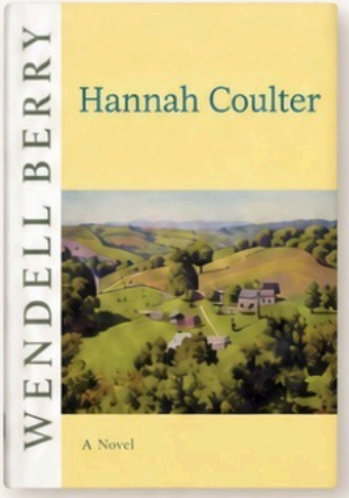
Lady Tremaine
RACHEL HOCHHAUSER



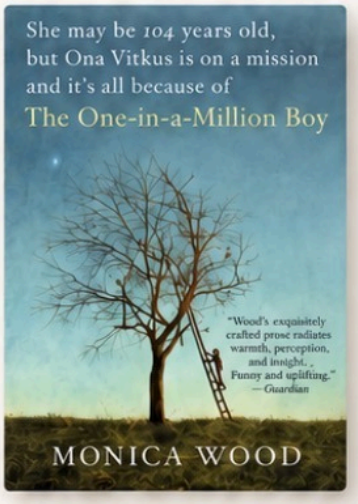
Theo of Golden
ALLEN LEVI



Remarkably Bright Creatures
SHELBY VAN PELT



Hannah Coulter
WENDELL BERRY



The One-in-a-Million Boy
MONICA WOOD

Reader notes on our Books page.

READ · TRADITIONS

Keepsakes for What *Matters Most*

Thoughtful ways to bring family stories to the Thanksgiving table and carry this year's memories forward.

BY THE EDITORS



A familiar recipe, a well-used server, a story worth keeping.

Before the groceries are bought and the table is set, there is something worth looking for: an object with a story.

It might be a serving spoon that appeared at every family holiday, a recipe written on an index card, or a photograph of the people who once gathered around another table. Brought into the day with a little explanation, an ordinary possession can give guests something unexpected: a connection to the life that came before this gathering.

Thanksgiving offers an opportunity to share those stories while there are people around to tell them. A few considered choices can help younger relatives discover something new, welcome guests into the family's history, and leave a record of the day you are making together.

"An ordinary possession can give guests something unexpected."

01 Begin with one meaningful object

Choose something connected to a person, place, or tradition you would enjoy talking about. One object gives the story a clear starting point.

A familiar serving dish might hold its customary recipe. A family photograph could stand beside the drinks. A handwritten menu from an earlier Thanksgiving might sit on a side table where guests can look at it.

Think about how it will be encountered. Something placed near the food invites a different kind of conversation from an album passed around after dinner.

If the object is fragile, its materials are uncertain, or you would worry about using it, display it nearby or use a photograph of it. The story can still be part of the meal.

TRY THIS

Before guests arrive, write down three things about your chosen object: who it belonged to, how it was used, and what you remember about it. Those details give you a natural way to introduce it.

02 Put the story beside the object

An heirloom can become anonymous surprisingly quickly. A small card supplies the context that appearance alone cannot.

Keep the wording specific. A card might read:

> *"This was Aunt June's pie server. She brought apple pie every Thanksgiving, usually wrapped in a kitchen towel because she never remembered her carrier."*

A detail like that gives someone character. It also offers guests an easy opening to ask a question or add a memory.

If you do not know the history, say so. This may be the year someone recognizes the handwriting, identifies the person in the photograph, or remembers where the dish came from.



The card lists the ingredients. The cook knows the rest.

03 Save the knowledge behind a family recipe

A recipe card may list ingredients while leaving out everything an experienced cook knew by instinct.

If the person who makes the dish is joining you, ask about those missing details. Which pan do they use? What should the mixture look like? How do they judge when it is ready? Have they changed anything over the years?

With their permission, photograph the recipe and record their answers. A short voice recording can preserve both the instructions and the familiar way they explain them.

For guests, make a clearly typed copy with the cook's name and a brief note about when the dish was served. Include an image of the original handwriting if you have it.

A USEFUL QUESTION

"What would someone making this for the first time need to know?"

"A short voice recording can preserve both the instructions and the familiar way they explain them."



A framed photograph set among the dishes invites a story.

04 Make room for other people's histories

A gathering becomes richer when guests can contribute to its traditions.

Ask someone about a dish they grew up eating, a holiday custom from their childhood, or an object they still associate with home. These conversations can happen naturally while setting out food or clearing plates.

For a guest joining the family for the first time, explain the tradition as you include them: who usually makes the stuffing, why there are two cranberry sauces, or how a particular dessert became essential.

Leave room for their version, too. A new contribution may become something everyone asks for next year.

> *"A new contribution may become something everyone asks for next year."*



An example gathering book: the year's menu, the names around the table, and a photograph of the room.

05 Keep a record of this Thanksgiving

Choose one simple way to document the day.

A photograph of everyone at the table is a good beginning. Add the date, location, and names in the caption or alongside the print. Those details are easiest to capture now.

You might also keep the menu, note who brought each dish, or start a gathering book with one page for each year. Include something particular: the first Thanksgiving in a new home, a child's contribution to dessert, or the recipe everyone requested.

Choose a record you will enjoy continuing. A dated photograph and a few sentences can hold a great deal.

BEGIN WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

You can start a family archive this year.

Write out a recipe you make often. Photograph your table. Save a note from someone who came. Record where you gathered and what you served.

A keepsake gains meaning through the life around it. Years from now, someone may recognize your handwriting, remember the cake you always made, or ask about the people in a photograph.

A few words recorded today will give them somewhere to begin.

FOR THIS THANKSGIVING

Choose one object to bring out. Ask one question about its history. Record one detail you want someone to know. Let that be enough for the first year.

READ · TRADITIONS

Five Ways to Begin

01 **Begin with One Meaningful Object**
Bring out a serving piece, a handwritten recipe, or something you already use and love.

02 **Put the Story Beside It**
Write down who it belonged to, how it was used, and one detail you want remembered.

03 **Save More Than the Recipe**
Record the cook explaining the texture, timing, and little adjustments the recipe leaves out.

04 **Make Room for Other Histories**
Invite someone to bring a dish or tradition, and ask what makes it meaningful to them.

05 **Keep a Record of This Thanksgiving**
Save a photograph, the menu, who gathered, and a few details that made this year its own.

"A dated photograph and a few sentences can hold a great deal."

Choose one object, ask one question, and write down what you learn.



The table, the night before.

HOME · GATHERING

Before *Everyone Arrives*

The little gifts, the hand-lettered names, the sprig of rosemary on every plate, and the quiet hour that makes them possible.

BY THE EDITORS

"Prepare the welcome before you need to give it."

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE →

There is a moment, just before the first car pulls into the drive, when the house goes still. The candles aren't lit yet. The kettle is cooling. The table is set, and for a breath it belongs only to you.

That moment is the whole reason to prepare ahead. Not so everything is perfect, but so you are free. Free to open the door with both hands, to pour a drink without hurrying, to look at the people you love and actually see them.

The details guests remember are rarely the expensive ones. It's their name written in your hand. A little jar tied with twine, waiting by the door with their name on it. A sprig of something green that makes the whole room smell like the season. Small things, made slowly, for someone in particular.

So begin where all good gatherings begin: with the people coming. Then work backward, one lovely, unhurried task at a time.

"Small things, made slowly, for someone in particular."

THE WELCOME BASKET

Gifts waiting by the door

We usually think of gifts as something guests bring. Turn it around. A small take-home gift, made days ahead and lined up near the entry, tells every person they were expected long before they knocked.

Keep it simple and keep it edible or useful. A few we love:

- **Rosemary-orange finishing salt.** Stir together 1 cup flaky sea salt, the zest of 2 oranges, and 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh rosemary. Spread on a parchment-lined sheet to dry overnight, then spoon into small jars. Makes about eight 2-ounce jars. *Tag: For your Sunday roast.*
- **Honey with a sprig.** Pour local wildflower honey into little jars and tuck in a cinnamon stick or a dried orange wheel. Florida orange blossom honey is a lovely choice.
- **A half-loaf to go.** Bake pumpkin or banana bread in mini loaf pans, wrap in parchment, and tie with kitchen twine. It becomes tomorrow's breakfast, and a reason to think of you.
- **A tiny paper sack** of spiced pecans with a folded card tucked into the fold.

Write each tag by hand, with the guest's name and a single line: *So glad you came*, or *Thankful for you*. Set them in a shallow basket or on a tray lined with a linen napkin, so the gift is the last thing people see on the way out, and the first thing they mention later.



Made days ahead, named by hand, waiting by the door.

If children are coming, give them their own: a paper bag with a cookie, a few crayons, and their name in bubble letters. They will remember it longer than the meal.

A few clean, labeled containers for leftovers belong in the same spirit. Sending someone home with a plate of tomorrow's lunch is one of the oldest kindnesses there is.

Make the salt a week ahead, it only gets better. ♥ C.

THE TABLE

A Table That Says *You Were Expected*

Set the table the day before. It's the most peaceful task on the list, and seeing it finished the night before is its own small gift to yourself.

Start with a plain foundation: a linen runner or bare wood, white or cream plates, cloth napkins. Then let the season do the decorating.

Rosemary napkin wreaths. Take a long, bendable sprig of fresh rosemary (6 to 8 inches) and gently curve it into a circle about 3 inches across. Wrap the ends with thin kitchen twine or a short length of florist wire. Slip a folded napkin through it, or lay the wreath flat on the plate with the name card tucked inside. Make them the morning of, or the day before and store them in a damp paper towel in the fridge. They smell wonderful when guests sit down.

Handwritten place cards. A name in your own handwriting does more than any centerpiece. A few ways to do it:

- Heavy cream cardstock, folded into a tent, written with a fine ink pen.
- A large magnolia or bay leaf with the name written in a gold paint pen, beautiful on a Florida table.
- A small clementine or pear with a paper tag tied to the stem.
- A kraft tag tied to the rosemary wreath itself.

Don't worry about perfect lettering. People treasure the handwriting of the person who invited them.

> *"Then let the season do the decorating."*

When you write the cards, think about where each person will sit. Put a shy guest beside someone warm. Seat a newcomer near you. That's the real work of a seating chart.

Keep it low. Arrangements should sit below eye level so everyone can see each other. Try a line of bud vases with one stem each, small bundles of herbs, a scatter of clementines and pomegranates, and unscented candles in mismatched holders. Scented candles compete with the food.

Finish with something personal: a short blessing or a single line on the back of each place card (what we're grateful for this year) to read aloud before the meal.

THE MENU

A Menu Your Kitchen *Can Love*

Write the menu by hand first, before any shopping list. Beside each dish, jot what it needs: the oven, a burner, the fridge, a last-minute finish, a serving bowl. This is where a beautiful menu becomes a peaceful one.

If three dishes need the oven at three different temperatures, swap one for something served at room temperature: a roasted vegetable salad, a grain bowl with herbs, a dessert made the day before. Cook the dishes you know by heart for the parts of the meal that matter most. Leave room for one new recipe, just for the joy of it.

Then pull out the serving pieces. Pair each dish with its platter and spoon, and set a small handwritten label in each: green beans, cranberry relish, rolls. Anyone helping you will know exactly where things go. Serving from a counter or sideboard keeps the table open for glasses, candles, and passing the bread.

"This is where a beautiful menu becomes a peaceful one."

A GRACIOUS ANSWER

When someone asks, *What can I bring?*

A specific answer is a kindness. Ask for a green salad ready to dress, a dessert that needs no oven, or a bag of ice and something sparkling. Confirm the amount, the arrival time, and whether it needs the oven or the fridge.

Keep a little list on the fridge of who's bringing what, so you don't end up with three pies and no bread. Leave a labeled spot on the counter for each contribution, so it feels expected, too.

For someone traveling far, suggest something easy to carry. For someone whose week is already full, tell them the truth: *Just bring yourself.* That is perfectly gracious.

THE FIRST WELCOME

Have the first welcome ready

Set out one drink and one small bite where guests can help themselves while you finish at the stove. Choose a spot just outside the kitchen's busiest path, so people gather without getting underfoot. A little tray, a pitcher, a stack of small plates. That's all it takes to make someone feel looked after the moment they walk in.



One drink, one small bite, set out before the doorbell.

SERVES 8

Cranberry-Apple Rosemary Spritzer

Combine 3 cups chilled nonalcoholic apple cider and 1 cup cranberry juice in a glass pitcher. Just before guests arrive, add 4 cups chilled sparkling water. Garnish each glass with a thin orange slice and a small sprig of rosemary. For a prettier touch, brush the rosemary lightly with water and roll it in sugar the day before: it looks frosted. Set plain water with lemon slices alongside.

Two small bites. Start with 16 toasted baguette rounds topped with olive tapenade and a few torn parsley leaves. Store-bought tapenade is perfectly fine; just check the label for anchovies and have another option ready. Beside it, a little board of guava paste and white cheese, cut into small squares and stacked with a toothpick. Sweet, salty, and a taste of home for some of us.

Group the glasses, a bowl of ice with tongs, small plates, and pretty cocktail napkins together. Leave a separate tray a few steps away for empty glasses.

Put out a modest amount and refill as needed. This is a welcome, not dinner.

Sugar the rosemary the night before. Worth it. — C.

"Prepare the welcome before you need to give it."

THE ENTRY

Walk in as a guest

Go outside, then come back in through the front door as if you'd never been there. Where would you set your bag? Your coat? Is the path to the living room clear? Would a first-time visitor know which door to use? A lantern or a small wreath at the right door answers that kindly.

In the rooms people will use, clear a few surfaces for a drink, pull together enough comfortable seats, and leave room to move. In the powder room, set out a fresh hand towel, good soap, a small jar of something green, and spare toilet paper where it can be found without asking.

If you'll gather on the porch, check it at the hour guests will actually be there. Florida afternoons can be bright and warm well into November. Have a throw basket ready for the evening chill, and an indoor plan just in case.

THE GUEST ROOM

A room someone can settle into

For an overnight guest, the kindest thing is making it obvious where everything goes. Make the bed with crisp sheets, and set fresh towels folded on the foot of it, tied with a ribbon and a sprig of rosemary. Clear a spot for a suitcase (a bench or an empty chair works as well as a luggage rack) and leave a few empty hangers.

Sit on the bed for a minute. Can you reach the lamp? Is there an outlet nearby? Somewhere to set glasses, a phone, a glass of water?

Then add the small comforts:

- A carafe of water and a glass on the nightstand.
- A spare blanket and a charging cable.
- A book you think they'd enjoy, with a bookmark already in it.
- A handwritten card with the Wi-Fi password and a line or two: *Coffee is on by 7. Sleep in as long as you like.*

Ask about the temperature rather than guessing. For a sofa bed or a shared room, prepare a small basket with their towel and essentials, and let them know when the space becomes theirs for the night.

THE PLAN

Working Backward *from the Doorbell*

A gentle timeline separates the deciding from the doing. Adjust it to your menu and your guests.

One week before

- Confirm the guest count, dietary needs, arrival times, and who's bringing what.
- Write the menu by hand. Check serving pieces, linens, bedding, and towels.
- Buy jars, twine, tags, and cardstock.

Three or four days before

- Make the rosemary-orange salt and spiced pecans; bake the mini loaves and freeze them.
- Shop for pantry items. Prepare the guest room.
- Write out a cooking schedule around oven space.

Two days before

- Write the place cards and gift tags while you have a quiet cup of coffee.
- Jar, tag, and arrange the take-home gifts in their basket.
- Sugar the rosemary sprigs for the drinks.

The day before

- Set the table, label the serving dishes, and make the rosemary wreaths.
- Cook what can be made ahead. Clear the fridge. Chill the drinks.
- Gather everything for the welcome tray.

The morning of

- Follow your cooking schedule. Freshen the powder room and the entry.
- Set out empty glasses, plates, and napkins on the welcome tray.

The last hour

- Refresh ice and water. Assemble the bites. Add sparkling water to the spritzer.
- Dim the lights, light the candles, and put on soft music.
- Get dressed slowly. Sit down for five minutes before anyone arrives.

If someone offers to help, give them one clear job: greeting at the door, or keeping glasses full. Good help starts with knowing what's needed.

THE QUIET LETTER

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THE GATHERING

Save a Seat *for Yourself*

When the doorbell finally rings, most of the work is already done. What's left is the part that matters most: a warm hello, a drink placed in someone's hand, an introduction between two people who haven't met.

Show guests where to settle. Let them know when you'll eat. Say yes when someone offers to help.

Then join them. Linger over the welcome drink. Talk while the rolls warm. Sit down at your own table, in front of your own name card, and look around at everyone you made all of this for.

That is what the preparing was for. Not a perfect evening, but a present one.

> *"Not a perfect evening, but a present one."*



THE LONG SEASON

When the Holidays Find You Here

For the years when gratitude and grief, celebration and worry, somehow have to share the same table.

"A hard season does not make gratitude dishonest. And gratitude does not make the hard thing disappear."

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE →

November has a way of arriving with instructions.

Gather. Give thanks. Come home.

Light the candles. Make the meal. Take the photograph. Notice how quickly the children are growing.

Most years, we enter into it without thinking very much about what the season is asking of us.

And then there are the other years.

> *The year someone is sick.*
> *The year someone is missing.*
> *The year the phone call still hasn't come.*

The year the marriage is tender, the money is tight, the child is struggling, the diagnosis is new, or you are simply more tired than anyone seems to understand.

The holidays arrive anyway.

The grocery stores fill with turkeys and ribbon. Invitations come. Lights go up on houses. Everyone seems to be moving toward celebration while some part of you is still standing exactly where October left you.

There is a peculiar loneliness in that.

Not because you don't want anyone else to be happy.

But because the world has become very loud about joy at precisely the moment yours has become complicated.

I THE CALENDAR DOESN'T ASK

Difficult seasons do not politely end before Thanksgiving.

Life continues straight through holidays. Hospital rooms still exist on Christmas morning. Caregivers still wake up tired. People still wait for test results. Families still fracture. Bills still arrive. Empty chairs remain empty.

And yet dinner still needs making.

There is something profoundly human about that collision: the ordinary rituals of a holiday continuing beside circumstances that feel anything but ordinary.

II TWO THINGS CAN BE TRUE

> You can be thankful and disappointed.
> Hopeful and frightened.
> Faithful and exhausted.
> Surrounded and lonely.

The mistake is believing one feeling invalidates the other.

III LET THE HOLIDAY BE SMALLER

Maybe this isn't the year for everything.

> Buy the pie.
> Leave early.
> Say no.

Use paper plates if that's what gets dinner onto the table.

Keep the tradition that still means something and let another one go.

Sit beside the person who understands.

Don't manufacture a photograph of a life you're not actually living.

"The holiday does not have to be impressive to be meaningful."

IV THERE IS STILL SOMETHING HERE

God is not waiting for us on the other side of the difficult season.

He is present in the middle of it.

> *At the hospital.*
> *At the table with the empty chair.*
> *In the car after the difficult appointment.*
> *In the kitchen when everyone else has gone home.*

Faith does not require us to tie a bow around suffering. Sometimes it is simply the decision to believe that even here, we have not been abandoned.

WHAT NOVEMBER MAY ASK OF US

Maybe this November does not need you to make the hard thing beautiful.

Maybe it does not need you to explain it, overcome it, or turn it into something useful before you are ready.

Maybe gratitude can be smaller than that.



> *A warm cup held in both hands.*
> *Someone who stayed.*
> *Enough strength for today.*
> *A laugh you didn't expect.*
> *A prayer that was little more than a name.*
> *The light coming through the kitchen window while the rest of the house was still asleep.*

These things do not erase what hurts.

They were never meant to.

They simply remind us that even here — especially here — life has not become entirely empty of goodness.

The holidays will find us
wherever we are this year.
We do not have to pretend
they found us somewhere else.

HIDDEN & SEEN

SIMPLE ELEVATED FOOD · GOOD BOOKS · QUIET FAITH

Until December —

Thank you for slowing down with us this month. May your table be full of the people you love, and may you save a seat there for yourself.

With love from our table,
Quietly yours,
Christina



To: you,
at the table

THE QUIET LETTER

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