



# EASY HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM BARWICK

**KELLEY L. MOORE**  
SHARES SIMPLE AND ELEGANT WAYS TO THROW A HOLIDAY PARTY TOGETHER IN NO TIME

**THE WEEKS BETWEEN** Thanksgiving and New Year's Day should be a time to relax with family and friends and enjoy good food and wine. But sometimes our schedules get away from us, and the holidays turn into a hectic mess. If you wish you could throw an elegant holiday party but don't feel you have the time—or if you often have friends show up unexpectedly with a bottle of Champagne—I've found a way to pull together a fabulous table in minutes that never fails to keep me sane and impress my guests. ¶ The week before Thanksgiving, I go shopping and pick up a broad selection of nonperishable food items to have on hand, such as dried apricots, an assortment of nuts, dark chocolate bars in various flavors and several bottles of red, white and sparkling wines. I also hit Home Depot and purchase a box or two of fairly inexpensive but beautiful 12-by-12-inch slate tiles in dark colors, take them home, wash them thoroughly and have them ready to set my table at a moment's notice. And I collect a few decorative items—preserved moss to contrast with the hard edges of the tiles, branches spray-painted gold or silver to add an organic element and delicately etched or hand-blown votive candleholders to add color and texture along with illuminating elements on the tabletop. ¶ I purchase a selection of cheeses in large sections or wheels—the new QFC at the Lumen condos on lower Queen Anne has a great selection. Providing variety is important, so I always select at least one soft goat cheese and a harder cheese that slices or crumbles easily, and I complete



This page, clockwise from top: these Blessing Tokens make great wine charms; a wine and cheese notebook and Wine Topics game gets conversation started and doubles as a party favor for guests; write information about the cheeses—this one's a gorgeous cow's milk farmstead Holland gouda from QFC—on simple placecards to help your guests choose their favorites; a pile of Marcona almonds invites nibbling. Opposite page: Kelley prepares an abundant table for holiday guests





Left, top to bottom, a separate table for wine gives guests a chance to try each one and compare; white Glassybaby votives and decorative elements, including moss and a porcelain pear, lend warmth to a holiday table

the selection with a stronger blue cheese. The larger the variety, the more interesting it will be for your guests. Labeling each cheese by type and country of origin is informative and educational for guests, and finally, pairing each cheese with a grouping of dried fruits, nuts and chocolate where appropriate is a must. It adds an element to the evening by creating pairings, and adds color to the table. Fresh fruits (grapes, apples and pears) are also useful and easy to keep on hand. If you don't know how to pair the cheeses with the other elements, don't be afraid to ask your local cheesemonger.

With these decorative and edible ingredients on hand, it's easy to pull together a spur-of-the-moment party. Two hours before your guests arrive, remove the cheeses from the refrigerator so they can warm to room temperature to bring out their best flavors. Wash the fruit, but don't slice your apples or pears until just before guests arrive, so the slices don't turn brown. Cover the surface of your dining room table with kraft paper and then lay the tiles across the table, tucking the artificial moss beneath the tiles' edges and filling the space between each tile. You'll end up with a large grid of tiles, with moss in between, covering the entire surface of the table. Then display your labeled cheeses, dried fruit, chunked chocolate bars and nuts—in pairings with the cheeses. On a side table, place small plates, cheese knives and cocktail napkins, making sure there is an easy pathway for guests to access and explore each side of the table.

To include an impromptu wine tasting (why not try some of Washington's best?), I place wines on a separate side table so I can line them up from the lightest, driest wine to the strongest or sweetest wine. I also provide individual notepads and pens for my guests to write down their comments about each wine and cheese to take home with them for future use. This engages them, sparks conversation and helps us all decide and remember if we want to try that specific wine again.

With just these few things on hand, you can throw together an elegant and easy gathering that will keep you sane during the holidays and also impress even the most finicky guests. **S**



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Clockwise from above, a buffet setup makes service simple for you and your guests; mounds of dried fruits from QFC and dark chocolate chunks from Theo set atop slate tiles give the table a rustic feel (and help balance out the cheese); this unique cheese knife is a whimsical contrast to an elegant tabletop



## Find it

Page 108: Dark gray 12-by-12-inch slate tiles, \$2 per tile at Home Depot (various locations including SoDo, 2701 Utah Ave. S; 206.467.9200; homedepot.com). Artificial moss, \$7 per package at Metropolitan Market (various locations including Queen Anne, 1908 Queen Anne Ave. N; 206.284.2530; metropolitan-market.com). A selection of cheeses, dried fruit and Marcona almonds, various prices at QFC (multiple locations including Lower Queen Anne; 500 Mercer St.; 206.352.4020; qfconline.com). Theo Chocolate 3-ounce Origin Bars, \$6 at Theo Chocolate (Fremont, 3400 Phinney Ave. N; 206.632.5100; theochocolate.com). Silver manzanita branch taper candelabras,

\$159 at London Flat (Bellevue, 12708 Northup Way; 425.882.7970). White chenille balls, \$12 (large), \$9 (small) at Camelion Design (Ballard, 5330 Ballard Ave. NW; 206.783.7125). Uptown Spots dessert plates by Rosanna (held by Kelley), \$46 for set of four at Tableau (Ballard, 2232 NW Market St.; 206.782.5846). Glassybaby true white votive, \$40 at Glassybaby (Madrona, 3406 E Union St.; 206.568.7368; glassybaby.com). Page 109: Juliska Gabriella large smoke-colored goblet, \$52 per stem at Stuhlbergs (Queen Anne, 4 Blaine St.; 206.352.2351; stuhlbergs.com). Blessing tokens, \$2 at Camelion Design. Manorisms silver place card holder, \$4 at Tableau. Nantaka Joy flowered notebooks, \$14 at Lucca Great Finds (Ballard, 5332 Ballard Ave. NW; 206.782.7337; luccastatuary.com); Montblanc Starwalker pen, \$375 at Montblanc (Bellevue, 1058 Bellevue Square; 425.646.7554; montblanc.com); Wine Topics game, \$12 at Stuhlbergs. Page 110: Petimento antiqued mercury glass urn, \$189 at London Flat. Global Views angle vase (used as wine carafe), \$41 at Whimsy Home Décor (Capitol Hill, 1535 14th Ave.; 866.494.4679; whimsyhomedecor.com). Silver Mariposa bamboo wine trays, \$26 at Stuhlbergs. 2005 Syncline Columbia Valley Syrah (\$21.99), 2005 Chinook Yakima Valley Cabernet Franc (\$19.99), 2006 Owen Roe Abbot's Table Columbia Valley red blend (\$22.99), 2005 Milbrandt Vineyard Traditions Washington State Merlot (\$14.99), all at Pike and Western Wine Shop (Pike Place Market, 1934 Pike Place; 206.441.1307; pikeandwestern.com). Porcelain by Kimenkoff white pears, \$50 at Polite Society (Downtown, 1924 First Ave.; 206.441.4796; shoppolitesociety.com). Page 111: Caspari cocktail napkins in Glen Plaid, \$4.50 for 20-pack; Wood Pecan Chilewich rubber placemats, \$15 each; Mariposa silver twig napkin box with acorn weight, \$42, all at Stuhlbergs. Cheese knives, \$3 at Metropolitan Market. Michael Aram cheese knife with painted gold mouse handle, \$66 at Stuhlbergs.