

# Entertaining Shortcuts

Every year we host our neighborhood board for a holiday celebration. We have the most wonderful group of neighbors who spend countless volunteer hours maintaining the integrity and character of our North Central neighborhood. I always feel so lucky to welcome them into our home to celebrate them and the holidays.

Typically, I would love to think I have the time and energy to make everything from scratch, but realistically that's not always the case. What did we do before Costco or Sam's Club? This year, I capitalized on all the wonderful things available at [Costco](#) for the hors d'oeuvres, flowers and desserts. With a little imagination you can take ordinary items and turn them into [something special](#) with these entertaining shortcuts.

As you know, I think the carnation is the underdog of flower choices, but they are affordable, hold up well and provide a burst of color.



**Caring for your Flowers**

- 1.) Prepare your flowers as soon as possible after purchase.
- 2.) Fill a clean vase with water and (floral preservative or 1/2 a capful of bleach). Use cool to room temperature water.
- 3.) Check foliage that falls below the water line and trim the stems at a 45-degree angle 1 inch or 1/2 inch immediately place into prepared vase.
- 4.) Keep fresh flowers away from heat and direct sunlight.
- 5.) Be sure to re-cut stems and change water every 2-3 days.
- 6.) Keep flowers away from pets, as some flowers are highly poisonous.

LIFE AT  
*Bella Terra*





With some evergreens from our [Christmas tree](#) (or greens from your yard), you can make them look like this.





[Costco](#) has a gourmet food section with an extensive assortment of salami, proscuitto, and cheeses. The [French brie](#), Isigny Ste. Mere is from Normandy and is so delicious. The [Cambozola](#) blue cheese was only \$8.00 for 2 wedges! Their [Cranberry Cinnamon](#) goat cheese is so festive.





With a very large tray and some effort (I had my son's assistance), it can look like this! We added olives, nuts and fruit for a beautiful display.









Pre-packed vegetables trays are available in most grocery stores.



With a few added tomatoes and sprigs of herbs (I used thyme, but rosemary or parsley would also work), the vegetable tray can have a holiday theme.





I love making Christmas cookies, but I've had no time this year. Costco has a very good selection and I especially like their Holiday Stollen Bites.





Though the picture isn't great because I took it after our guests started arriving, you can see how I arranged the desserts.





In addition to beer and wine, my son made a Christmas sangria. Our non-alcoholic options were water and hot mulled cider, which was a perfect choice on a chilly December night.

The cider is from [Trader Joe's](#). Simmered with mulled spices, the presentation was made pretty by adding mini Rome apples and whole cloves.



By using a skewer to pre-poke the holes, the cloves are easier to insert.





A crockpot full of Trader Joe's [party size mini meatballs](#) and

their [Bold & Smoky Kansas City Style BBQ](#) sauce rounded out the appetizers.



The back porch is the perfect location for larger gatherings. With the fireplace roaring and the ceiling heaters on, it was a lovely evening with neighbors.





What I didn't know before writing this post, is that Costco delivers! It appears they can do so in a few hours or a few days~~that opens up so many new possibilities!

Taking some entertaining shortcuts during this holiday season is a way to lower the stress and still provide a warm and welcoming environment for your guests.

Happy Entertaining!

Mary