

DINING ROOM BUYING GUIDE

Whether you dream of dazzling dinner parties or cozy family get-togethers, your new dining set will play a major role. The great news is that there is a style out there for everyone. But with so many choices, there are certain considerations you should keep in mind.

Estimating Needs

The first step you should take before you shop for any kind of furniture is to measure the room it will be placed in. The dimensions of a dining room should inform not only the size of the table, but the general shape as well. A dining table doesn't have to be rectangular. The shape of a table can change the overall impression of the room size. There are great expandable options in round and square tables as well. To get an even better idea of how the space can be laid out, use our online room planner. That way you can tryout round, oval, square and rectangular tables to see what will fit best in the room before you go shopping.

Here are a few rules of thumb to keep in mind when planning your dining room:

- Diners need 18" to 24" of space away from the table to sit down and pull their chairs up to the table.
- Diners should have 24" to 30" of space at the table to dine comfortably without bumping elbows with their neighbor.
- There should be four to five feet of space between the table and the wall to allow the host to easily move through the room and be able to serve the guests.

How many for dinner?

The number of diners you expect to seat affects the kind of table you get. It's easy to get extra bodies around a pedestal table, but beware

that a pedestal table can become wobbly and prone to tip when extended with multiple leaves. Round or rectangular tables with four legs can make it hard to pull up an extra chair.

A table with a leaf is a great way to expand your dining area. If you have the space, you might want to consider keeping the leaf in the table full time. A leaf in storage will not age the same as the rest of the table. Coloration may change or the leaf may warp if stored vertically, instead of horizontally, or if it is kept in a damp environment. Leaves are usually not an option with glass-topped tables. Butterfly leaves have become a popular option in recent years because they store the leaf right under the top of the table. It is important to try out the leaf mechanism when you are shopping. It should open and lock into place smoothly and easily without force. Drop leaf tables can allow you to place a table right against a wall for day-to-day use. You can pull them out from the wall and extend the leaf when you need to seat more people. A variation of the drop leaf table, gate-leg tables include a leg that swings out to support the leaf.

Flip top tables are another great option for expanding seating. A flip top table is distinguished by a tabletop that is doubled over on itself. As it is unfolded it is either rotated or shifted on the table base for support. In the folded state they can be used as console tables in the dining room, or behind a sofa in the living room as a sofa table.

Similar to the flip top table, a tilt top table can be positioned near a wall with the tabletop tilted to a vertical position. When needed the table is moved away from the wall and the tabletop is laid horizontal.

Dining room furniture is commonly sold in five piece sets. Occasionally retailers will run promotions that include two armchairs as well. You should buy at least two more chairs than you think you will need. Holiday entertaining and family gatherings can send you scrambling for seating to accommodate everyone. If you buy the extra chairs at the outset you can be sure that they fit with the table. The extra chairs can always be used as accents chairs in other rooms when you are not

entertaining.

Mixing and Matching

Eclectic looks are very popular these days, but there are several things you should think about when purchasing tables and chairs separately:

Will it fit?

If you are buying chairs to match a table in your home measure the distance from the floor to the table apron to calculate if a chair will fit. (The table apron is a rail that runs between the legs to support the tabletop.) If you are buying a table to match chairs in your home, measure from the floor to the seat of the chair and add eight inches to figure out how much space you need under the apron. This will ensure that a person sitting in the chair can actually get their legs under the table. Chairs with arms are another consideration. If you have a tight space, then you will probably want the armchair to tuck all the way under the table, therefore you will want to make sure that the arm will fit under the apron, but be careful. If the chair arms regularly make contact with the table apron, the finish may be marred. When considering armchairs, also look at the distance between the table legs and the distance between the arms of the chair to ensure they will fit together easily.

Take a Seat

Sit in the chair for some time; don't go from one to the other too quickly. You will want your guests to linger over dinner conversation, so make sure that the chair is comfortable for a longer period of time. It should be wide enough for your guests to be comfortable. The chair should support the back and allow you to keep your feet on the floor.

Chairs should not be rickety or wobble. If the chair has a padded seat, the corners should be reinforced with screwed-in (not glued) corner blocks. Padded seats should be removable so that the cover can be changed. Fabric covered chairs may not be appealing if you have young children who are messy eaters. Leather is a great option for quick cleanup, as is stain resistant microfiber upholstery. Slipcovers on

Parson's chairs are another easily cleaned option for the dining room.

Tables

Dining tables come in a variety of styles, sizes and shapes. Whatever the style tables should not be rickety or wobble. Leg tables should have screwed-in corner blocks. Glass-topped tables should come with silicone pads that go between the glass and the base to keep the glass from getting scratched.

Pub-height or counter-height tables have become very popular in recent years. While they have a youthful image, counter height tables are a great option for older people who have trouble getting up and down from low dining room chairs. If your kitchen or dining room has a window with a great view, a pub height table is a great way to enjoy. The higher seating can allow for unobstructed sight lines. The higher levels of these table tops also make them a great additional work surface in a kitchen with limited counter space. Keep in mind though; a pub height table may require you to raise your dining room chandelier.

When you purchase your dining table, you might want to check into table pads as well. Table pads are often felt-covered on the back side and vinyl on the top surface. They are usually covered over with a tablecloth when used. The pads protect the tabletop from hot dishes and moisture and can significantly prolong the life of your dining set.

Whether or not you opt for table pads, consider a protection plan like Protection First. Furniture that's worth buying is worth protecting and such a plan can help you take care of your investment so that little mishaps don't result in a major eyesore.

STORAGE & SERVING

Now that you have tables and chairs you should consider storage and display for your dining room. Features such as interior cabinet lights, outlets for plugging in crock-pots and extendable serving areas make entertaining easy and attractive. Below is a list of different storage pieces that you may want to add to your dining room.

Curio Cabinet

This cabinet is a freestanding display case that has a glass front and sides without any enclosed cabinet space. Many styles include interior lights, glass shelves and mirrored backs.

China Cabinet

These cabinets are normally part display and part storage. The top half of the china cabinet resembles a curio cabinet and possibly contains a railing to allow you to display plates, while the bottom contains cabinets for the storage of other commonly used items.

Buffet

Buffets are storage pieces, very often a cupboard or "dresser" of sorts to store serving dishes and platters. The upper surface is used as a service area. A frequent addition to a buffet, a hutch can provide both display and storage, leaving room for food service as well.

Sideboard

A sideboard is a table with a wide drawer in the center that is flanked by drawers and cupboards on the sides and is used for storing serving dishes and platters as well as for serving food.

Server

A server is a shallow table with drawers. It is a surface to put food before it is placed on the table. Unlike the sideboard, a server does not have cabinets.

COMMON WOOD CHAIR STYLES:

Windsor chairs are a style of chair that features turned spindles along the back, turned and angled legs, turned stretchers between the legs, and a carved saddle seat. The chairs were named because they originated in the town of Windsor England.

Arrow back chairs are a variant of the Windsor chair. The back spindles

resemble arrows. They are cylindrical both ends but are flattened in the middle to resemble arrows.

Slat back chairs have backs that contain at least one, possibly several, wide, flat, vertical supports.

Ladder-back chairs are chairs that feature horizontal supports in the upper section of the chair, often resembling a ladder.

Parsons is a tall dining room chair with an upholstered, rectangular back and seat.

COMMON TABLE STYLES:

Pedestal Table

This type of table usually has a round top with a single center support rather than four legs. It has become very popular recently because of the strong profile.

Leg Table

A leg table is a more traditional table featuring 4 legs but it is also harder to fit in additional people because of those legs.

Trestle Table

This table consists of two sets of legs that are connected by a horizontal beam. These tables are often good in dining spaces that are longer instead of square.

Drop Leaf Table

A table with hinged leaves that are unfolded for table extension.

Gate Leg Table

A variety of drop-leaf table in which the extended leaf is supported by a leg that folds into the base when the leaf is not in use.

Flip Top Table

A flip top table is distinguished by a table top that can be doubled over on itself. As it is unfolded it is either rotated or shifted on the table base for support.

Tilt Top Table

A top that can be tilted vertically to store against a wall.