There's a good chance you'll be both a host and a guest at some point during the holidays. And if not, you've most likely been on both sides of the table before. We know treating everyone with courtesy and respect during this time of the year is vital to your friendships year-round. What we may not know is just the right way to act in certain situations. Here are a few commonly asked questions and tips for both entertaining and visiting during the holidays:

I am having vegetarian friends for a holiday dinner. Do I alter the entire menu or just have one or two dishes for them?

It depends on the size of your celebration. If your vegetarian friends are the only guests, you'll want to be sure they can enjoy most of what you're serving. If they'll be part of a larger crowd, it isn't necessary to alter the entire menu. Serve enough vegetarian dishes so that they don't leave the table hungry. Often people on restrictive diets come prepared, so, if they offer to bring a dish to share, let them.

What are "chargers," and how do I use them?

At holiday times charger plates, also known as service plates, make a cameo appearance on our tables. In stunning gold, copper, silver, black, emerald green and ruby red, they turn their practical sisters, the soup bowl or salad plate, into Cinderellas for the evening.

This large plate, usually about 12" in diameter, serves as an underplate for the plate or bowl holding the first course. The first course is brought to the table and set on the service plate. When the first course is cleared, the service plate remains until the plate holding the entrée is served, at which point the service plate is exchanged for the entrée plate.

The Gracious Guest

Five Tips for Holiday Visits

1. All hosts—including your mother and aunts—love a surprise gift.
2. Be willing to pitch in, but instead of asking the harried host how you can help, volunteer to do a specific job like loading the dishwasher.
3. If you make the offer to help and the host firmly declines, back off—some people really don't want guests in their kitchen.
4. At family get-togethers, don't let nosy questions upset you. Deflect rudeness by changing the topic: "You're right, Uncle Jim, I was thinner last year. How 'bout those Steelers?"

5. Visiting friends or family? Observe this rule of thumb: Three nights is usually plenty. Spell out arrival and departure times well in advance so your host isn't left guessing.