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FRENCH COUNTRY COTTAGE INSPIRED GATHERINGS

ALLISON



GIBBS
SMITH

FRENCH COUNTRY COTTAGE

Inspired Gatherings



COURTNEY ALLISON



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SMALL GATHERINGS



A SNUG BREAKFAST SETTING IN THE GREENHOUSE, a beach picnic for two, or an afternoon break in a little patch of wildflowers—small gatherings are intimate and less formal than those that involve a guest list and lots of planning. They are everyday gatherings. Ones that set up in your backyard or plan impromptu while vacationing. They are more about creating a cozy ambiance and quiet conversation or reflection and are often inspired by the setting or location.

There is something about those smaller gatherings that brings remembrances of small plates of cookies and treats on the porch at grandma's house. They may seem a tad old-fashioned in some ways, especially in the day of Pinterest-worthy celebrations and everything being planned so perfectly. Yet they are the most comfortable and relaxing way to absorb the goodness of the moment, to catch up on the day and take a break from routine. Whether you can steal fifteen minutes between projects or a long couple of hours, these small everyday interludes are nourishment for the soul. They are perfect times to catch up and connect with friends and family, to relax and recharge, or to sit quietly and ponder.

They are some of my favorite gatherings, where a few moments can fill you with so much good energy and connection, without all the busyness that goes along with planning a larger party.



GREENHOUSE BRUNCH

Inside a warm and charming greenhouse, the abundance of light and fresh air pouring in created an enchanting spot for relishing a couple bites and a quiet talk, tucked away from the rest of the world.

Most of the time, the greenhouse is part getaway and part work space. The shelves are filled with oodles of old galvanized and painted buckets that are just waiting to be filled, as well as buckets of fresh greens and flowers ready to be clipped and processed for bouquets.

There is a place to relax inside, and the center work “island” becomes a table for two with just a quick wipe-down and a couple of odd stools or chairs.

A space like a greenhouse or garden shed converted to a room is a wonderful spot to enjoy outdoor dining, escaping bugs and the weather. I have sat inside this space and listened to the rain on the roof in the evening while relaxing, and with the twinkle of the chandelier and a string of lights just outside the door, it truly feels like a magical escape in the backyard. And it is an unexpectedly inspiring place for setting up a simple quiet lunch or dinner.

A gathering in a shed or greenhouse can be simple: a pot of coffee and platter of scones, cheese and crackers on a breadboard, or a sandwich cut and shared. The garden is just outside the greenhouse, so a bowl of fresh-picked berries is an easy treat to add. A simple bucket of flowers and candles create a bit of cozy on the old farm table. It is a good place to relax for a few minutes and take a break for a bite while enjoying the abundance of blooms on the shelves.

Being filled with fresh flowers in vintage containers makes the greenhouse feel much like a flower market. I tend to keep blooms separate from each other until creating arrangements, so there are buckets of different shades and styles of flowers that mingle quietly.



Peonies in buckets are a spring thing. There is no such thing as too many, in my opinion. I bring them to the greenhouse to clip and remove leaves then arrange them in various-sized buckets and vases to enjoy throughout the house.





A TABLE IN THE WOODS

Autumn is a season of abundance, filled with colors and ambience as nature puts on a brilliant display. It is also harvest time for apples and grapes. The crisp mornings and evenings are perfect for wandering in the woods, with leaves covering paths and crunching underfoot. There is a heavy scent that signals “cozy” and inspires me to gather, create, and delight with a table set among all that beauty.

We have acres and acres of forested land not far from our home and some on our own property. Back behind a line of trees that divides the open and wooded areas, there is a little path that meanders along. Tucked into tall grasses and wild blackberry bushes, it is an enchanted little walk that leads to an old hollow tree that we call the “raccoon tree,” as we found a family of raccoons nesting among the branches one year. That dirt path is dotted with old apple, cedar, and pine trees and is also filled with sweet pea blooms underfoot every spring. In fall, those sweet peas turn to a shade of brown as the chill sets in—and it was that moody feeling that appeared with the season that inspired me to set a table under the apple tree branches.

Setting a table that is not near the house requires a bit more carting of this and that to get the area ready for guests. But I have found that something as simple as a large French market basket is ideal for carrying various things like candles, napkins, and flatware to the site. After a few trips up and down the path with various tabletop elements, flowers, and food, it is time to turn on the twinkle lights and enjoy the warm autumn mood.

Gathering some fallen pine cones and acorns from the forest floor is a wonderful way to tie the table decoration to the environment.

BELOW, LEFT: Treasured delicate china and gilded coupes set the stage for a beautiful table.

BELOW, RIGHT: A collection of vintage and reproduction glassware is as pretty in waiting as it is on the table.

OPPOSITE: A small cake stacked with lemon and buttercream and topped with fresh fruit sits on a wood slice. A cake idea: Buy a unique special-order bakery cake and then embellish it for your occasion.

This one was a rectangular cake that I sliced into two sections and stacked; then I added fresh blueberries, sliced figs, and sprigs of rosemary, which gave it a whole new vibe.





ABOVE: A scattering of potpourri and fresh fruits, like peaches and Bosc pears, creates a natural and aromatic centerpiece.

OPPOSITE: A vintage crock from Italy holds a mixed bouquet. The garden roses, spray roses, hydrangeas, Craspedia, and eucalyptus echo the flowers on a table along the pathway to the barn and tie the two settings together for the evening.

