

To make a floral centerpiece for a family potluck, arrange a few flowers and leafy stems in a low, sturdy container. Keep it small enough to leave room for food and low enough that people can see one another across the table.

Start with the table

A potluck table has a lot of work to do. Before choosing flowers, think about where the serving dishes, plates, and drinks will go. If everyone will serve food from the same table where they eat, a compact arrangement is easier to move when a large casserole arrives.

Choose a container with a wide, stable base, such as a small ceramic bowl or a short glass jar. A container that holds water without leaking is important, especially on a table covered with a cloth. Set it on a plate if you want an extra layer of protection.

For a long table, one small arrangement may look a little lost. You can make two or three modest arrangements instead, provided they do not crowd the dishes or block anyone's place.

Choose flowers and greenery

Use flowers you enjoy, perhaps in colors that suit the season or the tablecloth. A simple mix of one larger flower, a few smaller blooms, and some greenery gives the arrangement variety without making it busy. Flowers cut from a garden can sit comfortably beside flowers bought for the occasion.

- Pick a few open blooms for the main points of color.
- Add smaller flowers to fill gaps between them.
- Use leafy stems to soften the edges.

- Choose flowers with little fragrance if guests will be eating close by.

Remove any leaves that would sit below the water. They can decay in the container and make the water cloudy. Keep flowers and loose plant material away from uncovered food, and avoid placing the arrangement where it could be knocked into a serving dish.

Arrange it for sharing

Fill the container partway with clean water. Trim the stems and place the greenery first, letting it spread gently over the rim. Add the larger blooms, then tuck the smaller ones into the spaces between them. Turn the container as you work so the arrangement looks pleasant from each seat.

Step back and check the height from a seated position. Trim any stems that interrupt the view, and leave some space between flowers rather than packing them tightly. The arrangement does not need to be symmetrical. A loose shape can feel at home among the different dishes and bowls people bring.

Before guests arrive, put the centerpiece in place and set a few serving dishes around it. This small rehearsal makes it easy to see if the flowers need a different spot.

Questions about the centerpiece

Can I make it the day before?

Yes. Keep it in a cool place away from direct sun, and check the water before setting it on the table.

What if there is no room on the dining table?

Put the arrangement on a side table or near the entrance, where guests can enjoy it without having to move it around the food.

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