

GATHERING

SETTING THE NATURAL TABLE



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*WITH PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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*LAYERS OF SPRING
AT BOTANICA*





When I create arrangements, I work from a place where the style of the tabletop conveys an organic connection with the environment around it. I want my work to reflect not only the spirit of the gathering or celebration, but also the time of year and location. At Botanica we hosted a brunch directly inspired by the California spring that was blooming all around us.

Botanica is a wonderful restaurant and marketplace in the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles. Emily Fiffer and Heather Sperling, the owners and chefs, are close friends and longtime collaborators of Moon Canyon. The two are accomplished food writers who penned stories on restaurants for nearly a decade before deciding to open their own.

Our work ethos and underlying business philosophies are very similar. They come to food with the intent of providing their customers with meals that are local, delicious, healthy and beautiful. Botanica's dishes are not only tasty, but also exquisitely presented. Although we work with flowers and they work with food, we are both trying to touch people through direct experiences with the natural world—botanical feasts fit for *all* the senses.

In Los Angeles, the spring comes on quietly, then blooms—seemingly overnight. The mud and rain make way for acid green grass which sprouts from every hillside and wildflowers that seem to suddenly appear everywhere. We worked with Botanica and a few other Moon Canyon collaborators to mirror this feeling of sudden abundance, of everything growing verdantly and all at once. We played with this concept not just in the centerpiece, which runs the entire length of the table and seems to almost emerge from it, but also with a playful overload of layered textiles.



Heather Taylor Linens is a Moon Canyon friend and co-conspirator in all things beautiful. A Los Angeles-based designer, Heather makes beautiful linens for home and dining. She creates classic plaid and gingham textiles that feel ordered and clean no matter how much you layer them.

For our pattern-on-pattern tabletop, Heather Taylor's designs provide the perfect palette of colors and textures. We chose some of her traditional gingham patterns and layered them over a classic striped tablecloth. To keep a layering theme, we decided to use cloth cocktail napkins as drink coasters, keeping the tabletop linen-focused.

We placed the flatware and rolled linen table napkins, bound with pale leather rings. We custom made these napkin rings especially for our brunch at Botanica and Heather later integrated them into her own line. Then we stood back to see how else we could layer colors, textures and patterns.

Our many Heather Taylor linens were placed directly atop the graceful, clay-colored Humble ceramics plates. We went wild layering everything, wanting to make it feel nothing at all like a typical place setting. The colors were kept to a minimum, pale peach and storm cloud grey, in order to allow us to play more freely with pattern and texture.



So many of my favorite flowers are at their best in spring; lily of the valley, iris, ranunculus, and viburnum, to name a few. To create this spring garden-inspired garland centerpiece we used long and low metal vases filled with chicken wire and placed them close to one another. Then we layered in low, tightly packed greens to provide the structure to hold the taller, wisper blooms in place. In spring, flowers rule our world, so we thought they should rule the tabletop as well!





Botanica has an incredible menu of predominately plant-based dishes and an amazing selection of natural wines. For this brunch we had chilled orange wine with avocado toast on Bub and Grandma's delicious bread. We also had colorful crudité, put together beautifully—again, with a modern/maximalist approach.

Botanica created a colorful crudité board with an array of fresh seasonal vegetables. Seasonality is key here. There's nothing better than exploring the farmers market and being inspired by what's local and in season. I recommend talking with the market vendors about what's best that day and sampling to make sure the fruit and vegetables you buy are at their peak of freshness.

Boards like this are a simple, elegant way to provide delicious foods and eye-catching colors and textures. The best the season has to offer, creatively placed on your favorite tray or cutting board, can be an arrangement in itself, adding a unique style, décor, and pop of color to any table.

Don't feel limited to using only vegetables. Cheeses, dried fruits, nuts, fresh fruit, anything that tastes great and is easy to source (preferably at your local farmers market), can elevate a table scape while also satisfying hungry guests.



Here I did what I love to do by creating a wild runner that spans the entire length of the table. Spring is an amazing season to work with flowers as so much is blooming and in season at the markets. We envisioned a hedge of blooms, a wide, high spread that ultimately stretched to nearly four feet long. It's only one centerpiece, but it's got a lot going on! There's heuchera, which is a plant I buy often at the nursery to use the leaves and selected cuttings. Then there's popcorn viburnum, ranunculus, lily the valley, clematis vine. Nothing says spring to me like iris and ranunculus and lily of the valley.

We wanted the heavy texture in the blooms to play off the pattern-on-pattern theme of the linens. I could have even added a table runner to go on top of these other beautiful textiles, yet another layer to joyfully overload the barrage of stripes and checks and plaids. I'm not afraid of maximalist style, but I always try to balance it with a modern take. Here, the minimal colors within the textiles ground the wildness of the arrangement, which almost seems to be growing directly out of the table.

THE ART OF THE NAPKIN FOLD

The ability to elevate a table scape can be found in the oft-overlooked art of the napkin fold.

If there is one element that can transform your table scape, it is the deceptively subtle multipurpose linen napkin. Even if you use the same dishes and flatware at every gathering, if you change up your napkins or even play with varied napkin folds, any gathering can be transformed into an elegant and special occasion.

One basic tip on harnessing the versatile power of the napkin: have a few different color options in your linen closet, so you can vary shades to complement the food, florals, setting and occasion. You can hand fold a napkin in a variety of ways and use a diverse range of materials to tie or shape linens, such as ribbons, floral elements, and napkin rings. See some of our favorite napkin folds on the following pages.





The Kerchief

Serving as the perfect canvas for a small bundle of dried or live florals, this fold lends itself to both formal and casual place settings.

INSIDER HINT: Taking a quick moment to iron the kerchief after it is folded will help to create crisp edges and sharper points.

The Band

There are occasions when the plateware is the star of a table and in these instances I love the simplicity of this fold. By simply wrapping the napkin around the dinner plate it is easy to create and allows your guests to experience the subtleties of the serving ware, be it a dish or a bowl, delicate porcelain or earthy, artistic ceramics.

INSIDER HINT: Depending on the size of your napkins and the desired width, this fold can be done in either thirds or quarters.

The Tuck

I love a bit of asymmetry in a place setting. Here, instead of shifting the salad plate to the side, which you will see throughout the book, the napkin is nestled under one side of the salad plate in a tuck fold. While it's not always necessary, you can style this setting with a menu or with an accent of florals, herbs or dried grass.

INSIDER HINT: The rectangular fold of the tuck is simply the band with an added fold on each end.

The Roll

A napkin ring provides the perfect opportunity to add another layer of artistry to your table. From carved wood or a buttery leather cuff to a more formal metal ring, a rolled napkin secured this way mimics the vertical lines of the flatware for a dash of table setting flair.

INSIDER HINT: Napkin rings don't need to be purchased; you can get creative and wrap your napkins with items you may already have at home—ribbon, scraps of fabric, or even a floral element from the garden.