

Buying Dining Room Furniture To Fit Your Lifestyle

Dining tables are the focal point of the room and set the mood of the space: formal, informal, casual, or sophisticated.

Friends and family naturally tend to gather around the food, so you want something comfortable, stylish and accommodating for everyone. You want to select dining room furniture that fits your lifestyle and family, and holds up for years to come.

Because most people only purchase furniture a few times in their lives, buying dining room furniture can seem a bit daunting.

No matter your budget, it is still an investment. Here are important points to consider when buying dining room furniture.

Style

Your dining room's feel has a lot to do with the style you choose. For a consistent feel throughout, choose dining room furniture that matches the home's architectural style, and the style of your other rooms.

There are many styles to choose from and you can often find a mix of styles, for example, a Modern top with Traditional legs. Although there are no hard and fast rules, styles are commonly described as:

- **Traditional** - Noted for elegant, rich wood details, carved legs and chairs.
- **Modern** – A combination of utility + aesthetically pleasing, you will find sleek, clean lines, sharp angles and care-free surfaces with this style.
- **Industrial** – A bold, purposeful, factory or mechanical looking style made typically of unfinished metal.
- **Rustic** – Often this style will have a hand-carved, chunky, natural wood construction, with unvarnished, unpainted or distressed surfaces.
- **Farm House or Shaker** – Uncomplicated, multi-purpose pieces, made of wood, with simple lines and details.
- **Contemporary** – This style has a broad range of looks and is easiest to describe it as an 'up to date' appearance. You will find a combination of all materials, shapes and styles.

Table Height vs Chair Height

Tables come in varying heights: standard, counter, and bar. The standard dining table height is between 28 and 30 inches. Standard height dining tables can be formal or informal. Taller tables are more informal.

Counter height dining tables are between 34 and 36 inches high and can pull double duty as a preparation or project space.

Bar height dining tables are a bit taller at 40 to 42 inches tall. These tables are more informal still, and also bring the eye up higher, making the room feel less cluttered. However, they are not very child friendly.

When buying a dining room set, the table and chair heights are already matched for you. However, if you are not buying your table as a set, here are some tips to ensure a comfortable fit:

- Make sure you are buying chairs designed for the table's height. 'Tall' chairs won't work for any tall table, as noted above. Also, standard chair heights can vary by a couple of inches, so make sure to

measure them (floor to top of seat height).

- For optimal comfort, allow a minimum of 12 inches clearance from the chair seat top to the bottom of the table. If the table has an apron or skirt (a strip of wood between the legs), measure from that point.
- Chair seat widths can also vary. Seat widths of 20-24 inches are the most comfortable. Other widths will work too, but make sure all chairs will fit all the way under the table, especially those with arm rests.
- Chair seat width to seat back height should also be considered. Narrow chairs with low seat backs are uncomfortable for tall family members and guests, or someone with back problems.
- Heavy chairs are difficult for young children to pull out from the table, and tall chairs are difficult for them to sit in.

Table and Chair Care

Table Care

Many table surface options are available, some requiring more care than others. Know the amount of care you are willing to commit before purchasing.

Table surfaces options include:

- **Wood** - Solid vs composite options exist. Consider the wood type – soft woods are less expensive, but more prone to scratches, marring, staining and other character marks than hard woods. As with other wood furniture, tables will need occasional furniture polishing.
- **Glass** – Resistant to staining and scratches, but fingerprints are easily seen. Usually, window cleaners are sufficient for cleaning these tables.
- **Laminate** – An easy to care for, scratch resistant, durable surface for practically any activity. It is porous to a degree and can be marred by stains and heat. Available in a wide variety of patterns and colors.
- **Metal** – Also easy to care for, very durable, non-porous surface. Metal tables retain cold and heat (depending on environment), and can be marred by dings and dents, which can be hard to repair. Also take note of the construction, metal thickness and watch for sharp corners.
- **Marble** – Beautiful and elegant, it is durable if properly cared for. Marble is a soft, porous stone that can stain and scratch easily.

Chair Care

Style, comfort and care are at the top of the list when purchasing chairs. Upholstered seats are the most comfortable, but don't forget to look at the material used, and make sure it can be easily cleaned.

Leather, microsuede or cotton are great choices. Heavier fabrics with a nap, like velvet, will require extra care to clean.

Choosing a Table Size to Fit Your Needs

Naturally, you need a table that accommodates your needs, but there are several factors to consider:

- **Room Size and Shape** – Before making your final decision, measure the room where your table will go. If other furniture is in the room, measure the usable space. For easy movement around all sides of the table and pulling out chairs, allow a minimum of 36 inches and ideally, 48 inches. This is the best table size and shape for your room.

- **Family Size and Entertaining** – Consider your family size and whether you like to entertain. If you have children, their friends will likely visit. Family size + two is an acceptable seating capacity plan for most entertaining needs.
- **Lifestyle Factors** – Dining preferences such as formal or casual dining and family-style or buffet style eating.

If your room is sized only for a table for 6 and you want seating for 8 to 10 people, consider an expandable table: drop-leaf, butterfly leaf or removable leaf. This way, your table can easily be downsized when not needed. Remember to measure the table when it's fully opened to ensure it will fit in your room.

Dining Table Size Chart

Use this chart as a guide to help you decide the dining table size you need. For the size options listed, you can find the number of people that table will comfortably fit.

Square or Round	Comfortably Fit
28" to 48"	4
58" to 72"	4-6
Rectangle or Oval (long side)	Comfortably Fit
60" to 72"	6-8
80" to 92"	8-10
96" to 108"	10-12
120" to 132"	14-16

Usually square or round tables are used for smaller groups. When choosing rectangle or oval tables, you will find two table width options: 36", great for casual or buffet style dining, and 48", ideal for formal or family style dining.

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