

HOME&GARDEN

Making your house feel like home for holiday guests

With many travelers opting for guest rooms over hotel suites this holiday season, interior designer Tracy Morris offers her tips on how to turn your extra bedroom into a home away from home.

By Katie Wilmeth
Special to *The Examiner*

This holiday season, Elisabeth Casey and her family will be hosting a plethora of people in their Arlington home — including her in-laws.

“We tease that this is my in-laws’ room, so if anyone else stays here, you’re staying in Faith and Bruce’s room,” said Casey, who’s had up to 12 people stay at her house at once. “They stay here the most because they live in Connecticut, but we’ve had all manner of people stay in this room.”

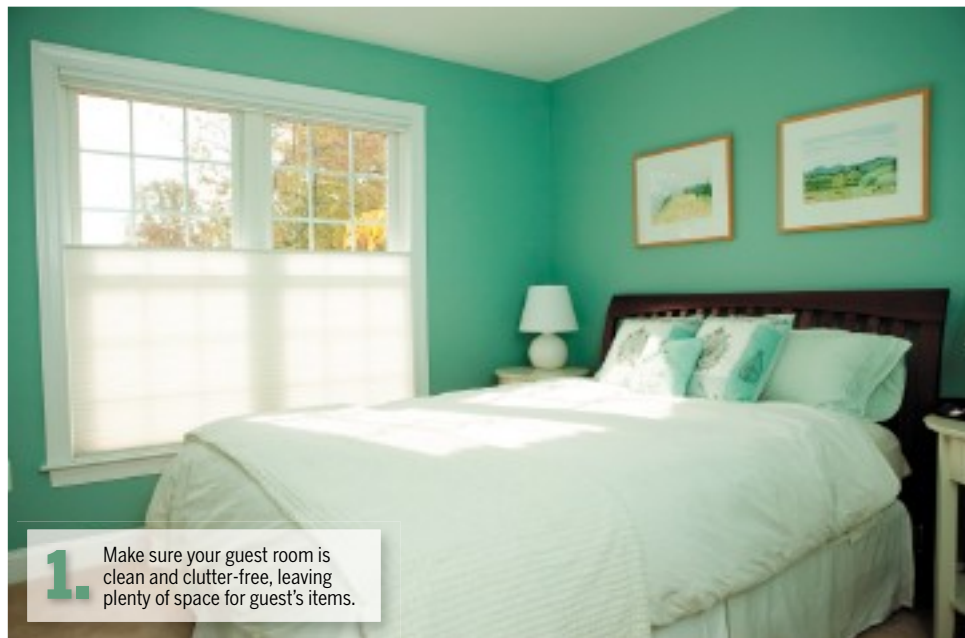
With so many people staying at Casa de Casey, she’s become an expert in making out-of-town guests feel at home.

But Casey’s just one of millions who will host out-of-town guests this winter. Last year, nearly 64 million Americans traveled more than 50 miles from home for holiday festivities, according to AAA. And with the recession in full swing, it’s likely more of those travelers will be hunkering down in guest rooms rather than hotels this season.

But transforming a space that many homeowners use to store their summer clothes or hide holiday gifts into a hotel-worthy room can be a challenge. Casey herself got a few tips from her Washington-based interior designer, Tracy Morris, on making the guest room in-law-friendly.

Here, Morris shares her tips with *The Examiner* for turning that extra bedroom into a true “guest” room:

1. Clean it up: It may seem obvious, but in addition to making sure there are fresh sheets and a dust-free nightstand, don’t forget to put that overflowing laundry basket in



1. Make sure your guest room is clean and clutter-free, leaving plenty of space for guest’s items.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

another room and clear out some space for your guests’ clothes in the closet.

“Really the main thing is just clean,” Morris says. “Just de-clutter the room.”

2. Decorate: Oftentimes a guest room is one of the last places to get paint and art on the walls, but a calming color and some conversation-piece artwork can go a long way toward making your guests feel welcome.

Casey painted her guest room a soothing green and hung watercolors from an artist she and her husband discovered while vacation-

ing in Oregon. Fresh flowers are also a simple way to make guests feel special and welcome.

3. Add creature comforts: An extra blanket at the foot of the bed, books for nighttime reading, a television to catch Conan and a bottle of water all add an extra touch of hominess to the room, Morris says.

4. Include the essentials: Just like at a hotel, make sure your company has everything they’ll need, from a bathrobe and plenty of towels to shampoo and a new toothbrush. Store these items in the guest room on the guest bathroom counter or

somewhere else in plain sight, Morris says.

“Especially for someone who’s a new guest, they may feel super-uncomfortable going through the closet [or bathroom cabinets],” she says. “Just make sure everything is out and available.”

5. Don’t forget the daytime: As hectic as the holidays are, Morris recommends leaving a house key in the guest room so your company may come and go as they please. And don’t forget to include an alarm clock in the room so they won’t miss out on any early-morning holiday fun!



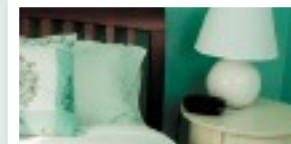
2. Use a calming wall color and add artwork to make your guests feel welcome.



3. Don’t forget to add extra comforts, such as books for nighttime reading.



4. Be sure your company has everything they may need, from towels to shampoo.



5. Include an alarm clock by the bed so guests won’t miss out on any of the fun.

Autumn drops free, organic fertilizer right at your feet and all over your yard

By Joe Lamp’l
Scripts Howard

Fall is in the air. The mornings are cool and crisp, the leaves are changing and college football is in full swing. It’s clearly my favorite time of year. But those reasons aren’t what make it so great for me. As lovely as deciduous trees are when their leaves are in glorious shades of red, yellow, orange and rust, my favorite part of this season is after the leaves have fallen. Once the now-brown leaves begin to blanket my lawn and beds, I know that it is compost time!

To be clear, I don’t relish the work of clearing off those leaves. But I do have a deep appreciation for what they will mean to my garden and landscape a few months from now, so I am happy to prepare the way.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Where most people see leaf debris as trash, along with hours of raking, bagging and hauling, I see garden beds blanketed in rich organic compost. Before they fall to the ground, leaves contain 50 to 80 percent of the nutrients that are extracted from the earth by tree roots. I will recycle this precious resource to replenish the soil and nourish all that grows in it.

As the leaves break down, earthworms will feast on them and then burrow deeper into the soil, depositing castings, and thus adding even more valuable nutrients and oxygen while improving drainage in the process. Beneficial fungi and bacteria will also assist in decomposition, consuming this raw leaf material and returning it in a nutrient-rich form that can be utilized by plant



SHNS PHOTO COURTESY COURTENAY VANDERBILT

The best part of the season is after the leaves have fallen from deciduous trees.

and tree roots more efficiently and effectively than anything man has ever created.

Within weeks after these shredded leaves are applied around my

garden beds, they’ll begin a transformation into composted organic matter that promotes the life of soil-dwelling organisms. Which in turn fortifies the plants and trees to be more pest- and disease-resistant. And what makes composted organic matter really amazing is that no matter what condition your soil is in to begin with, compost will help make loose soil retain moisture, and compacted soil will drain better.

As much as I relish this gift of nature for my garden, I see another opportunity to justify its use in the name of environmental stewardship. By keeping leaves, grass clippings and other yard waste at home, we can reduce overall landfill volume by 20 percent. Rather than ending up as unnecessary trash, these organic amendments could be going into our

own gardens to enrich the soil while reducing the need for supplemental fertilizers and other unnecessary chemicals.

Yes, in a few weeks, I’ll be gathering up and shredding not only the leaves falling from my trees, but from my neighbor’s as well. I also have the landscaping crews ready to bring me the leaves they’ve collected from their jobs. What leaves I don’t spread into the beds, I’ll store somewhere else in my yard. I’ll worry about that later. But for now, bring me all you have. It’s my organic fertilizer, multi-vitamin and soil conditioner all in one amazing package; it’s plentiful and it’s free. It doesn’t get any better.

Joe Lamp’l, host of “GardenSMART” on PBS, is a Master Gardener and author. For more, visit joe gardener.com.