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# Welcome - Making guests feel at home begins with a cordial attitude

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*By Kay O'Donnell July 31, 2004 Publication: San Antonio Express-News (TX) Page: 1E  
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The last time you had guests did you treat them well? Honestly? Did you provide comfortable bedding and gourmet coffee, or was it more like a SpongeBob sleeping bag and box juice?

Making visitors feel welcome doesn't always mean having a guest suite and private bath at the ready. It has more to do with being considerate, thoughtful and detail-oriented. Preparations are also essential, says Amy Nebens, author of the just released "A Gracious Welcome" (Chronicle Books, \$19.95). "Plan all you can before guests arrive so you can enjoy the time with them," Nebens says. The planning stage varies depending on how much time and advance warning you have regarding impending visits. Best-case scenario: You have a designated guest room, furnished and accessorized, ready for use. Worst case: Guests must make do on the living room sofa. Each scenario offers an extreme position, but either can result in a comfortable and memorable experience for guests. Permanent guest rooms Oftentimes, guest room, or spare room, furnishings consist of those extra pieces that don't quite fit in another room of the house. Or worse, worn or cast-off items that are dated and mismatched. "You want to furnish a guest room like you would any bedroom in your house in terms of window treatments (that can close and open), a chest of drawers, nightstand, and a bed," Nebens says. "Artwork," she adds, "is always welcoming, giving the room a 'lived-in' look." Interior designer Anita Henson, who also teaches on the topic, says if possible set up twin beds in a permanent guest room. "Not all guests are couples, and this does give you more flexibility," Henson says. In addition to twin beds, daybeds and trundle beds are surging in popularity, according to licensed interior designer Helen Anne Wilson. "Trundle beds have become extremely stylish," Wilson says.

Stores such as Restoration Hardware and Pottery Barn are responding to the trend by offering an assortment of these types of beds, although most need to be ordered from their catalog or online sites. Another online resource, Crate & Barrel ([crateandbarrel.com](http://crateandbarrel.com)), also features a contemporary daybed. Beds from all three outlets range from several hundred dollars to \$2,000. To enhance your guests' comfort, Wilson suggests making sure there's a table and chair in the room for the visitors to use to write a note or spread out a map. Henson also says it's essential to provide "plenty of hanging space with hangers, a collapsible luggage rack and at least one empty drawer if the guests want to use it." When it comes to the decor of a permanent guest room, Nebens says "the key to decorating is functionality and making guests feel like your house is their home away from home." "Use furnishings that give people plenty of room to unpack, good quality linens that make the bed extra comfortable, and drapes that can keep the light out in the morning for guests who like to sleep in." Just to be sure that the room is as comfortable as it looks, Henson suggests trying it out for a night or two. "This is the easiest way to determine comfort and convenience," she says.

**Dual-use rooms** Often a guest room doubles in use as a home office or exercise room, but that doesn't mean you have to shortchange your visitors on comfort or privacy. Start with moving office furniture or exercise equipment to the side of the room, Nebens says, giving guests the room they need to spread out. Then "make up a sleeper sofa bed, sofa, air mattress, etc. because a beautifully made bed is quite welcoming and instantly says bedroom," she says. If using an air mattress, Nebens suggests looking for one with a frame or "box spring" feature that raises the bed off the floor, making it easier to get in and out of. Wilson recommends looking the room over and asking "can this room be made sleepable?" Are there coverings for the windows, and a place to hang clothing and lay out personal items? To make the room feel even more personalized, make sure there's a reading light, some current magazines, a carafe of water, and possibly fresh flowers, Henson says. For the long run, consider investing in a sleeper sofa or futon, furnishings that can serve multiple purposes. Pier I offers a casual sleeper loveseat (\$375 on [pier1.com](http://pier1.com)) or opt for a more contemporary look with Eurway's Lotus loveseat sleeper (\$299 on [eurway.com](http://eurway.com)) or their Kyoto futon (\$329). Urban Outfitters ([urbanoutfitters.com](http://urbanoutfitters.com)) offers modern, hip versions of futons, loungers and even a chaise bed with prices ranging from \$320 to \$650.

**Make-do situation** If all you can offer a guest is your living room sofa, compensate by setting out high-quality bedding. Discard the fitted sheet and opt for two flat sheets for better coverage, Wilson says. "Offer a quilt or covering of some kind, but lose the old scratchy blankets" as this is not the time to pass out bedding that even your own family won't use, she says. "Offering a nice bedspread or even an antique family quilt is a nice touch to make a guest feel at home." Top it off with a good down pillow, "a great compensation for a make-do situation" Wilson says. To personalize the space, Nebens recommends preparing a basket filled with sheets, blankets and pillows "that can be used to quickly make up the 'bed' when the time comes." Allocating space

on a cleared-off bookshelf or table will allow the guest to unpack belongings, she says. If you're trying to fit more than one guest in the living room, consider purchasing a bedroll (urbanoutfitters.com), an item that can be stored easily when not in use and that provides a bit more padding and comfort than a sleeping bag. Preparing for guests is not limited to sleeping arrangements. Make sure there is room for your guests' toiletries in the bathroom and definitely make use of the guest towels. "Whether or not your guest uses (the towels) it is a nice courtesy to offer it," Wilson says. Consider buying a small bath caddy or plastic basket just for the guest, filled with towels, a bar of soap and possibly a small scented body wash, she says. For preparations such as these, Wilson suggests having as much done beforehand as possible because "you don't want to be running out to buy linens when guests are set to arrive." So stock it, store it and sit back. That way when company does come, you just might have time to visit a little.

Guest list Don't forget Alarm clock Telephone (with a list of local numbers, restaurant and shopping recommendations) Welcome basket (including activity suggestions, disposable camera, sunscreen, etc.) Water carafe and tumbler Books Daily newspaper with local section TV and radio channel guide (if you're providing a TV and radio) Iron or steamer Laundry bag and access to washing machine Nightlight

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