

I have always loved using nice linens. In general, I have pretty down to earth tastes, but I have always thought that presentation was the very most important thing when you are cooking a meal. The meal itself should look exquisite, the silverware should be beautiful and well polished, the dishes should be lovely, and the tablecloths should be nice. Raising kids, however, makes this a difficult goal to achieve. I have ruined, stained, or damaged more table cloths than you would believe because of them. Then I discovered the miracle of place mats. They saved my sanity along with my linen.

One of the nice things about place mats is that they are so colorful. You can really get kids to like using them, and appreciate them. In my house, each kid has his own place mat. George's placemat comes directly from Niagara Falls and tells all kinds of interesting facts about it that he is always reciting when he sits down at the kitchen table. Martin has a place mat which is styled to look like an old western cowboy street. If he starts making gunfire sounds, spills his drink, or otherwise makes a nuisance of himself, he gets the place mat taken away. Finally, Josh's has pictures of little fish on it. It is the perfect one for a kid of his age - 3 years olds - although I think we will get him a new one within a couple years.

We even have holiday placemats for Christmas time. It is so depressing for me not to be able to pull out the good linens around Christmas, but now that we have place mats, I don't have to worry about it. Nine out of every ten spills get completely contained. The kids know that, as long as they stay on the placemats, they will not be in trouble. This makes things less stressful for them and easier for me. It is a win-win situation, if you think about it.

What I didn't realize until I started using place mats with what nice souvenir gifts they make. A lot of people like to send a postcard from exotic destinations, but you can usually find place settings there as well. They wear better than postcards, are bigger, and they're useful too! Best of all, they can show my friends how much better life is with place mats. Many of them have kids, but they haven't discovered my secret yet.