

WITH AUTHOR **Kathryn Greeley**

A host who believes in putting collectibles to use

Kathryn Greeley turned a lifelong passion for collecting and entertaining into a successful design career. In her first book, *The Collected Tabletop*, she describes 12 events that featured her collections, home, and cooking. She spoke with USA TODAY's **John Taylor** about starting a collection, entertaining, and breaking dishes.

**WHAT IS COLLECTING?**

"The passionate search for items that speak to you that you can use on a day-to-day basis or enjoy, whether that's a utilitarian-type collection like tabletop dinnerware or whether it's a collection of miniatures of some kind that you put on the wall and enjoy as art."

display those on the wall. Or you might love a collection of blue willow dishes. You might find some of those at the flea market, some at the grocery store, and some at fine antique shops. But you can always do groupings of those in a bookcase or you can hang a grouping on the wall.

THE KEY IS TO ACTUALLY USE YOUR COLLECTED PIECES, RIGHT?

Absolutely. That is one of my biggest pet peeves. Do not collect and put it behind a closet door or a cupboard door. Get it out and use it. Nothing is too precious to use. I have broken some of my most collectible, expensive pieces, or a housekeeper may have broken them. That's just part of owning a collectible.

It grieves me, because if this willow blue china came from a house in England, that family kept it intact, and now 150 years later I've broken it. But that's just part of the use. If you have your grandmother's china, or your aunt left you a pretty collection of glassware, get it out and use it. It's of no joy to you wrapped up and packed up in a closet. ■

**DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST ITEM YOU ACQUIRED THAT STARTED YOUR PASSION FOR COLLECTING?**

I'm an only child, and I grew up having to entertain myself. I did a lot of creative pretending. My first collections were dolls and tea sets. Then as an adult, very early, I started collecting pieces of blue and white [dishes]—blue and white porcelain, blue and white dinnerware—everything from valuable pieces to flea market pieces.

I encourage people not to think of collections just as museum pieces or pieces of great value. Approach collecting in ways that are affordable and express your individual style.

AFTER THE FOOD, WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT A DINNER PARTY?

Well I don't think the food is the most important thing. The most important thing for any type of entertaining is that you make your guests feel welcome. It's the atmosphere of graciousness and gratitude that's the most important. It's that person's job to make their guests feel very special, very at ease, very comfortable. And by going to a lot of trouble and attending to details, then it makes them know that they're important.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE SEASON FOR ENTERTAINING?

I love the holidays, starting with Thanksgiving. I always do a large Thanksgiving dinner for about 24 people—friends, fam-

ily, and, as I say in the book, we take in strays. We take in anybody that doesn't have a place to have Thanksgiving, and it makes for a really fun mix of people.

I love Christmas. My husband thinks I'm sick-minded, because I put up seven live Christmas trees. This year he said, 'Well since the book's out and you're traveling a lot, I bet we're not going to put up seven Christmas trees, are we?' And I'm like, 'Sorry, dear, but yes we are.' I just love those traditions.

HOW WOULD YOU SUGGEST STARTING A COLLECTION IN A SMALL HOME?

Let's say you love pottery. You may not have a lot of cupboard space, but you can