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# Family-Friendly Winter Activities

Many people may run indoors when the temperatures outside approach or dip below freezing. But the truly adventurous see no reason why a little cold weather should keep them cooped up indoors for months at a time.

Sports and other physical activities can provide the perfect respite from the cabin fever that can settle in during long winters. Families looking to get some quality time outdoors together this winter can enjoy a host of activities in the great outdoors, even if the temperatures are a tad on the chilly side.

- **Sledding:** Sledding may remind adults of their childhoods and turn kids' snow days into fun afternoons they will never forget. Kids can seemingly ride their sleds and toboggans down snowy hills all day long, but even parents get a kick out of racing kids downhill or sharing a sled with their youngsters. While older kids can typically handle sleds on their own, parents should ride along with toddlers to prevent falls and handle steering duties. When sledding, keep a close eye for any signs that suggest kids might be getting too cold, such as shivering or clothes that are soaked through.

- **Snowshoeing:** Parents may not know that many retailers sell snowshoes for children. While snowshoeing can be physically demanding, it's also a fun way for families that like family walks to continue those traditions even if there are a few inches of snow on the ground. Make sure kids are bundled up, paying extra attention to their footwear. Kids will enjoy snowshoeing more if their boots are both comfortable and capable of keeping their feet warm.

- **Snowman building:** Perhaps no outdoor winter activity is more conducive to family fun than building a snowman. The season's first substantial snowfall provides the perfect opportunity for parents and

their children to start building some snowmen. While "snowman building" is unlikely to find its way onto any gym schedules, building a snowman provides a great workout. Lifting snow is great strength training, while pushing snow to form Frosty's body is a great way to get in some cardiovascular exercise.

- **Skiing and snowboarding:** The earlier youngsters start skiing and/or snowboarding, the more likely such activities will prove second nature. Many resorts offer skiing and snowboarding lessons to kids and adults, so parents can book weekend getaways for the family to nearby resorts and foster a love of winter sports in youngsters.

While it's tempting to huddle up indoors when winter hits full swing, families who embrace the great outdoors when the temperatures dip can avoid cabin fever and enjoy one another's company along the way.



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# Improve Entertaining Spaces

Some homes are seemingly built for entertaining, while others may need a little help to make them more fit for hosting dinner, holiday gatherings or an evening with friends.

Overall, one-quarter of people entertain guests in their home either daily or weekly across the globe. One-third entertain monthly, according to findings from GFK Insights.

People who open their homes to loved ones may want to make some modifications to their spaces to improve the experience for all involved.

- Tame the clutter. Look for ways to reduce clutter in rooms where entertaining takes place. Built-ins with bookshelves and cabinets can hide electronics and wayward toys or collectibles. Focus attention on the entryway, hanging hooks for collecting coats, keys and shoes, so they do not overrun the foyer. Remove any knickknacks or other breakable items from shelves or on coffee tables to free up more space.
- Improve conversation seating. Arrange tables and chairs to create conversation nooks for guests who want to talk and get to know one another better. Consider moving out big and bulky sofas in favor of lower seats or comfortable chairs that will take up less room and improve flow in entertaining areas.
- Find the pieces you like. Think about how you tend to entertain and then cater your space to those preferences. For example, a large dining table with fold-out extensions or leaves is ideal for someone who regularly hosts formal dinner parties. Renovate a room to include a small bar and club chairs for a lounge feel if cocktail parties are typical.
- Improve lighting. Work with an electrician and/or designer who can offer ideas for lighting that can set the mood for entertaining. Rooms



that are dull and dim can benefit from overhead lighting fixtures if there are none already available. Task lighting in the kitchen under cabinets can make it easy to prepare food for guests. Wall sconces or focused lighting on artwork can establish a dramatic effect.

- Do major construction. Consider working with a builder to make some changes if you simply don't have the space to entertain. Taking down a wall can open kitchens to living spaces, while adding a deck or three-season room off the kitchen or dining room can provide more space for guests to congregate.
- Install a guest bath. Update or add a bathroom near the main entertaining areas. This allows guests to discretely use the bathroom and keeps them from roaming in areas of the house you would prefer they avoid.



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# Comfortable Winter Entertaining Ideas

Winter entertaining need not end once Christmas and New Year's Day have come and gone. Getting together with friends and family is still possible even if the weather outside is frightful. When Mother Nature takes a chilly turn, those who don't want the party can consider the following entertaining ideas.

- Indulge in sweet treats. Comfort foods can make even the most blustery winds easier to tolerate. Invite people over for a dessert party. At a dessert pot luck party, everyone brings along a favorite decadent dessert, from molten lava chocolate cake to warm bread pudding. Serve alongside tea, coffee and hot chocolate. Adults can enjoy the added punch of spiked beverages, which can warm everyone up instantly.
- Host a "snowed in" party. Spending a day cooped up inside when the roads are covered in snow might not be your idea of fun, but invite a mix of friends and neighbors who live nearby over, and this impromptu party can make the cabin fever disappear. Ask guests to bring one food item or beverage. Light a fire in the fireplace and set out some cozy throw blankets. If possible, invite everyone outdoors to build a snowman.
- Get physical. Get physically active with friends or family members by staging mock Olympic events in the yard. These can be fun "sports" created by participants or variations on fun winter activities. Sledding races, snowball dodging contests, ice skating obstacle courses, and much more can make for an entertaining afternoon.
- Get cooking. Cooking can certainly pass the time, and it can be even more enjoyable when done in the company of others. Send out an invitation for friends to stop by for a meal or plan a meal prep party.
- Host a movie marathon. Handpick some favorite films and invite

everyone over for a movie marathon. Fill the family room, home theater room or living room to capacity and host a group for a film fest. If space permits, set up one room with a children's movie for youngsters, while the adults retire to another room for movies that are more their speed. A buffet table set up with assorted snacks will help keep bellies full while guests watch some favorite flicks.

Winter days and nights are ripe for entertaining possibilities. These events help squash the cabin fever that can sometimes develop during the colder times of year.





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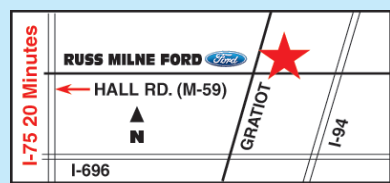
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# How To Prepare for an Out-of-Town Breakdown

Road trips make for excellent getaways. Whether you're embarking on a weekend excursion or a lengthy vacation, driving yourself to your destination is a great way to travel, especially for families looking to save money.

Though no one wants to think about the possibility of a vehicle breakdown while out of town, such things do happen. How prepared drivers can go a long way toward determining how affected they and their passengers will be if this happens.

- Get a checkup before skipping town. It sounds simple, but many drivers may overlook the importance of vehicle checkups before departing on weekend getaways or longer trips. A full checkup (including an oil change if the recommended interval has passed or is approaching) can uncover any problems that might derail a trip.

- Examine your options in regard to emergency roadside assistance. Insurance providers typically offer emergency roadside assistance to policy holders for a nominal fee, and memberships in clubs such as AAA also are inexpensive. That's especially true when drivers compare the cost of extra coverage or AAA membership to the potential price tag of a tow truck and out-of-town repairs. Drivers should note that out-of-town repairs may require costly overnight shipping of parts so travelers can get back on the road as quickly as possible. Roadside assistance offered through an insurance company or motor club may include tow trucks free of charge up to a certain number of miles, allowing travelers to get their cars back home without breaking the bank.



- Inspect tires, including your spare. Many a road trip has been derailed or thrown off schedule due to a flat tire or tires. Before departing, check the condition of your existing tires, including the spare, as well as the air pressure in each one. Firestone notes that many vehicle manufacturers recommend replacing tires at six years, regardless of tread wear. Tires that get heavy usage should be replaced even more frequently. To determine if tread wear is something to worry about, Firestone recommends the penny test, which involves placing a penny head first into several tread grooves across the tire. If the top of Abraham Lincoln's head is always visible, then your tires are shallow and worn and need to be replaced. But if part of Lincoln's head is always covered, your tires can probably withstand the trip. Worn tire treads can make it hard for tires to safely navigate roads in inclement weather, so don't discount the importance of this simple step.

- Bring along some basic tools. Pack some basic tools, such as screw drivers, wrenches, pliers, a trolley jack, a battery charger, and, of course, duct tape, which may help you temporarily solve some issues on your own. This is especially important for drivers who intend to visit remote locations where mobile phone networks may be inaccessible and the nearest tow truck might be far away. Hone your tire-changing skills before hitting the road and make sure tools are still capable of performing the kind of basic maintenance that might help your vehicle safely return to civilization.

Vehicle breakdowns happen, even while on vacation. Some advance preparation can help drivers avert out-of-town disasters.

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# Questions To Ask Before Embracing DIY

Home improvement projects are as popular as ever. In its 2017 True Cost Survey, the home improvement site HomeAdvisor found that, between February 2016 and February 2017, homeowners spent an average of just over \$5,000 on home projects. That marked a nearly \$1,900 increase from the year prior, indicating that homeowners are increasingly opening their wallets to transform their homes.

In addition to spending money to improve their homes, many homeowners are spending their time on projects as well. While DIY projects can provide a sense of fulfillment and personal attachment to one's home, prospective do-it-yourselfers should ask themselves some questions before picking up their hammers and getting to work.

## Do I have any physical limitations?

No matter how much home improvement television shows may simplify projects, prospective DIYers should know that such undertakings are typically very difficult and oftentimes physically demanding. Homeowners with existing health conditions or other physical limitations may not be capable of performing certain tasks or may need to take frequent breaks, which can delay projects.

## Do I have the time?

Many home improvement projects require a significant amount of time to complete. Homeowners whose time is already stretched thin with commitments to work and/or family may not be able to complete projects within a reasonable amount of time. That's fine if working on a part of the home that won't affect daily life, but can prove stressful or problematic if the project is in a room, such as a kitchen or bathroom, that residents of the home use

each day. Novice DIYers should be especially honest with themselves about the time they have available to work on the project, as such homeowners are bound to experience a few time-consuming missteps along the way.

## Can I afford it?

While DIY might seem more affordable than hiring a contractor, that's not necessarily true. Novice DIYers may need to buy or rent tools, costs that can add up. Contractors already have the tools necessary to begin and complete projects, so the cost savings of DIY might not be as significant as homeowners think. Before going the DIY route, homeowners should solicit estimates from contractors, comparing the estimates to how much a project will cost if homeowners do it themselves.

## Can I go it alone?

Many home improvement projects require more than one set of hands, and it's risky and even foolish for first-time DIYers to assume they can begin a project and see it through to completion entirely on their own. Homeowners whose spouses, partners, friends, or relatives are willing to chip in may think that's enough. However, the DIY skills of those who volunteer may be a mystery until the project begins. Novice DIYers should enlist the help of a friend or family member with home improvement experience. If no such person is available, it may be wise to hire a contractor instead.

Home improvement projects may seem simple on television. But prospective do-it-yourselfers must make honest assessments of their skills, time and budgets before taking on a DIY project.



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# A Sweet and Savory Halloween Treat

Save the tricks for another time; this Halloween is all about the treats. Halloween parties are par for the course, and spooktacular hosts and hostesses want to serve their guests something special. Enter a dessert hybrid that layers various flavors to create a masterpiece that simply works.

This recipe for "Grilled Chocolate Chip Cookie Bacon S'mores," courtesy of the National Pork Board and Tiffany Edwards of Le Crème de la Crumb, is the Frankenstein's monster of the dessert world. You'd be hard-pressed to find a person who can pass up the salty swagger of smoked bacon paired with the creamy richness of chocolate and the crunch and sweetness of a chocolate chip cookie. Top it with marshmallow and this Halloween treat is alive with flavor!

## Grilled Chocolate Chip Cookie Bacon S'mores

Yields 12

- 12 thick-cut slices bacon (hickory smoked, Applewood smoked or maple)
- 12 large marshmallows
- 12 2-inch squares chocolate good quality
- 12 skewers
- 12 tablespoons butter, softened
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 egg plus 1 egg yolk
- 2 cups flour



- 1 3.4-ounce box instant French vanilla pudding mix, dry, not prepared
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips

**Make the cookies:** In a bowl, cream together butter, sugar and brown sugar for 1 to 2 minutes until light and very fluffy. Add vanilla, egg and egg yolk, and mix well. In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, pudding mix, baking soda, and salt.

Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients and mix until incorporated and dough comes together. Stir in chocolate chips. Cover very tightly and chill for at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Roll dough into balls (about 1 1/2 inch) and space 2 to 3 inches apart on a baking sheet. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until lightly browned on top. Allow to cool 5 to 10 minutes on baking sheet before transferring to a cooling rack to cool completely.

**To grill the bacon:** Heat a grill to medium-high heat. Thread bacon onto skewers in an S-shape. Place skewers directly on grill and cook 8 to 12 minutes, rotating as needed to ensure even cooking. Transfer to a plate, let cool and then remove bacon from skewers. Set aside.

**Meanwhile, roast the marshmallows:** Roast marshmallows directly over the grill using skewers or roasting sticks until cooked to your preference.

**Assemble s'mores:** Flip one cookie over so it's upside down. Place a square of chocolate on top of the upside-down cookie, then top with grilled marshmallow, bacon and a right side-up second cookie. Serve immediately.

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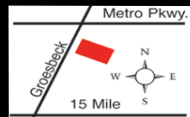
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