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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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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 are 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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How To Time Holiday Shopping Right

The holiday season begins at the end of November and stretches into the first week of January. But this five-week stretch may not necessarily be the best time for everyone to shop.

Harvard Business Review says that the retail industry has been turned on its head in recent years, and shoppers and retailers may want to rethink their approaches to the holiday shopping season. Consumers are no longer interested in retailers dictating their shopping schedules, and some people have grown accustomed to buying products when they want them — especially when price is of no concern.

Even budget-conscious shoppers have changed their habits, says the shopping advisor RetailNext. Many holiday shoppers are delaying their shopping until January to take advantage of postseason sales.

Holiday shopping need not wait until after the holiday season, either. A 2017 RetailMeNot survey found that 45 percent of U.S. consumers said they planned to start shopping before November 1. One-quarter of the survey respondents said they planned to start shopping before October, and 12 percent started shopping for the holidays in the summer.

So when should consumers do their holiday shopping? It all depends on what fits a person's individual needs.

• Shop sales, not schedules. If budget is a big concern, shoppers should grab items that are on sale whenever they are available. That can mean shopping at any time of the year. People can try

making a master shopping list early in the year and saving it on their mobile phones. While shopping throughout the year, items from the list can be purchased and stored until the holidays.

• Shop your strengths. Those who get a thrill from tackling their entire shopping list in one haul can still do that. Shopping in this manner can help shoppers focus on the task at hand and reduce the likelihood of wasting time. But keep in mind that, according to a survey conducted by Business Wire, 65 percent of holiday shoppers scramble to complete their purchases in the last two weeks before Christmas, so shoppers who delay may be stuck in long lines at the mall.

• Embrace in-store pickup. Many retailers are merging their online and brick-and-mortar operations. Shoppers have the convenience of price-comparison and online shopping, with the physical enjoyment of going out to the store to complete their purchases. In-store pickup often enables shoppers to avoid hefty shipping fees, as in-store pickup is free. Plus, scoping out items online — and ensuring they're in stock — saves the hassle of making a trip in vain.

Shoppers can look beyond the conventional holiday season to get the best prices and deals that fit their shopping needs.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Fall Wine and Food Tips For Outdoor Entertaining

Autumn is the ultimate time for outdoor dining. For your next gathering, bring the party out to the deck or patio for an evening of enjoyable light bites and delicious wines. If you need some inspiration to create a delectable spread, one resource is St. Francis Winery and Vineyards, a certified-sustainable winery in Sonoma County, California. The winery offers luscious, fruit-driven varietal wines and a food-pairing program voted #1 Restaurant in America by OpenTable.

If you are hosting an autumn gathering, elevate the evening with some tips and pairing ideas from the winery's culinary team.

White Wine Pairings

Chardonnay is a perfect white wine to drink in cool weather. Consider serving a Sonoma County Chardonnay 2016 (SRP: \$16.99), a classic, medium-bodied white wine that is refreshing, yet rich in flavors of green apple, juicy pear and melon. The winery achieves these aromas and flavors by picking the grapes in the cool of night and fermenting in French oak barrels.

Serve the Chardonnay alongside a tray of Smoked Salmon Mousse in Phyllo Cups. The creamy salmon mousse, paired with the crisp, bright flavors of the wine, refresh the palate and will have guests going back for seconds.

Another delicious pairing with Chardonnay is a Burrata, Beet and Grilled Peach Salad. Featuring fresh, seasonal produce, the sweetness of the beets and peaches will pair wonderfully with the melon and citrus notes of the wine for an enjoyable combination.

Red Wine Pairings

With the brisk fall air upon us, add a spicy, rich and balanced Sonoma County 'Old Vines' Zinfandel 2015 (SRP: \$20.99) to your spread. This classic red wine, produced from 50 to 100-year-old vines, has enticing baking spice



aromas and mouthwatering flavors of wild, crushed berries and red licorice.

You can serve this 'Old Vines' Zinfandel with a starter, such as Goat Cheese and Olive Skillet, a robust, easy-tomake dish perfect for dipping your choice of breads or crackers. The cheeses with tomato sauce and herbs bring out the warm spicy scents and fruit-forward flavors within the wine. Better yet, the wine's velvety texture accentuates the olives' saltiness, making for a harmonious pairing. One more appetizer option to make for your guests is Peperonata and Ricotta Crostinis, an appetizing blend of tomato sauce, red pepper flakes and garlic, topped with ricotta cheese. The Zinfandel's bold flavors and richness will balance this dish nicely without overpowering the creamy ricotta.

Create an evening to remember, complete with perfect pairings of two Sonoma wines and four appetizers. Your guests are sure to leave satisfied and impressed by an array of flavors that nod to the transition of seasons and help you welcome the tastes of even cooler weather.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media





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Learn How To Carve a Better Pumpkin

Toothy grins and a mesmerizing orange glow help make jacko'-lanterns captivating sights come Halloween. Pumpkin carving is an autumn tradition and runs the gamut of simple designs to more intricate artwork worthy of any medium. Although anyone can grab a pumpkin and get started, when done correctly, jack-o'lantern designs can last for several days.

• Start with a fresh pumpkin. Look for pumpkins that have a thick, green stem. These usually are fresh and haven't been handled much. A thick stem also may indicate fleshier pumpkin walls that can be carved more easily. Avoid pumpkins that are soft or full of blemishes, or those that have dried, shriveled stems.

• Cut a hole in the back. Rather than impeding the structural integrity of the pumpkin by cutting off the top and the stem for interior access, cut a hole in the back of the pumpkin. This will still make it easy to reach inside and clean out the pumpkin.

• Scoop out the pulp and seeds. Be sure to thoroughly clean the inside of the pumpkin. Leaving the pulpy, stringy matter and seeds inside can cause the pumpkin to rot that much faster and produce a foul odor. Scoopers, spoons and even hand shovels can help.

• Keep it cool. Heat can adversely affect carved pumpkins, so work in a cool area and store the pumpkin in a cold garage or refrigerator if you need a few extra days before displaying it. Also, carving experts suggest using an electric light inside rather than a candle; by using a candle, you're essentially cooking the pumpkin from the inside.

• Work in your lap. When carving faces or intricate designs, looking down onto the pumpkin provides more control.

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• Don't cut all the way through. Many pumpkin designers end up shaving or scraping off the outer rind of the pumpkin, but leave a delicate orange film underneath. Light can still shine through, but the design will not collapse on itself as easily if you were to cut straight through the pumpkin wall. Experiment with different tools to achieve the desired look.

Maintain the freshness. Rubbing exposed areas of the pumpkin flesh with petroleum jelly may help keep the pumpkin moist. Some designs will last for a few days. However, since pumpkins are highly perishable, it's wise to wait to carve until a day or two before putting a pumpkin on display.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



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House of Optical thriving in new Clawson location



The new location is at 250 E. 14 Mile Road, just a block east of Main Street.

PHOTOS BY JOEY YASHINSKY - FOR DIGITAL FIRST MEDIA

By Joey Yashinsky

House of Optical, a familyowned Metro Detroit institution, moved one month ago to a 4,000-square-foot building only five blocks from the previous home. The new location can be found at 250 E. 14 Mile Road, just a block east of Main Street.

"All of our equipment is state of the art," said Martin Casey, House of Optical's owner for almost 18 years. "It's a new location for us, but with the same great doctors and friendly staff."

There are three full-time optometrists, including Dr. Robert Feldman, a House of Optical veteran of more than 30 years. He is joined by Dr. Drew Langton and Dr. Mark Simard.

Langton has already noticed an uptick in energy following the move.

"Patients really seem to be enjoying our new place," said Langton. "It's definitely an upgrade and the staff is excited to be here, too."

House of Optical offers a wide range of services, including full comprehensive eye exams, contact lens exams, and medical eye care. The expert staff will help select glasses that not only look and feel great, but also ones that fit within the specific visual needs of each particular patient.

As for the glasses themselves, the selection is plentiful. House of Optical offers racks of gorgeous frames from all the hottest designers, including Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, Burberry, Nike, Oakley, Lacoste, and Versace. There is a large stock of contact lenses available, meaning that patients eager to see with perfect clarity aren't forced to retreat home and wait several weeks for a package to arrive.

At House of Optical, a patient's needs are catered to with speed and accuracy. With an onsite lab, requests for new glasses with a new prescription will often get turned around in less than an hour, a claim very few businesses can boast.

"If you can think it, we can do it," said Langton.

Doors are open six days a week, with Sunday being the only time this hard-working staff puts its feet up and takes a well-deserved breather.

There has never been a better time to update your prescription, pick out a fashionable pair of shades, and prepare to enjoy all the world has to offer in exemplary 20-20 vision.

House of Optical is the ideal place to make that dream a reality.

