



Holidays at Home

*Your guide to a festive and
safe holiday season*

PANDEMIC

**DOCTORS URGE
PUBLIC TO MAKE
SAFETY TOP
PRIORITY**

IN THE KITCHEN

**STOCK THE
PANTRY WITH
HOLIDAY BAKING
INGREDIENTS**

HOLIDAY DECOR

**MUST-HAVES TO
ACHIEVE WINTER
WONDERLAND AT
HOME**

HOME & DECOR

Keeping traditions alive during an unusual holiday season **PAGE 3**

Home lighting to add to your holiday wish list **PAGE 5**

Home projects that don't require a professional **PAGE 6**

Tips to improve indoor air quality and breathe better at home **PAGE 8**

Planting bulbs offers us the glimmer of hope that we all need **PAGE 22**

Must-haves to achieve a holiday wonderland **PAGE 27**

Eco-friendly home cleaning hacks **PAGE 34**

The meaning of the menorah **PAGE 42**

Why are Christmas colors red and green? **PAGE 46**

ACTIVITIES & ADVICE

5 fun DIY craft projects for

fall **PAGE 9**

How to plan virtual office parties this holiday season **PAGE 11**

A plethora of pandemic gifts available this holiday season **PAGE 15**

Give the gift of citrus this holiday season for pop of cheer **PAGE 17**

Help isolated loved ones this holiday season **PAGE 18**

6 ways to stick to a holiday budget **PAGE 19**

Factors to consider when planning year-round outdoor dining spaces **PAGE 29**

Identify winter birds in backyards **PAGE 31**

5 tips for thanking your heroes this holiday season **PAGE 33**

Safe holiday season volunteering ideas **PAGE 35**

How to select safe toys for kids this holiday season **PAGE 37**

This holiday season, doctors urge public to make safety a top priority **PAGE 38**

4 tips to help prevent electrical fires at home **PAGE 43**

Great gifts for book lovers **PAGE 45**

Housing instability and COVID-19: Help on the way **PAGE 48**

IN THE KITCHEN

Stock the pantry with holiday baking ingredients **PAGE 12**

A great steak starts with a sangria marinade, says one top chef **PAGE 21**

Serve potato pancakes for holiday celebrations **PAGE 28**

Pointers for holiday baking **PAGE 40**

Holiday baking gets even sweeter with brownies **PAGE 41**



33



46

GO & DO

6250 Metropolitan
Parkway, Dock D
Sterling Heights, MI 48312

CONTACT US

Customer service/circulation:
586-731-1809

ADVERTISING

Advertising: 586-716-8100

STAFF

Publisher, Michigan Region:

Greg Mazanec,
mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com

Vice president of news:

Don Wyatt, 248-285-9652,
dwyatt@medianewsgroup.com

Custom Content Editor:

Jenny Sherman, 248-284-7046
jsheerman@medianewsgroup.com

A 21st Century Media
publication managed by
MediaNews Group



28



19

TRADITION

Keeping traditions alive during an unusual holiday season

This holiday season may look a bit different due to social distancing. But just because everyone is not physically together, doesn't mean your family can't share its favorite traditions.

The Olesen family of O&H Danish Bakery knows how important holiday traditions are to feeling connected to loved ones. Now in its fourth generation, the family-owned and operated bakery is sharing its best tips for creating holiday cheer from anywhere:

- **Celebrate virtually:** In a survey commissioned by O&H Danish Bakery and conducted by SWNS Media Group and OnePoll, nearly 80% of respondents say time with family is their favorite part of the holiday season. Whether your tradition is a Christmas movie marathon, a caroling session around the piano or eating certain foods and baked treats, you can enjoy these activities together over video chat this year.

- **Share traditional foods:** The sensory memories that good food creates are powerful. In fact, 44% of people say the holiday spirit wouldn't be the same if they didn't have their traditional holiday dessert.

If you are like many families, that favorite dessert is Kringle, a traditional Danish treat made of 36 layers of butter and pastry. Among O&H's special holiday offerings are Thanks-giving Stuffed Kringle, A Very Danish Christmas Kringle and the classic Pecan Kringle. Over the past 70 years, the award-winning bakery has shipped to more than 100 countries, making landfall in all seven continents, including Antarctica. This year, doorstep delivery makes it easy to order a traditional favorite for your own household or send a gift to family members



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

This year might be especially difficult for families who are physically separated, but there are many ways to spread cheer and keep traditions alive.

near and far. Visit ohdanishbakery.com.

- **Plan ahead:** When it comes to ordering gifts and specially baked treats, make sure to account for busy schedules and congested delivery services to ensure all your goodies arrive on time. Take note of shipping times and policies, as well as ordering deadlines for each company. For example, O&H allows customers to pre-order Kringle and schedule a preferred delivery date in the future.

- **Create hygge:** Evoking the sights, sounds and aromas of a typical holiday season will help make

this year feel more cheerful. Take a cue from Danish culture and embrace hygge. Pronounced "hoo-ga," it means creating a cozy atmosphere and enjoying the good things in life, such as the warm glow of candlelight or a steaming cup of cocoa — and there is no better time of year to do it than the holiday season.

This year might be especially difficult for families who are physically separated, but there are many ways to spread cheer and keep traditions alive.

— *Story courtesy of StatePoint Media*



Evoking the sights, sounds and aromas of a typical holiday season will help make this year feel more cheerful.



HOME DECOR

Home lighting to add to your holiday wish list

Spending more time at home working, learning and simply living? The holiday season is the perfect opportunity to gift your household with lighting that enhances the feel and function of your spaces.

To take advantage of the best deals of the season, create your “lighting wish-list” in advance of Cyber Monday. Manufacturers such as Progress Lighting are making it easy to plan ahead. As you seek inspiration, consider these designs, which align with the latest home decor trends:

- **Bath & Vanity:** Create a serene bathroom oasis capturing the old and the new. Featuring a clean, precise design, the Hansford Collection’s four-light bath and vanity bracket with an Antique Bronze finish lends itself to farmhouse, coastal or industrial interiors. For a modern, yet timeless look, consider the Carisa Collection’s three-light Vintage Gold Bath light. Its metallic finish supports glossy white glass globes.

- **Ceiling Fans:** Add expansive design to great rooms, living rooms and bedrooms with statement-making ceiling fans. The Springer Collection 60-inch 12-Blade Distressed Walnut Coastal Windmill fan, inspired by the form and function of a windmill, has an architectural bronze finish ideal for farmhouse, industrial and transitional interior settings. For sophisticated, modern design, consider the Glandon Collection 60-inch fan, which has full-range dimming and reversible blades in driftwood and walnut.

- **Chandeliers:** Complement rustic and modern farmhouse home décor in hallways, foyers and great rooms, as well as urban industrial and coastal interior settings, with the

four-light linear chandelier of the Gulliver Collection. Its three circular bands wrap together for an open design. Dual-toned frame color combinations of graphite feature weathered gray accents. Or, create a soft, muted glow with the four-light black chandelier in the Durrell Collection. Inside the sailcloth linen shade nestle light bases on gently curved arms coated in a beautiful finish.

Demand attention with the Lassiter Five-Light Brushed Nickel Chandelier. Square tubing with clean angles and striking vintage light sockets blend the modern with traditional.

- **Close-to-Ceiling:** A new category of vintage modern fixtures takes center stage with this convertible fixture in the Debut Collection. Delicate details in a graphite finish create a statement-making focal piece for a variety of interiors — whether mounted flush to the ceiling or chain-hung — for a fitting stage to feature nostalgic, vintage lamps. For rustic flair, consider a close-to-ceiling fixture in the Durrell Collection featuring a round open-cage frame coated in a farmhouse-style matte black finish.

- **Outdoor:** Enhance modern and transitional style settings outdoors with the minimalist, yet exciting design of the Square Wall Lantern. The crisscross design of the Hollingsworth Collection Wall Lantern surrounds clear seeded glass, emulating popular farmhouse décor and when paired with vintage or traditional bulbs, enhances a variety of transitional exteriors.

- **Pendants:** The concentric rings of Equinox pendants pivot for an otherworldly feel inspired by astronomy, whereas Penn,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

By upgrading home lighting during the holidays, you can affordably gift your family beautiful, functional spaces. At left, create a serene bathroom oasis capturing the old and the new.

a one-light large pendant with a clear glass sphere in a natural brass finish, embraces a modern take on vintage electric design.

- **Controls:** Experience

the convenience of touchless lighting with voice control through Siri, Amazon Alexa, or the Google Assistant using the iDevices Smart Lighting Con-

trols. Manage home lighting from anywhere and set dynamic scenes via the connected app.

By upgrading home lighting during the holidays, you

can affordably gift your family beautiful, functional spaces.

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Home projects that don't require a professional



While spending more time at home, you may have noticed the little things that need to be fixed, and small ways you can improve the appearance and functionality of your home. So why not use this time to test your skills with a few DIY projects?

Here are some easy, affordable tips to fix those items that have been nagging at you, as well as check off small projects that will boost your home's aesthetic.

1. First impressions are everything. From your family and friends to the mail carrier, your front door greets everyone who comes to your home. But it can take a beating from weather and constant use, so revitalize it with a fresh coat of paint. Once the paint has dried, accent it with a new door knocker, hardware or address plate. Worried about drilling into the door? Secure these items with T-Rex Mounting Tape. Mounting tape is a strong, weather-resistant tape for heavy-duty projects that replaces nails, screws and staples.

2. Trim the walls. Accenting a room with wood trim is a quick way to add another level of depth and detail to the interior of your home, and it won't cost a lot. Your local home improvement store can provide the best trim to fit your budget. For a smooth installation, ditch the nail gun and runny glues, and opt for a fast-adhering super glue tape, which sticks on contact and works just as well as traditional nails.

3. Bolster your security. Feeling safe at home is important, and security cameras are a quick and easy solution to deter unwanted visitors and offer you peace of mind. If you've been toying with the idea of adding smart devices and cameras to the exterior of your home, look to install them above high-risk entry points, such as the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

During these uncertain times, staying active and checking those to-dos off your list will give both you and your home a much needed refresher.

front door, back and side doors, and the garage. There are many great security cameras that can be easily mounted to the exterior of your home without professional installation.

4. Effortless gutter repair. One project to check off your list is fixing that leaky gutter you've been ignoring. Don't worry, it's not as daunting a task as it might

seem. Simply wrap waterproof tape around the leak and smooth it around all of the gutter ridges for a tight seal. Formulated to withstand extreme temperatures from -70 to 200 de-

grees, the UV-resistant formulation will prevent the tape from breaking down under harsh sunlight. Now how simple was that?

During these uncertain times, staying active

and checking those to-dos off your list will give both you and your home a much needed refresher.

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

HOME MAINTENANCE

Tips to improve indoor air quality and breathe better at home

With more of life centered at home due to cool weather and social distancing, it's time to ensure the space where your family spends the majority of its time is healthy and safe.

What many people don't know is that concentrations of air pollutants can typically be up to five times higher inside one's home than out, and sometimes far more, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. However, there are many simple actions you can take to breathe better in your home:

- **Monitor carbon monoxide:** This potentially deadly gas can be emitted by a faulty gas-burning home appliance. Monitor for carbon monoxide using detectors placed in major areas of the home, especially the bedrooms.

- **Make the switch to VOC-free:** Most paints and stains, along with aerosol sprays, air fresheners and other household products, contain Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), which emit gases that can result in respiratory problems, headaches and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat, among other health problems. Take a cue from forward-thinking institutions like the Getty Museum and Google and swap out conventional paints in your home interiors for an eco-friendly, non-toxic alternative such as ECOS Paints. The brand, which has a 35-year history of offering VOC- and odor-free paints and stains in virtually any color, uses sustainable ingredients and can deliver directly to a home or business. To learn more, visit ecospaints.net.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

When it comes to creating a healthy home sanctuary, taking steps to manage the most common indoor air pollutants should be a top priority.

"We want people to feel good about what they are bringing into their homes. This is why we are transparent about ingredients and VOC testing results," says Julian Crawford, ECOS Paints CEO.

- **Keep airborne dust to a minimum:** Dust carries a variety of contaminants, including bacteria and al-

lergens. Mop and dust often using a wet mop and dust cloth. Vacuum often as well using a vacuum with a HEPA filter, which traps small particles.

- **Eliminate moisture from the air:** Moisture promotes mold, which can cause serious health problems when left unabated. Reduce moisture by elim-

inating sources of water leaks, installing exhaust fans in kitchens, using air conditioning, and positioning dehumidifiers in high-moisture rooms such as bathrooms, laundry rooms and basements.

- **Reduce airborne particles:** Install an air purifier to trap irritating particles, including mold, pollen

and pet dander, which are particularly bad for people with respiratory problems like asthma. Brush pets often — outdoors if possible — and give pets regular baths.

- **Decrease dirty air:** Replace HVAC filters regularly. While the optimal frequency that you perform this task depends on the type of filter, the number of pets at home

and other factors, a good reference point is the manufacturer's guidelines.

When it comes to creating a healthy home sanctuary, taking steps to manage the most common indoor air pollutants should be a top priority.

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

ACTIVITIES

5 fun DIY craft projects for fall

Give your home a warm and cozy vibe this fall with a few DIY projects that are sure to add seasonal cheer to any space. Whether you're looking for a rainy day activity to keep kids busy or searching for affordable décor options, these fall craft ideas are a great place to start — all you need is your creativity and a few supplies.

Celebrate Fall Foliage. Add fall flavor to a tabletop or mantel by filling mason jars with wheat and dried baby's breath flowers. Give the mason jar an elevated look by wrapping it with jute ribbon and lace. Or, you can simply roll coordinating scrapbooking paper into decorative cuffs that slip inside.

Have a Pumpkin Party. Carving pumpkins can be messy and dangerous for little ones. This year skip the mess and decorate pumpkins using duct tape. Duck Tape provides a fun and creative way to craft stylish and spooky pumpkin designs. Available in a variety of colors, designs and licenses, there's a tape for everyone in the family. Kids can simply cover a pumpkin with the tape of their choice or cut out a scary stencil to provide the illusion of a carved pumpkin. Duck Brand even offers Glow in the Dark Duck Tape so creations can be enjoyed at night. Pro tip: use craft pumpkins that won't go bad or attract unwanted guests. You can even enjoy them year after year.

Give Thanks. Banners are an easy way to make your own décor without spending a lot of money. DIY banners look great on a front porch to welcome guests or they can be used on a mantel. Easily create a banner



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

There's no time like the present to get crafty, so grab a cup of cider and schedule a fun family "crafternoon."

with paper and duct tape. Write your own message or cut out shapes like leaves and pumpkins and attach them to twine or string.

Get Cocoa Cozy. Nothing is better on a crisp fall day than a cup of hot cider or cocoa. Make sure everyone in the family has their own customizable mug by

using chalkboard paint. Use a quality painter's tape, such as Duck Clean Release painter's tape, to create a writable area. Remove the tape and bake the mug for a custom creation that can be personalized with names or festive phrases.

Craft a Welcoming

Wreath. Wreaths are the ultimate seasonal décor item — they are perfect on the front door to welcome guests into your home or can be used to line interior windows for a festive feel. However, store-bought versions can be expensive. Test your crafting skills with a duct tape leaf masterpiece.

All you have to do is create a variety of leaves in fall hues out of colored Duck Tape: make two of each leaf, then add wire to the sticky side of one of the leaves so it can easily be shaped, place the two leaves together and repeat the steps until you have your desired amount of leaves.

For more fall craft projects and DIY inspiration, visit duckbrand.com.

There's no time like the present to get crafty, so grab a cup of cider and schedule a fun family "crafternoon."

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



CELEBRATIONS

How to plan virtual office parties this holiday season

Holiday parties are a tradition at many businesses. A 2019 survey from the outplacement services firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas found that 76 percent of companies planned to hold holiday parties in 2019.

As popular as holiday office parties may be, few businesses are likely to gather in person this holiday season as the world continues to confront the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing guidelines may put many holiday office parties on indefinite hold, but there are still ways for employees to gather this holiday season.

Virtual meeting apps like Zoom have helped many businesses stay connected during the pandemic, and there's no reason why the same platform cannot be utilized when hosting virtual office parties this holiday season. While it might not be the same as planning in person holiday office parties, planning a virtual office get-together can still capture the spirit of the holiday season.

- Encourage festive backgrounds. Backgrounds have taken on special meaning as people limit their interactions to video calls. Virtual holiday party organizers can encourage employees to decorate their backgrounds in traditional holiday colors to give the virtual party an authentic holiday feel.

- Send special care packages to employees. Various companies have helped make virtual happy hours more unique by offering virtual happy hour kits, and such kits can be created and shipped to employees with a holiday theme in mind. Such kits may include snacks, the ingredients necessary to whip up special beverages like eggnog and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

While it might not be the same as planning in person holiday office parties, planning a virtual office get-together can still capture the spirit of the holiday season.

even some party favors. Company presidents can then propose a toast during the party and express their appreciation to all the hard work employees have put in during what's proven to be a very challenging year.

- Take the day off. Holiday office parties often take place after office hours.

Since that might not be doable when everyone is working from home, host the virtual holiday party on a company-wide off day. Schedule the party for midday and then encourage everyone to hang around on the video call and chat for as long as they'd like. Such calls can be a great time for

everyone to catch up and unwind without having to worry about going back to work once the call ends.

- Cater the party. Dinner is often served at traditional holiday office parties, and while it may require some logistical maneuvering, employers can still provide employ-

ees with meals. If employees all live in the same general vicinity, arrange for individually prepared meals to be delivered to their homes. If employees are more spread out, employers can offer to reimburse them for meals they eat during the virtual get-together.

Office holiday parties will likely go virtual this year. While that might not be how employees prefer to get together and celebrate, there are many ways to make such gatherings memorable and festive.

— Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

IN THE KITCHEN

Stock the pantry with holiday baking ingredients



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Food is an integral part of celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas and Chanukah, and key components of each holiday are tied exclusively to food.

Many holiday traditions begin with family and friends gathered in the kitchen or around the dinner table. Food is an integral part of celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas and Chanukah, and key components of each holiday are tied exclusively to food.

Come the holiday season, many people gather to make delicious desserts for holiday dinners or even as gifts. The right ingredients are necessary to produce a bounty of baked goods. It's also essential to ensure those ingredients are fresh, as age can compromise the taste of some spices, and leavening ingredients like yeast, baking soda and baking powder may lose efficacy over time.

- **Flours:** All-purpose flour is versatile and useful in many recipes. In addition, bread flour, cake flour and pastry flour have attributes that make them better suited for their respective jobs than all-purpose flour. Individuals who follow certain diets, including gluten-free diets, can find alternative flours that can be substituted in many different recipes.

- **Baking soda:** This leavening agent is activated when it is combined with acid and heat. That is why it is often paired with citrus juice, buttermilk and sour cream.

- **Baking powder:** This leavening agent is baking soda mixed with a powdered acid and cornstarch. If baking soda is the only leavening agent, it will not require the addition of another acidic ingredient. "Double-acting" means carbon dioxide bubbles will form during mixing and again during heating.

- **Yeast:** Yeast takes more time to metabolize and cause doughs to rise than other leavening agents.

- **Sugar:** Granulated

sugar is the most common sugar found in recipes. Confectioner's sugar (powdered sugar) is used in frosting and icings. Brown sugar is refined sugar with molasses added, and is used in certain recipes, like gingerbread.

- **Salt:** Granulated table salt is used in everyday baking.

- **Unsalted butter:** Unsalted butter will be the default for baked goods unless the recipe specifically mentions salted butter.

- **Eggs:** Eggs help to bind ingredients together. Large eggs are most often cited in many baking recipes.

- **Milk:** Dairy adds moisture and texture to batters. Alternative milks, such as soy or almond milk, can sometimes be substituted, but the resulting texture may change.

- **Vegetable oil:** Many recipes call for vegetable oil, which has a neutral flavor.

- **Shortening:** Shortening is a solid vegetable fat used to make tender baked goods. Shortening also has a higher melting point, which helps cookies and other items retain their shape while cooking.

- **Flavorings:** It is helpful to have various spices and extracts on hand. Cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, and allspice are some common baking spices. Almond and vanilla extracts are quite versatile and add extra punch to recipes.

- **Additions:** Mix-ins, such as chocolate chips, cocoa powder, oats, nuts, and dried fruits, often turn up in holiday recipes.

Certain ingredients are essential for baking and holiday cooks can take steps to ensure their pantries are stocked in time for the holidays.

— *Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



Come the holiday season, many people gather to make delicious desserts for holiday dinners or even as gifts.



The right ingredients are necessary to produce a bounty of baked goods. It's also essential to ensure those ingredients are fresh.



SHOPPING

A plethora of pandemic gifts available this holiday season

By Leanne Italie

They Associated Press

From masks and fresh reads to outdoor gear and Christmas tree ornaments, the pandemic has inspired a slew of holiday gifts for all.

And after the recent trend of cozy, comforting hygge, there's another Scandinavian state of mind to embrace. It's the pandemic-perfect friluftsliv (free-loofts'-leev), which means "open air living" in Norwegian.

Some ideas for giving in the time of coronavirus:

▪ **MASK & SPEAK:** There's at least one mask out there for anybody on your gift list. One company has gone a step further with the MaskFone. It comes with wireless earbuds attached and built-in volume controls. The black, breathable fabric is water-resistant. Not on a call or listening to music? It doubles as a voice amplifier for mask-on conversation and comes in two sizes, with replaceable filters. Available at MaskFone.com and Amazon. From \$49.99.

▪ **SLEEP & LISTEN:** Coronavirus anxiety is no joke. Who hasn't lost more than a little sleep? Enter SleepPhone, a soft headband of fleece or wicking fabric (for exercise) that includes two flat speakers built in. Wireless, corded and wireless rechargeable versions exist. The SleepPhone comes in two sizes and four colors, including black, blue and lavender. Available at SleepPhones.com and Amazon. From \$99.95.

▪ **PANDEMIC TREES:** Yes, we'd all like 2020 to go away. A little something for the Christmas tree may be just the keepsake once it does. Pandemic ornaments are abundant, including a set of three with snowman, reindeer and gingerbread



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

From masks and fresh reads to outdoor gear and Christmas tree ornaments, the pandemic has inspired a slew of holiday gifts for all.

person in masks touting rolls of toilet paper. The set goes for \$35.99 on Amazon. Ornament king Christopher Radko has a Dr. Santa in scrubs holding this message: "We stayed at work for you. You stay at home for us." \$60 at ChristopherRadko.com and Amazon.

▪ **KID BOOKS:** For kids up to 5 and fans of "Goodnight Moon" parodies, there's "Good Morning Zoom," written by a mom isolated with her kids in April, soon after the pandemic took hold. One page reads: "Good morning room. Good morning Zoom. Good morning friends you hope to see soon. Good morning light. And a world not quite right." By Lindsay Rechler and illustrated by June Park. Widely available. \$14.99. Another possibility: The kid boredom buster "The Highlights Book of

Things to Do." Hundreds of activities between covers for \$24.99. Widely available.

▪ **LIFE BOOKS:** What better time to ask, "Um... How did I get here?" as 30-year-old entrepreneur Kathi Sharpe-Ross does in her book "Re:Invent Your Life! What Are You Waiting For?" The self-published, self-help guide includes 30 interviews with executives to artists on their a-ha moments. Quincy Jones writes in a short foreword: "I believe that we are the biggest barriers to our own creativity and growth because of paralysis from analysis." Available on Amazon and elsewhere. \$19.99. Need to go in another direction? AcroYoga instructors Max and Liz Lowenstein are out with "Yoga for Inflexible People," a beginner's guide to Zen. \$19.99. Not available until Nov. 11.

▪ **THE WORK WONNIE:** Waist-up dressing remains a thing, but one still has to dress. Enter this work onesie for the Everyman. It's a button-down, suitable-for-meetings, striped work shirt attached to comfortable sweats on the bottom. It's made to look like the shirt is loosely tucked in. And, wait for it, there's a flap in the back. \$55. Head to Workwonnies.com to pre-order for a Nov. 1 release.

▪ **EXOTIC SWEETS:** With the world at home in extended, close proximity to kitchens and pantries, snacking is an ever-present pastime. Mix it up for a lucky loved one with a monthly subscription to the Japanese snack box service Bokksu. Each box is themed and includes tea. Among past themes is the Otsukimi Moon Festival

box, with mochi puffs and red bean doughnuts among the offerings. Items sourced from Japan. From \$36.99 on a year's subscription at Bokksu.com.

▪ **WARM HANDS:** As we live our best friluftsliv lives, we'll be pulling double duty with gloves. The rubber ones may ward off germs but not do the trick when the weather goes frigid. Gifting nice gloves is usually a welcome thing, with options everywhere. For women, try a pair in cashmere and animal print from Amicale. \$95. Widely available. There's a matching headband for the same price. Plenty of cashmere-lined options for men, too.

FRILUFTSLIV LOVE

Along the lines of the great outdoors, the folks at Oceas have on offer a fleece-lined waterproof blanket

that comes with a carry-level gift budget? Do you know a homebound exerciser with a design bent? Technogym notes its sleek Cross Personal elliptical trainer was designed by Italian architect and designer Antonio Citterio. The thing sure is pretty with its mirror-like steel finish. It has a live console with on-demand content and surround sound built into its handles. And it costs \$14,815 at Technogym.com.

ULTIMATE EXERCISE



SHOPPING

Give the gift of citrus this holiday season for pop of cheer

By Leanne Italie

The Associated Press

When life gives you lemons, get gift-y.

Dayna Isom Johnson, the trend expert at Etsy.com, sees a turn toward “cheerful citrus” as a trend this holiday season.

“It’s an escape from traditional themes for the holidays,” she said. “It’s really allowing you to add a pop of sunshine.”

A look at holiday-brightening citrus gifts:

▪ **A HAPPY BOX:** Check out the Main Squeeze Citrus Box at HappyBoxStore.com. It’s filled with grapefruit gummy bears, orange blossom honey, a tangerine clove cocktail mixer, a lemon hydrating sheet face mask and more. A great embrace of happy citrus. \$58.

▪ **A BOWL:** A company called Vegetabowls molds lifelike pottery bowls around actual fruit, including lemons, limes, oranges and grapefruit. Each bowl is molded by hand. They do vegetables, too. Prices range from \$22 to a four-piece nesting set for \$156. Available at Vegetabowls.com.

▪ **A WREATH:** The Etsy shop GraceAndHome sells a citrus and cinnamon winter wreath perfect for windows and front doors. Oranges bring a pop of color, fur branches a bit of nature and cinnamon sticks a homey touch. Two sizes at \$40 and \$48.

▪ **A CANDLE:** A company called Tokyn uses orange slices and tiny, delicate flowers encased in clear gel around a hand-poured Minabé yuzu citrus soy candle. When lit, the outer botanicals are illuminated. The center glass is reusable and can hold 3-ounce candle refills. \$42 at TokynCandles.com.

▪ **A SIX-PACK:** Because,

why not? There’s the Schoferhofer Hefeweizen Grapefruit Bier from Germany that comes in a six-pack of glass bottles. The Hefeweizen part means it’s a wheat beer, but it’s half wheat blended with half carbonated grapefruit juice, and it’s easy drinking at 2.5 ABV (alcohol by volume). Widely available. \$8.99.

▪ **A PIE:** Gigi Butler, founder of the cupcake brand Gigi’s Cupcakes, has branched out into pies. She’ll ship a Lemon Chess Pie from her home base in Brentwood, Tennessee. It’s a cornmeal gluten-friendly crust filled with creamy lemon egg custard. It spells goodness. \$32. Available at PiesByGigi.com.

▪ **A JACKET:** The Approach Jacket from Canada Goose is designed to be worn on a mountain or in a city. Available in seven colors, including a lime the company calls aurora green. It features a removable hood, a draw cord at the hem and oversize cuffs that can be rolled up. \$795. Available at CanadaGoose.com and Canada Goose retail stores.

▪ **A SNACK:** Edible sells two holiday buckets full of mixed fresh fruit, including citrus. There’s the Star of David in a blue bucket adorned with Jewish stars that includes orange slices for Hanukkah, starting at \$64.99, and the Holly Jolly Village bucket with a Christmas wreath and pineapple chocolate-covered snowmen and reindeer, starting at \$74.99. The company offers free same day or second day shipping. Available at EdibleArrangements.com.

▪ **A HAND SANITIZER:** It’s a pandemic, after all. The Cottage Greenhouse has made a lemon and aloe hand sanitizer gel packed with vitamin C and lemon, along with 70% alcohol. The



MEDIANEWS GROUP FILE PHOTO

Oranges bring a pop of color, fur branches a bit of nature and cinnamon sticks a homey touch to a traditional holiday wreath.

aloe soothes as the alcohol does its pandemic thing. The packaging is pretty. \$18. Sold at MargoTelena.com.

▪ **A FRAGRANCE:** Kayali Citrus from Huda Beauty includes notes of Italian bergamot and pink grapefruit mingled with rhubarb, blackcurrant and pink pepper. Fans of the Instagram sensation Huda Kattan will understand.

\$85 for 1.7 ounces and \$118 for 3.4 ounces. Available at Sephora.com, some Sephora stores and HudaBeauty.com.

▪ **A TUMBLER:** Brumate’s Uncork’d Wine Tumbler comes in daisy yellow and hunter orange, but they look lemony and orangey. More importantly, they’re insulated and hold 14 ounces of wine. That’s half a bottle, fyi. \$19.99.

Sold at Brumate.com and Amazon.

▪ **AN ORANGE LIQUEUR:** Grown, picked, squeezed, produced and bottled in the Sunshine State. That’s Tippler’s Orange Liqueur, from the craft St. Petersburg Distillery. They use Florida Temple oranges, peels and all, to distill this all-natural orange liqueur from scratch in small batches. \$19.99.

Widely available.

▪ **A CHOCOLATE:** Jacques Torres has dipped 5 ounces of orange peels in 60% dark chocolate from Belgium and placed them in a gift box. \$16.99. The company also has dipped orange slices, along with orange cubes that are bite-size made of candied peels. All available at MrChocolate.com.

▪ **A SWEET BREAD:** The Bona Furtuna farm in Sicily has made an Olive Oil & Blood Orange Panettone. The traditional Italian treat features the farm’s organic oil and local Tarocco oranges wrapped in packaging of a hand-painted blood orange design. \$64.95. Available at BonaFurtuna.com and select retailers.

▪ **A VODKA:** Really, two vodkas, from an Alameda, California, company called Hangar 1. There’s one made with the blossoms of local mandarin orange trees and another with the pith of Buddha’s hand citron. The taste is clean and bright. They’re delicious on their own or mixed into cocktails. \$29.99. Widely available.

▪ **A SPARKLE:** The jewelry site JTV has some bling that fits the citrus bill but doesn’t break the bank. It’s a pair of stud earrings in striking orange citrine set in sterling silver. Citrine is a variety of quartz. The site has an entire collection of citrine in the same orange hue. \$52. Available at JTV.com.

▪ **A HAND CREAM:** The luxury soap brand Comptagne de Provence creates scents in a fragrance capital, Grasse, France, including nourishing hand creams in pink grapefruit and orange blossom. If hand cream can be decadent, this is it. \$25 for 3.4 ounces. Available at Cieluxe.com.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Help isolated loved ones this holiday season

A phenomenon called “cabin fever” tends to set in around late autumn or in midwinter. Long hours of darkness coupled with cold, inclement weather often is a recipe for increased time spent indoors. For people who live alone, the effects of cabin fever might be more pronounced.

In addition to seasonal cabin fever, this year another factor comes into play: social distancing and voluntary quarantine as a result of the novel coronavirus COVID-19. Even those who may venture outside to socialize, particularly around the holiday season, may be hesitant or unable to do so to help prevent the spread of the virus. In these instances, friends and loved ones can mitigate feelings of isolation in various ways.

- **Schedule video chats.** Video conferencing apps have become the communication vehicles of choice during the era of social distancing. Different applications and services continue to evolve and help people stay in touch. Plan regular chats, either once or twice per week with isolated or vulnerable people. Try to organize a large group chat on the holiday itself so no one has to spend Christmas or Chanukah alone.

- **Drop off supplies.** Even though supermarket shop-from-home and other delivery services have normalized somewhat since the start of the pandemic, treat individuals who may be isolated to some personalized attention. Put together care packages of supplies or holiday treats and deliver them in person so you can see the smiles that result from being able to visit with someone familiar.

- **Send uplifting mes-**



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Even those who may venture outside to socialize, particularly around the holiday season, may be hesitant or unable to do so to help prevent the spread of the virus.

sages. Children or even adults can make personalized cards and mail them to loved ones at home or those who may be in long-term care facilities. Send new mailings every week or two so that residents always have something to

look forward to in the mail.

- **Start a virtual club.** A book club or another shared interest can be the catalyst for more frequent communication. A club puts everyone on the same page and enables them to come together, via phone

or video chat, for a discussion.

- **Ask for help learning a new skill.** Along the same vein as a virtual club, lessons on everything from woodworking to crochet to making favorite holiday recipes can be conducted

online. Give an isolated individual daily purpose and distraction by engaging him or her with online lessons.

Isolation and feelings of loneliness can affect anyone who normally suffers from cabin fever. However,

this year it may be more pronounced, as it could be coupled with social distancing precautions that have already been in effect for some time.

— *Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*

SHOPPING

6 ways to stick to a holiday budget

The holidays are an exciting, fun and joyful time of year. And for many people, the holidays also are expensive.

According to the Motley Fool Company, a financial wellness resource, the average American spent \$882.45 on Christmas gifts, food, decorations, travel, and other holiday-related expenses in 2019. Around 56% of gift shoppers set a budget for holiday spending, but only 64% stuck to it. In addition, 21.5% of respondents went into debt due to holiday shopping.

Who doesn't want to have a super holiday with delicious foods on the table and lots of presents to share with family and friends? While that's tempting, such a bounty should never result in financial peril. These six strategies can make it easy to establish and stick to a budget this holiday season.

1. Budget for everything. When working out holiday spending plans, factor in all of the expenses associated with the holidays — not just the most obvious, like gifts. Costs for gas, parking lot fees, greeting cards, postage, travel expenses, and much more should be included in your final number.

2. Determine how much you can spend. Money for gifts and other holiday expenses should ideally come from your disposable income. Look at your finances in advance of the holiday season and figure out how much extra cash you have for the holidays, and use that figure to determine how much you should spend. Find ways to make up any deficit by curtail expenses like din-

ing out or entertainment extras. Many people plan to use credit cards to pay now and worry about the aftermath later. Only use credit cards if you have the money in the bank and can pay off the entire bill when the balance due is in January.

3. Set a spending limit for individuals. Based on your numbers and how much you plan to spend overall, start allocating money to categories, including gift recipients. Come up with a spending range for each person and stick to it.

4. Pay in cash as much as possible. It's easy to know what you're spending when using cash as opposed to credit. There is some risk with carrying around cash, but that risk may be offset by the benefit of spending only what you can afford to spend.

5. Track all purchases. Save the receipts and keep a running total of expenditures so you can see how your spending is measuring up to your budget. If necessary, scale back on one category if you've tipped the scales in spending on another.

6. Shop sales and deals. High-end stores may have the impressive tag, but their prices can set you back. Instead, look for comparable gifts at discount stores and other retailers. Also, if you must use a credit card, use one that earns you a cash-back bonus for added savings.

A holiday budget is a must to avoid overspending and finding yourself in debt early next year.

— Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

These six strategies can make it easy to establish and stick to a budget this holiday season.



A holiday budget is a must to avoid overspending and finding yourself in debt early next year.



IN THE KITCHEN

A great steak starts with a sangria marinade, says one top chef

By Kate Krader
Bloomberg News

In the wide world of cooking, steak is, ostensibly, one of the least complicated foods to prepare. Fanatics can and will go deep on the subject, but what's basically required is a hot surface and the aptitude to take it to the doneness of choice with minimal intervention.

And then there's skirt steak, the simplest of cuts to cook. It's so thin, it doesn't require a meat thermometer to check for doneness; even if you wanted to use one, skirt steak isn't thick enough to accommodate it. Instead, you just count the few minutes until it's charred, then slice and serve.

Joey Campanaro is a die-hard skirt steak fan. The chef-owner of the Little Owl on a scenic West Village corner in New York favors it for its intense, meaty flavor. The cut is from the diaphragm muscle in the chest area, near the liver, which adds a powerful hint of iron.

He also appreciates it from a practical standpoint. Because his restaurant and kitchen are tiny, Campanaro likes the ease with which skirt steak is prepared; the meat cooks speedily over fire and then is sliced and ready to go. This makes it a great, unfussy dish to prepare at home. It's good for dinner, says Campanaro, while working well for lunch or brunch, too. "It's not the heaviest of steaks, but it satisfies that crave," he says.

What makes this skirt steak recipe compelling is the sangria-styled marinade Campanaro prepares. Studded with orange slices, the red wine mixture includes garlic and shallots that flavor the meat; the acidic wine and citrus also

tenderize the beef, making the cut cook even faster.

Another ingredient with benefits is honey: Besides infusing the steak, it enhances the cooking. "It's the honey that accelerates the caramelization of the meat and gives it that excellent char," says Campanaro. The result is a tender but chewy steak that has the perfume of red wine with an underlying sweetness.

The marinated skirt steak is featured in Campanaro's new *Big Love Cooking: 75 Recipes for Satisfying, Shareable Comfort Food*, with Theresa Gambacorta (Chronicle Books: \$30). While the book includes recipes for such destination dishes as the Little Owl pork chop, it is fundamentally a love letter to his heritage.

Campanaro devotes a chapter to the crafting of a major Italian American Sunday supper like the ones he grew up among in South Philadelphia. Included in that feast are Sunday gravy stocked with meatballs, braciola (steak-wrapped, cured meat), as well as country-style ribs, Italian sausage, and pigs foot for special occasions. The recipe goes on for four pages and includes a sidebar on the importance of "stirring the gravy."

There are also "homemade," as in pasta, made-from-scratch slider buns for meatballs, "old school salit" (as in, salad with iceberg lettuce), and rum cake. "I built the book around that meal," says Campanaro. But the chef, who also trained with the illustrious Jonathan Waxman, doesn't think the amount of time spent cooking defines the importance of a dish. "It can be Sunday gravy, it can be a skirt steak. Just make food that you want to share."



PHOTOS BY KATE KRADER — BLOOMBERG NEWS

Sangria-Marinated Skirt Steak

Sangria-Marinated Skirt Steak

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

2 cups fruity red wine, such as Spanish Rioja
 ¼ cup honey
 1 orange, skin-on, sliced into thin wheels
 1 shallot, thinly sliced
 3 garlic cloves, smashed
 3 sprigs fresh thyme
 ¼ cup olive oil
 1 ½ lb. skirt steak, fat and any sinew trimmed

Kosher salt
 Freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp. neutral oil
 Flaky sea salt

STEPS

In a non-reactive bowl or pot large enough to contain the marinade and the steak, combine the wine, honey, orange wheels, shallot, garlic, thyme, and olive oil. Place the steak in the marinade, cover tightly, and refrigerate for at least 6 hours and no more than 12

hours.

Remove the steak from the marinade and cut into it 6- to 8-inch lengths that will fit in the skillet. Season generously with salt and pepper on both sides. In a large cast-iron skillet over high heat, warm the neutral oil until it shimmers. Gently place the steak in the skillet and cook until the underside is browned—don't move it or touch it, just let it do its thing—about 2 minutes.

Flip and cook until the other side is browned,

too, for an additional 1 to 2 minutes, depending on the thickness of the steak. Transfer to a plate and let rest for 7 to 10 minutes before slicing it, so the juices don't leak out.

Slice the steak against the grain and transfer to a serving platter. Sprinkle the steak with Maldon sea salt flakes and additional pepper, if you like.

Adapted from *Big Love Cooking*, by Joey Campanaro, with Theresa Gambacorta.

GARDENING

Planting bulbs offers us the glimmer of hope that we all need



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLORBLENDS.COM

For mass plantings of eye-catching tulips, the anticipation of their appearance is almost as much pleasure as the spring show. The easiest way to plant a block in a vacant bed is to dig a trench at least seven inches deep with a shovel.

By Adrian Higgins*The Washington Post*

Bulb-planting in the fall is always an act of hope. This year, it becomes a form of therapy. When the crocuses, daffodils and tulips next flower, we will be assured of at least one thing: It won't be 2020.

Not much is instant in the garden, but spring bulbs planted in autumn come pretty close. I can't think of anything more forward-looking or reassuring at the moment than planting tulip bulbs.

From a practical standpoint, it's difficult to mess up with bulbs; they are little packages programmed to grow and bloom. All they need is some moisture and the enduring cold soil of winter to shoot up and flower early next year.

Even if you ignore the earliest bloomers - the snowdrops and aconites - carefully selected bulbs can give you a show that in the Mid-Atlantic begins in late February and endures until at least late May, offering three months of icing on the vernal cake.

The next month is prime bulb-planting season, but these wee packets of spring can go in anytime before the ground freezes. I'd get to this sooner rather than later, though. In the hyperdomestic pandemic paradigm, many people are jumping on bulb-planting as a way of doing something for and around their homes, and varieties are selling out.

Crocuses launch a continuous and overlapping display, followed by daffodils and tulips and alliums, or ornamental onions. This weeks-long parade is enlivened by specialty bulbs, which bloom in the following order, loosely: giant snowdrop, bulbous iris, common snowdrop, crocus, scilla, chionodoxa (glory-of-the-snow), windflower and muscari (grape hyacinth). By variety, daffodils generally bloom from late Febru-



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACQUELINE VAN DER KLOET/COLORBLENDS.COM

Spring bulbs can be planted within existing perennial beds. Pairings with spring-flowering perennials can be particularly effective. Here, Dutch garden designer Jacqueline van der Kloet has produced a hot color scheme with daffodils, tulips, wallflowers and spurgas.

ary to late April, tulips from late March to early May, and most alliums in May to early June. Hyacinths bloom in early spring; I find them awkward in the garden but cheerful as indoor potted plants. I've given up on fritillaries, which are, in my experience, one-shot wonders in hot, humid regions.

My long-standing advice has been to plant far more bulbs than you think is enough, so you can create drama in the garden. (The smaller the bulb, the more you should plant.)

I was thinking that Tim

Schipper, owner of bulb retailer Colorblends, would agree with me; his business model relies on bigger orders, both for landscapers and consumers.

But he says that a common mistake of new gardeners is to buy too many bulbs that never make it into the ground, because, well, bulbs don't plant themselves.

"It's hard work," he said. "Take a smaller bite, see how it goes, don't try to get it all done in one year."

Bulbs are available from independent garden centers, mail-order bulb com-

panies and other online retailers. Mass merchandisers are another source, but selection tends to be limited and the availability period short.

There are two basic ways to employ bulbs. The first is to plant in large blocks, the second to intersperse them among existing perennials. The latter course is especially effective in spring-themed beds, where bulbs pop up between such things as hellebores, epimediums, creeping phlox, foam flowers, Virginia bluebells, Solomon's seal and ferns.

In recent years, I've tried

a different approach by finding spare beds in the vegetable garden for extravagant tulip displays. The bulbs are lifted and discarded in May, and then the beds are used for summer vegetables. By crowding the tulips together - avoid having the bulbs touch - I can take plenty for the vase without affecting the show.

If you have blocks of perennials, such as hostas or day lilies, or expansive ground covers, you can achieve the same effect of a carpet of tulips by planting densely if carefully. Otherwise, it's a case of planting

isolated clumps of spring bulbs in existing beds. The perennials, as they grow, mask the declining bulb foliage. Amid beefier perennials, you will need to plant taller bulbs, such as big daffodils and tulips and alliums, to elevate the show sufficiently.

Four-legged pests are always an issue with bulbs; a prime culprit right after planting is the squirrel. One trick is to plant the bulbs deeply - to six or seven inches - and cover with a little mulch to hide the disturbed soil. In smaller ar-

Bulbs

FROM PAGE 23

eas, an inch or two of pea gravel may provide a barrier, and this looks attractive.

Come spring, deer will regard tulips and crocuses as candy. Repellents will help, but the best remedy against furry invaders in fall and spring is to focus on daffodils and alliums, which both squirrels and deer find distasteful.

Here are some thoughts on planting tulips and daffodils, the two most favored bulbs, and some general advice on planting bulbs.

Tulips

Many of the showy hybrid tulips are not reliably perennial, and those that return will probably be less vigorous. Their chances of returning are improved if they are grown in full sun and perfectly drained soil that is kept on the dry side in summer. I treat them as annual indulgences and yank them after blooming. Species-type tulips, sometimes called wild or botanical tulips, are low-growing and appear earlier. They usually come back year after year, especially if given a sunny site and good drainage. These include the wonderfully slender (and taller) clusiana varieties and the bakeri, humilis, praestans, tarda and turkestanica species. Common varieties include Lilac Wonder, Little Beauty and Little Princess.

Daffodils

Dainty, bloom-rich miniature varieties work beautifully in small garden beds and in areas with low-growing ground covers. They add a cheerfulness beyond their stature, recede with more decorum than their bigger brothers and reflect the sophistication of the gardener. I put them in clumps of up to a dozen bulbs, each grouping a few feet apart. Look for Hawera,



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLORBLENDS.COM

Small, multiflowered versions of the daffodil are easier to place among ground covers and perennials than tall, brassy types, and their lingering foliage is not as conspicuous. The variety Avalanche, pictured, has the added benefit of a sweet fragrance.

Geranium, Jetfire, Tête-à-Tête, Minnow, Sailboat and Avalanche, among others.

How to grow

Most spring bulbs originate in arid regions and need well-drained conditions, especially when they are dormant in summer. They are not for soggy soil. If you have an irrigation system, your bulbs may rot away. Camassia, a native bulb, will take wetter conditions.

They also need sunlight to recharge themselves. A daffodil in partial shade will flower

each year, but one in the heart of a deep woodland will peter out. For this reason, avoid beds right next to north-facing walls and fences.

Generally, larger bulbs are planted at about six inches (I go an inch or two deeper), and smaller ones at three to five inches. You want at least three inches of soil above the top of the bulb. I plant crocus bulbs as deeply as tulips to try to thwart the squirrels.

In theory, a bulb set askew will right itself. Trying to orient every

little specialty bulb is tedious and unnecessary. But for bigger bulbs, do them a favor and try to set them with the growing point or nose upward.

Tools

Stay away from cheap trowels, which aren't up to the job. The common handheld bulb-planter is tough on the wrists, especially with heavy soil. Long-handled versions rely on leg muscles and are more effective.

If you are block-planting in a vacant bed, take a strong, sharp shovel and

excavate the whole area. Schipper says if you have a sheet of plywood, pile the soil on that as you go. That makes it easier to shovel the soil back afterward. He also recommends the shovel for spot-planting in perennial beds. My preferred tool for planting in tight spots is the mattock, especially if the soil is on the poor side. A weeding knife is effective for opening up holes for small specialty bulbs, especially in cultivated soil.

Containers

Bulbs, especially miniature varieties, are effective

in pots, planters and containers. But they must drain and be freeze-proof. Common terra-cotta pots will crack in winter.

There must be soil beneath the bulbs for the roots to grow into. After planting (in potting soil), cover the surface with netting or an inch or two of pea gravel to thwart squirrels. Ideally, the container should be kept in an unheated shed or garage for most of the winter, watered occasionally and brought outside once the bulbs have initiated top growth.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACQUELINE VAN DER KLOET/COLORBLENDS.COM

Jacqueline van der Kloet adds to the layering effect here by planting two lily-flowered tulip varieties of the same rose hue but of different heights. Jacqueline grows to 23 inches, Mariette to 18 inches.



HOLIDAY DECOR

Must-haves to achieve a holiday wonderland

The end of the year marks a period of heightened festivity. Come the holiday season, homes and businesses are decorated and everyone seems to have an extra spring in their step.

The sight of snowflakes, candy canes, evergreen wreaths, and Christmas trees can elicit nostalgia for happy holidays of the past, as well as excitement for what is yet to come. When it comes to decorating for the holidays, there are certain items that set the scene.

- **Christmas trees:** Germany is credited with starting the modern Christmas tree tradition. It dates back to the 16th century when devout Christians brought trees into their homes and decorated them. German settlers brought Christmas tree traditions to America upon their arrival in Pennsylvania in the 19th century.

- **Mistletoe:** Mistletoe is known as the “kissing plant” and it is customary for couples to kiss while standing beneath the plant, typically hung in doorways and arches. Mistletoe was once hung to drive off evil spirits and ensure fertility. Kissing under the mistletoe was first found associated with the Greek festival of Saturnalia and later with primitive marriage rites.

- **Lights:** Lights are commonly seen during the holiday season. The custom of having holiday lights dates back to when Christmas trees were decorated with candles, which symbolized Christ being the light of the world. These traditions evolved from pagan rituals that would celebrate the return of light of the sun as the days grow longer after the winter solstice.

- **Yule log:** Many families burn a yule log in the fireplace and watch it burn while listening to Christmas carols. The familiar custom of burning the log dates back to solstice celebrations and the tradition of bonfires. The Christmas tradition called for burning a portion of the log each evening until Twelfth Night, also known as the Epiphany, which takes place on January 6.

- **Poinsettias:** Poinsettias are a tropical plant that originated in Mexico. Joel Roberts Poinsett was the first Ambassador from the United States to Mexico. He became enamored with the plants, and brought them back to his native South Carolina. An old Mexican legend suggests a poor girl had nothing to offer baby Jesus at Christmas Eve services, so she picked a handful of weeds and put them at the bottom of the nativity scene. These weeds burst into bright red flowers and became known as “Flores de Noche Buena,” or “Flowers of the Holy Night.”

Holiday decorations borrow traditions from all over the world to help establish a festive wonderland.

— Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



The sight of snowflakes, candy canes, evergreen wreaths, and Christmas trees can elicit nostalgia for happy holidays of the past, as well as excitement for what is yet to come.

PHOTOS
COURTESY
OF METRO
CREATIVE
CONNECTION

IN THE KITCHEN

Serve potato pancakes for holiday celebrations

Potato pancakes are traditionally served during Chanukah celebrations. This dish is often referred to as “latkes,” a Yiddish word that loosely translates to “little oily thing.”

Potato pancakes are not exclusive to Jewish celebrations and cuisine. Germans have their own variation called “kartoffelpuffer” that can be served with sour cream, applesauce or smoked salmon. The Irish have “boxty,” which may be made with a combination of shredded potato and mashed potato before being fried.

Many potato pancake recipes are quite similar. They involve only a few ingredients and fry up in a flash. Some chefs recommend draining the shredded potato prior to cooking so that the pancakes will fry up crispy and not be soggy or break apart. Enjoy this recipe for “Latkes,” courtesy of AllRecipes.com.

Latkes

(Potato Pancakes)

Serves 12

3 large potatoes, peeled and shredded

1 small onion, shredded

3 large eggs

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, or as needed

1/2 cup vegetable oil

Place the potatoes and onion into a bowl, and stir in eggs, salt and flour as needed to make the mixture hold together. With wet hands, scoop up about 1/3 cup of the mixture per patty, and form into flat round or oval shapes.

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium heat until it shimmers, and gently place the patties into the hot oil. Fry until the bottoms are golden brown and crisp, 5 to 8 minutes, then flip with a spatula and fry the other side until golden.

Line a colander or strainer with 2 paper towels, and drain the cooked latkes in the colander. Serve hot.

— Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Many potato pancake recipes are quite similar. They involve only a few ingredients and fry up in a flash.

ENTERTAINING

Factors to consider when planning year-round outdoor dining spaces

Al fresco dining is popular in spring and summer, and that popularity reached new heights in the summer of 2020. With much of the world still grappling with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 and government officials fearing rising case numbers if indoor gatherings were allowed, many restaurants were limited to offering only outdoor dining to patrons. Such restrictions reintroduced many people to the pleasure of outdoor dining.

Outdoor dining may be synonymous with summer, but there's no reason why good meals can't be enjoyed outside year-round. That's especially true when homeowners and hosts take stock of certain factors when planning outdoor dining spaces they intend to use all year long.

- **Lighting:** If you plan to keep outdoor dining going after summer, then some extra lighting may be necessary. The sun sets in late afternoon/early evening in fall and winter, so you won't be able to rely on natural light to keep the dinner table aglow. Lighting also can make outdoor dining in summer more enjoyable. Outdoor string lights can add a relaxing vibe to a deck or patio. If you intend to string the lights up year-round, make sure poles are sturdy enough to withstand winter winds.

- **Weather:** Table cloths can add a touch of class to outdoor dining tables. But those table cloths are only



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Outdoor dining can be enjoyed year-round, especially when hosts take steps to prepare their outdoor spaces for four seasons' worth of gatherings.

effective if they remain on the table. Summer breezes might not prove too great a challenge in that regard, but fall, winter and spring weather might make it hard to keep table cloths on the table where they belong. A simple set of table cloth clips can ensure the wind doesn't blow table cloths around while people are eating or completely off the table when everyone is inside. Hurri-

cane candle holders also can make it easy to maintain the ambiance candles provide without having to worry about the wind extinguishing the candles in one strong gust.

- **Seating:** Guests might have no problem dining on traditional summer barbecue fare like burgers and hot dogs while sitting in camping chairs. But hosts who want to serve meals that require the use of a

knife and fork will need to make sure all guests have a seat at the table. A foldable picnic-style table that can be easily stored in a garage or shed can do the trick. In addition, some deck and patio tables are expandable, making them ideal options for hosts who may want to work around social distancing guidelines and serve holiday meals outside this year.

- **Grill:** Charcoal grill

devotees may find it frustrating to keep coals lit long enough to get hot so they can keep enjoying grilled meals after summer and throughout fall, winter and spring. A hybrid charcoal/grill smoker that does not expose the fire to the elements as much as a traditional charcoal grill can do the trick, and such a grill also gives cooks the chance to slow cook and smoke foods all

year long. For those with no special devotion to charcoal grills, a propane grill can light up in a matter of seconds regardless of the weather.

Outdoor dining can be enjoyed year-round, especially when hosts take steps to prepare their outdoor spaces for four seasons' worth of gatherings.

— *Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO
CREATIVE CONNECTION

ACTIVITIES

Identify winter birds in backyards

Birds flittering around the neighborhood are a common sight during spring and summer, and these welcome guests can be enjoyable to observe as they nest, feed and interact. When the weather cools in fall and winter, many birds seek out warmer climates, but a good number of these feathered friends stick around.

Certain birds can be found all winter long across regions of North America. The Great American Bird Count is a program that is run by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. Its purpose is to seek the help of volunteer birdwatchers across North America to observe and count all the birds seen in a 15-minute interval during a four-day data collection period. This program helps identify birds that are most commonly seen in cold temperatures and study the composition and distribution of the winter bird populations across North America. Birds seen during this time may change from year to year, though certain species are more likely to be around in the winter months.

▪ **Northern cardinals:** One of the more iconic winter birds, the bright red cardinals are around much of the year but perhaps most noticeable against the snowy, stark landscape of a winter's day. Cardinals use their bright, powerful bills to crack open seeds and cut through sugary fruits to help them survive the winter.

▪ **Tree sparrows:** Tree sparrows are large-bodied and long-tailed sparrows with gray and reddish-brown streaking along the edges of their feathers. They also wear a bright



MEDIANEWS GROUP FILE PHOTO

The American goldfinch is sometimes called the “wild canary” of the Americas.

chestnut colored cap. Despite their name, tree sparrows spend much of their time on the ground feeding. The bird count has unveiled a greater number of tree swallows in recent years. These birds are insectivorous, so milder winters may be contributing to their increased presence.

▪ **Tufted titmice:** Tufted titmice resemble cardinals in body and head shape, al-

beit on a smaller scale, but they are pale gray in coloring. These are bold birds who defend territory with scolding calls.

▪ **Blue jays:** These common, vibrant birds are well known to many people. They are large-crested songbirds with broad, round tails. They have white or light gray feathering on the underside of their bodies with various shades of blue, black and

white on the top. A favorite food is acorns, and these birds are often found on forest edges. Their calls are loud and carry long distances.

▪ **Mourning doves:** Many people hear mourning doves before they actually see them, as their soft cooing often comes from roof rafters and tree branches. These birds have plump bodies and long, tapered necks, with a head that looks particularly

small in comparison. They tend to be brown to buff color. When the birds take off for flight, their wings make sharp whistling or whinnying sounds.

▪ **American goldfinches:** These birds are sometimes called the “wild canary” of the Americas. They have distinctive yellow plumage that fades in winter to a palette of buff, brown and gray. They’re small seed-eat-

ing birds that often travel in flocks.

Birds may need a little help surviving in the winter. Keep fresh, unfrozen water around and supplement food scavenged with peanut butter, suet and nuts. Brush piles, roost boxes or birdhouses can provide needed shelter.

— *Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



COMMUNITY

5 tips for thanking your heroes this holiday season

Those who go above and beyond to make a difference in the lives of others are rarely in it for recognition. However, in this especially challenging year, the holiday season is a perfect time to not just show these selfless people your appreciation, but also take inspiration from their kindness. Here are five simple ways to thank the everyday heroes in your life.

1. Send a unique care package. Even if you can't share your appreciation in person, you can still say thanks with a care package filled with goodies you know your recipient loves. Start with special holiday treats, then add personalized items. If your recipient enjoys cooking and baking, you might include a handwritten recipe card. For those who love doodling or writing to-do lists, a lovely journal and a set of long-lasting G2 gel ink pens from Pilot are a great pair. Available in more than 25 ink colors, your recipient will be able to color-code tasks or sketch lively bullet journal spreads with ease. Snag a pack for yourself and write a thoughtful note to accompany the gift.

2. Make a donation in their honor. Consider thanking those often unsung heroes doing the hard work of keeping our communities strong by making a donation to a charity close to their heart. In these uncertain times, many such organizations are in particular need of financial support. Whether it's an animal shelter in a region affected by natural disaster, a food bank, or a nonprofit that offers support to essential workers, take a cue from the giving folks around you.

3. Give thanks to someone who always gives back.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Here are five simple ways to thank the everyday heroes in your life.

We all know someone who goes beyond their day-to-day responsibilities to help make the world a better place. Let them know just how much their work is valued by nominating them for the G2 Overachievers Grant. For the fifth year, the grant is recognizing individuals making measurable differences in the lives of others. One

exceptional overachiever will be awarded \$100,000 to help continue their charitable works and broaden their positive impact. Visit G2Overachievers.com before November 15 to learn more and submit your handwritten nomination. It's a meaningful way to celebrate someone's passion for giving and show the impact of their hard

work.

4. Give the gift of relaxation. Give those always in the service of others an excuse to practice some self-care. Whether it's an at-home spa kit, a new book to curl up with, or a nice bottle of wine, some of the most welcome gifts are those that give someone a chance to unwind.

5. Write a thank you note. There is something so personal about putting pen to paper. In this digital age of emails and texts, a heartfelt, handwritten letter or card can become a true keepsake. With the right tools, it's easy to let your feelings flow and craft a meaningful message. So, pick up some nice stationery and a

smooth, vibrant G2 gel ink pen to let your loved ones know just how much you appreciate them.

For those who kept our communities strong during this difficult year, let the holiday season be your opportunity to give thanks and give back.

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

HOME MAINTENANCE

Eco-friendly home cleaning hacks

With families spending more time at home, messes are on repeat and cleanups are often an hourly routine. At the same time, many households are looking to reduce their environmental impact affordably.

The good news is that saving money and the planet can go hand-in-hand at home. To green up your clean up and create healthier spaces, consider these tips:

Reduce and Reuse

Ditch paper towels for reusable cloths and sponges. Make sure to wash them regularly on the highest heat setting (dishwasher for sponges, washing machine for cloth) to avoid spreading messes around. Your old t-shirts and towels make fantastic reusable cleaning tools. Use old towels on your refillable sweeper mops, and cut t-shirts into large squares to be used as rags and dusting cloths.

Opt for Green Cleaners

Over 50 percent of people are looking for cleaning products that reduce the number of harsh chemicals their families are exposed to, according to a Lightspeed/Mintel survey. If that describes you, consider solutions working for other consumers, such as Art of Green multipurpose cleaning sprays and wipes. Recently named number one in the Green Cleaning category by Product of the Year USA, the nation's largest consumer-voted award for product innovation, these cleaning supplies are as tough on grease and grime as mainstream brands, but free of harsh chemicals and cost far less than most green cleaners. They



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

For a healthy home, prioritize cleaning habits that reduce your environmental impact and limit the harsh chemicals to which your family is exposed.

are also safe for use around kids and pets, safe for sensitive skin and not tested on animals, making them a good choice at a time when families are looking to cut back expenses, and make the switch to more natural products.

"This is the perfect time

to take steps toward a greener home," says Erin Chase, founder of \$5 Dinners and Art of Green "cleanfluencer." "As a busy mom of four boys, it's the first affordable green cleaning option I've tried that actually works."

To find Art of Green, visit

artofgreen.com or purchase at Target.com. Follow the brand on Instagram and Facebook for their cleaning tips and tricks.

Foster Cleaner Air

Skip store-bought air fresheners. Instead, simply boil lemon, cinna-

mon, cloves or any favorite plant for a natural, lasting aroma. You can further promote fresh air at home simply by opening windows whenever possible. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends doing so to reduce the spread of coro-

navirus.

For a healthy home, prioritize cleaning habits that reduce your environmental impact and limit the harsh chemicals to which your family is exposed.

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

GIVING BACK

Safe holiday season volunteering ideas

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have created instability for many. Looking for ways to give back? Consider these socially distant volunteer ideas:

- By hosting a virtual fundraiser, you can support a non-profit organization and amplify its work while connecting with friends and family during an unusual holiday season. To get people excited about the cause, go beyond simply asking for donations. For example, host a dance-a-thon to be conducted over video conference and have each participant rally to get sponsors. Or, perform a concert and live stream it, asking friends to make a donation in order to watch.

- Spread holiday cheer by donating toys, books, games and other gifts to kids who may not otherwise receive gifts this season. Just be sure to review the policies of the organization you select. For example, some charities ask that gifts remain unwrapped. At the same time, look for drop-off sites that allow you to donate in a safe, socially distant way.

- Older adults often lead isolated lives, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these circumstances. Unfortunately, isolation and loneliness can lead to depression and a number of other health risks. Become a pen pal to an older adult in your community. Whether you write to each other with handwritten cards and letters or you use video conferencing, your friendship will provide much needed connection.

— Story courtesy of
StatePoint Media



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Spread holiday cheer by donating toys, books, games and other gifts to kids who may not otherwise receive gifts this season.



SAFETY

How to select safe toys for kids this holiday season

Children look forward to opening their holiday presents all year. However, there are some things to keep in mind to make sure gifts are safe and appropriate.

To help you make savvy selections, PlaySafe.org from The Toy Association, the premier site for toy safety information, is offering the following guidance:

- **Avoid shady sellers:** This time of year can be especially costly, making it tempting to shop around. However, that low priced toy may not actually be “a good deal.”

“U.S. toy safety laws are considered the gold standard. Before reaching your home, a toy is subjected to over 100 different safety standards and tests and must be certified compliant by an independent testing laboratory,” says Joan Lawrence, The Toy Association’s “Toy Safety Mom” and senior vice president of standards and regulatory affairs. “The cheap imitations and counterfeits available online from illicit sellers haven’t met these same safety standards.”

A recent survey commissioned by The Toy Association of U.S. parents who are their household’s primary toy purchaser revealed that 71% of parents whose kids get holiday gifts from grandparents who shop online aren’t completely confident that their elders know how to ensure that toys are from verified sellers. In the same survey, 19% of parents report that their child has received a knock-off toy that was bought online.

Parents should talk to gift purchasers about sticking with verified sellers. This includes buying directly from brand websites or by following provided links to official retailers selling a brand’s products. For those who do choose to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Playing with toys above a child’s age grade can lead to misuse and possible injury. Pay special attention to age grading on product labels and encourage family members who are also toy shopping to do the same.

shop through lesser-known online sellers, checking out reviews and a product’s legitimacy before making a purchase is essential.

- **Follow age recommendations:** Playing with toys above a child’s age grade can lead to misuse and possible injury. However, 26% of parents in The Toy Association survey report that their kid has received a toy which was meant for kids who were older. Pay special attention to age grad-

ing on product labels and encourage family members who are also toy shopping to do the same. These are not merely suggestions, they’re firm recommendations made by safety experts based on childhood developmental stages. Find this information on labels and in product descriptions. If it’s not available, that’s a red flag and could mean the toy is illicit.

- **Pay attention to toys labeled 3+:** Toys labeled 3+

may contain small parts that can be a choking hazard for children under 3 or kids who still mouth toys. While these items often make great gifts for older kids, they should be stowed away after playtime to keep younger siblings safe. Not sure if a toy is small enough to be hazardous? Consider getting a Small Parts Tester to test toys and other small household objects.

- **Monitor playtime:**

Kids find ways to play with things that are not toys, including objects that can be very dangerous if accidentally swallowed. The holiday season may introduce new curiosities to the house (e.g. batteries, high-powered magnets, decorations, medications from visiting family members). On the other hand, there is a federal law that requires batteries in toys to be kept inaccessible, thanks to the use of a locking mecha-

nism. Keep dangerous, non-toy items out-of-reach and monitor children during playtime.

For additional toy safety information, tips and resources, visit PlaySafe.org.

“Don’t let your child unwrap a potential safety hazard this holiday season,” says Lawrence. “By shopping smart you can ensure safe play.”

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

SAFETY

This holiday season, doctors urge public to make safety a top priority

With COVID-19 infections at an all-time high, medical experts urge the public to make safety their number one priority throughout the holiday season.

"Nearly a year into this pandemic, people are yearning for a return to normalcy. However, COVID-19 cases are surging and with flu season already upon us, bringing together people from different households during the holidays is far too great a safety risk," says Susan R. Bailey, M.D., president of the American Medical Association (AMA).

During this unusual year, the AMA is sharing top tips for a safe and healthy holiday season:

1. It may not be the way you're used to celebrating, but consider limiting this year's gatherings to just the people who live in your household.

2. If you live somewhere warm, you may be able to add a few people to your plans, but only if your get together is outdoors and safely physically distant.

3. Take advantage of the video conferencing technologies available at your fingertips to bridge the distance between you and family or friends. Whether it's watching holiday movies, unwrapping gifts or sharing recipes together, many of these traditions can still happen virtually.

4. Interested in holiday deals and discounts? Shop for

bargains from home. And if you must go to the store in person and you're at-risk, check ahead of time to see if there are special hours for you.

5. Consider additional outdoor activities that can bring together other people in your circle without the dangers of dining inside. Go apple picking, leaf peeping or hiking. Think beyond the traditional holiday activities and start new traditions.

6. Disappointed that your usual large dinner is for a smaller group? You can still cook a large meal and share a portion with neighbors or friends. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends "delivering them in a way that doesn't involve contact with others."

7. Continue to follow everyday safety guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19: wash your hands, maintain physical distancing and #MaskUp.

More health resources, along with tips to prevent the spread of COVID-19, are available at ama-assn.org.

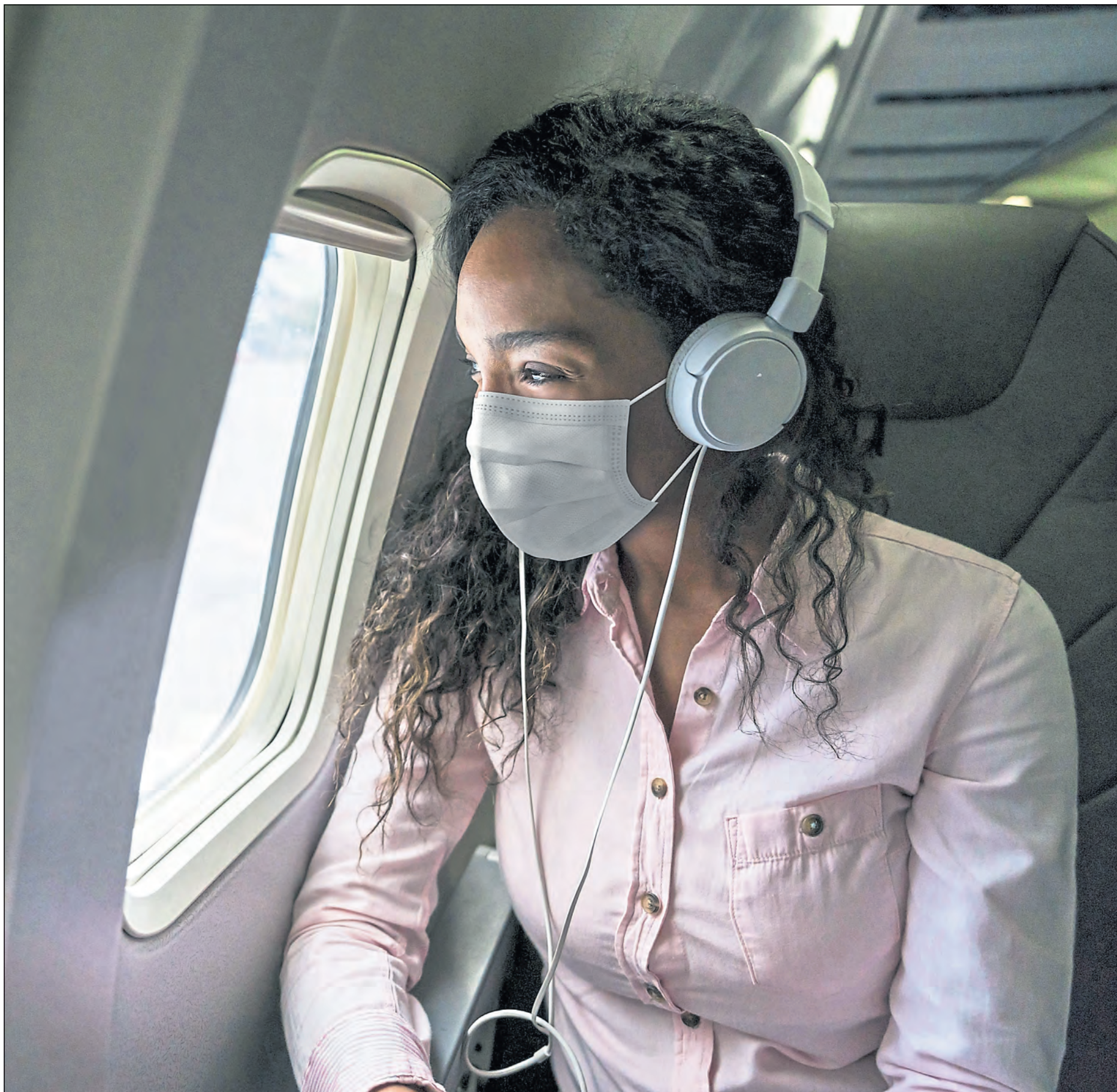
"Missing holiday traditions is difficult, but with top scientists and researchers working round the clock to combat this virus, I'm hopeful that by this time next year, friends and family will be together again, one way or another," says Dr. Bailey.

— Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

More health resources, along with tips to prevent the spread of COVID-19, are available at ama-assn.org.



IN THE KITCHEN

Pointers for holiday baking

The holiday season is steeped in tradition. Baking is one tradition that comes with the holiday territory.

Many people may only bake in November and December, so it's understandable if they're a little rusty come the holiday season. These baking tips can lead to successful yields of cookies, cakes and other holiday treats.

Follow the recipe carefully

When cooking, it is easy to add an extra dash of this or a pinch of that. But baking is a science and the ingredients are used in a ratio to produce a desired chemical reaction while cooking. To ensure success, do not substitute ingredients unless the recipe tells you how to do so, and measure each addition carefully.

Spoon out your measurements

It can be tempting to dig a measuring cup right into a bag of flour, but scooping packs the ingredients down — potentially causing you to use more than the recipe calls for. Instead, spoon the flour into your measuring cup gently and use a straight edge to level it out. Even better, use a scale and metric measurements to ensure exact amounts of wet and dry ingredients.

Read up on temperature

Certain ingredients, like butter and eggs, are temperature-dependent. Cold butter in biscuits helps them to rise up flaky and delicious. Eggs brought to room temperature enable the emulsification process to work more readily. The difference in temperature can mean a completely different chemical reaction, so follow the recipe accordingly.

Calibrate the oven

Purchase an oven thermometer, set your oven to 350 F, the standard baking temperature, and see what the thermometer reads. If it is different, adjust cooking times accordingly or have the oven repaired. Cooking at the wrong temperature might mean the recipe doesn't turn out right.

Use unsalted butter

Most recipes will call for unsalted butter so you aren't adding unwanted sodium to the recipe, affecting dough consistency and flavor.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

A few tips can go a long way to helping holiday baking go more smoothly.

Position pans centrally

Pans should be on the center rack of the oven. If the oven isn't wide enough to put multiple pans side by side, place them on different racks and slightly offset them to enable air circulation.

Use parchment paper

This unsung hero of baking can keep cookies from spreading out on baking sheets, prevent cakes from sticking to pans and may even help batter and dough bake evenly.

Flip cakes

Cool cakes upside down on a cooling rack. This will help flatten out the tops, which makes it easier to stack and level cakes for layered cakes.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

IN THE KITCHEN

Holiday baking gets even sweeter with brownies

What would the holidays be without delicious foods to share with loved ones? In fact, crafting elaborate meals and baking goodies is par for the course once the weather begins to cool and decorations turn up on businesses and homes.

Many people have tried-and-true recipes they rely on each year, but there's always the possibility to give new tasty tidbits a try. There are so many tantalizing desserts to tickle the tongue, but this recipe for "Rocky Recchiuti Brownies" from "Chocolate Obsession" (Stewart, Tabori & Chang) by Michael Recchiuti and Fran Gage yields rich and chewy brownies that no holiday celebrant will be able to resist.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

ROCKY RECCHIUTI BROWNIES

Makes 16 brownies

INGREDIENTS

5 1/2 ounces 100 percent unsweetened chocolate, coarsely chopped, divided

10 tablespoons (5 ounces) unsalted butter with 82 percent butterfat, cut into 1-inch slices.

2/3 cup (3 1/2 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

3 extra-large eggs, at room temperature

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract, preferably Madagascar Bourbon

1 1/3 cups granulated cane sugar

1/3 cup walnut halves, roasted and roughly chopped

6 Tahitian Vanilla Bean Marshmallows, each 1 1/2 inches square, cut into quarters (see recipe below)

STEPS

Preheat the oven to 325F. Line the bottom of an 8-inch square baking pan with parchment paper and liberally coat the paper and the pan sides with flavorless vegetable oil.

Put 3 ounces of the chocolate and the butter in a medium stainless-steel bowl and set over



MEDIANEWS GROUP FILE PHOTO

Many people have tried-and-true recipes for brownies they rely on each year, but there's always the possibility to give new tasty tidbits a try.

a pot of simmering water. Heat, stirring occasionally, until the chocolate and butter melt and are fully combined and the mixture is smooth. Lift the bowl from the pot. Set aside.

Sift the flour and salt together into a bowl. In another bowl, combine the eggs and vanilla extract

and whisk together by hand until blended. Whisk in the sugar.

Whisk the egg mixture into the chocolate. Add the flour and the remaining 2 1/2 ounces chocolate to the batter and, using a rubber spatula, mix well. Then mix in the walnuts.

Pour the batter into the pre-

pared pan. Spread it evenly with a small offset spatula. Scatter the marshmallow pieces evenly over the surface and push them halfway into the batter. The tops should remain uncovered.

Bake on the middle shelf of the oven until the marshmallows are browned and a skewer inserted into the center of the brownie sheet comes out with some batter clinging to it, about 45 minutes. Let cool completely in the pan on a wire rack, then cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until cold.

Run a table knife around the edge of the pan to loosen the sides of the brownie, and then slide the brownie, still on the paper, onto a work surface. Using a ruler to guide you and a sharp knife, cut into sixteen 2-inch squares. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks.

TAHITIAN VANILLA BEAN MARSHMALLOWS

About 40 marshmallows

INGREDIENTS

Flavorless vegetable oil for the pan

3 3/4 teaspoons unflavored gelatin

3 tablespoons water

2 cups granulated cane sugar, divided into halves

1 1/2 cups light corn syrup

4 extra-large egg whites, at room temperature

1 Tahitian vanilla bean, split horizontally

About 3 cups powdered cane sugar for finishing

STEPS

Line the bottom of an 8-by-12-inch sheet pan with parchment paper and lightly coat the paper and the pan sides with flavorless vegetable oil. Put the gelatin in a small bowl. Add the water and stir. Set aside to soften.

Combine 1 cup of the sugar with the corn syrup in a large, heavy-bottomed pot. Use an unlined copper pot if you have one. Place over medium heat and cook, stir-

ring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until the sugar melts. Then continue to cook, without stirring, until the mixture reaches 230F on a candy thermometer. If any crystals form on the sides of the pan and the mixture heats, wash them down with a wet pastry brush.

Meanwhile, put the egg whites in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whip attachment. Scrape the seeds from the vanilla bean into the bowl.

When the sugar syrup reaches 240F, start to beat the egg whites on medium speed. When the whites form very soft peaks, add the remaining 1 cup sugar and continue beating.

When the sugar syrup reaches 250F, remove it from the heat and stir in the softened gelatin. The syrup will foam up and triple in volume. Switch the mixer to high speed and slowly pour the syrup into the beaten egg whites, aiming for the side of the bowl. The whites will almost double in volume. Reduce the speed to medium-high and beat until the whites (not the outside of the bowl) are lukewarm to the touch, about 114F, about 15 minutes.

Scrape the marshmallow mixture into the prepared pan and, using a small offset spatula, spread it evenly to the sides. Let cool completely at room temperature.

To cut the marshmallows, sift about 1/2 cup of the powdered sugar onto a work surface in a rectangle the size of a sheet pan. Sift another 2 cups powdered sugar into a large bowl. Run a thin-bladed knife around the edge of the pan to loosen the marshmallow. Invert the pan onto the sugared surface to unmold, then lift off the pan and peel off the parchment paper. Sift about 1/2 cup powdered sugar evenly over the top. Using a ruler to guide you and a lightly oiled sharp knife, cut the marshmallow sheet into 1 1/2-inch squares. It is easier if you use a pressing motion, rather than pull the knife. After cutting, toss the marshmallows, a few at a time, in the bowl of powdered sugar, coating them lightly.

TRADITION

The meaning of the menorah

Menorahs are a prominent symbol of Chanukah. Menorahs are seven-branched candelabras that have been used in Jewish worship since ancient times. The seven branches refer to the seven days of creation. The menorah is the traditional symbol of Judaism and the emblem of the state of Israel. For Chanukah, a nine-branched candelabra called a hanukkiyah is used, but the word “menorah” has become interchangeable. The Chanukah menorah consists of nine candles. The center and ninth candle are referred to as the Shamash. It is used to light all the other candles. The Shamash is raised above the other candles to make it kosher. The lighting of the menorah over the eight days of Chanukah symbolizes the miracle that occurred during the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean revolt. The sacred oil, of which there was only enough for one day’s lighting, miraculously lasted for eight days.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Menorahs are seven-branched candelabras that have been used in Jewish worship since ancient times.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

SAFETY

4 tips to help prevent electrical fires at home



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Electrical fires can be devastating and lethal. Fortunately, there are simple proactive steps every household can take that can help stop an electrical fire before it starts.

Electrical fires often occur unexpectedly in locations that may be hidden from view. As the second most common type of home fire in the U.S., more than 40,000 electrical fires occur in American homes every year, resulting in hundreds of deaths, over 1,000 injuries and more than \$1 billion in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

“With millions of Americans working and learning from home amid COVID-19, it’s more important than ever to take a few simple steps to protect your home and loved ones from electrical fires,” says Ashley Bryant, National Electrical Manufacturers Association Low Voltage Distribution Equipment AFCI Task Force co-chair.

To make needed updates at home, consider these safety tips from the NEMA LVDE AFCI Task Force:

1. Take Care with Cords: Inspect cords regularly for signs of damage or wear and tear. Use extension cords properly and according to the load ratings for the product. Never overload them or run cords under furniture, carpets or rugs.

2. Examine Appliances: When using appliances, inspect them for signs of damage. Only use the appliance in its intended manner.

3. Ensure Products Meet Safety Standards: To ensure the products you use at home comply with national safety

standards, always look for the label of a nationally-recognized testing laboratory, like UL, CSA or Intertek.

4. Consider Additional Protection: Arcing was the heat source in approximately three of five electrical home fires from 2012-2016, according to the National Fire Protection Association. However, you can help prevent this dangerous condition from leading to a worst case scenario with Arc-Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCIs). AFCIs are designed to monitor the circuit for the presence of “normal” and “dangerous” arcing conditions in order to reduce the chance of your electrical system being an ignition source of a fire.

An affordable, proven smart technology that provides a higher level of protection than standard circuit breakers, AFCIs have been a National Electrical Code requirement in new home building since 1999 for certain electrical circuits. To better protect your entire home, experts recommend requesting AFCI protection on all 15 and 20A branch circuits.

To learn more about electrical fire prevention and AFCI technology, visit afcisafety.org.

Electrical fires can be devastating and lethal. Fortunately, there are simple proactive steps every household can take that can help stop an electrical fire before it starts.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



As the second most common type of home fire in the U.S., more than 40,000 electrical fires occur in American homes every year, resulting in hundreds of deaths, over 1,000 injuries and more than \$1 billion in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

But finding the right gift for a book-loving loved one may not be as easy as it seems.

SHOPPING

Great gifts for book lovers

Books are very popular gifts come the holiday season. Genres that run the gamut from fantasy to non-fiction ensure there's a book out there for everyone. But finding the right gift for a book-loving loved one may not be as easy as it seems.

Avid readers may have personal book collections that rival local libraries, so it can be difficult to find something they haven't already read. In addition, asking them what's on their wish list of books can remove the element of surprise from holiday gift-giving. Fortunately, shoppers can still light up their favorite book lovers' eyes this holiday season, even if they're not giving them a recent bestseller.

• **Bookshelf:** E-readers may provide instant access to millions of books, but many avid readers still prefer physical books. Bookshelves can make the perfect gift for book lovers who take great pride in their home libraries. Bookshelves come in all shapes, sizes and styles, from ladder bookcases to floating bookshelves to built-ins. A basic understanding of your loved one's home decor preferences is all you need to find a bookshelf that can blend in seamlessly in his or her reading room.

• **Audio book subscription:** Audio book subscription services have grown in popularity in recent years. These services make it possible for busy readers to devour their favorite books while commuting to and from work or running daily errands in the car. Amazon's Audible membership provides readers with a host of benefits, including discounts on audiobook purchases, monthly credits toward anything available through the service and even complimentary digital newspaper subscriptions.

• **Bookends:** Book lovers tend to put a lot of effort into designing their reading rooms. Decorative bookends, which can have a humorous angle or tie into a theme that correlates to readers' favorite literary genre (i.e., boat bookends for lovers of maritime histories), can make for great, unique gifts.

• **Embossers:** Embossers allow readers to put their personal stamps on every book in their collections. That not only adds a unique touch to readers' personal libraries, but also may increase the chances that the books they loan out to friends and family members are ultimately returned. After all, who wouldn't return a book to its original owner when that book has been personally embossed?

Many items make the perfect gift for book lovers, even if shoppers are unsure about buying their loved ones actual books.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Many items make the perfect gift for book lovers, even if shoppers are unsure about buying their loved ones actual books.



Shoppers can light up their favorite book lovers' eyes this holiday season, even if they're not giving them a recent bestseller.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

TRADITION

Why are Christmas colors red and green?

Many people may not get in the holiday spirit without decorations and all the trimmings. Chances are strong that if you have containers full of items just waiting to see the light of day again this holiday season, those items are red or green or some combination thereof. Red and green have become the traditional colors of Christmas, just as blue and white symbolizes Chanukah. But how did this color palette come to evolve?

COLORS » PAGE 47



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Just like many traditions of Christmas, the red and green scheme has origins that pre-date the Christian celebration.

Colors

FROM PAGE 46

Just like many traditions of Christmas, the red and green scheme has origins that pre-date the Christian celebration. Christmas has borrowed from many of the customs of winter solstice celebrations of ancient peoples, including the Celts. Ancient Celtic people revered holly plants, believing they brought beauty and

good fortune in the middle of winter — a time when the landscape is normally bleak and holly plants thrive and stand out. Celts would regularly bring in sprigs of holly and decorate their homes with the plants, which feature shiny, serrated leaves and bright, red berries, as a way to guarantee a prosperous new year. Holly also came to be associated with the crown of thorns Jesus Christ was forced to wear during his crucifixion.

The custom of using red

and green continued into the 14th century. Dr. Spike Bucklow, a research scientist at the University of Cambridge, says red and green also were used to paint medieval rood screens, which were partitions installed in churches to separate the congregation from the priest and altar. Dr. Bucklow notes that Victorians also extended the association of these colors as a physical boundary to another boundary: the marking of the end of the old year

and the beginning of a new one at Christmastime.

While red and green had associations with Christmas in early times through holly and other sources, the connection was perhaps best solidified thanks to a man named Haddon Sundblom. Sundblom was an artist commissioned in 1931 by the Coca-Cola company to create an image of Santa Claus for the company's upcoming holiday ads. Until this point, versions of Santa were rarely consis-

tent, with his clothing vacillating between green, blue and red. He also wasn't the plump, jolly fellow associated with Christmas as we know him today, but rather thin and elf-like. Sundblom portrayed him as a chubby man wearing red robes, likely as a nod to Coca-Cola's own red logo, even though the company denies the connection. Santa was featured in front of a green background. The ads proved popular and Sundblom's Santa became the

preferred depiction. Santa's red robes perfectly complemented the green background and other green components of the holiday, such as Christmas trees and holly, that already had been solidified as Christmas imagery.

Color plays a strong role in creating Christmas nostalgia. Red and green are put on vivid display throughout the season.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

COMMUNITY

Housing instability and COVID-19: Help on the way

The economic downturn caused by the pandemic has created widespread housing insecurity for both renters and homeowners. However, advocates say that free and low-cost legal assistance and other support is helping people remain in their homes.

“The economic challenges caused by COVID-19 are putting a spotlight on the most vulnerable communities, which have been disproportionately affected by job losses, under-employment and housing instability,” says Eileen Fitzgerald, head of Housing Affordability Philanthropy with the Wells Fargo Foundation.

By the end of the year, up to 40 million U.S. renters may face eviction, according to research from the Aspen Institute and the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project. Black and Hispanic tenants represent 80 percent of those potentially facing eviction nationwide.

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an eviction moratorium until the end of the year, tenants must still be proactive. Here are steps you can take to protect yourself, according to the National Housing Law Project:

- **Contact your landlord.** As soon as you know you won’t be able to make a rent payment, contact your landlord.
- **Gather documentation.** Retain all correspondence and receipts from your landlord. Be sure to document phone calls and in-person conversations.
- **Know assistance is available.** Seek out community services offering rental relief, food and health care. Visit www.Legalfaq.org to learn more about services available in your community.

- **Seek legal assistance.** An estimated 90 percent of landlords have legal representation, while only 10 percent of tenants do, according to Harvard researchers. This creates a glaring equity gap, as legal representation can make you more likely to avoid eviction. Look into services providing free legal assistance and submit your declaration. The CDC moratorium requires tenants to file a federal declaration form to be eligible for



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

By the end of the year, up to 40 million U.S. renters may face eviction, according to research from the Aspen Institute and the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project.

the eviction protection.

What's Being Done

Fortunately, large-scale, multifaceted efforts are already underway to address the nationwide housing affordability crisis. As part of its \$175 million response to COVID-19, the Wells Fargo Foundation has provided over 1,200 grants to nonprofits, including funding grants to provide legal assistance for renters at risk for eviction. Grants from the

Foundation will allow 15 organizations that work to keep people and families housed through services and advocacy efforts to expand their services.

Housing insecurity is an issue in communities beyond urban centers. According to Partners for Rural Transformation, of the 395 counties with persistent poverty in the U.S., eight out of 10 are rural and the majority of people living in them are people of color. In response, the Wells Fargo Foun-

dation has made grants to community development financial institutions to help keep people housed in rural communities.

These efforts are part of the Wells Fargo Foundation’s \$1 billion philanthropic commitment to address housing affordability solutions by 2025, which includes investing in strategies to advance housing stability, increase the supply of affordable homes and expand homeownership opportunities for people of color. To learn

more about the housing crisis and some of the philanthropic efforts to address it, visit wellsfargo.com/impact.

“Housing instability is a persisting problem that must change. Home is a sanctuary. Having a safe and affordable place to call home is an essential pathway for wellness, dignity and economic opportunity,” says Fitzgerald.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media