



Holidays at Home

*Your guide to a festive and
safe holiday season*

SHOPPING GUIDE

**'FROM MICHIGAN
WITH LOVE'
RELEASES ANNUAL
GIFT LIST**

ATTRACTIONS

**8 HOLIDAY LIGHT
DISPLAYS NOT
TO MISS IN
MICHIGAN**

RECIPES

**SAVOR THE
HOLIDAYS WITH
THIS SPECIAL
ROAST**

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ENTERTAINING

Must-have tools for entertaining with ease this holiday season

'Tis the season for gatherings galore. Whether you're an all-star entertainer or a first-time host, having the right tools will set you up for success—meaning you can spend less time in the kitchen and more time with loved ones. Here are a few must-haves to add to your holiday shopping list:

Classy and creative cocktails

Create memorable cocktails or mocktails that everyone will be talking about with uniquely shaped craft ice. Tovolo offers a variety of craft ice molds to fit every occasion—from spheres and sports balls to novelty and holiday ornament shapes. The easy-to-use, durable, stackable molds are dishwasher safe for easy clean-up. Plus, the slow-melting shapes keep drinks cool for longer. So, drop them in for fun and festive drinks at your next gathering.

Pops in a pinch

Popsicles aren't just for summertime. In fact, they're a great option for a holiday crowd since you can prep them well in advance, and they make for a light dessert after a night of feasting. With Tovolo Stackable Pop Molds, simply puree some fruit — strawberries, kiwis, etc. — pour the mixture into the molds, stack them in the freezer, and voilà, you've got a delightful treat that basically made itself. Better yet, guests can add the fruity pops to a glass of champagne or cocktail of choice to add flavor and keep



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

Having the right tools makes all the difference when you're preparing to be the host with the most.

drinks cool.

Table-worthy tools

When hosting a dinner party, dishes will inevitably pile up in the sink. One way to cut down on dirty dishes is to use a set of kitchen utensils that is both stylish and attractive, so you can go from the stovetop to the dining table without needing to dirty any additional tools. Another tip is to make the meal family style, which

allows your guests to choose what they want and reduces the need to portion out individual servings, ultimately giving you more time to enjoy the party.

Spatulas that make you smile

From cookie batters to mashed potatoes, everyone needs a quality spatula to whip up their favorite holiday dishes. And now

you can add both fun and function to your feast with Spatulart Spatulas featuring double-sided holiday designs and puns. With a nylon core, these high-quality spatulas provide strength for the heaviest mixing jobs and silicone edges that remain flexible for easy scraping. Plus their FSC-certified wood handle makes them an environmentally-conscious way to add a touch of whimsy to the kitchen

roster.

Functional and fashionable bowls

Despite the name, mixing bowls can be one of the most versatile kitchen tools, used for mixing, prep, storage, and if you choose a stylish design like stainless steel, even serving! Why dirty multiple dishes when you can opt for one-bowl recipes? When it comes to

entertaining, it's best to work smarter, not harder.

Having the right tools makes all the difference when you're preparing to be the host with the most. Be sure to equip yourself right for a season of easy and festive holiday prep, and don't forget that when it comes to hosting, versatility is the name of the game.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

RECIPES

Put a plant-based twist on holiday baking

Flavorful desserts are a staple of the holidays and the exciting, appetizing allure of new recipes can help elevate seasonal gatherings and create sweet memories. With near-endless options for celebrating the season, putting a plant-based twist on traditional recipes offers everyone the opportunity to indulge with decadent treats.

In seasonal sweets like Brulee Pumpkin Pie and No-Bake Chocolate Peanut Butter Cheesecake, an option like Country Crock Plant Cream can be used as a dairy-free substitute for heavy whipping cream. With 29% less saturated fat than dairy heavy whipping cream, it's an easy 1:1 swap and is also soy-free, certified plant-based and 100% vegan, making it ideal to have on hand during holiday baking season. It's all of the de-

liciousness of heavy cream, with none of the heaviness of dairy.

Visit [CountryCrock.com](https://www.countrycrock.com) for more delectable holiday dessert ideas.

Brulee Pumpkin Pie

Prep time: 45 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour

Servings: 8

Pie Crust:

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

8 tablespoons Country Crock Plant Butter, cold and cut into cubes
2 tablespoons chilled vegetable shortening, cut into pieces
4 tablespoons ice water

Pumpkin Filling:
1/2 cup maple syrup

1 tablespoon vanilla
1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin puree
1/4 cup coconut cream
1 cup Country Crock Plant Cream
1 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon ground clove
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons cornstarch
3 tablespoons white granulated sugar

Whipped Topping

2 cups Country Crock Plant Cream, chilled

1/4 cup powdered sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

To make pie crust: Preheat oven to 350 F.

In bowl of food processor, add flour, sugar and salt; pulse to combine. Add cold plant butter and shortening. Process about 10 seconds until it looks like coarse meal.

With food processor running, add ice water. Process until mixture clumps together.

On lightly floured surface, roll dough into 14-inch circle. Transfer to 9-inch pie dish. Lift edges and allow dough to drape into dish. Trim, leaving 1-inch overhang. Fold excess dough under and crimp edges.

To make pumpkin filling: In medium saucepan over medium heat, add syrup and vanilla; warm about 2 minutes then remove from heat and set aside.

In large bowl, combine syrup mixture, pumpkin, coconut cream, plant cream, brown sugar,

cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, clove, salt and cornstarch; blend with hand mixer until smooth. Pour mixture into pie crust.

Bake 1 hour. If crust starts to burn, cover edges with aluminum foil. The middle will still be jiggly.

Cool at room temperature 30 minutes then cover and transfer to refrigerator to chill at least 5 hours or overnight.

Before serving, sprinkle pie with white sugar and, using kitchen torch, brulee until sugar is melted and dark brown.

To make whipped topping: Using electric hand mixer or stand mixer, whisk plant cream, powdered sugar and vanilla on high until mixture thickens and stiff peaks form.

Slice and serve with whipped topping.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES

Putting a plant-based twist on traditional recipes offers everyone the opportunity to indulge with decadent treats.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES

In seasonal sweets like Brulee Pumpkin Pie and No-Bake Chocolate Peanut Butter Cheesecake, an option like Country Crock Plant Cream can be used as a dairy-free substitute for heavy whipping cream.

No-Bake Chocolate Peanut Butter Cheesecake

Prep time: 5-10 minutes

Cook time: 5 minutes

Total time: 6-7 hours

Servings: 8

Country Crock Plant Butter, for greasing

Crust:

1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs

1/2 cup Country Crock Plant Butter, melted

Filling:

2 packages (8 ounces each) dairy-free cream cheese, at room temperature

1 cup peanut butter

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1/2 cup Country Crock Plant Cream

1 cup powdered sugar

Chocolate Ganache:

1 stick Country Crock Plant Butter, cubed

1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

Grease 9-inch pie dish with plant butter; set aside.

To make crust: In medium bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs and melted plant butter; mix thoroughly.

Add crust to greased pie dish and press firmly to bottom and sides; refrigerate.

To make filling: In bowl of electric mixer, beat cream cheese until smooth and creamy.

Add powdered sugar; beat until fully incorporated.

Add peanut butter, vanilla extract and plant cream; beat until smooth and creamy.

Pour filling into prepared crust and refrigerate 5-6 hours or overnight.

To make chocolate ganache: In pan over medium heat, add plant butter cubes and chocolate; stir continuously.

Spread chocolate ganache evenly on top of chilled cheesecake. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before slicing and serving.

Courtesy of Family Features

HOLIDAY DECOR

Craft an entire day around tree shopping

Though retailers may begin playing holiday tunes shortly after Halloween, for many people, no date on the calendar marks the beginning of the holiday season better than the day they pick up their Christmas tree.

There are many different ways to acquire a Christmas tree. Some people prefer artificial Christmas trees that can be stored and taken out each year. Others make a yearly expedition to a tree lot or a Christmas tree farm to find the perfect fir or spruce.

Historians believe a man named W.V. McGallard planted 25,000 Norway spruce seedlings at his Mercer County, New Jersey farm in 1901, essentially establishing the first commercial Christmas tree farm. By 1908, customers could visit the farm and choose trees for \$1 each. McGallard helped create an entirely new industry that now accounts for 350 million trees being grown and sold in the United States every year.

Selecting a Christmas tree may not take more than an hour or two, but there are ways for families and other tree shoppers to maximize their time spent looking for a tree.

- **Bring refreshments.** Couple Christmas tree shopping with picnicking if the weather is amenable. Pack some foldable chairs into the vehicle (sitting on the ground on a blanket may be too cold) and bring along thermoses of coffee or hot cocoa. Snacks like granola bars, Christmas cookies or other filling treats can keep everyone satisfied and energized while they shop for a tree.

- **Pair tree shopping with a trip to see lighting displays.** Find the tree lot or tree farm and then scope



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Make a day of selecting and putting up the Christmas tree each year.

out potentially scenic spots to view holiday lighting displays nearby. Neighborhood Facebook or other social media groups often tout homes that put up eye-catching displays. Ask around for addresses and plan your own tours.

- **Plan a night out.** Everyone may be tired and hungry after a long day of Christmas tree hunting. Plus, it's typically a good idea to wait some time for

boughts to open before decorating. Use this opportunity to dine out and return home ready to decorate. Make it a regular occurrence that Christmas tree shopping is followed by a family meal at a favorite restaurant.

- **Watch a classic film.** Many different holiday movies are broadcast this time of year and each enhances the Christmas spirit. While putting up the tree, play a favorite film in the back-

ground. What better way to enjoy decorating your own tree than by watching Charlie Brown adorn his meager evergreen at the same time?

Make a day of selecting and putting up the Christmas tree each year. Doing so can enhance the holidays and make for an entertaining way to spend time together as a couple or family.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

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Some people prefer artificial Christmas trees that can be stored and taken out each year. Others make a yearly expedition to a tree lot or a Christmas tree farm to find the perfect fir or spruce.

SAFETY

How to pet proof your home when decking the halls

The holiday season is a special time of year. Many factors combine to make the holiday season so unique and festive, and that includes all the effort people put into decorating their homes.

Much thought is given to holiday lighting arrangements and which tree to buy, but it's equally

important to consider pets when decorating. Many common household pets are naturally curious, and that curiosity can make it difficult to decorate safely come the holiday season. But various pet-proofing strategies can ensure holiday decorations and displays aren't compro-

mised by four-legged friends this season.

- Secure the Christmas tree. Much like other residents of the home, pets may be mesmerized by a glowing Christmas tree. Pets may sniff around the tree or investigate it closely, which can increase the chances that

it tips over. That poses a significant safety hazard and underscores the importance of using a sturdy stand. Fastening the tree to a wall, much like one might do with a television that isn't mounted, adds a further layer of protection from tip-overs.

- Block off the base of a live

tree. Live trees need water to stay green and keep their needles throughout the season. That water could prove enticing to thirsty pets. Drinking water from a tree stand could increase the risk of the tree tipping over and the water could upset the stomach of pets if the tree was treated with



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Pet owners must exercise an extra bit of caution to keep their pets and homes safe when decorating during the holiday season.

pesticides prior to being brought home. When decorating with a live tree, make sure the base of the tree where the water will be is blocked off. A small fence around the tree could keep curious pets away. The room where the tree is located should be locked or inaccessible when pets are home alone.

- Inspect and conceal light wires. Wires can become frayed over time, and that could pique pets' curiosity. Lighting wires should always be inspected prior to decorating and frayed or damaged wires should be thrown away, even if it means replacing lights. If wires are still sturdy, conceal them along the base of the wall using a cable concealer, which prevents pets from chewing on them.

- Avoid lighting candles. Candles should not be lit in homes with pets. Even candles on shelves that are seemingly beyond pets' reach can be hazardous, as pets, especially cats, have a way of accessing spaces they seemingly shouldn't be able to reach. Use electric candles in lieu of traditional ones.

- Speak to a vet about seasonal plants and flowers before bringing them into the home. Pet owners can speak with their veterinarians before bringing poinsettias, holly and other seasonal plants and flowers into their homes. Some pets could suffer allergic reactions if they eat certain seasonal plants, so it's best to err on the side of caution and speak to a vet before including live plants and flowers in decorative displays.

Decorating is part of the holiday season. Pet owners must exercise an extra bit of caution to keep their pets and homes safe when decorating during this special time of year.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Much thought is given to holiday lighting arrangements and which tree to buy, but it's equally important to consider pets when decorating.

SHOPPING

Great gifts for physical fitness buffs

Holiday shopping is a fun way to show loved ones just how much they're appreciated. Though it's not always so easy finding the right gift, identifying a passion of each person on your holiday shopping list can make finding the perfect present that much easier.

No two families are exactly the same, but that doesn't mean they don't share similar characteristics and personalities. For example, many families have at least one person who qualifies as a physical fitness buff. A passion for fitness can serve as a great starting point when shopping for a loved one who can't wait to exercise each day. This holiday season, shoppers can stoke that passion for exercise with some gifts designed to help people reach their fitness goals.

- **Insulated water bottle.** On the surface, a new water bottle might not seem like the most impressive gift. However, fitness buffs know just how much water bottles have changed in recent years and how invaluable it can be to have a good one at the ready. A high-quality insulated water bottle can keep water cold for hours, ensuring endurance athletes accustomed to long runs or cycling sessions won't need to hydrate with warm drinks no matter how long it's been since they started their workouts.

- **Fitness trackers.** Fitness trackers run the gamut from low-cost options with useful yet limited capabilities to more expensive items that can seemingly give athletes all the information they need about variables such as their heart rate and performance metrics. If the fitness buff on your list has his or her

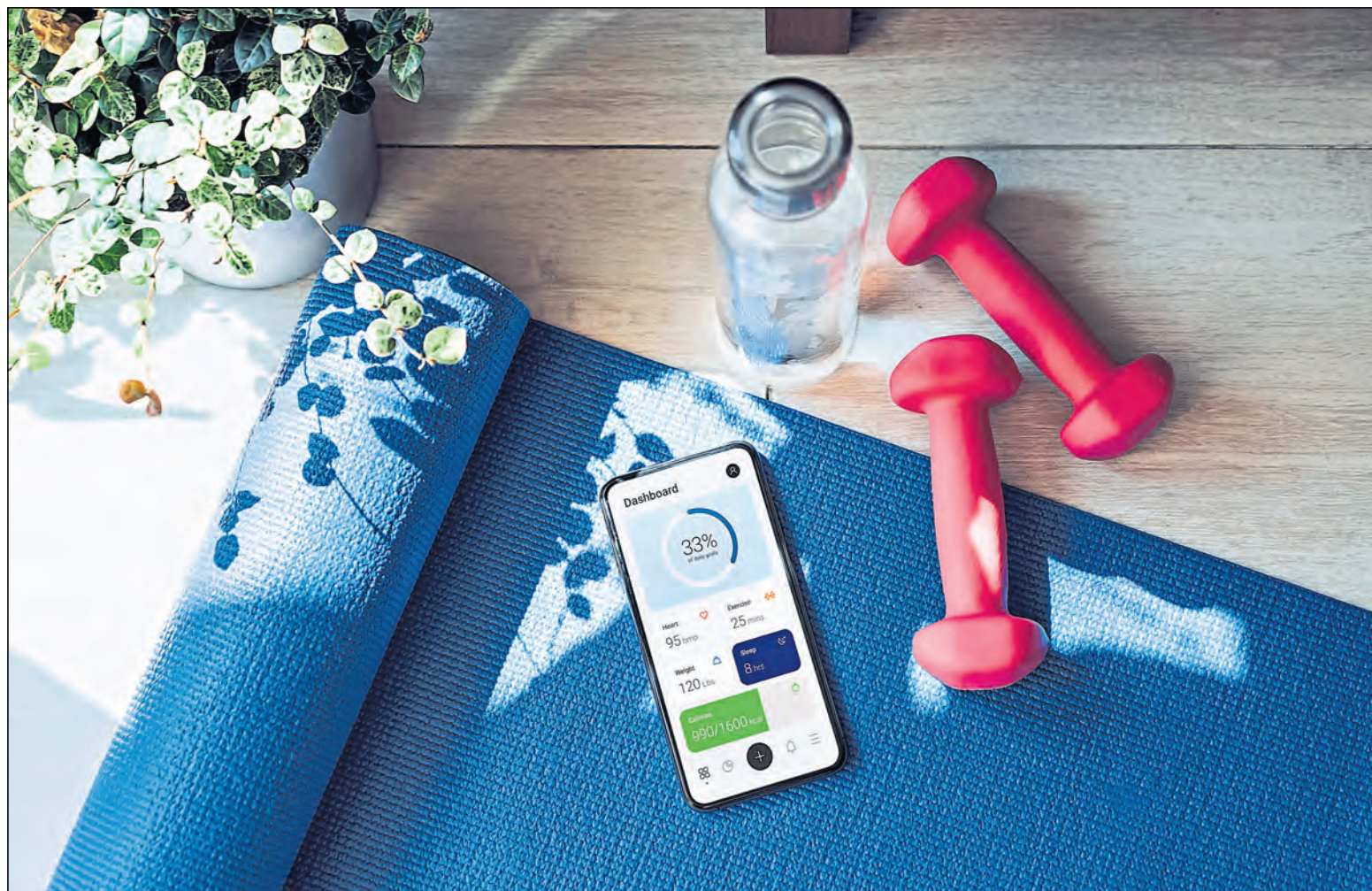


PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Exercise is an essential part of fitness buffs' daily routines. Holiday shoppers can keep that in mind as they look for gifts to make this season even more special.

heart set on an expensive device, speak to other family members about pooling your resources.

- **Fitness app subscription/gift card.** The popularity of various exercise apps spiked dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic because they made it easy to get professional fitness instruction at home. A subscription to a service like ClassPass ([classpass.com](https://www.classpass.com)) provides access to classes at thousands of top-rated gyms, fitness studios, salons, and spas across the

globe. This can help fitness buffs find new exercises if their existing routines have grown stale or simply stay in shape even if they don't always have time to get to the gym.

- **Home exercise equipment.** Though the darkest days of the pandemic might be in the rearview mirror, the world has grown accustomed to periodic spikes that could compromise workout routines. That needn't be the base for fitness buffs who keep some simple exercise

equipment at home. A set of dumbbells, a new weight bench or even a new yoga mat can ensure fitness buffs won't miss a workout even if they can't get out of the house.

Exercise is an essential part of fitness buffs' daily routines. Holiday shoppers can keep that in mind as they look for gifts to make this season even more special for their fitness-focused family members.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Fitness trackers. Fitness trackers run the gamut from low-cost options with useful yet limited capabilities to more expensive items that can seemingly give athletes all the information they need about variables such as their heart rate and performance metrics. If the fitness buff on your list has his or her heart set on an expensive device, speak to other family members about pooling your resources.

ATTRACTIONS

Celebrate the holidays with these Michigan attractions

By Kathy Blake

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From visits with Santa to spectacular holiday displays, there will be no shortage of events and activities to ring in the holiday season across Michigan this year with family and friends.

Here are few Michigan communities with holiday attractions worth checking out if you're in the area. Be sure to check event or community websites for the latest information on event times and dates.

Armada

▪ **Blake's Santa Experience:** Select dates and weekends through Dec. 23, includes a train ride, visit with Santa and bonfire at Santa Stop with donuts and cider, tickets are \$15.95+ each 11 a.m. — 5:30 p.m. and \$18.95+ each, 6-8 p.m., Blake's Orchard & Cider Mill, 17985 Armada Center Road, Armada. Reservations are recommended, blakefarms.com. Blake's Skating Rink is open through Jan. 8, 2-7 p.m. Fridays, 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays outdoor synthetic ice skating rink, surrounded by holiday décor, lights, and music, \$10 per person for a 50-minute skating pass, available for purchase online or on-site, \$5 for skate rental or guests can bring their own.

Bloomfield Hills

▪ **Santa Sighting** with visits with Santa: 9 a.m.-noon, and 12:30-3 p.m. Dec. 3 and 9 a.m.-noon, Dec. 4 at Cranbrook House: 380 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills, \$50 per family. Registration is required by Nov. 29 at housegardens.cranbrook.edu/events/santa, 248-645-3149.

Clare

▪ **Rooftop Landing Reindeer Farm** — Visit with Santa and his reindeer in Clare through December 23, where you can view, pet, and feed the reindeer. You'll find a heated barn with Christmas alpaca and other animals, as well as a gift shop, fresh warm donuts, hot caramel cider and hot cocoa. More information at rooftoprein-



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRANBROOK HOUSE AND GARDENS

"Santa Sighting" event is Dec. 3-4 at Cranbrook House in Bloomfield Hills.

deer.com.

Clarkston

▪ **Clarkston Holiday Lights Parade "Gingerbread All The Way":** 6 p.m. Dec. 10, starting at Renaissance High School Community Education Building, 6558 Waldon Road, Clarkston, proceeding to Main St., ending at Calvary Lutheran Church, 6805 Bluegrass Drive, teamrush27.net/community/holiday-lights-parade.

Detroit

▪ **Menorah in the D**, set for 5 p.m. Dec. 18, is a community-wide menorah lighting event at Campus Martius Park in downtown Detroit. The 26 foot tall menorah was designed and built by the artists Erik & Israel Nordin of the Detroit Design Center in Corktown. More info at menorahinthed.com.

▪ **17th annual Detroit Urban Craft Fair:** Dec. 2-4 at Masonic Temple, 500 Temple St., Detroit. Founded and organized by Handmade Detroit, more than 100 makers who sell handmade goods, vintage clothing and home decor, handmadedetroit.com.

▪ **48th Annual Noel Night:** 5-9 p.m. Dec. 3, Midtown Detroit, Inc. in the Cultural Center and 5-10 p.m. in Midtown. With more than 90 participating venues, this walkable holiday celebration features free indoor and outdoor programming, holiday shopping, outdoor art installations, yuletide treats, caroling, family craft activities, artist demonstrations and performances by local and national artists. Venues include the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's "The Cube," and the Detroit Institute of Arts. The DIA is hosting two free holiday matinee perfor-

mances in the Detroit Film Theatre as part of the Noel Night celebration, Noelnight.org, free admission.

▪ **Historic Palmer Woods Holiday Home Tour & Soiree:** 4:30-11:30 p.m. Dec. 3, tour of five historic homes festively decorated, live music, cuisine prepared by a local chef, gourmet food and desserts, libations, 313-744-2624, reserve timed tickets at palmerwoods.org, \$150+.

Farmington/Farmington Hills

▪ **Holly Days:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 3, at Riley Park in downtown Farmington. Event includes photos with Santa, elves, Christmas carolers, coffee, hot cocoa, and cookies. Also, the Farmington Public Safety Department and the Farmington Area Goodfellows

and The Farmington Hills Police and Fire Departments toy drive. Donations of new unwrapped toys in their original packaging may be dropped off at the event, toys-fortots.org.

▪ **30th Annual Holiday Lights Ceremony:** 6:30 p.m. Dec. 6 outdoors on the Farmington Hills City Hall campus, 31555 W. Eleven Mile Road on the southwest corner of Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. Trees at City Hall will be illuminated along with a 20-foot-tall candle. Special guest singers from the Farmington High School Vocal Harmonics will provide holiday entertainment. After the ceremony, families will enjoy a visit from Santa when he arrives on a big red fire truck. Hot cocoa and cookies will be served inside Fire Department Headquarters, located on the City Hall Campus at 31455 W. Eleven Mile Road. For more information, call 248-699-6700.

Frankenmuth

The world's largest Christmas store with over 90,000 square feet of decorations is a holiday shopper's dream. Bigger than one and a half football fields in size, it features over 50,000 trims, gifts and collectibles, with more than 350 decorated Christmas trees displayed in Bronner's salesroom and approximately 100,000 outdoor Christmas lights that illuminate the grounds every evening throughout the year.

Harrison Township

▪ **Harbor Holiday Bazaar:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 11, Macray Harbor, 30675 N. River Rd. Shop for original holiday gifts from local artists and crafters, including unique hand-made items like candles, soap, cocoa bombs, woodwork, wreaths, jewelry, and more. This event is free to attend, and open to the public

Holly

▪ **Holly Dickens Festival:** 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays, and noon-5 p.m. Sundays, Nov. 26-Dec. 11, downtown Holly, facebook.com/hollydickensfestival.

Independence Twp.

▪ Magic of Lights drive-through holiday lights display: Through Dec. 31, Pine Knob Music Theatre Parking Area, 33 Bob Seger Drive, Independence Twp. Passes must be purchased online at magicoflights.com/events/clarkston, \$20+.

Lake Orion/Orion Twp.

▪ Lake Orion Lighted Christmas Parade: 6-8 p.m. Dec. 3, downtown Lake Orion, downtownlakeorion.org.

▪ Canterbury Village Holiday Stroll: Opens at 5 p.m. Friday to Sunday, through Dec. 18 and Dec. 22-23, at Canterbury Village, 2359 Joslyn Ct., Orion Twp., featuring festive lights and a light show spectacular, choreographed to classic holiday songs and the sounds of professional carolers, live Christmas performances and recreations of holiday scenes. Santa Claus will be available for visits and his personal mailbox also will be available. Tickets for Holiday Stroll, which takes place rain, snow, or shine, are \$14.99 per person and must be purchased online in advance at CanterburyVillage.com. Children younger than two, active military members and veterans admitted free. Parking is \$5.

▪ "The Nutcracker" ballet performance: 5 p.m. Dec. 3, L.A. Dance, Lake Orion High School, 495 E Scripps Road, Orion Twp., 248-393-1339, buy.tututix.com/ladance, \$25+.

Lansing

Nearly 9,000 lights wrap the tree outside the Capitol Building in Downtown Lansing. Each year, Michigan's official Christmas tree is lit during Silver Bells in the City which draws thousands of spectators.

Leonard

▪ "Holly, History & Harmony: 5-8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 5 at Addison Oaks County Park in Leonard, featuring an educational tour and live seasonal music provided by the Twelfth Night Singers, who will sing a wide range of a cappella selections while dressed in traditional Renaissance attire. The cost is \$45/person. Registration is due by Monday, Nov. 21. Reserve your spot by calling



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCHESTER DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Annual Kris Kringle Market, open-air holiday market is Dec. 2 and Dec. 3 in downtown Rochester.

248-858-0916 or for information, email ActiveAdults@oakgov.com.

Marquette

The Annual Winter Snow Fun Holiday Parade and Tree Lighting is set for 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 8. Watch tinsel and light twinkling floats with carolers transform downtown into a holiday wonderland. Festivities include visiting with Santa Claus, pony rides, hot chocolate and photos with Santa Claus. More information at downtownmarquette.org.

Mount Clemens

▪ Anton Art Center Holiday Market: Open through Dec. 23, the 44th annual Holiday Market features Michigan handmade gifts and seasonal décor. Admission is free and open to the public. More information at theartcenter.org/holiday-market.

Mt. Pleasant

▪ Mt. Pleasant Christmas Celebration: Dec. 2-3; a longstanding tradition in downtown Mt. Pleasant for almost three decades, this annual holiday celebration fea-

tures a variety of activities including breakfast with Santa, warming stations, a Lighted Christmas Parade, "make and take" crafts, holiday lights, carolers, downtown shopping, food and refreshments and more.

Muskegon

America's Tallest Singing Christmas Tree, presented by Mona Shores High School, has become a tradition for families near and far as a way of kicking off their holiday and getting into the spirit of the season. With its 25,000 colored lights, 15 tiers that reach 67 feet up into the majestic Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts, over 275 singers, the Singing Christmas Tree must be seen to be believed.

Northville

▪ Christmas in the Village is Dec. 2-3 at Mill Race Historical Village, 215 Griswold St, Northville, decorated buildings and Christmas trees, Santa Claus, Christmas Market, carolers, children's story time and marketplace, complimentary profes-

sional family photos, hot cocoa, baked goods, advance registration, timed tickets, millracenorthville.org, \$12+ each.

▪ A Holiday to Remember is Dec. 9-11, downtown Northville (Main and Center Street closures), strolling music and carolers on Main and Center Streets, food truck, vendors, horse and wagon rides starting behind the Pavilion in Town Square. Hours are 6-9 p.m. Dec. 9; 2-9 p.m. Dec. 10 and 1-5 p.m. Dec. 11, millracenorthville.org.

▪ The City Lights Chorus Holiday Show: 3:30 p.m. Dec. 10, Hilltop Church, 21260 Haggerty Road, Northville, citylightschorus.com, \$15 each.

▪ It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play" performances through Dec. 18, at Tipping Point Theatre, 361 E. Cady St., Northville, tippingpointtheatre.com, \$28+.

Pontiac

▪ Tree of Hope — Pontiac Tree Lighting: 6-7 p.m. Dec. 2, featuring singers, choirs and carolers at Saginaw St. and Huron St., down-

town Pontiac, afterglow at First Presbyterian, mainstreetpontiac.org. Also, the Festival of Trees for the public to vote for favorite trees is Dec. 2-30. Christmas trees are "adopted" and decorated at participating merchants throughout downtown Pontiac by nonprofits. The nonprofit with the most votes receives \$500, Holidayextravaganza.org.

▪ 41st Holiday Extravaganza: Saturday, Dec. 3, free Winter FUN Festival is 8:30-10:30 a.m., then parade with floats from The Parade Company, at 11 a.m. downtown Pontiac. Parade route will begin on Cesar E. Chavez Ave at the Oakland Livingston Human (OLHSA) and continue down Saginaw Street, ending at the Pontiac City Square (Lot 9). Santa and Mrs. Claus afterglow after the parade, with Santa's Workshop, pictures with Santa, music, Gracie the Clown, reindeer, crafts, hot cocoa and food, toy giveaway, free food. Collaboration between Auburn Hills, Pontiac, Waterford, and White Lake, Holidayextravaganza.org.

Ray

▪ **Holiday Lights at the Farm** at Wolcott Mill Metropark, Farm Center: Enjoy traditional holiday decorations and thousands of sparkling lights from 6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 2-3, 9-10, and 16-17 at the Wolcott Mill Farm Center, Write letters to Santa and visit his workshop in the Dairy Barn. Cost is \$8/person, ages 2 and under free. Registration required.

Rochester/Rochester Hills

▪ **Gifts & Greens Market:** Dec. 1-3 at the Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, 1550 Walton Blvd., just west of Livernois in Rochester Hills. The event is hosted by the Rochester Garden Club and features affordable fresh greens for the home, and fresh and permanent table arrangements that are handmade by the club's designers, holiday cookies and gourmet items and handmade gifts. An opening gala is 5-8 p.m. Thursday Dec. 1 when shoppers can enjoy sampling snacks while getting ready for the holidays, for a \$5 entrance fee. Market Days are held 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Dec. 2 and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Dec. 3 with a \$2 entrance fee. Proceeds benefit conservation, education, scholarships, horticulture therapy, and civic improvement in the area, RochesterGardenClub.org.

▪ **Annual Kris Kringle Market,** open-air holiday market: 4-10 p.m. Dec. 2 and noon-10 p.m. Dec. 3, downtown Rochester, West Fourth St. between Main and Walnut and will coincide with The Big, Bright Light Show. The event includes live entertainment, food, shopping with offerings including hand-crafted gifts, specialty foods, gift wrapping and baked goods. Children can enjoy a visit and photo opportunity with Santa Claus. Food and beverage will be available to purchase in the warming tent, proceeds to benefit the Rochester Area Youth Assistance on Friday evening and the Rochester Avon Recreation Authority on Saturday. The market is hosted by the DDA, and presented by Lincoln of Troy, DowntownRochesterMI.com.

▪ **A Visit with Santa & Mrs. Claus:** 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Dec. 3 at Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, 1005 Van Hoosen Road, Rochester Hills, \$7 mu-



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANKENMUTH CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

More than 2 million guests visit Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland annually in Frankenmuth.

seum members; \$10 for non-members. Bring a camera. Registration required at rochesterhills.org/musprograms.

▪ **Downtown Rochester Cookie Stroll:** 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Dec. 3. Cookie Stroll participants can collect 14 delicious cookies at 14 different cookie stations throughout town. The Cookie Stroll is presented by Older Persons' Commission. The official Cookie Stroll tins are only available for purchase online at downtownrochestermi.com/store. A cookie tin is \$35 each (limit two per order), and tins must be picked up at the DDA's Downtown Collaboration Studio (431 Main Street) by Dec. 1. Cookies are created by Downtown Rochester's great bakeries and restaurants.

▪ **Candlelight Walking Tours:** 6-9 p.m. Dec. 8 hour-long timed tickets, at Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, 1005 Van Hoosen Road, Rochester Hills, \$8 museum members and \$10 for non-members. Registration required at rochesterhills.org/musprograms.

▪ **The Rochester Symphony Orchestra "Holiday Cheer" concert:** 8 p.m. Dec. 9 at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 620 Romeo Road, Rochester. Orchestral numbers include Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Snow Maiden Suite" and Leroy Anderson's "Sleigh Ride", concluding with traditional holiday sing-along for the

whole family. The event includes performances by Rochester Community Schools Choral Programs. Attendees who wish to do so, may bring an unwrapped toy or children's book for donation collection for The United States Marines "Toys for Tots." Concert tickets are available at rochester-symphony.com or by calling the Box Office 248-651-4181.

▪ **All Aboard! Model Railroad Exhibit** presented by the Stoney Creek Model Railroad Club: noon-3 p.m. Nov. 27, Dec. 10-11, Dec. 18, Dec. 28-30, Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, 1005 Van Hoosen Road, Rochester Hills. Free for museum members and \$5 for non-members, except when other events are happening, such as A Visit with Santa & Mrs. Claus, Dec. 3 and Old Fashioned Christmas event, Dec. 17.

▪ **The Big, Bright Light Show:** 5 p.m.-midnight through Jan. 21, buildings in downtown Rochester are decorated in holiday lights, downtownrochestermi.com.

Plymouth

▪ **Michigan Philharmonic Holiday Pops:** 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Dec. 8, Penn Theatre, 760 Penniman Ave., Plymouth, michiganphil.org, gen. adm. is \$30, seniors 62+ tickets are \$25 and students-\$10.

Royal Oak

▪ **Royal Oak Symphony Orches-**

tra "Holiday Delights": 8 p.m. Dec. 9, Royal Oak Middle School, Dondero Auditorium, 709 N. Washington Ave., Royal Oak, royaloakorchestra.org, gen. Adm.-\$15, students and seniors-\$12. Harmony United Chorus at 7:30 p.m.

▪ **"Elf the Musical"** performance: Through Dec. 18, The Baldwin Theatre, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak, Stagecrafters production, stagecrafters.org. Tickets are \$28+ on Thursdays, and \$38+ on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays.

Sterling Heights

▪ **Expo Michigan Marketplace:** Friday-Sunday, through Dec. 24, (plus Dec. 22) Lakeside Mall, 14000 Lakeside Circle, Sterling Heights. Annual Holiday Entrepreneurs Expo, Small Business Fair and Crafters Marketplace hosted by The Oakland County Business Association Inc. of Michigan, an approved Autism Speaks event for people with disabilities to display their crafts and artwork. Hours are 3-7 p.m. Friday, 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturdays and noon-5 p.m. Sundays, EXPOMichigan.com. Exhibitors \$199 weekend, \$299 two weekends. Admission to the public is 5 for \$5 cash, 248-599-2461, EXPOMichigan@gmail.com.

Traverse City

▪ **Festival of Trains:** Dec. 17-31, Creekside Community Church,

3686 W South Airport Rd. Presented by the Northern Michigan Railroad Club, this beloved holiday tradition features model train layouts constructed in several gauges. There's a swap meet planned at the Festival Dec. 17-18 for those interested in selling or buying. Tickets are \$5 for individuals; kids 4 and under get in free.

Troy

▪ **City of Troy Christmas Tree Lighting:** 6:30 p.m. Dec. 2 at Veterans Plaza — the south entrance of City Hall, 500 W. Big Beaver, Troy. The event features the Troy High Colts Drumline, Athens High Concert and Treble Choirs, and hot cocoa and Timbits from Tim Hortons Troy, sponsored by Troy Auto Care/Troy Auto & Truck Center. Santa will visit with children under a tent on the north side of city hall immediately following the Christmas tree lighting.

▪ **Visits with Santa:** Somerset Collection's holiday castle in North Grand Court, has been revamped with turrets covered in fluffy snow and glistening icicles, ready for Santa visits with children, 2800 West Big Beaver Road, Troy. On Dec. 1, Somerset Collection will open the Children's Only Holiday Shop, noon to 6 p.m. until Dec. 23, on Somerset Collection North, Level 3 near Nordstrom, Visits to Santa are available Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. — 6:55 p.m. and Sunday, noon — 5:55 p.m. Photos with Santa are \$30 and reservations can be made at thesomersetcollection.com. Santa's departure from Somerset Collection's rooftop is at 7 p.m. Dec. 23.

Waterford Twp.

▪ **Annual Holiday Craft Show:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Dec. 2 and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Dec. 3 at Waterford Baptist Cathedral, 2640 Airport Road, Waterford Township, free admission. Variety of crafters with unique items, lunch and baked goods for purchase.

▪ **Holiday Hoopla and Tree Lighting Event** is 3-6 p.m. Dec. 10, at Waterford Township Hall, 5200 Civic Center Drive, Waterford Twp., crafts, reindeer visit, cookie decorating, photo opportunity with Santa. tree lighting is at 5:40 p.m., Waterford Parks and Recreation, waterfordmi.gov/parks.

TRAVEL

Cut the stress out of holiday travel planning

The holiday travel season is just around the corner, and experts are expecting it to be a busy and expensive one, with airline ticket prices for the winter holidays increasing nearly 30% since last year. While travel experts recommend you start organizing trips at least three months in advance, do not fret if you're a last-minute planner. There are still a few ways to maximize your travel plans and save a few dollars while you're at it.

Hit the highway

For those planning on taking a road trip this season, make sure your vehicle is up to date on all registrations and maintenance so you don't experience any road bumps. If you're planning a road trip and you're a T-Mobile customer, you get a year of AAA membership for free with all Magenta plans. This means you can get from point A to point B with the confidence and safety of 24/7 roadside assistance, if you need it. Plus, T-Mobile customers also save \$0.10 per gallon of gas from Shell via the T-Mobile Tuesdays App.

Opt for low traffic travel days

When booking airline travel, CheapAir.com recommends avoiding Thursdays-Sundays. Instead, book airline travel on Tuesdays or Wednesdays if possible, as those are the slowest travel days of the week. According to CheapAir.com, traveling on actual holidays like Thanksgiving Day or Black Friday can save you \$75-\$90 in flight ticket prices. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are also expecting lower airfare prices this year.

Check the cancellation rules

Make sure you can cancel your hotel, airline, or car rental reservations if you need to, and understand what additional fees you may be subject to if you do need to adjust your trip. Plans can change at the drop of a hat,



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACOBLUND / ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Holiday travel can be stressful, but it doesn't have to be.

especially in the post-COVID world.

Use those travel perks

Many credit card companies offer benefits like points and frequent flier miles, which you can redeem on flights, hotels and more. If you're a T-Mobile customer, you can save up to 40% on select hotels and car rentals by booking through T-MobileTravel.com. Most come with free, flex-

ible cancellations. You can also save your travel perks to use for your holiday travel plans and save even more.

Stay connected

The internet can be hit or miss when traveling abroad, so make sure you're well-versed in the details of your data plan before logging on. Luckily, T-Mobile customers with Magenta MAX plans can get 5GB of free high-speed

data worldwide in more than 215 countries and destinations, plus free in-flight Wi-Fi and streaming all flight long on four of the biggest U.S. airlines. Visit t-mobile.com/travel to learn more about T-Mobile's travel benefits.

Pack smarter

Make sure all your tech items are within arm's reach during your trip. Pack charging cables, headphones and tablets to keep

children entertained on trips. Packing a portable charger in your carry-on is a game-changer when all the outlets at the airport are in use.

Holiday travel can be stressful, but it doesn't have to be. Do your research, take advantage of deals and you'll cut out the hassle of planning your upcoming travels.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

RECIPES

Savor the holidays with a special roast

Roasts are customary during the holiday season because they often feed a crowd and look impressive on serving platters. Some people opt for a roast beef while others prefer to roast a turkey. However, chicken just as easily can be turned into a Christmas dinner since it is versatile and tasty. In addition, the cooking time for a roasted chicken is much shorter than it is with other roasted dishes.

This recipe for “Roast Chicken with Whole Roasted Garlic” from “Rachael Ray 50: Memories and Meals from a Sweet and Savory Life” (Ballantine Books) by Rachael Ray provides the basis for a tasty holiday meal. Simply multiply the recipe as needed depending on the number of guests.

Roast Chicken with Whole Roasted Garlic**Serves 4**

1 4-pound chicken

Kosher salt

2 lemons, one pierced several times with the tines of a fork and one halved

Few sprigs each of thyme and rosemary

4 large bulbs garlic, 1 per person or portion, ends cut to expose the cloves (keep the hairy root end intact)

EVOO (extra-virgin olive oil) for drizzling

Freshly ground black pepper

3 tablespoons butter

1 cup white wine

Warm, crusty bread

Place the chicken in a shallow baking dish. Salt the chicken inside and out and place uncovered in the fridge overnight.

Preheat the oven to 450 F.

Pat the chicken dry and fill with the pierced whole lemon, thyme and rosemary. Tie the legs up. Dress the bulbs of garlic with EVOO; season with salt and pepper. Arrange the garlic in the baking dish around the chicken. Rub the skin of the chicken with butter and season with pepper. Pour the wine into the bottom of the dish.

Roast the chicken for 1 hour or until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the dark meat reads 165 F. Let the chicken stand for a few minutes on a carving board until just cool enough to handle. Carve the chicken, dividing the white and dark parts and slicing the breast meat on the bias. Arrange the chicken on plates or a platter and top with drippings, juices and the juice from the remaining halved lemon. The garlic may get dark but it won't be charred. Serve in the skins or squeeze the paste from the skins with your knife and pass with a spoon to eat with the chicken or to slather on the warm chunks of bread.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

This recipe for “Roast Chicken with Whole Roasted Garlic” from “Rachael Ray 50: Memories and Meals from a Sweet and Savory Life” provides the basis for a tasty holiday meal.

Courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

HOLIDAYS

Lesser known Hanukkah traditions

Hanukkah is a relatively modern holiday in regard to the Hebrew calendar. Unlike Yom Kippur or Passover, which are steeped in rich traditions, there are few Hanukkah customs.

Hanukkah celebrants still participate in various customs each year, some of which are customized according to family preferences. While some traditions, such as the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah, are familiar, others may not be as widely known — especially to those outside of the faith. Here's a look at a select few.

- Saying the Shehechey-anu blessing. Traditionally, there are two blessings that some people say each night while lighting the candles. The first is recited while holding the lit shamash, and the second is said while lighting the candles. Another blessing, known as the “Shehechey-anu,” is said the first night. According to 18Doors, a resource on the Jewish faith, it's the same blessing traditionally said on the first night of all Jewish holidays and other special occasions.

- Display or use of the shofar. A shofar is a type of instrument made from a ram's horn. It is a symbol of the ram that Abraham offered as a sacrifice in place of his son Isaac, exemplifying heroic faith of the fathers of the Jewish people. The shofar also serves as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and calls people to strive for Israel's renewal and fellowship with God.

- Singing “Ma'oz Tzur.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

“Oh Hanukkah Oh Hanukkah” and “Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel” are some of the most widely known songs, but some people also follow the custom of singing “Ma'oz Tzur (Rock of Ages)” around the menorah.

Hanukkah songs may not be as numerous or as widely sung as Christmas carols during the holiday season, but there are a select few that are part of the festivities. “Oh Hanukkah Oh Hanukkah” and “Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel” are some of the most widely known songs, but some people also follow the custom of singing “Ma'oz Tzur (Rock of Ages)” around the men-

rah. The words were composed in the 13th century, and the song summarizes historical challenges faced by the Jewish people that were overcome with God's help.

- Use of oil in Hanukkah feasts. It's well known that latkes, or fried potato pancakes, are served around Hanukkah. The reason is due to the oil used to fry them, which traditionally

While some traditions, such as the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah, are familiar, others may not be as widely known — especially to those outside of the faith.

is olive oil. Fried foods call to mind a specific Hanukkah miracle. After the Greeks destroyed the sanctuary and defiled what was thought to be all of the oil, one jug sealed with the imprint of the High Priest was

found. That one jug managed to keep the Temple's menorah lit for eight days, despite it being insufficient to handle this task.

This was considered a miracle and celebrated in subsequent years.

Hanukkah is a relatively modern holiday with few traditions. However, the customs associated with this holiday are held dear.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

While some Hanukkah traditions, such as the lighting of the menorah, are familiar, others may not be as widely known.

RECIPES

A classic cocktail toasts the season with a twist

People indulge just a little bit more when the holidays arrive. That may translate into enjoying an extra meal at a favorite neighborhood restaurant, buying one or two additional gifts to stash under the tree or hosting a gathering with close friends that stretches into the wee hours of the morning.

Some choose to indulge by sipping a cocktail while watching the snowflakes fall. A whiskey sour is a classic that can be given a makeover with some ingredients that are tailor-made for the holiday season. In this recipe for “Rosemary Cranberry Whiskey Sour,” courtesy of the editors of American Lifestyle, fragrant and flavorful fruit and herbs blend well with the tartness of the drink.

Rosemary Cranberry Whiskey Sour

Makes 4

Rosemary Simple Syrup:

1/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup water

2 tablespoons fresh rosemary

Cocktail:

6 ounces whiskey

3 ounces sour mix

16 ounces cranberry juice

Cranberries, for garnish

Rosemary sprigs, for garnish

1. In a small pot over medium heat, whisk together the sugar, water and rosemary. Simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, creating a syrup. Remove from the heat, strain to remove the rosemary, and refrigerate.

2. Fill a shaker with ice, and pour in the whiskey, sour mix, simple syrup, and cranberry juice. Shake, and pour into ice-filled glasses. Garnish with cranberries and rosemary before serving.

Tip: This recipe is great without the whiskey, as a classy, adult “zero proof” drink. You can make a big batch as a lovely punch — leave some cranberries and rosemary on the side for garnish.

Courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

In this recipe for “Rosemary Cranberry Whiskey Sour,” courtesy of the editors of American Lifestyle, fragrant and flavorful fruit and herbs blend well with the tartness of the drink.

RECIPES

Wrap up this app at your holiday cocktail party

Cocktail parties feature prominently on social schedules each holiday season. Such get-togethers are convenient because the foods and beverages served are designed to be small and portable. That can save any holiday host time in the kitchen.

There may be plenty of prepared foods in the grocer's freezer that can be served for gatherings, but the taste of easy, homemade offerings can mingle with the time-savers when guests arrive.

"Bacon-Wrapped Goat Cheese Stuffed Dates" are an easily prepared appetizer that pairs sweet with savory. Even better, these morsels are delicious served warm out of the oven or can be eaten at room temperature when late-arriving guests stroll in.

Wrap up cocktail party spreads with this recipe, courtesy of "Spectacular Spreads: 50 Amazing Food Spreads for Any Occasion" (Rock Point) by Meagan Brown.

Bacon-Wrapped Goat Cheese Stuffed Dates

Makes 16

16 pitted dates

8 thin slices bacon, halved

4 ounces creamy goat cheese

Toothpicks

Hot honey, for garnishing

Chopped fresh parsley, for garnishing

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Lightly grease a rimmed bak-

ing sheet with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.

If your dates are not already pitted, slice the dates lengthwise on one side, but not all the way through, to create an opening. Remove the pit. Using a teaspoon measure, fill the cavity of each date with a heaping teaspoon of the goat cheese and then gently press the sides together to close a bit.

Wrap each date with a half slice of bacon and secure with

a toothpick. Arrange the bacon-wrapped dates on the prepared baking sheet.

Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, turning the dates halfway through so the bacon is evenly cooked. Transfer the bacon-wrapped dates to a serving platter and drizzle with the hot honey. Garnish with the parsley. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

"Bacon-Wrapped Goat Cheese Stuffed Dates" are an easily prepared appetizer that pairs sweet with savory.

SHOPPING

Fun holiday gift ideas that get kids excited to learn

Shopping for kids this holiday season and looking for gifts that offer some educational value? The good news is that you don't need to sacrifice fun. Here are five awesome gift ideas that will get school-age kids excited about learning outside the classroom.

1. With the Magic Adventures Microscope, young biologists can explore tiny worlds full of huge discoveries, zooming in on flowers, animals, food, minerals and more using eight double-sided smart slides that activate amazing BBC videos and images. Inquiring minds can

discover answers to curious questions like: How do leaves change colors? What do plant cells look like? What is sand made of anyway? They can also make their own discoveries by finding things around the house and getting a closer look using the reusable slides or large sam-

ple tray. With up to 200x magnification on this real microscope, kids will be amazed by what they see. A capture-and-save feature allows for documenting findings, and included games and quizzes add to the fun and let kids put their knowledge to the test.

2. Reading enthusiasts will love a subscription to a book of the month club offering selections for their reading level and interests. This is not only a great way to promote a lifelong love of literature, it can help a young reader build their home library.



With up to 200x magnification, kids will be amazed by what they see with the Magic Adventures Microscope.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

3 . Fledgling explorers can travel the world and see everything in it with the Magic Adventures Globe from LeapFrog. Using the stylus, children can tap on the interactive learning globe and experience new places, languages, cultures, animals, geography, habitats and more through high-quality BBC videos. Featuring an integrated video screen, animations and live-action videos fully immerse kids in the curriculum to provide a better understanding of the world through more than five hours of videos. They can also play interactive games to explore the globe, challenge a friend and solve mysteries. With its focus on curriculum-based content and important foundational skills, LeapFrog toys offer experiences that make learning fun.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Here are five awesome gift ideas that will get school-age kids excited about learning outside the classroom.

4 . Encourage kids to become informed citizens of the world with a subscription to a news magazine designed just for them, such as “The Week Junior.” This is an excellent way to build vocabulary, while engaging kids on a wide range of subjects — from culture and arts to science and government — in a way that’s appropriate for their age.

5 . Foster a love of fine arts by gifting kids an all-in-one sketching, painting and coloring set complete with everything they need to unleash their inner Picasso. Pencils, markers, acrylic and watercolor paints, along with brushes, paper pads and canvas boards, will give artists of all ages the foundational tools they need to try their hand in various mediums.

*Story courtesy of
StatePoint Media*



Pencils, markers, acrylic and watercolor paints, along with brushes, paper pads and canvas boards, will give artists of all ages the foundational tools they need to try their hand in various mediums.

HOLIDAY DECOR

8 easy holiday centerpiece ideas

The holiday season is a great time to make any home a bit more merry and bright. Most individuals let their personalities show through their home decor, and holiday decorating is just as personal as decorating throughout the rest of the year.

The main living areas of a home get the most decorating attention, with a Christmas tree or menorah taking a prominent position in the front window. Garlands, candles and other accoutrements also may dress up spaces. However, when it comes to holiday hosting, attention also should be given to the dining table — which can benefit from a festive centerpiece.

Premade centerpieces are undeniably attractive, but adding a homespun touch can be a fun creative pursuit and become a fam-

ily tradition. Explore these eight simple ideas to dress up your holiday table.

1. Frosted pine cones. Take advantage of a crisp winter's day to venture into a forest or park that is rich with evergreen trees. Gather pine cones from the forest floor and, if possible, a few evergreen boughs. Give the pine cones a touch of winter whimsy with a little faux snow in a can or even white paint. Nestle the boughs and pine cones into a wide-mouthed vase or bowl in the center of the table. Individual pine cones can later be turned into place cards for seating guests.

2. Holiday thanks. Cut many strips of paper roughly 6 inches in length from various

colored pieces of paper to match the holiday theme. When guests arrive, ask them to write a favorite holiday memory or two, or what they're thankful for. Twirl the paper strips around a pencil to curl them, and then place the curlicues into a decorative bowl in the center of the table. Later in the evening, the host or hostess can read some of the sentiments.

3. Magical forest. Use green and silver conical party hats to turn a table or sideboard into a veritable evergreen forest. Arrange them on a blanket of faux snow or white confetti.

4. Freshly cut. Select attractive flowers in vibrant holiday hues from a florist or even the supermarket floral section.

Cut the stems and place them into an unusual display container, such as holiday themed mugs or a punch bowl.

5. Glass baubles. Who says ornaments should be exclusive to the tree? A crystal or glass cake stand can be transformed into an icy delight when topped with silver and clear glass ornaments.

6. Birch wood. The crisp white coloring of birch bark is right at home with holiday decor. Go stark with pieces of the cut wood in varying heights intermingled with white candles that mimic the shapes and scale of the wood.

7. Fruit and vegetables. If guests are coming over and

the race is on for a fast centerpiece, look no further than the kitchen. Lemons, artichokes, pears, or pomegranates look festive in a bowl interspersed with some greenery and baby's breath.

8. Cornucopia. The horn of plenty can be customized to any holiday. Purchase a horn in wicker or woven grapevine and fill with flowers, fruit and greenery, or even painted gourds or miniature pumpkins.

Holiday hosts and hostesses should not neglect the dining table when they decorate. Festive centerpieces can be handmade without much effort on the part of hosts.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Festive centerpieces can be handmade without much effort on the part of hosts.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



Holiday hosts and hostesses should not neglect the dining table when decorating this season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

SHOPPING

'From Michigan With Love' releases annual holiday shopping guide of Michigan-made products

By Franklin Dohanyos
Special to MediaNews Group

Those seeking opportunities to shop local this holiday season can look no further than From Michigan With Love's annual Holiday Shopping Guide for the 2022 season, featuring a variety of products made right here in the Mitten State.

Now in its 17th year, the 2022 guide features everything from local spices, snacks and baked goods to handmade artisan products and more.

The 2022 Holiday Gift Guide includes:

G3 STUDIOS

INTERLOCHEN

G3 Studios designs and creates beautiful hand-crafted wood gifts at their studio in the beautiful city of Interlochen. G3 creates beautiful and functional wood items that make wonderful gifts, including beer caddies, bottle openers, clocks, kitchen items, unique gifts, things for pets, salt and pepper grinders, Michigan-themed items, wine accessories, and more in their studio. More information at g3studios.net, 231-275-0017.

ALDEN MILL HOUSE

ALDEN

Alden Mill House has over 33 custom spice blends to satisfy your taste buds. Alden Mill House products are made of the finest ingredients that are carefully selected from around the world, and are available in three sizes. All products are made with no additives, MSG, or preservatives, and are gluten free. More information at aldenmillhouse.com, 231-331-4711.

CHOCOLATE CHIPPED BAKERY

WIXOM

Chocolate Chipped Bakery makes quarter pound cookies in delicious flavors like chocolate chip, raisin chocolate chip,



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALDEN MILL HOUSE

Alden Mill House has over 33 custom spice blends to satisfy your taste buds.

oatmeal chocolate chip, pumpkin chocolate chip, double chocolate and more. Chocolate Chipped Bakery opened in 2017. For more information, visit etsy.com/shop/chocolatechipped or chocolatechippedbakery.com.

LAKE SUPERIOR WOOLEN COMPANY

RUDYARD

Lake Superior Woolen is owned by fourth generation sheep farmer, Eric Wallis. Wool is the way to go for natural warmth. The

fleece used in the wool blankets is 100% virgin wool, giving full benefit of its original resilience, loftiness, and durability. Blankets in various eye-pleasing colors are available in different sizes to fit your needs and can add a bit of color to any room. More information at lswoolen.com, 906-322-2285.

BETTER MADE SNACK FOODS

DETROIT

Now in its 92 year, Better



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAKE SUPERIOR WOOLEN COMPANY

Lake Superior Woolen Company offers blankets in various sizes and eye-pleasing colors to suit your needs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BETTER MADE

Better Made's famous chocolate covered chips are back and available in a 7 oz. tin of milk or dark chocolate.

Made continues to be Michigan's favorite potato chip and snack food maker. The company is still family owned and still supports Detroit and charitable organizations in Michigan. Better Made's famous chocolate covered chips are back and available in a 7 oz. tin of milk

or dark chocolate. Better Made also offer a handy 18 ct. variety pack, a 10 ct. original and BBQ multipack, and Better Made Detroit Mix — a delicious bag of caramel and cheese popcorn that I can't stop eating! More information at bettermade.com, 313-925-4774.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GILBERT'S CHOCOLATES

Gilbert Chocolates, with locations in Jackson and Ann Arbor, has an extensive collection of milk chocolates, dark chocolates, truffles and more.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CASK & KETTLE

Cask & Kettle in Battle Creek makes fine restaurant quality Hard Coffees & Cider, which are now available in Michigan Walmart stores.



PHOTO COURTESY OF OLD WORLD ALMONDS

Old World Almonds in Livonia has been making delicious Bavarian-style cinnamon coated nuts since 1984.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAMASUDS

MamaSuds in Goodrich offers a wide array of all-natural, non-toxic, eco-friendly household cleaning and personal products.

GILBERT CHOCOLATES

JACKSON

Gilbert Chocolates was started by John O. Gilbert in Jackson over 100 years ago and still makes the most deliciously decadent chocolates I have ever tasted! Gilbert Chocolates has an extensive collection of milk chocolates, dark chocolates, assorted chocolates, truffles, snappers, seasonal chocolates, and unique corporate chocolate gifts. More information at gilbertchocolates.com, 517-764-3141.

HOLLAND BOWL MILL

HOLLAND

The Holland Bowl Mill creates the finest heirloom wooden bowls, utensils, cutting boards, and household decorations made from exotic woods — mainly from Michigan! One of the hot offerings this year is the Michigan-shaped wooden bowl. The company started out as the Holland Wooden Shoe Factory in 1926 and then began turning hand crafted bowls from exotic woods. Each bowl or product is hand made, hand pol-

ished with bee's oil, and can be engraved for free on the bottom. More information at hollandbowlmill.com, 616-396-6513.

PINCONNING CHEESE COMPANY

PINCONNING

Pinconning is known as the "cheese capital" of Michigan. That's where you'll find The Pinconning Cheese Company, Deli, and Fudge Shoppe — home to the famous Pinconning brand of cheese created by Dan Horn in 1915. The shop is always expanding the number of

Michigan made goods and also offers specialty items, such as homemade sausages, custom takeout sandwiches, and pizzas, as well as the now famous Pinconning Pizzaloaf to its daily menu. More information at pinconningcheese.com, 989-879-2281.

CASK & KETTLE

BATTLE CREEK

Cask & Kettle in Battle Creek makes fine restaurant quality Hard Coffees & Cider, which are now available in Michigan Walmart stores. You can enjoy a hot cup of coffee with

your choice of toppings in the comfort of your own home. Cask & Kettle has five delicious flavors, including Mexican Coffee, Spiked Irish Coffee, Hot Blonde Coffee, Spiked Dry Cider, and the newest flavor — Mint Patty. More information at caskandkettle-usa.com, 269-420-2529.

UNCLE PETER'S PASTIES

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

You can find the best of the U.P. at Uncle Peter's Pasties with locations in Clarkston, Lake Orion, and Shelby Township. The company started with beef and chicken pasties, and uses only Amish Free Range poultry, and hormone and antibiotic free meats. Now the shops offer 28 different kinds of pasties, including wild game, three gluten free, apple, and a breakfast pasty, plus homemade soups, sandwiches to order, take home dinner meals, homemade cookies and more. More information at unclepeterspasties.com, 248-804-5039.

OLD WORLD ALMONDS

LIVONIA

Old World Almonds has

been making delicious Bavarian-style cinnamon coated nuts since 1984. Whether it's sweet, salted, cinnamon-candied, CBD-infused, or even sugar-free, the company roasts the finest almonds, cashews, peanuts and pecans. What started as a festival business has blossomed into a much larger business with wholesale and retail clients. More information at oldworldgourmetnuts.com, 248-703-4767.

MAMASUDS

GOODRICH

MamaSuds offers a wide array of all-natural, non-toxic, eco-friendly household cleaning and personal products including liquid soap, cleaners, body wash, Castile soap, laundry detergent, hand soap, laundry stain sticks, and more. All ingredients are natural, cruelty-free, free of dyes and synthetics, and hand crafted by mamas. MamaSuds officially opened in January of 2012 and in 2013 owner, Michelle Smith, decided to stay home with her family and concentrate on building up the company. More information at mamasuds.com, 248-330-7911.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LITTLE TRAVERSE TILEWORKS

Located in beautiful Harbor Springs, Little Traverse Tileworks has a team of specialty designers and staff, which creates incredible and amazing hand-made Michigan-themed tiles for many uses.

Products

FROM PAGE 25

LITTLE TRAVERSE TILEWORKS

HARBOR SPRINGS

Located in beautiful Harbor Springs, Little Traverse Tileworks has a team of specialty designers and staff, which creates incredible and amazing hand-made Michigan-themed tiles for many uses. The company creates ceramic tile for retail, wholesale, and commercial installation. The company was founded in 2010 with the mission of providing superior quality ceramic tile to the retail industry. Whether it's souvenir gift tiles, commemorative tiles or an entire kitchen backsplash installation, Little Traverse Tileworks has done it all. More information at littletraverse.com, 231-526-5807.

ALTES BEER

DETROIT

Altes, brewed in Detroit, recently launched a great new product, Altes Sportsman Copper, reviving the iconic Altes Sportsman brand as a celebration of Michigan's great outdoors. Altes Sportsman is a copper with flavorful drinkability for all seasons. Amber in color with an inviting smoothness and aroma, the craft brewed Sportsman delivers a malty backbone and a crisp finish. More information at 248-797-7379.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALTES

Born at the Tivoli Brewery at the corner of Mack and Hurlbut on Detroit's East Side, Altes was known as "the beer that bewitches" in 1910.

RECIPES

Bake up a sweet holiday treat

Entertaining is a big part of the holiday season. Calendars are packed this time of year with gatherings with friends, family and professional colleagues.

Entertaining requires keeping plenty of refreshments on hand to ensure guests maintain their holiday spirit. Dessert is no stranger to the season, with office break rooms, dining tables and buffet stations brimming with sweet treats to tempt celebrants' palates.

Everyone should have a go-to dessert to bring along to a holiday party or to offer guests when hosting their own fêtes. Cookies are a standard due to their versatility and portability.

Festive "Sour Cream Cookies" provide all of the holiday feels and can be customized in color to reflect celebrations of Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or New Year's. Bake up a batch, courtesy of "Live Well Bake Cookies" (Rock Point) by Danielle Rye.

Sour Cream Cookies

Makes 22 cookies

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour,
spooned and leveled

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter,
softened

3/4 cup granulated sugar

1 large egg, at room temperature

1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1/2 cup sour cream, at room temperature

Vanilla Buttercream Frosting

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter,
softened

1 1/2 cups powdered sugar

1 tablespoon heavy whipping
cream or milk

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Gel food coloring (optional)

1. To make the cookies: Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats and

set aside.

2. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt until well combined. Set aside.

3. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a handheld mixer, beat the butter and granulated sugar together for 1 to 2 minutes, or until well combined.

4. Mix in the egg and vanilla extract until fully combined, making sure to stop and scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed.

5. Mix in the dry ingredients in two additions, alternating with the sour cream. Make sure to mix in each addition until just combined, and be careful not to over-mix the batter.

6. Using a 1 1/2-tablespoon cookie scoop, scoop the cookie dough onto the prepared baking sheets, making sure to leave a little room between each one.

7. Bake for 14 to 16 minutes, or until the tops of the cookies are set and spring back when touched lightly. Remove from the oven, and allow to cool on the baking sheets for 10 minutes, then carefully transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

8. To make the vanilla buttercream frosting: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a handheld mixer, beat the butter for 1 to 2 minutes, or until smooth. Add the powdered sugar, 1/2 cup at a time, mixing in each addition until well combined.

9. Add the heavy whipping cream, vanilla extract, and gel food coloring (if using), and continue mixing until fully combined.

10. Once the cookies have cooled completely, spread the frosting on top of the cookies.

11. Store the cookies in an airtight container at room temperature or in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.

Courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Festive "Sour Cream Cookies" provide all of the holiday feels and can be customized in color to reflect celebrations of Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or New Year's.

SHOPPING



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Outdoor enthusiasts need reliable gear to make their experiences that much more enjoyable.

Gifts for people who love the great outdoors

Certain people feel right at home in the great outdoors. With the sun on their faces and the wind in their hair, rock scramblers and kayaking buffs simply can't get enough of being outside in the elements.

Outdoor enthusiasts need reliable gear to make their experiences that much more enjoyable. Brandon Gaille Small Business & Marketing Advice reports that \$230.6 billion was spent worldwide on sportswear and outdoor apparel in 2021. However, there's always room to improve on adventures large and small, and holiday shoppers can keep these items in mind as they look for items for their favorite nature lover this season.

▪ **Plasma lighter.** A plasma lighter can start fires in conditions that aren't con-

ducive to other fire-starting measures. Plasma lighters are water- and wind-resistant and work in nearly all weather conditions. Saberlight even makes a rechargeable option with USB charging cable.

▪ **Lantern.** Outside magazine recently named the BioLite AlpenGlow 250 as its new favorite road trip item. It can be used in a variety of settings, including inside a tent or at a hunting cabin, and produces customizable illumination.

▪ **Backpack cooler.** Yeti is known as a leader in coolers, and the Yeti Hopper Backflip Soft Cooler makes carrying food and beverages even more convenient. This product is a backpack and a cooler, so it's a hands-free and portable option when out in nature.

▪ **Hiking socks.** Keeping feet cool and comfortable is essential on hiking trips. Injinji socks are made from CoolMax fibers that help provide a blister-free wilderness experience designed to minimize friction.

▪ **Waterproof backpack.** Whether a loved one spends time in or near the water or just wants to safeguard his or her belongings in inclement weather, a waterproof backpack is the ideal outdoor gift. It's easy to clean and keeps items inside dry. IDRY-BAG Waterproof Backpack is one to consider.

▪ **Lightweight sleeping bag.** Maybe someone's sleeping gear needs an overhaul? Enlightened Equipment offers an 850-fill, zero-degree sleeping bag that is warm, but only weighs 1.5 pounds. That

helps free up space and lessens hikers' loads when carrying gear on the trail.

▪ **Power bank/solar charger.** Many people can't live without their devices, even when out in the great outdoors. Since you can't plug a phone into a tree, a portable solar charger and power bank is key. The BioLite SolarPanel 5+ comes with its own built-in battery, so a person can capture the sun's rays during the day and save some power reserves for charging after sunset.

These are just a few of the innovative items that can appeal to outdoor enthusiasts on your holiday shopping list.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



These are just a few of the innovative items that can appeal to outdoor enthusiasts on your holiday shopping list.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

SHOPPING

5 screen-free holiday gift ideas for families

Holiday shopping for families with children? Check out these five totally screen-free gift ideas that are sure brighten the season by getting families to spend some much-needed quality time together.

1 . Upgraded outdoor games. Give outdoor play an upgrade with Ki-diGo NexTag from VTech, designed for ages 5 and up. Way more than just tag, it's a high-tech spin on 20 different backyard games including capture the flag, freeze tag and hide-and-seek. To play, all you need are the four included electronic units and adjustable arm bands. A friendly voice explains the quick and easy-to-learn rules and no referee is required — the game lets you know who got tagged, who's safe and who's it. With single- and multi-player options, the whole family can get in on the fun, especially when you combine two systems. Play indoors or out with a 135-foot range between units. All you have to do is press the big button and tag, you're it!

2 . Kitchen assistance. Introduce adults and kids alike to the fundamentals of baking with a family-friendly baking kit subscription. Each month, a new kit is mailed to your recipients' home with recipes, activity booklets and all the ingredients needed to create something delicious.

3 . Swim time. The weather may be frightful, but that's no reason why families can't enjoy a delightful day at the pool.

Consider gifting your favorite family with a day pass to an indoor aquatic



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Encourage some good old fashioned family fun with board games.

center or water park. For families with young children, look for a facility that offers splash pads and swim lessons. For those with older kids who are already proficient swimmers, check for amenities like water slides and wave pools. Want to take it a step further? Sign your recipients up for an indoor pool membership until summer returns.

4 . Inspiration. Give families all the ideas and inspiration they need to beat boredom, create new traditions and make memories with "The Ad-

venture Challenge: Family Edition." This journal offers 50 adventures in different categories, along with space to share thoughts and photos about each experience.

5 . Board—not bored. Encourage some good old fashioned family fun with board games. From chess and checkers to modern classics to the latest trendy games, this is a gift option that's sure to engage family members of all ages.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



Consider gifting your favorite family with a day pass to an indoor aquatic center or water park.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Introduce adults and kids alike to the fundamentals of baking this holiday season with a family-friendly baking kit subscription.

HOLIDAYS

8 HOLIDAY LIGHT DISPLAYS NOT TO MISS IN MICHIGAN

There are no shortage of holiday light displays across Michigan come Christmas time, and for some families, paying a visit to some of the best displays the state has to offer has become an annual tradition.

Here are eight great light displays Michigan-ers won't want to miss this holiday season, courtesy of Pure Michigan:

1. Holiday Nights in Greenfield Village — Dearborn

Step into a living Christmas card — the glowing candlelit windows, the scent of roasting chestnuts, and the sounds of carolers and sleigh bells — when you enter Holiday Nights in Greenfield Village. The Henry Ford has added nights to keep up with demand, so book tickets quickly before the most popular nights sell out! A great event for the whole family at one of the nation's true hidden gem locations. More information at thehenryford.org.

2. Wayne County Lightfest — Westland

The Wayne County Lightfest in Westland is the largest and longest drive-through holiday light show in the midwest, featuring nearly 50 animated holiday-themed displays and more than 100,000 lights along a four-mile stretch of Hines Park. Visitors enter Lightfest at Hines Drive and Merriam Road in Westland and exit onto Warren Avenue near Telegraph Road in Dearborn Heights. When you've reached the end,

don't forget to stop by Santa's Workshop at Warrendale Park, or drop off a letter to Santa at the giant mailbox in Perrin Park, where a few food trucks will also be stationed.

The attraction is open from 6 to 10 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday, through Dec. 24. Cost is \$5 for cars, \$20 for commercial vehicles, \$25 for a 20-passenger bus and \$50 for a 40-passenger bus. Visitors within three to five miles of the Lightfest entrance can tune in to AM 1640 to receive regular updates on wait times, traffic flow, special event and event costs. Visit waynecounty.com for more information.

3. Christmas at Crossroads Holiday Magic — Flint

Enjoy a festive nighttime ride on the Huckleberry Railroad as more than one million lights sparkle throughout the streets and shops of Crossroads Village for "Christmas at Crossroads Holiday Magic." This year there's no need to bundle up, all you have to do is get in your car to drive through the stunning display of holiday lights and festive Christmas music. There will also be live entertainment from costumed villagers, craft demonstrations, unique shopping opportunities, visits with Santa and more. Hours are 4 to 9 p.m. Dec. 2-4, 9-11, 16-18, 21-23, and 28-30. Open for Drive Through Only nights from 5 to 9 p.m. Dec. 5, 12, 19, 24 and 26. For more information, visit geneseecountyparks.org.



PHOTO BY KMS PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE HENRY FORD

Carolers inside Greenfield Village during Holiday Nights.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GENESEE COUNTY PARKS

Enjoy a ride on the Huckleberry Railroad in Flint this holiday season as thousands of lights fill the streets and shops of Crossroads Village.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCHESTER DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The Big, Bright Light Show lights up downtown Rochester, nightly from 5 p.m.-midnight.



DETROIT ZOO PHOTO BY MARK GASKILL

Wild Lights at the Detroit Zoo runs through Jan. 8

4. Big, Bright Light Show — Rochester

With more than 1.5 million points of glimmering holiday light adorning the buildings in downtown Rochester, the Big, Bright Light Show is a must-see attraction for many metro Detroiters during the holiday season. Now in its 15th year, the Light Show will be on display every night from 5 p.m. to midnight through Jan. 3, 2023. As a bonus, the lights will be aglow every weekend in January through the Fire & Ice Festival. Be sure to check out the wonderful Rochester businesses while you gaze at the city's lit-up beauty. Visit downtownrochestermi.com for more information.

5. Nite Lites — Jackson

One of Michigan's largest Christmas light displays, this animated drive-through display at the Michigan International Speedway is five miles long, featuring millions of lights making up 65 different themes, a 250-foot lighted tunnel, a forest of mega trees and holiday train rides on the NiteLites Express. Children can families can also enjoy special visits from Santa and live reindeer. Open every day from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Sunday to Thursday, and from 5:30 to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through Dec. 31. Visit nitelitesshow.com for more information.

6. Christmas Lite Show — Grand Rapids

Open through Dec. 31, the Christmas Lite Show uses more than 40 animated displays that stretch almost two miles. One of west Michigan's largest holiday light displays, the Christmas Lite Show is a family tradition for thousands of folks in the Grand Rapids area and beyond. Visitors can also enjoy holiday train rides, reindeer bike rides and more. For more information, visit christmasliteshow.com.

7. Wild Lights — Royal Oak

This list wouldn't be complete without the Wild Lights at the Detroit Zoo! Experience the magic of the Detroit Zoo in winter as you take in the lights and the sights and enjoy holiday entertainment and activities for guests of all ages. More than five million LED lights will illuminate trees, buildings and more than 100 animal sculptures throughout the front of the Zoo until Dec. 31. Advance ticket purchase is advised as many nights might sell out. More information at detroitzoo.org.

8. Light up the Soo — Sault Sainte Marie

Visit the Tower of History this holiday season and experience the lights of Sault Sainte Marie from 210 feet in the air. Businesses, homes, and area attractions will be decked out in festive lights for your viewing pleasure. Celebrate this wonderful time of year by creating a new family tradition with a trip to the top of the Tower. For more information, visit saultstemarie.com/light-soo-holiday-style-sault-ste-marie.

Content courtesy of Pure Michigan

HOME ORGANIZATION

4 tips to minimize holiday clutter

'Tis the season for fun and festivities, which means more party attire, kids' toys and decorations coming into the home. Family organizing expert Jessica Litman, the CEO and founder of The Organized Mama, shares her tips to keep your space clean and under control during the holidays.

Clear the countertops

"When the party invitations, gift lists and schedules start to pile up in the kitchen, it's time to designate one area where everything should go," Litman says. "This will make it easier to keep the counters clear and for everyone in the family to know where to find their things before running out the door."

Litman says to collect all the papers and store them in a tray. For a DIY organizing system, try hanging a couple of clipboards on the wall in the entryway to hold important reminders and leave messages, or empty out a drawer and use shallow baking pans as bins for each person to place their grab-and-go items.

Prep for cooking and cleaning

With all the time spent in the kitchen cooking, baking and cleaning up after family parties, make sure that you're set up for easy maintenance.

A Lazy Susan is a great way to create more room in a cabinet and store ingredients and utensils in one place for quick access, while keeping the mess to a minimum. Litman suggests lining it with the Duck brand Smooth Top EasyLiner Lazy Susan Kit to keep surfaces free from sticky residue. The pre-cut, circular shaped liner is simple to install, prevents items from falling over and is easy to wipe clean without having to remove the Lazy Susan from the cabinet. Litman also suggests decluttering drawers and stocking up on to-go containers so you can send guests home with leftovers.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

'Tis the season for fun and festivities, which means more party attire, kids' toys and decorations coming into the home.

Store the décor

There will likely be an excess of bows, ribbons, gift bags, tape, scissors and wrapping paper around your home in the coming months. Instead of using a cabinet or drawer to store these items, Litman suggests hanging an over-the-door organizer in the closet and using the compartments to keep extras neat and tidy.

When the holidays are over, Litman says to store small ornaments in egg cartons and wrap breakables in bubble cushioning for safekeeping until next year.

Make way for play

All of the gift wrap means the kids will have new toys that need to be stored. Before the holidays

begin, Litman says to go through your little one's playroom and donate items they no longer use or have grown out of.

Once the room is clear of clutter, wipe and line storage bins and cubbies with machine-washable EasyLiner with Clorox. The liner contains antimicrobial protection that resists the growth of odor-causing mold and mildew, keeping surfaces spotless throughout the cold season and ensuring there is always a tidy spot to put holiday crafts, games and puzzles.

Following these simple tips will allow you to enjoy neat spaces all season long.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media



Following these simple tips will allow you to enjoy neat spaces all season long.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Quick repair projects to prep your home for winter

It's fall, which means it's time to roll up your sleeves, make minor fixes and prepare your home before it's time to hunker down for winter. Here are four easy DIY projects that will ensure your humble abode is in tip-top shape before the cold weather is here to stay.

Patch it up

If you experienced storms this past season, survey your home's exterior for any damage. Take a walk around the grounds and look at the siding and the condition of the roof, including the garage and porch.

Use T-Rex Waterproof Tape to temporarily patch small holes in vinyl siding, loose shingles or leaks in your gutter. The tape is formulated to withstand extreme temperatures and can stretch up to 700% of its original length, so it can be used for any indoor or outdoor job that requires a waterproof seal.

Making quick repairs will save you from expensive water damage costs down the road and help prevent any further issues arising during the cold weather season.

Lawn improvement

As the leaves fall off the trees and onto the ground, an alternative to raking is to pull out the lawn mower. Trim the leaves into smaller pieces, which can then be used as natural mulch around the yard and garden. Layer the com-

post around perennial beds or other plants to provide insulation and protection through the winter.

Mid-to-late fall, with the warm soil and cool air, is also an ideal time for planting grass seed, and fertilizing and filling in holes with the leaf compost. This will put you on a path to a greener lawn next spring.

Prepare the deck

Before the first cold front approaches, make sure to clean up the patio or deck and store outdoor umbrellas, cushions and rugs in a safe spot in the garage or shed. If you notice any rot or wetness on the deck, it can be a simple fix by replacing the wood boards or using a wood filler to prevent further damage.

Winterize large patio furniture and protect items that are staying outside with a weatherproof cover. To keep the covers in place, secure them to the bottom of the furniture.

If there is a small tear in the fabric, mend it with T-Rex Clear Repair Tape. The all-weather, crystal clear tape has a waterproof backing and an aggressive adhesive to stick to wet surfaces — plus, it applies securely at below freezing temperatures.

Squeaky clean exterior

Once the patio is prepped, turn your attention to the rest of the exterior. Debris and stains collected on the outside of the house during summer can



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

After checking off these projects on your fall list, your home will be properly prepped so you can relax, slow down and enjoy the season.

set over the winter, so it's a good idea to power wash away the dirt.

Start with the driveway, deck and windows and then take time to wash the siding and gutters, as long as you spray water in a direction that won't force it behind the siding or under shingles. This project will help remove lingering grime, mold and mildew and ensure the outside area is clean and ready for winter.

After checking off these

projects on your fall list, your home will be properly prepped so you can relax, slow down and enjoy the season.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

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Right: Use T-Rex Waterproof Tape to temporarily patch small holes in vinyl siding, loose shingles or leaks in your gutter.



CELEBRATIONS

14 facts about the winter solstice

The winter solstice occurs each year during the month of December in the northern hemisphere. In 2022, the winter solstice will take place on December 21 at 4:48 p.m. EST.

Solstices are significant events that occur twice per year. One occurs in the winter and one in the summer. The winter solstice also is known as the first day of winter and occurs when the Earth's pole reaches its maximum tilt away from the sun. During the winter solstice, people will experience the shortest period of daylight and the

longest period of nighttime of the year.

Here are 14 fascinating facts about the winter solstice:

1 . Depending on the hemisphere, the north or south pole will experience continuous darkness or twilight around its winter solstice.

2 . The winter solstice sometimes is referred to by the term midwinter.

3 . Even though the solstice is marked by a whole day on the calendar, it actually is just the brief

moment of time when the sun is exactly over the Tropic of Capricorn.

4 . The word "solstice" can be translated from Latin and means "sun stand still."

5 . The Tropic of Capricorn is located at 23.5 degrees south of the equator.

6 . Tourists flock to Stonehenge to track the movement of the sun. The stones will frame the sunset on the winter solstice and the sunrise on the summer solstice.

7 . Ancient cultures viewed the winter solstice as a time of death and rebirth.

8 . Important events in history have taken place on winter solstices. The Apollo 8 spacecraft launched on the solstice in 1968. Pilgrims also arrived at Plymouth on the winter solstice in 1620.

9 . Each planet in the Earth's solar system has its own solstices and equinoxes.

10 . The southern hemisphere expe-

riences the winter solstice in June each year.

11 . A full moon on a solstice is even more rare than a blue moon. The last full moon to occur on the winter solstice was in 2010 and the next one won't happen until 2094.

12 . Earth is closer to the sun around the winter solstice in December. However, the northern hemisphere receives less sunlight and has cooler temperatures because it is tilted away from the sun during winter.

13 . Even though the winter solstice features the shortest amount of daylight of any day during the year, it does not have the earliest sunset. That takes place roughly two weeks prior. In 2021 in New York, the winter solstice took place on December 21, but the earliest sunset occurred on December 7 at 4:28 p.m.

14 . Meteorological winter begins on December 1 rather than December 21.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Here are 14 fascinating facts about the winter solstice.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

During the winter solstice, people will experience the shortest period of daylight and the longest period of nighttime of the year.

RECIPES

Holiday fun with a joyful pop



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES/POPCORN BOARD

You can take the holiday season up a notch with creative recipes like Gingersnap Popcorn Snack Mix, White Chocolate Peppermint Popcorn Bark and Easy, Elegant Holiday Popcorn.

With countless ways to enjoy the holiday season from decorating and hosting parties to wintertime activities, it's a perfect time to bring family and friends together for some festive fun. One simple ingredient can be your go-to for just about any tradition: popcorn, which is an inexpensive, versatile, whole grain that makes holiday occasions better.

Consider these simple seasonal ways you can let popcorn fuel your holiday adventures.

Decorate

Strings of popcorn and cranberries add a nostalgic touch to the family tree while making popcorn trees adds whimsy to the table. Before stringing popcorn, let it sit out for a day or two as freshly popped popcorn may be too fragile to thread without breaking. Push a threaded needle through the center of each kernel then pull the kernel to the end of the knotted thread, adding an occasional cranberry, if desired. Festive trees can be made using popcorn mixed with melted marshmallows then shaped and finished with sprinkles.

Give it as a gift

If it's your turn to host this year's holiday party, popcorn makes for a perfect party favor. Pop up a delicious treat like these Cranberry Popcorn Balls, place them in pretty jars or neatly wrap them then finish each with a bow. For an added touch, include the recipe instructions and popcorn kernels in a separate container so your guests can make it at home.

Enjoy it as a snack

Freshly popped popcorn is a simple and delicious snack to share after a day of shopping, caroling, sledding or decorating. You can take the holiday season up a notch with creative recipes like Gingersnap Popcorn Snack Mix, White Chocolate Peppermint Popcorn Bark and Easy, Elegant Holiday Popcorn. These treats are perfect for popping up in the morning so the snacks are ready once guests arrive.

Visit Popcorn.org to find more sweet, salty and savory holiday recipe ideas.

Gingersnap Popcorn Snack Mix

Yield: 2 quarts

2 quarts popped popcorn
butter-flavored nonstick cooking spray
1/3 cup granulated sugar substitute
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black or white pepper

Preheat oven to 325 F.

Spread popcorn on baking sheet and spray lightly with nonstick cooking spray.

In small bowl, combine sugar substitute, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and freshly ground pepper; sprinkle evenly over popcorn.

Spray again with nonstick cooking spray and toss to coat evenly. Bake 7 minutes and serve warm.

Easy, Elegant Holiday Popcorn

Yield: 8 cups

8 cups popped popcorn

1/2 cup milk chocolate chips

1/2 cup white chocolate chips

candy sprinkles

On serving platter, spread popcorn in thin layer.

Over double boiler or in microwave, melt milk chocolate chips. Drizzle over popcorn.

Over double boiler or in microwave, melt white chocolate chips. Drizzle over popcorn.

Sprinkle candy sprinkles over warm, chocolate-coated popcorn. Allow drizzles to set until firm.

White Chocolate Peppermint Popcorn Bark

Yield: 1 pound

5 cups popped popcorn

12 ounces white chocolate baking chips, chopped white chocolate or white candy coating

1 cup crushed hard candy peppermints

Cover baking pan with foil or wax paper; set aside.

Place popcorn in large bowl; set aside.

In double boiler over barely simmering water, melt chocolate, stirring until smooth, or melt according to package directions.

Stir in crushed peppermints after chocolate is melted. Pour chocolate mixture over popcorn mixture and stir to coat. Spread onto prepared pan; cool completely.

When chocolate is cooled and set, break into chunks for serving.

Store in airtight container at room temperature.

Cranberry Popcorn Balls

Yield: 18 balls

2 cups sugar

1 cup whole berry cranberry sauce, slightly mashed

1 tablespoon grated orange peel

1/2 cup cranberry juice

1/2 cup light corn syrup

1 teaspoon vinegar

1/2 teaspoon salt

5 quarts unsalted popped popcorn

In heavy saucepan, combine sugar, cranberry sauce, orange peel, cranberry juice, corn syrup, vinegar and salt. Bring to boil; lower heat and cook to 250 F on candy thermometer.

Mixture will bubble in pan; watch to keep from boiling over.

Pour slowly onto hot popcorn and mix until well-coated.

Let stand 5 minutes, or until mixture can easily be formed into balls.

Butter hands and form into 3-inch balls.

Courtesy of Family Features/Popcorn Board



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES/POPCORN BOARD

Pop up a delicious treat like these Cranberry Popcorn Balls, place them in pretty jars or neatly wrap them then finish each with a bow.

SAFETY

Preventing scams and fraud this holiday season

Scams and fraud are more deceiving these days, reaching you in more ways than ever before. The FTC reported 2.8 million fraud reports from consumers in 2021 alone, with reported fraud losses increasing 70% from 2020 and more than \$5.8 million.

Scammers begin their traditional uptick at the start of the holiday season, and identity theft protection expert Carrie Kerskie says being aware of what new cyber and phone fraud trends to look out for is your biggest defense against unwanted fraud.

“The more that we can get this information out there the better,” Kerskie recently told T-Mobile Stories, “Unfortunately when it comes to technology, privacy and identity theft, the same old advice that was given 10, 15 years ago is still the gospel of what you’re supposed to do. And that is outdated. None of it works. It’s not true, it’s not relevant anymore.”

Scammers have expanded from targeting consumers with only traditional email and phone calls. The most recent trending scams are occurring using person-to-person payment platforms or P2P, remote access software and even public Wi-Fi.

Kerskie says the most desirable accounts to criminals include bank accounts, mobile phone accounts, credit card accounts and Amazon accounts. Now, with P2P payment platforms, criminals can get access to your bank account and use it to transfer money within moments.

The latest tactic that concerns Kerskie is using remote access software to gain access to everything on your computer without having to directly ask you for things like your social

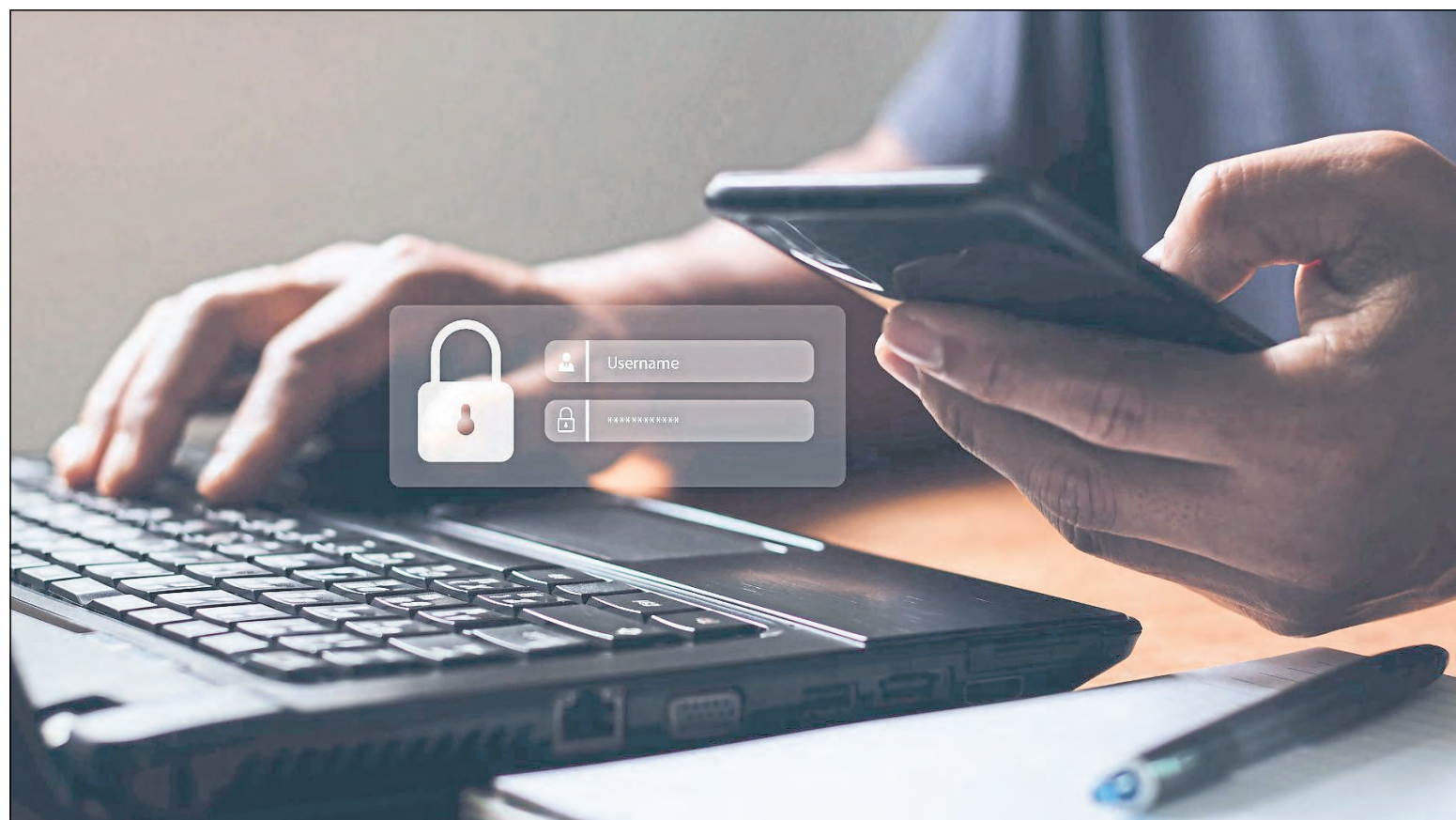


PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

Understanding how potential cyber threats and fraud work will help protect you this holiday season and beyond.

security number, bank account or credit card number. While many workers use remote access software safely from their companies' IT departments, criminals are also using this software in their scams.

Criminals also try to access your information in settings like coffee shops or libraries using public Wi-Fi. A laptop or smartphone using public Wi-Fi can easily fall victim to scams. An easy fix is to use your smartphone's wireless data and hotspot to help keep your personal information secure.

Kerskie says there are ways to keep scammers and fraud at bay ahead of the holiday shopping season.

- Prioritize privacy. Ker-

skie says, if it's easy for you, it's easy for a criminal. Privacy means having strong and unique passwords with a minimum of 12 characters, and for pins using random numbers and taking advantage of extra security. Enabling multi-factor authentication on your various apps and accounts will also protect yourself from potential threats.

- Use available resources. Take advantage of the free anti-fraud safeguards offered by your mobile carrier. In the case of T-Mobile's Scam Shield, services include enhanced caller ID, scam ID and blocking, which flags suspicious calls and gives customers the option of blocking those numbers. Additionally, custom-

ers can get a free second number to keep their personal number personal, or even change their primary number completely.

- Validate or eliminate. Whatever potential threat you come across via email, text message, letter or even a phone call, try to validate the information. If you cannot confirm the information is true or confirm the senders' validity, throw it away, block the phone number or email address and report it as spam or junk mail.

Understanding how potential cyber threats and fraud work will help protect you this holiday season and beyond.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

The latest tactic is using remote access software to gain access to everything on your computer without having to directly ask you for things like your social security number, bank account or credit card number. While many workers use remote access software safely from their companies' IT departments, criminals are also using this software in their scams.

RECIPES

Enjoy this vegan challah during Hanukkah celebrations

Challah is a special bread within Jewish households that is cooked to herald the Sabbath and celebrate various holidays. Jewish scholars indicate that the history of challah can be traced to the scripture story of manna, or bread, that God sent to the Israelites in the wilderness. Also, during the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, Jews presented dough as an offering to priests, who used it to bake their own bread.

Challah can be sweet or savory, and leftovers can make for a delicious French toast base for breakfasts and brunches. Anyone can learn how to make challah for their holiday celebrations. Traditional challah is made with eggs and a shiny egg wash, but this plant-based version uses potato water starch in the recipe. Bake up a loaf or two with this recipe, courtesy of “Plant-Based Gourmet: Vegan Cuisine for the Home Chef” (Apollo Publishers) by chef Suzi Gerber.

Vegan Challah

Makes 2 loaves

3 Yukon Gold potatoes or other butter potatoes (about 1 1/2 pounds), peeled and cubed
 1/3 cup safflower oil or avocado oil
 1/3 cup sugar
 5 cups all-purpose flour or gluten-free all-purpose flour
 1 tablespoon cornstarch
 1 teaspoon kala namak (Indian black salt)
 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
 1 teaspoon sea salt
 1 packet active instant dry yeast (approximately 1/4 ounce)
 1/2 cup Homemade Butter (see below), softened and cut into cubes
 1/3 cup oat milk

1. To make “potato wa-



FILE PHOTO — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Traditional challah is made with eggs and a shiny egg wash, but this plant-based version uses potato water starch in the recipe.

ter,” combine the potatoes with 3 1/2 cups cold water in a large pot, bring to a boil, and keep at a boil for 20 minutes, uncovered. The liquid level should reduce to about 2 cups.

2. Drain the potatoes, and reserve the liquid.

3. Combine 1 1/2 cups of the potato water with the safflower oil and sugar in a mixing bowl or a large measuring cup with a pour spout (reserve the remaining potato water). Whisk until sugar is completely dissolved.

4. Combine the flour, cornstarch, kala namak, turmeric, and sea salt in a stand mixer and whisk to combine. Make sure there are no salt

clusters for the yeast to come in contact with, then slowly add the yeast.

5. Change the mixer attachment to a dough hook, and slowly add the potato-water mixture to the dry ingredients while mixing. This slow pour should take about a minute.

6. Add in the softened butter, 1 cube at a time, until fully incorporated.

7. Knead the dough hook on medium-high (number 6 on standard home machines) for 10 minutes, keeping an eye on the elasticity of the dough. Pinch and pull the dough to check its elasticity: When ready, it should stretch like a rubber band and reach about 10 inches

without breaking.

8. Let the dough rise, covered, for 45 minutes at room temperature. It should double in size.

9. Portion the dough into 2 equal blocks. Divide each block into thirds to form a traditional straight braid, or into 4 sections to form a round braid. Roll the pieces into equal-sized ribbons that are at least 18 inches long. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and braid the ribbons directly on the parchment, tucking the ends under and pinching them together.

10. Cover again and let rise a second time, for 30 to 45 minutes. The dough should dramatically increase

in size, eliminating any gaps in the braid.

11. Preheat the oven to 375 F.

12. While the bread rises, combine the remaining potato water (about 1/2 cup) with the cornstarch in a small saucepan. Bring to a simmer, whisk often until a thick gel forms, and then remove from the heat.

13. Slowly add the oat milk to the gel, whisking until the gel is thin enough to paint.

14. Brush a generous and even amount of the starch-and-oat-milk wash onto the risen bread right before placing in the oven.

15. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, rotating once halfway through. Remove once the

crust is smooth and dark and the bottom is strong. When you thump the bottom with your finger, it should sound hollow. The internal temperature should be 190 to 200 F.

16. Paint the loaves again with more of the wash and let cool. Store in zip-top bags. Keep for 3 to 5 days (if they last you that long!) at room temperature, or up to 6 months if frozen.

17. If you over-proof or let the finished loaves sit out uncovered or past 5 days and they get hard, it's French toast time.

Homemade Butter

Makes approximately 2 1/2 cups

1 cup hempseed milk or full-fat canned coconut milk
 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
 1 teaspoon salt 1 3/4 cups melted refined coconut oil (the kind that is solid at room temperature)
 3 tablespoons safflower oil, avocado oil, or sunflower oil
 1 tablespoon sunflower lecithin powder or 1 1/2 teaspoons liquid lecithin
 1/2 teaspoon arrowroot powder

1. Combine the hempseed milk, apple cider vinegar, and salt and stir. Allow to curdle for 5 to 10 minutes.

2. In a blender or food processor, combine the milk mixture with the remaining ingredients and blend for 2 minutes on high.

3. Pour the mixture into a stick mold or any shape tub and freeze for at least 3 hours.

4. Keeps for up to 1 month in the fridge or up to 6 months in the freezer.

Tip: Use the boiled potatoes from making the potato water and turn into mashed potatoes or potato pancakes.

Courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

SHOPPING

4 gifts for the busy professional on your holiday list

The life of a successful professional can be hectic. Demands at work force many professionals to work long hours, and those days could be even longer for remote workers.

In fact, a 2020 study of 2,800 workers by the staffing firm Robert Half found that 70% of workers who transitioned to remote work due to the pandemic now work on the weekends. The survey also found that 45% of workers indicate they now routinely work more hours during the week than they did prior to the pandemic.

With so much on their plates, busy professionals may not have time to shop for products that can make their lives a little easier. That makes the holiday season a perfect time for people to consider what to get the hardworking professional on their shopping list.

These four gifts can each make it easier for busy professionals to handle long days at the office.

1. Portable phone charger

Modern professionals rely on their smartphones to check and send work emails, keep track of their busy schedules and answer calls from colleagues, among other things. But those phones are only useful when their batteries are charged. Portable phone chargers are lightweight and easy to use, making them ideal for on-the-go professionals who need to keep their phones charged all day long. Professionals who spend lots of time in their vehicles may love a solar-powered portable charger, which ensures their phone batteries stay charged even when they forget USB cables at home.

2. Wireless headphones

Though some models can cost of hundreds of dollars, a reliable set of wireless headphones can be found for as little as \$50. These headphones can be especially useful for professionals who work from home, as many are designed to cancel out ambient noise, making it easier to participate in Zoom calls or other meetings even if the kids are being rowdy right outside a home office door.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A crock pot can be especially valuable to professionals who work long hours and don't have the time to prepare a meal from scratch at the end of a workday.

3. Cleaning service

Few chores are less appealing after a long day at the office than cleaning a house. Many cleaning services offer weekly or monthly packages, and professionals would undoubtedly appreciate someone taking this time-consuming task off their to-do list. Ask a relative or two to pitch in and help pay for the service if it's beyond your budget.

4. Slow cooker

Slow cookers allow users to put everything in a pot in the morn-

ing and then arrive at night to a ready-to-eat, homecooked meal. These can be especially valuable to professionals who work long hours and don't have the time to prepare a meal from scratch at the end of a workday.

Whether it's portable tech, some help keeping their homes clean or a device designed to simplify homecooking, various gift ideas can help make busy professionals' lives a little less hectic.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

Modern professionals rely on their smartphones to check and send work emails, keep track of their busy schedules and answer calls from colleagues, among other things. But those phones are only useful when their batteries are charged. Portable phone chargers are lightweight and easy to use, making them ideal for on-the-go professionals who need to keep their phones charged all day long.



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Whether it's portable tech, some help keeping their homes clean or a device designed to simplify homecooking, various gift ideas can help make busy professionals' lives a little less hectic.

ACTIVITIES

Movies that are perfect for families this holiday season

Various traditions take center stage during the holiday season. One of those traditions may be sitting down and enjoying any of a number of timeless Christmas movies or even newer holiday films that are quickly becoming favorites.

Film fans have their own ideas about the best films to watch during the holidays, but the following movies are some kids and adults can enjoy together.

- “The Polar Express” (2004): A young boy enjoys a magical adventure to the North Pole aboard the Polar Express train. He learns about the true spirit of the holidays and the value of bravery and friendship along the way.

- “The Muppet Christmas Carol” (1992): Charles Dickens’ classic story about a bit-

ter miser might be a little frightening for young children to enjoy in its more theatrical offerings. However, when the Muppet characters tell their version of the classic tale, the story becomes much more family-friendly.

- “A Boy Called Christmas” (2021): Based on the book by Matt Haig, this movie is a reimagined take on Father Christmas. It focuses on Nikolas as he goes on an adventure to find a magical town called Elfhelm.

- “Jack Frost” (1998): When a father dies in a car accident, he comes back to life as a snowman in his son’s front yard. Jack learns to keep his promises and make things right with his son — things he wasn’t capable of doing as a human.

- “Christmas with the Kranks” (2004): The Kranks decide to forgo their annual Christmas party and plan a vacation since their daughter will be out of town. But when said daughter decides to come home after all, chaos sets in as the couple tries to figure out how to put together an extravaganza at the last minute.

- “Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas” (1997): The Beast does not favor the holiday season, so Belle must change his mind on the matter in this animated Disney offering.

- “Elf” (2003): As a youngster, Buddy was magically transported to the North Pole and raised by Santa’s elves. As an adult, he’s determined to find his real dad in New York City and uncover a way to

fit in.

- “Santa Hunters” (2014): A young boy teams up with his sibling and cousins to try to capture new footage of Santa in action and prove that the man in red truly exists.

- “The Nutcracker and the Four Realms” (2018): This is a newer take on the classic Nutcracker tale. This adventure sees Clara defending the Land of Sweets from the evil Mother Ginger.

Holiday films enhance the celebratory nature of the season. Certain movies are tailor-made for families to watch together during this special time of year.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection



Holiday films enhance the celebratory nature of the season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



Certain movies are tailor-made for families to watch together during this special time of year.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

ENTERTAINING

Create the perfect charcuterie board for your party

Are you hosting a holiday party and looking for a simple way to impress your guests?

The Texas Roadhouse Butcher Shop is sharing steps for building an eye-catching and mouth-watering charcuterie board that will add color, flavor and variety to your holiday table.

1 Grab a platter or surface to display your charcuterie. Anything will work, even a simple cutting board. Just be sure to choose a size that you can fill completely.

2 Use dishes or ramekins of mismatched sizes, shapes and colors to hold dressings, toppings and sauces. This will keep your board clean and add fun visual details

to the display.

3 Include two to four cheeses of contrasting flavors and textures to please all palates, and to complement other elements of the board. The varieties you select should represent these basic categories: hard cheese, (such as Chardonnay Bellavittano) soft cheese, (such as brie) and blue cheese (such as French Roquefort).

4 While a traditional charcuterie board typically sticks with cured meats, the holiday season is the perfect occasion for adding depth and richness to your feast with grilled meats, such as filet, sliced into strips. Those from Texas Roadhouse Butcher Shop are lean, flavorful, and melt in



PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

To wow your guests and their tastebuds, take your charcuterie board to the next level with seasonal treats,

your mouth, making them a natural choice for a hearty holiday spread. Whether you are firing up the grill or preparing on a cooktop, allow any cooked meats

to rest well before adding them to your board.

5 No charcuterie board is complete without some

crunch. Add two to three options like pita crackers, crusty breads or toasted baguettes that will stand up to the weight of your meats and cheeses.

6 Now, add some brightness and sweetness to your board. Fresh fruits like blueberries, strawberries and green grapes, and preserves such as peach pepper jam, will add contrast to rich, salty meats and cheeses. Don't forget seasonal sweets and treats like soft peppermints, peanut brittle, chocolate dipped pretzels and candied nuts.

7 You'll want your charcuterie board to look as if it's overflowing. So, as you're building it out, start with the largest elements like the

cheeses and meats first, followed by smaller items like crackers, fresh produce and sweets. Fill in any holes with sprigs of aromatic rosemary for trimming, along with additional portions of the smaller items. The various elements of the board should pair well together, so it's okay if they touch.

For additional hosting tips, or to shop for seasonal gifts and your holiday spread, visit trbutcher-shop.com. For 15% off your order, use the promo code PARTY15.

To wow your guests and their tastebuds, take your charcuterie board to the next level with seasonal treats, grilled meats and a cornucopia of sweet and savory flavors.

Story courtesy of StatePoint Media

SAFETY

Fire safety protocols to keep in mind when holiday decorating

Decorating the interior and exterior of a home is a beloved holiday season tradition in millions of households. Such decor makes it easy to dive into the festive nature of the season.

Many people could not imagine a holiday season without decorating their homes, and it's vital that celebrants do so safely. Fire safety is especially important during a time of year when string lights and potentially dried out trees feature so prominently.

These fire safety tips can ensure this holiday season is safe.

▪ Buy the safest lights. It might be tempting to buy the most inexpensive lights, especially given all the extra costs already associ-

ated with the holiday season. However, safety should be the utmost priority when buying new lights. Testing laboratories such as CSA, Intertek and UL certify products to ensure they're safe for use. Products that aren't certified should be avoided.

▪ Use lights and cords where they're intended to be used. The packaging on lights will indicate if the product is intended to be used indoors or outdoors. It's vital that individuals decorating their homes with lights pay attention to these labels. Never decorate the exterior of a home with interior lights, and vice versa. Extension cords made for indoors also should not be used outdoors



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Fire safety is especially important during a time of year when string lights and potentially dried out trees feature so prominently.

and vice versa.

▪ Be especially careful with candles. Candles should only be burned when adults are in the room and should always be extinguished before leaving the room or going to bed. When burning candles, place them

on heat-resistant surfaces that are beyond the reach of curious kids and pets. Never place candles within arm's length of Christmas trees or houseplants, including poinsettias.

▪ Ask an electrician to inspect your exterior outlets

and circuits. Ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets are designed to prevent electric shocks and reduce the risk of electrical fires. Most areas now require new homes be built exclusively with GFCIs, which are recognizable because they feature two buttons between the outlets. But older homes may not be equipped with GFCIs, particularly with exterior outlets. GFCI installation is not an especially expensive job, so homeowners should ask an electrician to inspect their interior and exterior outlets and replace non-GFCIs with GFCIs.

▪ Do not pinch light cords. Stringing lights can be a hassle, but cords should never be pinched in doors

or windows or beneath interior and exterior furniture. Doing so increases the risk of damage to the cord, which in turn increases the likelihood of fire.

▪ Avoid overloading circuits. Overloaded circuits pose a significant fire hazard. When plugging in lights, choose outlets that aren't already occupied by devices and other electronics. If need be, unplug appliances like televisions and devices while lights are on and plugged in.

When decorating this holiday season, celebrants are urged to do everything they can to reduce the risk of fire in their homes.

Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection

RECIPES

Serve up smiles with favorite holiday sides

Turkey and ham may sit centerstage, but classic holiday sides can make the season truly special. You can bring smiles to your loved ones' faces by dishing out those favorite recipes everyone asks for year after year.

Made with a delicious combination of rice, cheddar cheese, cream of mushroom soup and broccoli florets, this quick and easy version of Broccoli and Cheese Rice Casserole is an ideal one-pot dish to keep the holidays simple. With three easy steps and everyday ingredients, it comes together with minimal effort for traditional casserole taste.

When it comes to feeding a crowd, it's often best to let your oven do the work. This Brussels Sprouts and Ham Rice Gratin recipe allows you to serve up a filling favorite with little effort using pantry staples. Plus, it's a kid-friendly way to encourage veggies at this year's holiday meal with gooey cheese providing tempting taste bud motivation.

These seasonal classics and more are made quick and easy with an option like Success Boil-in-Bag Rice, a pre-measured, mess-free way to make fluffy, high-quality rice. It's cooked by simply dropping a bag of rice in a pot of water or broth then boiling it for 10 minutes. BPA-free and FDA-approved, the bags are safe to use and made to withstand high temperatures.

An added bonus: If you're aiming to achieve a particular flavor, just season the rice by cooking in water infused with herbs, spices, broth, coconut milk or other liquids like juice for sweeter recipes.



This Brussels Sprouts and Ham Rice Gratin recipe allows you to serve up a filling favorite with little effort using pantry staples.

Visit successrice.com to find more holiday recipe inspiration.

Brussels Sprouts and Ham Rice Gratin

Prep time: 20 minutes
Cook time: 25 minutes
Servings: 4

1 bag Success White Rice
½ pound Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved

1/3 cup diced ham
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tablespoon olive oil
¾ teaspoon salt, divided
¾ teaspoon black pepper, divided

1 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided



This quick and easy version of Broccoli and Cheese Rice Casserole is an ideal one-pot dish to keep the holidays simple.

1/3 cup breadcrumbs
2 tablespoons butter, melted
Preheat oven to 450 F.

Prepare rice according to package directions.

In large bowl, toss Brussels sprouts, ham, garlic, ol-

ive oil, ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Place on parchment paper-lined baking tray and roast 12-15

minutes, or until caramelized. Decrease oven temperature to 425 F.

In large bowl, toss rice, Brussels sprouts mixture, cream, chives, Dijon mustard, remaining salt and remaining pepper. Stir in cheddar and 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese. Transfer mixture to greased, 2-quart baking dish.

In small bowl, stir breadcrumbs, remaining Parmesan and melted butter. Sprinkle over rice mixture.

Bake 12-15 minutes, or until golden brown and bubbling.

Broccoli and Cheese Rice Casserole

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Servings: 4-6

1 bag Success White Rice or Brown Rice

nonstick cooking spray

1 can (10 ¾ ounces) condensed cream of mushroom soup

2 cups frozen broccoli florets, thawed and drained

1 ½ cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided

½ cup evaporated milk

3 tablespoons butter, melted

1 tablespoon grated onion

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

Prepare rice according to package directions. Preheat oven to 350 F.

Coat 2-quart casserole dish with nonstick cooking spray. In medium bowl, combine soup, broccoli, 1 cup cheddar cheese, evaporated milk, butter, onion, salt and pepper. Fold in rice.

Pour mixture into prepared dish and top with remaining cheddar cheese. Bake 20 minutes.

Story courtesy of Family Features



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

When decorating this holiday season, celebrants are urged to do everything they can to reduce the risk of fire in their homes.