



HAPPY Holidays



GET HOLIDAY AND GIFT READY

A checklist to prepare for the season

(Family Features) Creating lasting memories during the holidays is all about spending quality time with loved ones. Being prepared for everything the season brings helps minimize stress so you can maximize that special time together.

If prepping for the holidays has you feeling overwhelmed, use this checklist to ensure your home is guest-ready, your thoughtful gifts are wrapped early and your celebrations are festive and worry-free.

Clean, Declutter and Restock Ahead of Guests' Arrival

To guarantee your home is ready for everything the holiday season can throw at it, start with a thorough cleaning. Focus on high-traffic areas like the living room, kitchen and guest bathrooms. Don't forget the bedrooms if you'll have company staying over during the holidays.

Declutter your living spaces to make room for holiday decor and create extra space for guests to move around comfortably. Make room in the refrigerator and restock essentials such as snacks, beverages and toiletries, and set out towels and bedding for overnight guests. Whether or not you're hosting guests, having a clean home during holiday chaos can help bring peace of mind.

Get Gift Ready to Avoid the Rush

Planning your list in advance can help you avoid the last-minute rush to find thoughtful, elevated gifts for

friends and family members. Perfectly gift-ready, Air Wick Essential Mist is an easy, thoughtful holiday surprise for anyone on your list. Featuring a range of fragrances and portable design, it effortlessly transforms any space into one that feels more elevated, inviting and holiday-ready. With its long-lasting scents and effortless setup, it's an affordable present that delivers a multi-sensory experience.

Stress Less with Smart Boundaries

The holidays often bring packed calendars, endless to-dos and added financial pressures, but setting boundaries can help you prevent burnout. Create a realistic budget and stick to it, opting for thoughtful yet affordable gifts. Don't be afraid to delegate tasks, whether that's asking family members to bring an extra dish to dinner or letting kids help wrap presents. Just as important, block off a few evenings when you can commit to no obligations, giving yourself time to rest and recharge. By setting limits on your time, spending and energy, you'll be able to enjoy the moments that matter most.

Wrap Presents as You Go to Stay Ahead

Wrapping presents as you purchase them can help avoid the stress of last-minute giftwrapping, not only saving time but also allowing you to be more creative with your wrapping style. Keep supplies such as paper, ribbons and tags on

hand in an easily accessible location so your gifts are gift ready the moment you bring them home.

Set the Mood with Music and Lighting

Create a warm and inviting ambiance with the right music and lighting. Whether it's a lively gathering or a quiet family dinner, playing holiday music can get everyone into the festive spirit. Soft, warm lighting from lanterns or seasonal string lights, along with holiday fragrances, can create a relaxing environment that makes everyone feel welcome.

Keep Host Gifts On Hand to Be Party Ready

Be prepared for any last-minute

invitations by keeping a few host gifts on hand. While 66% of candle purchasers consider candles an appropriate gift for hosts or dinner parties, according to the National Candle Association, 1 in 3 recipients say they're likely to regift candles because they received a scent they don't even like. With Air Wick Essential Mist, there's no such risk - its wide range of fragrances makes it a ready-for-anything gift that can be easily tailored to the recipient's preference. By having the diffuser on hand, you can show your appreciation effortlessly, without the stress of last-minute shopping.

Find more information about gift-ready fragrances at airwick.us.



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Tips for first-time holiday hosts

The holiday season is a busy time of year. From holiday shopping to readying the home for guests, there's no shortage of things to accomplish in a relatively brief amount of time. Seasoned holiday enthusiasts may be ready to put their game faces on and tackle tasks with ease. But for first-time holiday hosts, the prospect of crossing items off to-do lists may require a little extra assistance.

According to Dr. Vanessa Kennedy, a clinical psychologist at Driftwood Recovery, holiday hosting can "lead to the pressure to curate picture-perfect moments, creating stress and anxiety." The following are pointers those new to holiday hosting can employ to simplify the process and enjoy the holidays a little more.

- **Do as much prep work in advance as possible.** Giving yourself extra time to get things done can help immensely. Grocery shop one day, prepare food the next, clean the house one day, and set the table or arrange decor on another. Minor task can be left for the morning of the day guests arrive.

- **Cook and freeze items.** Utilize recipes that enable you to cook in bulk and then store foods until you need them. Casseroles, baked pasta dishes, freezable soups, and ready-to-bake cookie doughs made in advance will save a lot of time closer to the holidays.

- **Stock the pantry.** If holiday hosting involves overnight guests, be sure to keep easy items on hand so guests can help themselves. Dry goods or pre-packaged muffins for breakfast, chips or pretzels for late-night snacks, granola bars, or store made croissants can fit the bill. Put everything in a dedicated basket so guests can grab items as needed. Stock the refrigerator with water, seltzer, iced teas, and sodas, and make a full pot of coffee in the morning so guests can pour their own.

- **Avoid complicated cocktails.** You don't want to be stuck mixing drinks all evening. Instead,

make it simple for guests to help themselves. Wine, beer, premade punches, or even one specialty drink are ideal.

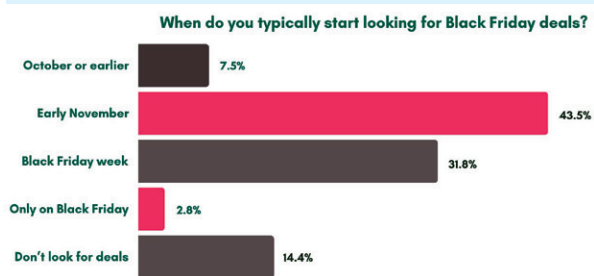
- **Consider hiring a caterer.** If the idea of a homecooked meal feels like climbing Mount Everest, swap out some items for store-bought alternatives, or work with a favorite restaurant or caterer to secure foods that only need to be reheated and served.

- **Free up closet and room space.** Guests will be coming with a lot of stuff, particularly if you live in a cold climate. Make room in the entry closet for guests' coats and boots. Be sure you can accommodate suitcases or overnight bags. Set aside an area where guests can deposit their wrapped gifts.

Holiday hosting can be a whirlwind of activity, but novice hosts can quickly get into the swing of things.



BLACK FRIDAY FROM PAGE 3



plan to, and nearly 1 in 5 said it happens most years. Still, only 5% said they always feel pressured by sales, though 39% said they sometimes do.

For 68% of shoppers, seeing a huge percentage off is what makes them feel best about spending. Another 8% said they enjoy feeling like they "beat the system" and 7% said earning cash back brings them satisfaction.

"People want to feel proud about their spending," Chatman said. "They're realizing that a good deal isn't just about price in this economy. It's about timing, confidence and getting something that feels worthwhile."

If Black Friday disappeared altogether, 55% of Americans said they'd be indifferent. Only 31% said they'd be disappointed while 13% admitted they'd feel relieved to skip the pressure.

For all its changes, Black Friday still reflects the psychology of modern spending: the balance between excitement and restraint, hype and habit. Experts say shoppers can make the most of the season by planning ahead, comparing prices over time and focusing on rewards that add long-term value rather than chasing every flash sale.

"Black Friday isn't gone; it's simply grown up," Chatman said. "Today's shopper is more strategic, less impulsive and more aware of what makes a deal truly worth it."

To find more information, visit [TopCash-back.com](https://www.TopCash-back.com).



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Must-Have Gifts for Students and Graduates

(Family Features) Whether your graduate is venturing into the real world for the first time or simply continuing his or her education, tech gadgets can help make post-grad life easier and more enjoyable.

From a computer that will likely come in handy for a new job or classes and a smartwatch to stay organized and on time to headphones that help concentrate and relax or a new television to unwind, these gift ideas are perfect for tech-savvy grads in your life.

Laptop

Whether starting a new job, freelancing or pursuing further education, a reliable and powerful laptop is a must-have for graduates. Performance is a key consideration when choosing a laptop. Look for a powerful processor, ample RAM and a high-resolution display to handle demanding tasks such as graphic design, video editing, programming or data analysis. Also keep factors such as portability, battery life and connectivity in mind. Being able to work without interruptions regardless of location allows for seamless flexibility in post-grad endeavors.

Noise-Canceling Headphones

The right headphones can be a game-changer, blocking out unwanted noise and creating a peaceful listening experience while studying in a noisy coffee shop, commuting on a crowded train or trying to relax in a busy apartment. Look for noise-canceling headphones with cushioned ear cups and adjustable headbands to provide a snug and comfortable fit even through extended wear to provide the ability to focus on work or enjoy favorite music with minimal distractions.

Smartwatch

Not just a stylish accessory, a smartwatch is also a useful tool for staying connected and organized. From tracking fitness goals and monitoring sleep patterns to receiving notifications, answering calls and making payments with a

flick of the wrist, advanced smartwatch features make it easy to stay on top of opportunities and responsibilities. Plus, with customizable faces and interchangeable bands, most watches can be styled to match personal tastes for any occasion.

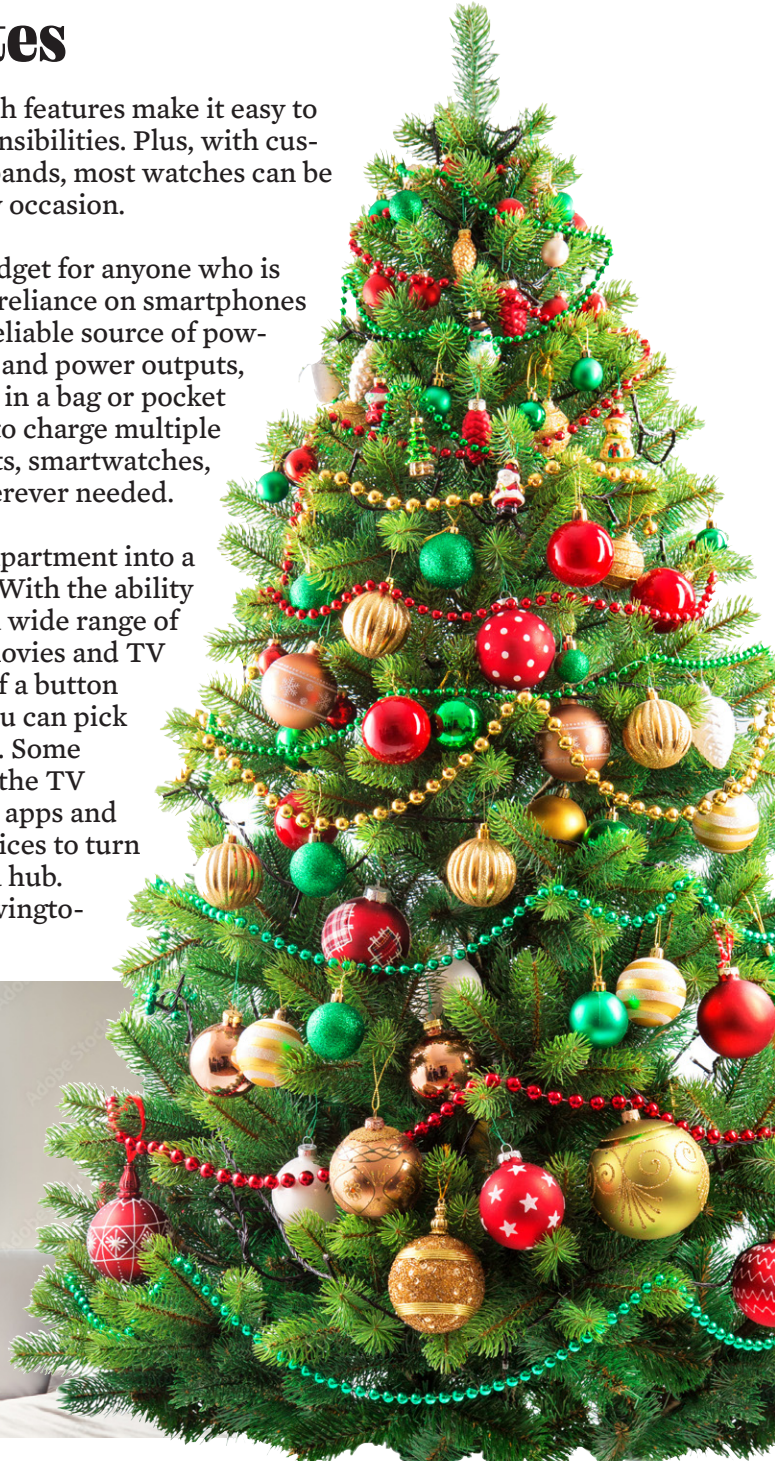
Portable Charger

A portable charger is an essential gadget for anyone who is always on the go. With the increasing reliance on smartphones and other portable devices, having a reliable source of power is crucial. Available in various sizes and power outputs, these convenient devices can easily fit in a bag or pocket and often feature multiple USB ports to charge multiple devices, including smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, cameras and more, whenever and wherever needed.

Smart TV

Transform that dorm room or new apartment into a home theater with a smart television. With the ability to connect to the internet and access a wide range of popular streaming services, favorite movies and TV shows are never more than the push of a button away. Available in a variety of sizes, you can pick an option to fit nearly any living space. Some models even allow the user to control the TV using voice commands or smartphone apps and offer integration with other smart devices to turn the living room into a true multimedia hub.

Find more gift ideas for grads at eLivingtoday.com.



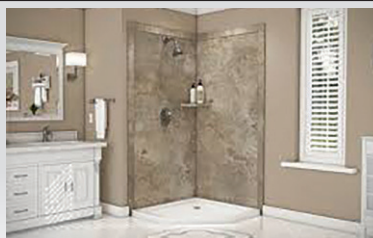
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How to Honor Loved Ones' Memories During the Holidays

Guidance and resources to support families navigating grief during the holiday season

(Family Features) The holiday season can be a time of joy and connection, but it can also bring intense feelings of loss and sadness for those grieving the death of a loved one.

To help families honor memories while caring for their emotional well-being, the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) recognizes the unique challenges of this season and offers these resources and tips.

Embrace Your Feelings

Grief is unique to each person, and emotions during the holidays can vary widely - from sadness and longing to moments of joy and peace. Give yourself permission to feel whatever arises without judgment. Allow space for tears or quiet reflection and remember it's OK to experience mixed emotions. Acknowledging your feelings honestly can help you move through the season with greater self-compassion.

Create New Traditions

While old holiday traditions often hold treasured memories, creating new rituals can help you honor your loved one in a personal way.

"Keep as many traditions as you can keep, but we always encourage families to create a new tradition to remember that loved one who's been lost," said Tim Schramm, owner of Howe-Peterson Funeral Homes.

Lighting a candle in their memory, sharing stories that celebrate their life or setting up a special display of photos or keepsakes are small acts that can bring comfort. Some people find meaning in donating to a charity in their honor or volunteering together with family or friends to celebrate the spirit of giving.

Lean on Your Support System

Having trusted people around you can offer solace. Whether through family gatherings, friends, support groups or counseling, reaching



out helps bridge feelings of loneliness. Being with others who understand your grief or sharing your memories can provide reassurance and companionship during times that might feel isolating.

Set Boundaries to Protect Your Well-Being

It's important to do what feels right for you, even if that means saying no to events or stepping away from overwhelming situations. Setting limits helps protect your emotional health and allows you to navigate the holidays at your own pace.

"As funeral directors, we often remind families that caring for yourself is just as important as honoring your loved one," said Dr. Camelia

Clarke, owner and licensed funeral director at Paradise Memorial. "Setting boundaries isn't selfish - it's an act of compassion that allows you to truly be present in the moments that matter most."

Communicate honestly with loved ones about your needs as they will likely appreciate your openness.

Prioritize Self-Care

Grief can be emotionally and physically tiring, especially around the holidays. Take care of yourself through adequate rest, comforting meals, finding a new hobby or buying yourself a gift. Simple mindfulness practices, such as

SEE HONOR LOVED ONES' PAGE 7

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Let Charitable Gifts Spread Joy and Benefit More Than Just Recipients

Charitable giving increases significantly in the months surrounding the holidays. Approximately one-third of annual giving happens in December, and 10 percent of all giving occurs in the last three days of the year, according to Charities Aid Foundation America. The surge in donations typically occurs with people's desire to spread holiday cheer, enjoy tax advantages and help people in the community, says Nonprofit Source.

Some people are compelled to donate in the name of another person. Here are some ideas for charitable holiday gifts that benefit many.

Donate in someone's name

To honor a loved one who may be living or deceased, or who fought an illness and won, you can donate to a nonprofit in the name of that loved one. Many charities offer printable or physical cards to let the recipient know a donation has been made in his or her name.

Giving back through gifts

Certain products purchased feature proceeds that go toward a charitable cause. For example, every purchase of TOMS® shoes helps fund mental health access and community development, while the body care prod-

ucts from Thistle Farms are made by women survivors of trafficking, prostitution and addiction. Other products may help feed the hungry or support cancer patients.

Supporting animals

A symbolic animal adoption can support conservation efforts around the world. Making a donation to the World Wildlife Fund in someone's name, for example, enables you to get a plushie, certificate and information on the animal the contribution will be helping.

Fair trade gifts

Making a purchase of fair trade items means you're often buying handmade and ethically sourced goods. These gifts support artisans in developing countries and help fund community projects. Gift recipients can feel pride in ownership of an item that was designed and purchased with the greater good in mind.

Charity gift cards

Charitable gift cards, like those available from TisBest Charity and CharityChoice, let the gift recipient choose which nonprofit will receive the funds.

Support special businesses

Offer gift cards or take people to dine or shop



at businesses that support those with special needs. For example, No Limits Cafe in New Jersey is a full-service restaurant that trains and employs adults with intellectual disabilities. Dining there will help to continue to support these important efforts to give every employee a sense of pride and purpose.

Charitable gifts make a recipient feel special and can make many additional people feel good as well.

HONOR LOVED ONES' FROM PAGE 6

journaling or breathing exercises, can also help manage stress and bring moments of calm.

Remember with Compassion

Honoring your loved one's memory is a personal journey. You might choose to share stories, write letters, observe moments of silence or engage in creative expressions like art or music. Embracing these acts with kindness and patience fosters healing and helps keep their spirit alive.

The holiday season often brings both challenges and opportunities for healing. By embracing your emotions, leaning on support, creating meaningful rituals, and caring for yourself, you can honor your loved ones in ways that feel right for you. Remember, you don't have to face this time alone. Resources like journey cards from RememberingALife.com and other ways to keep memories alive are available to provide guidance and comfort as needed.



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Budget-friendly holiday shopping tips

Holiday shopping and entertaining involve a whirlwind of activity to round out the end of the year. The holiday season also tends to be an expensive time of year. According to Capital One Shopping, the average spending for holiday travel, gifts and entertainment expenses is \$1,638. The National Retail Federation says American consumers spend an average of \$997.73 on gifts and other holiday items each Christmas.

For some people, adding an additional \$1,000 to their November or December budgets can be challenging, and many individuals seek budget-friendly solutions for their holiday celebrations. The following guidelines can help corral spending this year.

Set a budget

It's impossible to keep a budget if one is never established in the first place. Determine how much you can comfortably spend on gifts, travel and entertaining, as well as any other holiday expenses. Once the number is calculated, divvy up spending accordingly.

Plan your list

Make a list of everyone you need to purchase gifts for, along with gift ideas and estimated costs. Set a dollar amount for each individual, particularly if you will not be spending the same amount on each person.

SEE SHOPPING TIPS PAGE 11

Top video games for holiday gifting this year

Gaming remains a wildly popular pastime. According to TechJury, more than 3.3 billion people worldwide played video games in 2025, and gaming is a mainstream hobby across all generations. The Entertainment Software Association's 2025 Facts About the U.S. Video Game Industry report indicates the average player is 26-years-old and female and male gamers are nearly evenly split (47 percent versus 52 percent). Baby Boomers and even older generations also play video games each week and benefit from the mental stimulation and relaxation the hobby offers.

Given the popularity of gaming, gifting video games for the holidays can be a smart tactic. The following are some 2025 releases that can be wrapped up as gifts this year.

- **Donkey Kong Returns HD:** Players will blast out of barrels, ride mine carts, stomp enemies, and more in this popular game newly imagined for the Nintendo Switch. Players join Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong on their wild adventures to retrieve their stolen banana horde.

- **Split Fiction:** In this game, a player and partner become Mio and Zoe, two writers who are trapped in a simulation of their own imaginations after a high-tech attempt to steal their creative ideas goes awry. This unlikely duo will need to work together in order to escape with their memories intact from a world filled with dragons, trolls, cyber ninjas, and robo-parking attendants. The game is available for PlayStation 5.

- **Star Wars Episode 1: Jedi Power Battles:** Video games often tap into nostalgia, which is perhaps why gamers were excited to find out that this popular Star Wars game was being remastered for modern consoles. This enables players to enjoy the original experience with only minor updates that include a simpler control scheme.

- **Citizen Sleeper 2: Starward Vector:** This role-playing game is a sequel to the popular



game from 2022. Players control an escaped android with a malfunctioning body, a price on its head and no memory of the past. The goal is to get a ship, find a crew and take on contracts.

- **Doom: The Dark Ages:** This game is a prequel to the popular Doom experience, including Doom and Doom Eternal. It tells an epic story, and players inhabit the boots of the Doom slayer in this medieval and sinister war game.

- **Elden Ring: Nightreign:** This game is a standalone adventure within the Elden Ring universe. It's crafted to offer players a new gaming experience by reimagining the core attributes of play. Players join forces with others to battle the creeping night and become heroes.

Video games are popular gift ideas, and 2025 doesn't disappoint with its newest crop of exciting releases perfect for gamers of all ages.

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IDEAL GIFTS FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE OUTDOORS

Many people find that the great outdoors is the perfect place to spend their days. Activities run the gamut from hunting and fishing to hiking and camping. Plenty of other interests, like birdwatching or mountain biking, also maximize time spent in the outdoors.

According to the "Outdoor Participation Trends Report" from the Outdoor Industry Association, gateway activities like hiking, camping and fishing each gained more than two million new participants over the last year. There's also been a surge in participation in such activities among seniors and youth, contributing to a more multigenerational outdoors experience. There's also been participation growth among Black and Hispanic Americans, indicating long-term momentum toward equity and inclusion.

When it comes to holiday giving, tapping into the interests of outdoor enthusiasts is a great way to offer gifts that will be used and appreciated. Here are some ideas when making holiday shopping lists.

- **First aid kit:** No matter the activity, having an up-to-date and well-stocked first aid kit can be a lifesaver when spending time in the outdoors. The kit should include items like splints and bandage wraps for immobilizing ankles or limbs in the event of sprains.

- **Quality wool socks:** Nothing can derail an outdoor adventure faster than wet, cold or blistered feet. Wool socks are a must because they are moisture-wicking, warm and comfortable.

- **Insulated, waterproof jacket:** A high-quality jacket for outdoor adventures that will be efficient at trapping heat, windproof and water-resistant is a thoughtful gift. Patagonia is a popular brand of outerwear, but retailers like Columbia and REI also merit consideration.

- **Trail shoes or sandals:** Supportive, comfortable and non-slip footwear is a given when



enjoying the great outdoors. Depending on the activity, there are plenty of options from boots to hikers to trail sandals to consider.

- **Waist pack:** Packing light for short jaunts in the wilderness may include stocking a waist pack (also known as a fanny pack) with must-have items. They are lightweight, comfortable and spacious enough for the essentials without getting bogged down by a backpack or another bag.

- **Buff:** A buff is a tube of lightweight, stretchy material that serves innumerable functions in the great outdoors. It can be used to shield the neck from the sun or wind, or to absorb sweat or keep hair out of the face. A buff can be useful on a hiking or backpacking trip, or just about any outdoor activity.

- **Headlamp:** Visibility is essential when en-

joying the great outdoors, and many activities happen during dawn and dusk when light may be at a premium. A headlamp keeps things hands-free and sheds light on surroundings or up-close tasks, like setting up fishing hooks or field dressing game.

- **Satellite communicator:** A satellite communicator can keep outdoors enthusiasts safe and at ease when off the grid. Certain regions have spotty cell coverage, and satellite devices will do better at sending out messages or SOS signals should something go awry.

- **Hiking poles:** Telescoping hiking poles are adjustable and lightweight, and offer extra support and balance when on trails.

Outdoor enthusiasts will benefit from gifts tailored to their love of nature, wildlife and adventure.

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Gifts for every music lover

Music provides the soundtrack for people's lives. Music evokes strong emotions and can inspire and motivate individuals while also helping them calm down and reflect. Finding the right gift for a music lover this holiday season can be a worthwhile endeavor, as the world of music offers an array of gift possibilities. Whether a gift recipient plays an instrument, loves live performances or enjoys singing, there is a gift out there to hit all the right notes.

The listening experience

People who prioritize the listening experience will enjoy quality audio equipment. High-fidelity headphones or an upgraded Bluetooth speaker can enhance daily listening sessions, allowing individuals to fully immerse themselves in their favorite tracks. Although digital music is the go-to nowadays, plenty of music lovers are vinyl enthusiasts. For them, a new record player with modern features, such as Bluetooth connectivity or record storage, would make an ideal gift. For others, a subscription to a quality audio streaming service will offer uninterrupted music on demand.

Music creator

Many music lovers enjoy creating their art. A gift that supports those endeavors will be cherished. Beginners may appreciate entry-level instruments, like a ukulele or a keyboard. Those



already playing and creating might appreciate personalized sheet music, new guitar strings and capo, drumsticks, or upgraded software for recording and mixing sound.

Devoted fan

Music fans enjoy expressing their devotion to favorite bands and other musicians. Therefore, artist merchandise can make fitting gifts. Vintage T-shirts, framed album covers, souvenirs from past shows, and any other band-related

memorabilia will keep music fans happy.

Live music

A live show is many music lovers' ideal experience. Tickets to a concert, solo vocal night, theater show, or orchestra performance will certainly strike the right chords with music lovers.

The best gifts for music lovers are those that resonate with their passion for the songs and sounds of life.

DID YOU KNOW?

Every year certain gifts emerge as the "hot" toys and games for children. These are the presents kids are eager to find wrapped up and ready for them. Adults often scramble to secure these popular items. According to the United Kingdom-based retailer Argos, the following are among the most popular items children were asking Santa Claus to deliver over the previous decade.



- 2024: BeyBlade Xtreme Battle Set
- 2023: Nerf Elite Double Punch
- 2022: LEGO Icons Optimus Prime "Transformers" Robot Model Set
- 2021: Bluey Family Home Playset
- 2020: Hatchimals Pixies Crystal Flyers
- 2019: Furreal Cubby Bear
- 2018: Fingerlings Untamed T-Rex and Dino Cage
- 2017: Cozmo, White Robot
- 2016: Hatchimals, Purple Egg
- 2015: Barbie Saddle 'N Ride



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Take a bite of these holiday gifts for foodies

Food-related gifts are popular come the holiday season. According to Packaged Facts' November-December 2023 report on consumer and corporate food gifting in the United States, 50 percent of consumers had purchased food gifts for others over the 12-month report period, and 65 percent had purchased food gifts for themselves. The holidays of Chanukah and Christmas are particularly popular for giving food gifts, with nearly half of all food gifts purchased during these holiday seasons.

For a dedicated foodie in one's life, a gift that tempts the palate can be rewarding. There are delectable gifts of all flavors for the culinary-minded. Explore these possibilities when building holiday shopping lists.

Aspiring cook

Preparing meals at home allows cooks to customize flavors to meet their personal needs. Experimenting with recipes and perfecting techniques is high on the list for budding chefs. Outfitting their kitchens with durable cooking gear, like a cast-iron skillet, Dutch oven, immersion blender, or kitchen scale can help home cooks immensely. A variety of cookbooks that feature different cuisines can provide endless inspiration.

Tempting sweets

Cooks and bakers typically fall into two distinctive camps. Baking is an art that marries creativity with science. If a foodie delights in all things sweet, focus on gifts that cater to their sugar-laden passions. Baking essentials like a stand mixer, silicone baking mats, cookie cutters, professional-grade pans, and gourmet ingredients are sure to please. Don't underestimate the appeal of beautifully packaged candies, chocolates, cookie bars, or even specialty coffees and liqueurs when gifting food.

Global palate

Some foodies love nothing more than sampling cuisines from all around the world.

While you might not be able to offer a ticket to every far-flung region, you certainly can gift flavors from these countries with a well curated gift. Think international snack boxes, a collection of sauces from different areas, unique condiments, or food baskets brimming with items from a particular country or region.

High-class dining

Some food lovers seemingly have everything. In such cases, a bottle of wine or another favorite liquor as well as a gift certificate to a local four-star restaurant might be the icing on the cake for gifting.

Ultimately the best gifts for foodies are those that recognize their passion for palate-tempting treats.



SHOPPING TIPS FROM PAGE 8

Having numbers in black and white, and comparing them to what you have allocated for gifts, will enable you to see whether you are overspending or on budget.

Shop early

Begin holiday shopping as early as possible, even months before the holidays arrive. Such an approach enables you to take advantage of sales as they come up. Also, you will not fall victim to impulse buys or last-minute purchases because you are under a time crunch.

Track spending

Utilize whatever method works for you to keep apprised of spending. It may be jotting down numbers on a piece of paper or using a budgeting app on a smartphone. Having a clear idea of what you have spent and any dollars remaining will help you keep your overall spending in line with your budgeted amount.

Get coupons

Signing up for stores' loyalty programs can enable you to receive members-only coupons or digital codes to your phone or email. Compare the discounted final price with other stores' offers to make sure that you are getting the best deals. Browser extensions also can search automatically for coupons and apply them to the checkout when online shopping.

Use credit cards wisely

Credit cards come with various perks, many of which are points or cash back accumulated with each purchase. Utilize a card that works best for your needs, whether it's to get airline miles or score extra spending money for a particular retailer. Only charge what you can pay in full when the bill arrives; otherwise, the benefits may be negated by high interest rates.

Holiday spending can derail financial plans for those who do not establish a firm budget and commit to spending wisely towards the end of the year.



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Lots Of Holiday Options

Tips for gifting coworkers

The holiday season finds people making shopping lists that include gifts for all of the special people in their lives. Such lists also feature the people with whom individuals may spend the majority of their time each day: coworkers.

Gifting coworkers can strengthen professional relationships, build camaraderie and show appreciation while on the job. A well-chosen gift can leave a lasting impression, whether it's given for a birthday, promotion or the holiday season. According to a 2019 survey from Office Depot, 70 percent of employees said their workplace had a holiday gift-giving tradition like Secret Santa or White Elephant. It is important to balance thoughtfulness with professional decorum when selecting gifts. These guidelines can help anyone navigate workplace giving.

- Consider company culture. One of the first aspects of gift giving among coworkers is understanding the culture of the company. In some businesses, gift exchanges are commonplace and encouraged during team celebrations or the holiday season. In others, they may be rare or even frowned upon. It is always a good idea to check with human resources before choosing a gift, particularly for those who are new to the company.

- Avoid personal gifts. When selecting gifts, consider thoughtful items that are not too personal. These can include desk organizers, coffee mugs, plants, notebooks, photo frames, or even gift cards to nearby restaurants.

- Be mindful of food and beverages. When choosing to give a gift of food, be aware of any dietary restrictions and allergies the gift recipients may have. Also, while a gift of wine or another bottle of alcohol may seem fitting, one never knows if a person is abstaining from



drinking, so it's best to avoid such gifts in the workplace.

- Consider personalized gifts for close colleagues. Giving personalized gifts to close coworkers can be a great way to show appreciation when one knows the recipient well enough. For example, if he or she can't survive without coffee each morning, then a gift of an engraved insulated coffee tumbler can be perfect. If the coworker mentions being part of a book club, a specialized bookmark or gift card to a bookstore will be fitting.

- Be careful with humor. When gifting a funny present, avoid anything that can be misinterpreted or considered offensive. It's best to avoid any political humor. For those unsure about whether a gift might be taken the wrong way,

skip that gift and choose another option.

- Limit the cost. Some coworkers may be friends, but it is best to keep all gifts inexpensive and of the same value if the plan is to gift everyone in the department. According to the Office Depot survey, 27 percent of respondents felt meeting a spending limit is very important. The general range of gift prices at the workplace is between \$20 and \$30.

One of the best ideas for company gifting is to see who might want to participate in a gift exchange, and then everyone brings a grab bag gift. Then there isn't pressure on any one person, and gifts are distributed randomly.

Gifting between coworkers can be thoughtful and foster stronger relationships if done correctly.

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Experiential gifts for everyone on your list

Gift exchanges are a hallmark of the holiday season. Individuals spend weeks making lists and shopping for items they believe recipients will appreciate. However, this holiday season shoppers may want to change up their gift-buying strategy to focus less on material offerings and more on experiences.

A recent survey from Get Your Guide found 92 percent of Americans prefer to receive an experience over a physical gift during the holiday season. In addition, Deloitte's 2024 survey of more than 4,000 consumers in the United States found that spending on experiences during the holidays is expected to rise by 16 percent year-over-year, reaching an average of \$735.

Experiential gifts place value on memories and emotional connections rather than objects. As people increasingly are drawn to these special moments, here's a look at experiential gifts for everyone on a holiday shopping list.

Parents and grandparents

Experiential gifts for older adults are beneficial because they won't add to the clutter or belongings such individuals have already accumulated throughout the years. Useful ideas include memberships to museums, entry to botanical gardens, culinary tastings, travel vouchers, and subscriptions to wellness classes.

Teens and young adults

Teens are big on experiences over material gifts. According to TD Bank's 2024 survey, Gen Z leads the trend in experience-first gifting, with 68 percent preferring experiences. Examples of good experiential gifts for this demographic include escape room experiences, concert tickets, adventure sports like indoor rock climbing, subscription services to streaming music, or movie passes.

Children and families

Families already may be out and about, and



parents of young children may appreciate experiences more than additional toys and games that are already filling the house. Annual passes to zoos, museums or aquariums can keep families occupied year-round. Children might like a science or art workshop, while movie night gift cards and tickets to family shows also are viable gift options.

Special partners

Experiences can strengthen relationships and intimacy. Possible gift ideas include spa days, cooking classes for two, a weekend travel getaway, or tickets to a theater performance or concert. The Amex Trendex 2024 survey found that 38 percent of people plan to give an experience to a significant other.

Experiential gifts focus on fun, creating memories and reducing waste. Such gifts also tend to be more economical in the long run. The holidays are often filled with excess, and experiential gifts can put the focus back on joy and spending time together.



Toy types to avoid when gifting kids under 5

The holiday season presents plenty of opportunities to spread cheer and bring joy into the lives of others. That's particularly true for parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles of young children. Few things are more enjoyable come the holiday season than watching a youngster's eyes light up upon receiving a sought-after gift.

Well-meaning adults and even older kids anxious to give a younger sibling or cousin a coveted gift must remember to keep safety in mind when shopping for especially young children. Certain toys may pose a threat to children age five and under. As holiday shoppers begin to search for gifts for children in that age group, they might want to avoid the following types of toys.

- Toys with lots of small pieces: Toys with small, detachable pieces can be hazardous to kids age five and under because kids might intentionally or mistakenly put the tiny pieces into their mouths, which increases their risk of choking. Legos are a wildly popular gift come the holiday season, but it's important that shoppers read the package and purchase a Lego set that's age-appropriate. According to a recent report from Consumer Product Safety Commission, 9 percent of

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Tips for Parents to Minimize Stress and Maximize Joy During the Holidays

(Family Features) Stress and parenting go hand in hand, but during the holiday season, many parents find their stress levels rising to new heights. Between coordinating schedules, shopping, traveling and managing children's expectations - plus the disruption to the school routine that everyone had finally settled into - the season can feel more like mayhem than merry.

However, by thoughtfully planning and implementing a few practical strategies, parents can protect their well-being and support their families. Early childhood experts from The Goddard School share guidance to help parents stay grounded and make the most of their meaningful family moments this holiday season.

Clarify Priorities

One of the most empowering steps is to decide in advance what truly matters to your family. Consider:

- Which traditions or gatherings are nonnegotiable?
- Are there holiday events you can skip this year without regret?
- What obligations are you taking on out of habit rather than genuine desire?

By reducing the number of “must-do” activities, you can avoid overextending your family. It's OK to decline invitations when your calendar is already full.

Establish a Budget

Holiday spending can weigh heavily on your mind. Create a family holiday budget that includes gifts and activities, then stick to it. Use the opportunity to teach your children about responsible spending and gratitude. Remember, the most meaningful gifts are often those made with time, attention or creativity, not the highest price tag.



Set Boundaries

Stress often arises when family dynamics, expectations or traditions clash. You can reduce this by setting boundaries and communicating them early. Speak openly with the relatives and friends you'll see about what's comfortable for your family and what isn't (e.g., physical space, travel, topics to avoid). Let your children know what to expect, as the lack of routine during this time can be particularly challenging. Modeling clear boundaries helps your children learn to express their own needs, too.

Prioritize Your Physical and Emotional Health

Amid the hustle, your own basic care often slips, but your well-being is key to being present for others. Consider establishing routines, such as:

- Sleep: Aim for 7-8 hours per night whenever possible.
- Nutrition: Keep healthy staples in the mix, even if treats abound.
- Movement: A short walk, stretch breaks or gentle exercise may help reset your ner-



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your system. Stepping outside can be especially helpful.

Also, if illness strikes, listen to your body and give yourself permission to pause. Pushing through tends to backfire.

Design a Stress Rescue Plan

Even the best-laid plans don't prevent tension or unexpected emotional triggers. Anticipate stress by creating fallback strategies. For example, plan to use a playlist, a quick breathing exercise or a sensory object to help you regroup when your stress escalates. These strategies work for children as well.

If you're worried about unwanted questions - such as a family member asking about politics or your plans to have another child - rehearse your response in advance with a friend. When these stressful moments arise, having a toolkit gives you a sense of control.

Unplug and Be Present

Screens are omnipresent. While they serve a purpose, they can be an unwelcome distraction, especially when you're spending time with loved ones you don't get to see often. Try to designate screen-free times, such as during meals, after dinner or when gifts are being exchanged. Use screens intentionally, such as video calling out-of-town family members, rather than passively scrolling. Focus on in-person connection by playing games, telling stories, making crafts or taking walks. Remember to lead by example, as your children are watching. Being fully present at key moments is the one gift your family will remember above all else.

As the holidays approach, the pressure to do it all can loom large. By clarifying priorities, setting boundaries and safeguarding your health, you can minimize stress and maximize joy. That said, even with careful planning, things can go off course, and that's OK. Practice self-compassion and allow for imperfections. Enjoy every laugh, surprise and even the occasional moment of calm.

For more parenting guidance and insights, including a blog and webinar series, visit the Parent Resource Center at GoddardSchool.com.



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toy-related injuries in kids age four and younger occurred while the children were playing with building sets. Though building sets provide a host of benefits, not the least of which is the fun children get from playing with them, it's imperative to purchase age-appropriate sets.

- **Toys with an electronic component:** Toys with electronic components can pose a number of dangers to children five and under. Such products can heat up, potentially causing burns. And wire coverings can fray over time and thus expose children to electrical currents. When shopping for children five and younger, skip toys with an electrical component.
- **Motorized gifts:** Motorized gifts like scooters, cars and non-traditional bicycles also pose a threat to children five and younger. Motorized gifts may reach speeds that kids cannot safely manage, as young-

sters' motor skills are not fully developed by age five.

- **Toys with sharp points:** Sharp points also pose a threat to children five and younger. Kids can easily suffer lacerations, eye injuries or other issues that pose a threat to their physical safety when playing with toys with sharp points or edges. Toys with soft, rounded edges and no points are ideal for children age five and under.
 - **Projectile toys:** Toys that shoot projectiles pose a danger to children and anyone who happens to be in the room with youngsters playing with such items. Eye injuries and bruises are two injuries that can occur when children five and under play with projectiles.
- The chance to light up a child's eyes with the perfect gift is part of what makes the holiday season such a special time of year. But it's imperative that shoppers find age-appropriate toys for children.



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Thinking outside-the-box for kids' gifts

Children may look forward to the holiday season more than most people. The holiday season is an opportunity for kids to tear open wrapping paper and see the amazing gifts they've received this year.

Although toys and games are typical gifts for children, there are many other items that go beyond these staples to make for unique and creative gifts that can spark imagination or boost physical activity. Shoppers can consider these outside-the-box gift ideas when shopping for youngsters this holiday season.

- 3D pen or printer: Kids can design and build amazing objects that encourage them to employ their creative side.

- Soap-making kit: These skits spur creative endeavors and ultimately produce useful finished results. Soap or perfume kits are great for hands-on sensory learning. Such gifts also teach some components of science and math by requiring users to follow the recipe.

- Robot-building kits: Take building kits one step further with items that can move. Robot kits combine play with engineering basics.

- Interactive books: Children can solve puzzles or make choices to move the story along. These types of books may even appeal to the most hesitant readers.

- Bug collection kits: Budding entomologists can observe insects close up, and then release them back into the wild.

- Greenhouse, terrarium or bonsai tree kit: Put together the materials needed for kids to grow something special. They can nurture the plant along the way.

- Dress up trunk: Fill a box or a trunk with various dress-up costumes and accessories and let children's imaginations run wild. This will spur hours of imaginative play and crazy combinations of clothing.

- Geocaching app: Let kids find objects hidden all over their neighborhoods in real-world

outdoor treasure hunts. Geocaching utilizes GPS coordinates to find hidden containers, called geocaches, placed there by other players.

- Various craft supplies: Let kids create any and all of their fun ideas by compiling a kit full of various craft supplies. From beads to wooden letters to paints to paper, there are plenty of items to be made.

- Hiking attire: Get kids out into nature by supplying the gear needed to take to the trails.

- Adopt a star or planet: Children can adopt and name a star or planet and get a certificate honoring the event.

- Time capsule: Let children store favorite items tucked away for safe keeping, where they'll remain until unveiled in the future.

Parents and other holiday shoppers can think creatively when it comes time to choose gifts for children.



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Thoughtful gifts for aging parents

Children typically want to treat their parents to something special during the holiday season. Parents do a lot for their children, and when those kids become adults, a desire to express their appreciation for Mom and Dad grows.

According to The Wrap Up: Snappy's 2022 Holiday Gift Report, the majority of Americans (64.2 percent) report they need help when it comes to holiday gifting. They may want to carefully consider a recipient's interests, as the report also discovered more than half of all Americans want a gift that reflects their personal interests and hobbies. When shopping for elderly aparents, it may not be as simple as identifying interests, particularly if Mom and Dad are experiencing age-related health issues. Consider these gift ideas that may be ideal for the aging adults in your life.

- **Cozy blanket:** Older adults may have trouble regulating their body temperatures, which can translate to feeling cold a lot of the time. A new blanket or throw for a bed or to cuddle up with in a favorite recliner might be the perfect gift.

- **Family history book:** Budding writers can interview their aging parents and jot down

family stories. Those stories and anecdotes can be compiled into a book and combined with photos to make a family history log, which can be gifted back to the interviewee.

- **Gripping slippers:** Slips and falls can injure aging adults and put them out of commission for quite some time. Sturdy and secure slippers with anti-slip soles are good for getting around the house and making quick trips to take out the trash or get the mail.

- **Robotic vacuum:** Keeping up with the household chores is easier with a robotic vacuum that automatically scours carpets and hard-surface floors. This eliminates having to wrestle with a cumbersome vacuum.

- **Key finder:** A key finder can help adults find their keys if they are misplaced. Some employ radio frequency, while others utilize Bluetooth technology and can be paired to a smartphone.

- **Magnifying light:** Older parents who like to do puzzles or close-up work like knitting or stitching can benefit from an LED lamp that also has a magnifying glass built right in.

- **E-reader:** Avid readers may enjoy an e-reader because they don't have to find spots to store even more books in their homes. E-readers can be customized so the print is the right size for the reader's needs. Also, the devices are lightweight and easy to stow in a bag.

- **Automatic card shuffler:** Parents who are known card sharks around the community can use an automatic card shuffler to make card play even easier.

- **Resistance bands:** Resistance bands are like large rubber bands that exert force to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility. They can help aging adults stay in shape in a low-impact way.

- **Dining gift cards:** When parents do not want to spend additional time in the kitchen, they may opt to visit a favorite restaurant. A combination of a gift card to a favorite establishment as well as pre-paid taxi or ride share service ensures a good meal and a safe ride home.

Although they seem to have everything, aging parents still can benefit from some thoughtful gifts.



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12 GIFTS FOR CRAFTY PEOPLE

Craft enthusiasts can be easy people to shop for come the holiday season. Shoppers can simply fuel their loved one's passion for crafts by keeping their supplies fully stocked or introduce them to new crafting techniques.

There are roughly 85 million active creatives and 30 million sewists in the United States and Canada, according to Customcy, a custom product manufacturer. Millennials account for 41 percent of consumers in the craft market, according to the Center for Generational Kinetics. These 12 gift ideas will be perfect for creatives who want to enjoy their passion for crafting to the fullest.

1. Organizers: Craft supply organizers can keep people's gear neat and tidy in bins or compartmentalized boxes.

2. Gift cards: A spending spree at a nearby craft retailer can help crafters get everything they need.

3. Rotary cutters: While quality scissors are a necessity, a rotary cutter can make fast work of slicing through materials.

4. Cutting mat: A self-healing cutting mat is ideal for model-making, sewing and paper crafts.

5. Cutting machine: A cutting machine, like those offered from Cricut® or Silhouette®, can help people complete a vast number of projects. These machines can cut vinyl, paper, labels, and even fabrics and foam for certain models.

6. Pattern books: Those who enjoy needlework, crocheting or knitting can benefit from books that offer patterns or digital sewing ideas.

7. Yarn and thread: High quality yarns and threads can elevate completed projects.

8. Paper or canvases: Fine artists and painters will need places to display their creative visions. A stock of mixed media paper and canvases means art can be made whenever inspiration strikes.

9. Resin supplies: Resin products have become more popular and crafters who enjoy such projects will benefit from epoxy resin and molds or acrylic pouring kits.

10. Clay: Those who enjoy making clay-based creations can always use more clay in a variety of colors and new clay sculpting tools.

11. Floral supplies: Whether live flowers or artificial, foam, floral tape, stem snips, and ribbons can help people create beautiful designs.

12. Home improvement: Many crafters can benefit from having a dedicated space to engage in their projects. A gift of minor home renovations to create a crafting room or area in an existing spot can make a crafter very happy.

Crafting is a popular hobby with scores of enthusiasts. Catering to their hobbies with special gifts will keep crafters busy and happy throughout the year.

Tips to get ready for DIY gift projects

There are many reasons people gravitate to homemade holiday gifts. Customizing and personalizing gifts to the needs of a particular recipient is a thoughtful touch. Homemade gifts may be particularly fun for savvy do-it-yourselfers to give to loved ones.

DIY gifts require extra time and effort, which means they often cannot be left to the last minute. Crafty gift givers who plan to

give homemade items this holiday season should plan and gather supplies well in advance of the holidays to ensure gifts will be ready in time. Following these tips can help the planning process.

- **Identify your project(s).** Prior to the holiday season, begin to think about which holiday gift projects you will be undertaking. Ideas run the gamut from yarn crafts to woodworking to food gifts. Understanding the scope of the project will help you determine how much time it will take to complete it.

- **Start shopping supplies.** Each project will require various materials. Shopping early ensures availability of materials. The closer it gets to the holiday season, the more scarce certain supplies may become, making shopping early a necessity. Plus, the

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Great gifts for new homeowners

Homeownership is a goal that many people aspire to. However, a complicated housing market in the United States, marked by high prices and high interest rates, has led the homeownership rate to dip to 65.1 percent in the first quarter of 2025. This decline marked a five-year low, and younger homeowners, particularly those under age 35, have found buying a home particularly challenging, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the Federal Reserve Economic Data.

Those who have been successful with their homeownership endeavors can benefit from all the help they can get to offset rising costs. The excitement of a new space often comes with a long list of home needs, making housewarming gifts practical and appealing this holiday season. The following are a selection of items that can benefit any new homeowner.

Practical essentials

New homeowners will need to outfit their homes with basic household items. As repairs and remodeling might be the first tasks to tackle, a high-quality tool kit and some key power tools will be invaluable. Additional practical gifts include a fire extinguisher, smart home devices, a sturdy step stool, and painting equipment.

Kitchen gadgets

Plenty of action takes place in the kitchen, and this room often is referred to as the heart of a home. Upgrading the space with an arsenal of culinary tools is often slow-going for new homeowners. That's when gifts of a durable coffee maker, a set of mixing bowls, a cutlery set, cast-iron cookware, or stylish serving platters can help get homeowners established.

Cozy corners

A new home may seem stark at the outset. Gifts of creature comforts like throw blankets, lush bedding, luxurious soaps, scented candles, accent lighting, low-maintenance houseplants,



or a Bluetooth smart speaker can create a welcoming retreat.

Helping hands

New homeowners likely will appreciate a little help by way of services that can take some of the work off of their shoulders. A gift of lawn care or cleaning services will get the property and home looking its best. For the security-minded, gifting security cameras or access to a remote security monitoring service will be thoughtful. Homeowners who have pools or spas may appreciate a maintenance service that helps with cleaning and water balancing.

New homeowners have much on their plates, so well-intentioned holiday gifts can fill in the gaps as they begin life in their new abodes.



GIFT PROJECTS FROM PAGE 18

earlier you shop, the greater the opportunity to compare prices and shop sales.

- **Store materials in an organized manner.** Devote an area, box or another storage solution for your tools and materials so that they are not absorbed by existing clutter. Time can be wasted looking for materials and setting up a project, particularly if you purchased items in advance.

- **Block out time.** Devote time on your schedule to working on holiday gifts. Treat the work like any other job. Take advantage of quiet moments when you can devote your attention to the DIY projects.

- **Create personalized tags.** Let gift recipients know the item was handmade by you. Create or purchase tags that can be attached to the finished project and read, "Made by (Name Person)." It's a clever finishing touch to the gift. Plus, it showcases your pride in the homemade item.

Do-it-yourself gifts are heartfelt and personal. Prepare for any homemade gifts well in advance of the holidays to ensure you have the time and materials to get everything done on time.

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4 ideas for homemade food gifts

Personalized holiday gifts can be especially heartwarming, particularly when they incorporate activities recipients enjoy. That is perhaps one reason why experiential gifts have become so popular in recent years.

Food gifts never go out of fashion. Homemade offerings of edible items may be particularly coveted because they are delicious and don't take up space. Food gifts require time to prepare and reassure recipients that they are worth the work that goes into this special offering. Those who have the time and talent to prepare homemade food gifts may want to explore these four options that can be especially meaningful to their recipients.

1. GRANOLA

Granola is essentially a baked oats treat. Many varieties sold in stores offer the nutritional benefits of oats overshadowed by high sugar content. With homemade granola, cooks can customize the ingredients so certain flavors or health profiles may be prominent. Oats, nuts, sunflower seeds, chia seeds, and dried fruit can go into granola. A small amount of maple syrup or honey can be used to sweeten the granola before it is baked in the oven for around 15 to 20 minutes. Granola should be allowed to cool before packaging to enable the formation of clusters of oats and other goodies.

2. FROZEN COOKIE DOUGH

If people are always commenting on your delicious cookies, you certainly can gift them ready-made cookies in a tin. But homemade frozen or refrigerated cookie dough also makes a great gift. Follow the lead of commercial cookie dough companies and prepare your ingredients before rolling them tightly in freezer paper to store until you're ready for gifting. When it comes time for gifting, wrap the cookie dough log in patterned wax paper and secure the ends. Those on the receiving end can slice and bake according to the directions cooks provide on the tag.

3. CHOCOLATE BARK

Chocolate bark is simple to make and looks impressive when wrapped in tissue paper and packaged in a decorative box. Melt a favorite chocolate in a heatproof bowl in the microwave and then mix in various ingredients like chopped nuts, raisins, chocolate candies, dried cranberries — whatever you desire. Spread into a parchment-lined pan and refrigerate until firm. Break the bark into pieces and package into a gift.

4. FLAVORED SALTS

Use fresh herbs or fruit rinds to flavor salt for gift-giving. Process fresh herbs and kosher salt in a food processor for about 30 seconds, or until the herbs are well chopped. Spread the salt mixture on a baking sheet and bake at 200 F or 250 F for around 15 minutes. Let the salt cool and then scoop into small jars or other containers.

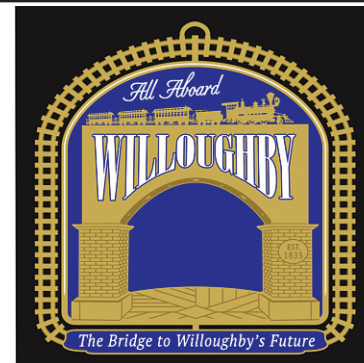
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Special and affordable homemade gifts

The holiday season is a joyous time of year, but it also can be expensive. According to the National Retail Federation, American consumers spend an average of \$998 on gifts and additional holiday items each Christmas. In 2024, the anticipated spend for holiday travel, entertainment and gifts was expected to top \$1,600 per shopper.

While some people have no qualms about spending so much come the holiday season, others may be tightening their budgetary belts this year and could be interested in some cost-effective gift options. Homemade gifts are very thoughtful, and they tend to be more budget-friendly than some commercially sourced items. Check out these inexpensive homemade gifts.

Bath bombs

Bath bombs are fizzing, scented balls that dissolve in bathwater. Popular retailers sell bath bombs, but such products can be expensive. However, bath bombs are easily made at home with some basic ingredients like baking soda and citric acid. Simply search online for popular bath bomb recipes and then wrap the finished product in cellophane treat bags with ribbon.

Photo ornaments

There are various ways to create photo ornaments, which provide an excellent reason to make prints of some of your favorite images. Insert a print inside of a clear ball ornament, purchase a small photo

frame and add a hook for hanging, or use a photo transfer product to transfer photo ink to another object, like a cardboard or wood cutout. Recipients will love hanging these thoughtful photo ornaments on the tree or around the house.

Sugar scrubs

Just like bath bombs, it's relatively easy to recreate a spa experience by gifting homemade sugar scrubs. These scrubs are made from mixing sugar with coconut oil and a few drops of essential oil for a scented boost. If desired, add vitamin E oil or jojoba oil to soothe the skin even more.

Potted plant

Utilize an interesting container in lieu of a traditional flower pot to put a creative and personalized spin on this gift. A coffee mug with a witty saying can house a plant or even a small ramekin picked up at the dollar store. Choose a plant that matches the care style of the recipient. Someone whose green thumb isn't perfect may appreciate a cactus or another succulent, which tend to be low-maintenance.

Personalized stickers

Many people now have printing and cutting craft machines that enable them to expand their crafting options at home, or even start home businesses. Kids may appreciate a stack of homemade, personalized stickers they can use to adorn water tumblers, phone cases or notebooks.

Homemade gifts are thoughtful and often inexpensive options for creative types shopping on a budget.



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Popular books from 2025

Reading is a relaxing way to pass the time, expand your vocabulary and help maintain cognition. Piedmont Health says reading boosts health in a number of ways. Researchers at the University of Sussex found that participants who read for just six minutes experienced reduced muscle tension and a slower heart rate. Studies have shown that regular reading may slow mental decline and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

New books inspire people to read more readily. According to Goodreads and The New York Times® Best Sellers, the following are some of the best-selling books of 2025.

- **Onyx Storm** by Rebecca Yarros: Violet Sorrengail must journey beyond the failing wards and seek allies from unfamiliar lands, a trip that will test her strength, luck and much more. This book is the third in the fantasy romance Empyrean series.

- **Alchemised** by SenLinYu: Hope seems lost for Helena, a prisoner of war facing a dreary world of death and dark magic. In this dark fantasy, a woman with missing memories fights to survive in a war-torn world.

- **Sunrise on the Reaping** by Suzanne Collins: It's the fiftieth annual Hunger Games and fear blankets Panem. In honor of the Quarter Quell, twice as many

SEE BOOKS PAGE 23

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Upcycle boxes to make a gingerbread village

Building gingerbread houses is a holiday tradition in many classrooms and households. But as any adult enlisted to help out with the project can attest, constructing gingerbread creations tends to be a messy business. Kids and counters are covered in sticky icing, candy rolls onto the floor, and unless the builders are especially adept, many gingerbread homes topple over before they can be appreciated. Plus, the recipes to create strong gingerbread for building tend to be dense and less palatable than others, meaning kids are not likely to munch on the gingerbread after the thrill of building is over.

Children can recreate the appeal of making gingerbread houses by turning to non-edible materials. Chances are most homes have plenty of shipping boxes and other cardboard around this time of year, especially since online shopping is so prolific. These boxes — with a few extra materials — can be transformed into entire gingerbread villages.

Collect the materials

Kids can begin by gathering the necessary materials. Depending on the desired size of the finished project, boxes can be small, like those that contain tea, hot cocoa or cereal, or larger shipping boxes can be utilized for more ambitious undertakings. Scraps of wrapping paper, postal paper, construction paper, colored markers, crayons, washable paints, and additional decorative



materials also can be gathered.

Cut house panels

For thicker cardboard, adults may need to use a craft or utility knife to score through the cardboard and get kids started. Prepare gingerbread house “walls” and triangular portions that can be used to make roofs. Kids may be able to cut through thinner boxes with their own safety scissors.

Design and build

Before they are stuck together, children can be encouraged to decorate their gingerbread homes by drawing, painting or gluing items on, or adding whatever embellishments they desire onto the cardboard panels. Once ready to go, the house can be constructed by using masking tape to attach the corners of walls and roof pieces together.

Painters tape is another option, as it is less sticky, and can be removed and repositioned more easily if a mistake happens.

Display and play

Children can take pride in displaying their homemade gingerbread villages among the rest of the holiday decor. Kids can use their imaginations and create stories and other play using their cardboard gingerbread houses as the backdrop. When the holiday season is over, the cardboard can be recycled and ideas for a new batch of gingerbread village creations can take root.

Upcycling cardboard boxes into materials to build gingerbread-style homes is a way to foster creativity among kids and add to the holiday magic.

BOOKS FROM PAGE 22

tributes will be taken from their homes. This book provides an interpretation of the Reaping through the eyes of Haymitch.

• 107 Days by Kamala Harris:

Vice President Harris answered her party's last-minute call to enter the presidential race in 2024. She only had 107 days to prepare and make history, with an eye on the most important job in the country, if not the world. This book provides an unfiltered look at the triumphs and pressure Harris faced.

• Atmosphere by Taylor Jenkins

Reid: Thoughtful and reserved, Joan Goodwin is content with her career as a physics professor. But when she sees an advertisement seeking the first women scientists to join the NASA space shuttle program, suddenly Joan aspires to be one of those lucky enough to visit space.

• The Housemaid by Freida Mc-

Fadden: The queen of suspenseful reads is at it again with a tale of a live-in housekeeper who is very much entwined in the lives of the family she serves without them really knowing much about the woman living in their attic. A mystery-thriller with a surprise twist that no one will see coming, and the first in a series.

• Greenlights by Matthew McCo-

naughey: An honest and unflinching memoir from one of the more popular actors of his generation. Compiled from years of diaries and stories, the book is a composition of his life thus far and offers readers many lessons.



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A beginner's guide to wreath-making

Wreaths are popular decorative items that can be customized for any season or occasion. Wreaths are particularly popular during the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, especially when adorned with evergreen boughs and berries. Learning how to make a wreath can be a handy skill.

Those new to wreath-making need not worry, as it's relatively easy to learn the technique. Here are the basics to crafting a wreath, which can then be adorned as desired.

Materials needed

The first step to making a wreath is having the right tools and materials on hand.

- **Wreath form:** This is the frame upon which the materials will be attached. Choose a form diameter that matches the desired size for the center ring of the wreath, as longer flowers or branches can be attached to create a larger finished wreath. A 10-inch wreath form is good for getting started. The form can be made from metal or grapevine. For a foam form, you'll be poking wire into the form instead of wrapping it around it to secure your greenery and decorations.

- **Paddle wire:** Choose 22- to 24-gauge paddle wire to attach greenery and additional items onto the form.

- Clippers and wire cutters
- Craft scissors
- Foliage, flowers and boughs
- Decorative items and accessories
- Floral tape
- Door hanger

Prepare your work station

Once you have collected your supplies, it's time to begin. Place all materials on a protected surface. Trim foliage into workable sizes that will fit neatly on the frame, and set aside.

Build bundles

The first step to making a wreath is to make

Here are the basics to crafting a wreath, which can then be adorned as desired.

small bouquets or bundles of greenery that look good in small bunches, suggests Homesteading Family. Hold the bundle tightly and use floral tape around the stems to keep each bundle together. Repeat this process until you have several bundles to attach to the wreath form.

Start attaching the greenery

Begin by laying a bundle onto the form and using a piece of paddle wire to first wrap around the form, and then wrap around the bundle stems to hold in place. Experts suggest pointing the stems inward and arranging the leaves and greenery to point outwards to create a fan shape. Always place the next bundle slightly overlapping and on top of the previous bundle to cover the stems. Repeat this process all around the wreath form until you reach the starting point.

Add your embellishments

Fill in any sparse areas with some decorations, such as small ornaments, bows, pinecones,

ribbons, or plastic gems. Simply wrap a piece of wire around the decoration and attach it to the form as you did the bundles. When adding embellishments, work in odd-numbered groupings, as they look more aesthetically appealing on a circle, say the floral experts at Team Flower. Twist all wire ends tightly to avoid scratching your door or wall when the wreath is ready to hang.

Hang the wreath

Place the wreath holder on your door or in another spot. Determine what is the top of the wreath and twist two pieces of your paddle wire together to thicken it. Fashion the wire into a loop shape so you will have a "hook" for hanging the wreath onto the holder, which makes it more secure.

Making a homemade wreath is inexpensive and a perfect craft project for the holiday season.



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Scented crafts capture the season

The holiday season is a glorious time of year when many people are itching to transform their homes and businesses into winter wonderlands. Decorations certainly catch the eye and do much to establish that festive holiday feeling. Savvy individuals know that scents also can convey messages and elicit strong memories.

Scents can bring back memories and have a stronger link to emotions than the other senses, according to Discovery. Neuroscientists say scents bypass the thalamus, which acts as the relay station in the brain, and go directly to the olfactory bulb. The olfactory bulb is directly connected to the amygdala and the hippocampus, which is why aromas can trigger intense emotion and detailed memory, as these components are vital to processing memories and emotions.

This holiday season, crafters can explore the various ways to capitalize on the scents of the season to make the experience more immersive for everyone involved. These projects showcase inviting aromas.

Stovetop potpourri

Set a simmering pot of warming scents to give your home an inviting aroma. Dried orange or lemon slices, cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, and star anise will smell wonderful together. Turn this into a gift by packaging the ingredients inside of a mason jar with a festive ribbon attached to it.

Cocoa-scented soaps

Crafters need only visit their local craft stores to find inspiration for various projects. Many retailers have an entire aisle dedicated to soap-making. Kits often have reusable molds, colorants and essential oils. Look for add-ins that can mimic the inviting scent of a warm mug of hot cocoa with cinnamon. Every time the soap is used it can elicit memories of



sipping hot chocolate while snow falls outside.

Evergreen candles

Making candles is another fun craft project, with soy wax, paraffin wax or beeswax widely available. Crafters can customize the scents as they desire, but for the holidays, the fresh scent of pine can trigger fond memories of the season. Line the mold or fill a vessel with a few sprigs of evergreen branches collected for a decorative effect, and use drops of pine-scented essential oil to mix into the wax. When lit, the candles will make it seem like a fir tree is inside your home.

Peppermint bath bombs

Candy canes are displayed and enjoyed during the holiday season. Mimic the effect of candy canes with peppermint bath bombs that can revitalize and sooth whenever a spa experience is needed. Bath bombs can be made with a few simple ingredients pressed into a mold. They

can be tossed into the bath water or allowed to dissolve during a shower to release a rich aroma into the steamy environment.

DIY reed diffusers

Reed diffusers are a flame and heat-free way to fragrance a space, which is perfect for those with pets or small children. They are easy to make and can be great gifts. One will need a glass or glazed ceramic container with a narrow opening at the top. Then add a solvent or oil to the container as the base. Some people use sweet almond oil or even vodka and water. Then add a fragrance of choice. Vanilla-scented essential oils can create a “Christmas cookie” scent. Then fill the container with a few reed diffuser sticks or bamboo skewers and wait for the scent to permeate the room.

Scented crafts can enhance the holiday experience by eliciting strong, happy memories.

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Tips for crafting a holiday meal for a crowd

Holiday meals typically involve a large number of people sitting around the table enjoying one another's company. Allrecipes estimates the average gathering size for a Thanksgiving dinner is eight people, while Pew Research Center data indicates a little more than a quarter of Americans invite six to 10 people for holiday feasts.

Holiday hosts typically prepare food for larger than normal crowds, and that requires a few tweaks to typical cooking routines. The following tips can ensure that anyone can host a crowd and send them home happy and well fed.

- Plan ahead. It is important to give thought to what you will be cooking several weeks in advance of the holiday meal. This enables you to decide on a menu, shop for ingredients at the best prices and accommodate any food intolerances or allergies.

- Consider versatile dishes. Choose foods that can be made in large quantities and easily adapted to different dietary needs. For example, offering a tray of roasted chicken enables guests to add sauces, cheese, vegetables, or enjoy it plain, depending on their preferences.



- Utilize bulk cooking. Certain meals lend themselves to larger batches. Casseroles, baked pasta dishes, stews, and stir fry all can be increased in volume depending on how many guests will be attending. Purchase items in "family size" packages to save money and time.
- Keep it simple. Stick to dishes that you've

previously cooked, and utilize slow cookers, air fryers or other tools to make things easier. Limit your meal to one main course and three sides. Think about making appetizers and dessert pot luck, so that guests can contribute to reduce the amount of work you will need to do.

- Be mindful of others. Don't make food allergies or health needs a second thought. Try to have a separate main course that guests who adhere to vegetarian or gluten-free diets can eat safely.

- Try to limit waste: Even with careful calculations of guest-to-food ratios, there are bound to be leftovers. Plan ways to utilize leftovers if you choose specific types of food. For example, roasted chicken can be made into sandwiches or salads. Another idea is to have take-home containers at the ready so guests can bring some leftovers home with them.

Feeding a crowd takes some advanced planning and preparation. Bulk-friendly meals that can be made ahead or in a timesaving kitchen appliance means that holiday hosts can enjoy the festivities with guests.

Tips to keep holiday guests entertained

Gone are the days when extended families live in close proximity to one another. Ours is now a global society, and it is not unheard of for people to live on the opposite side of the country or even the globe from their parents and siblings. But come the holiday season, families often congregate at one place so they can spend time together. That means that out-of-town guests may be spending a few days with holiday hosts to maximize their visits.

According to Diane Gottsman, a national etiquette expert and owner of The Protocol School of Texas, a weekend is typically sufficient for a nice visit, while anything more than three days can be challenging for hosts, particularly if guests are not being helpful.

Hosting houseguests for a few days requires hosts to keep guests engaged. Although the actual holiday itself provides ample oppor-

tunity for entertainment, hosts may need additional ideas to quell boredom if visits stretch for more than one day. Here are some ideas for making spirits bright without having to stress too much.

Create a guest basket

Offer some in-house entertainment for guests. This can include best-selling novels, a book of word games, an adult coloring book, or some small craft kits picked up at the store. This option enables guests to self-soothe if boredom strikes.

Host a movie marathon

When guests visit, hosts can whip up some microwave popcorn and additional snacks and cue up a few different films. They can be holiday classics or movies that will bring back fond memories.

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Christmas Eve fun for families

The day and evening before Christmas is a time of much anticipation for young children, particularly those awaiting the arrival of Santa Claus. What children do not realize is their parents have been working hard behind the scenes for many weeks to help maximize the holiday magic, and Christmas Eve often is the final push to get everything done before the big day (and man in red) arrives.

Keeping children happy and entertained on Christmas Eve can free up time for adults to check off their to-do lists and savor some of the holiday spirit themselves. Here are some traditions to explore on Christmas Eve that are entertaining for kids and adults.

- **Bake some cookies.** Santa is going to want a fresh batch of cookies to refuel for a long night of delivering presents. Therefore, having children prepare and bake some cookies can be a Christmas Eve tradition that keeps little ones occupied. When cooled, and after sampling one or two themselves, kids can feel pride placing a dish of cookies out for the jolly old elf.
 - **Decorate gingerbread houses.** Christmas Eve is a great night to decorate gingerbread houses. Families who do not freshly bake the panels for the gingerbread houses can rely on pre-made kits available at various stores. It's a smart idea to have some extra icing available, especially if kids are anxious to "glue" on extra candy embellishments.
 - **Attend evening services.** Most churches hold Christmas Eve services, with some offering a Midnight Mass for parishioners. Spending time at these services enables families to slow down and celebrate their faith.
 - **Do a Christmas pajama reveal.** It's traditional in some families to buy matching PJs to wear to bed on Christmas Eve and then lounge around in them on Christmas morning. Whoever is in charge of wrapping gifts can set apart the Christmas PJs by wrapping them in a different patterned paper. Then everyone opens the pajamas at the same time for the big reveal.
 - **Leave out reindeer food.** Kids can have a fun time putting together a batch of special reindeer food. After all, Santa isn't the only one doing the heavy lifting delivering gifts; his reindeer probably get hungry, too. Reindeer food can be made using a few different ingredients, namely oatmeal, shredded carrots and glitter. Children can decide where to toss this reindeer food, with some opting to make a path along the front lawn leading toward the house.
 - **Watch a holiday classic.** Choose a Christmas movie and gather the family around to watch it. Some options include "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," "Miracle on 34th Street," "Elf," or "A Christmas Story." Set up a popcorn bar nearby where everyone can customize their popcorn with different add-ins, like chocolate candies, cheese or seasonings.
- Christmas Eve traditions can be fun for kids and families as they anticipate all the festivities to come on Christmas morning.



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Party pointers for holiday hosts

Entertaining is par for the course from November through the end of December. The holiday season is an especially festive time of year, and there's no shortage of opportunities to celebrate.

Holiday hosts may wonder where to get started in regard to planning their events. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the process, but with some pointers just about anyone can have a holiday gathering worth remembering.

- **Don't be scared off by social media.** When Rebecca Jennings, Vox senior correspondent covering social platforms, was hosting Thanksgiving for the first time last year, she remarked that her social media feed was filled with tutorials that made her feel like everyone was doing it better than she. Although social media can be great for generating ideas, it also might put undue pressure on hosts who feel they need to measure up to the events being executed by professionals, or people with a lot more time on their hands. It's fine if a host can't make everything from scratch or doesn't have a home that looks like something out of a Hallmark Christmas movie. Guests won't be expecting perfection; they just want to have fun and spend time socializing.

- **Plan around the guest experience.** Instead of getting bogged down on details related to decor, holiday hosts should direct most of their attention to the guest experience. They can ask themselves if a guest will even care about something they are considering having at the event. This can certainly save time and stress.

- **Keep everyone full.** Great food often is at the center of a holiday event, and the menu should be designed to be a crowd pleaser. Work with familiar ingredients that may be presented in unique ways. For example, a traditional caprese salad can be transformed into finger foods by alternating cherry tomatoes, chunks of mozzarella and leaves of basil on skewers. Don't forget classics like roasted meats, mashed potatoes,



stuffing, rolls and butter, and other hearty items. They will fill guests up and keep them happy.

- **Lighten the hosting load.** Hosts can identify ways to alleviate stress and free up time to engage with guests. This may involve making the event a potluck where everyone is tasked with bringing a dish. Or, if budget allows, hire bartenders, caterers or a cleaning service to handle some jobs and free up time for hosts to mingle.

- **Plan for some entertainment.** Music and entertainment can set the tone of the party. Create a playlist that includes a mix of holiday favorites and other tunes. Hosts who want to go above and beyond may want to hire a DJ or live musicians, or enlist a karaoke company to get guests involved.

Entertaining during the holidays, whether it's a festive party or a formal dinner party, can go more smoothly with some simple planning.



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Take a trip

This time of year there are plenty of activities going on. Plan a drive over to a Christmas tree farm that may be offering rides through the fields or has a hot cocoa station. Walk down the main street of a quaint local town and savor all of that cozy flavor. Time a trip to a tree lighting or another holiday-related special event, or drive around at night and look at neighborhood lighting displays.

Make an edible craft

Spend some time in the kitchen making gingerbread cookies or another relatively easy holiday treat. Guests can customize their desserts with colored sprinkles or other embellishments.

Set up Christmas karaoke

Get everyone in the holiday spirit by streaming instrumental tracks of favorite holiday carols and songs. Everyone takes turns singing a tune, whether they're great singers or not. The fun is in giving it a shot and laughing along the way.

Go on a crawl

Whether it's to visit area pubs, diners, dessert shops, or coffee spots, pick a few different places to stop in so everyone can get some fresh air and have a little fun.

Entertaining guests for the holidays requires some creative thinking and a willingness to have a little fun.

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Great Christmas stories for children

December is filled with opportunities to make magical memories, particularly for families with young children. Christmas commands a lot of thought and attention, and parents know such efforts are worth it to see smiles on children's faces. Stories help set the holiday scene and enable children to hold tight to all of the magic. Whether they are read together as a family or children read them on their own, these literary works can enhance special holiday moments.

- **"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry:** This story tells the tale of a young married couple who have to sacrifice in order to buy Christmas presents for one another.

- **"A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens:** No Christmas season would be complete without reading (or watching) "A Christmas Carol." When three ghosts visit Ebenezer Scrooge, he learns an important lesson about charity, friends and family.

- **"The Berenstain Bears Meet Santa Bear:** A Christmas Book for Kids" by Stan and Jan Berenstain: Kids of all generations have grown up reading Berenstain Bears books. This



volume has Mama and Papa showing Sister and Brother that the true meaning of the holiday is about giving.

- **"Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree" by Robert**

Barry: When Mr. Willowby's tree arrives for Christmas, it is too tall for his parlor. He must cut off the top so it will fit, and that top is passed along again and again to spread holiday cheer.

- **"The Greatest Gift" by Philip Van Doren Stern:** Written in 1943, this story is about a man named George who is contemplating his life while standing on a bridge on Christmas Eve. This tale became the basis for the classic film, "It's a Wonderful Life."

- **"How the Grinch Stole Christmas" by Dr. Seuss:** Famed children's writer Dr. Seuss was a master of imbuing life lessons in his stories and this book is no different. Isolated and angry, the Grinch learns to appreciate his neighbors in Whoville and comes to realize that Christmas is about being with loved ones and not material gifts.

- **Gospels of Matthew (1 and 2) and Luke (1 and 2):** Families can read about the birth of Jesus Christ, whose birth is primarily narrated in these passages. Matthew focuses on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, while Luke speaks to the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary, Christ's birth and visits from shepherds.

Classic, family-friendly holiday traditions

Tradition figures prominently in many households throughout the holiday season. Whether it's decorations like a Chanukah menorah or a Christmas tree, or a family gathering on Christmas Eve, there's no shortage of traditions to make this unique time of year even more special.

Young families or first-time hosts may want to incorporate as many popular traditions into their seasonal celebrations as possible. Doing so can lay a foundation for years of celebrations to come. As families prepare to spend this holiday season at home, they can incorporate some of these classic traditions into their celebrations.

Family baking sessions

What would the holiday season be without baked goods? While it's easy to purchase premade goodies at grocery stores and other retailers, homemade

SEE HOLIDAY TRADITIONS PAGE 31



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Learn to decorate like a holiday pro

The sights and sounds of the holiday season help to make this a special time of year that people look forward to. With its magical moments and opportunities to gather with family and friends, the holiday season is a period to celebrate and, of course, decorate. According to an informal poll from the decorating, culture and travel experts at Veranda, 65 percent of respondents said that the time to decorate for Christmas is right after Thanksgiving or the first week of December.

Many stores now display holiday decorations and other wares concurrently with Halloween and fall items, so people can plan their decorating early if they expect to be adding to their holiday collections. These tips can help with decorating and make anyone deck the halls like a professional.

- **Choose your theme and color palette.** Consider a specific style of decorating, whether it's traditional, minimalist, country, or even winter wonderland. Then select a few coordinating colors to complement the theme and existing items in your home. Pick up these items as they become available in stores, as holiday merchandise often goes quickly.

- **Focus on a few key areas.** While it's tempting to decorate an entire home, pros know to focus on key areas like tables, doorways and mantles to create the most visual interest. This also makes decorating more manageable.

- **Rely on the rule of thirds.** Create balanced and visually pleasing arrangements by dividing the space visually into nine equal parts, symbolically drawing two equally spaced horizontal and two equally spaced vertical lines. Designers often place important elements along these lines or at their intersections to create a more visually balanced and appealing composition. When grouping decorative items together on shelves and tables, threes often look best.

- **Remove clutter.** It's important to declutter a space prior to introducing holiday elements in order to create a clean and organized look. Store additional decorations and knickknacks until after the holiday season.

- **Start with lights.** It's often easier to decorate by beginning with lights first, and then weaving additional decorations into the mix. Build on lights with garlands and accent items.

- **Less is often more.** Keep the decorating simple. A few elements here and there can have a much more effective impact than several things that draw attention away from one another. When taking out holiday decorations this year, use it as an opportunity to assess and cull the collection, which will make things easier next year.

Homeowners can decorate their spaces for the holidays effectively with some guidelines professional designers often use.



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HOLIDAY TRADITIONS FROM PAGE 29

concoctions made in the comforts of one's own kitchen alongside loved ones is a classic and cherished tradition in many households.

Letters to Santa

Santa Claus makes his presence known one night a year, and writing letters to the jolly old elf is a custom with a lengthier history than some may realize. Though it might not be possible to pinpoint precisely when the first letter to Santa was written, historians believe the tradition began in the early nineteenth century. Roughly two centuries later, children's letters to Santa remain a popular tradition in many households and communities, and there's no stopping adults from writing letters to the man who calls the North Pole home.

Advent calendars

Advent calendars are another holiday season tradition with a history that dates back centuries. Historians believe the first Advent calendars were produced in Germany around 1850. Faithful celebrants can now find Advent calendars in many forms, and some retailers even sell craft kits that enable families to create their own calendars at home. Homemade Advent calendars can be a unique way for families to put a relatively new spin on a centuries-old holiday tradition.

Christmas cards

Christmas cards may seem like a relatively recent phenomenon, but that's not the case at all. Prior to 1843, many Christmas celebrants shared handwritten letters with friends during the holiday season. Come 1843, Sir Henry Cole commissioned designer John Colcott Horsley to design a Christmas card that Cole could then send to various friends. Christmas cards remain a popular means to spreading holiday cheer, and families can design cards together and work as a team to get them ready to send.

These are just a handful of the many holiday season traditions families can embrace this December.



Which family game is best?

Looking for a new way to enjoy family time together? Family games are designed to be as inclusive as possible and get the whole household playing. Their rules are typically straightforward and easy to learn so that even the youngest players can play without assistance. Some games are lightning fast, making them perfect for short

attention spans and limited time frames, while others are more involved and encourage a couple hours of undivided — and screen-free — attention to the game.

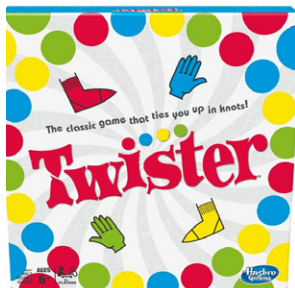
There's a game

out there for every family. To find the right one for your house, read our buying guide. We're including our top pick, the Exploding Kittens Card Game, which offers a mix of luck, strategy, and fun that makes for plenty of exciting game nights. **What to know before you buy a family game**

Age appropriateness

Family games aim to include all members of the family, but realistically, some games are better suited to certain age groups than others. If you have kids who can't play a certain game independently, you might be able to have kids partner with adult teammates to keep them involved. Some games are adaptable, too,

SEE FAMILY GAME ON PAGE 33



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Snuggle up this fall with a wearable blanket

The weather is cooling off and cozy season is pretty much here. It's the time of year when it's acceptable and even encouraged to be under blankets all day, but sadly, that's not always practical. Enter, wearable blankets.

Whether you're working from home, doing chores, watching football or just hanging out, a wearable blanket is a warm and comfy wardrobe addition that will keep you toasty while still able to move around. Try walking to the fridge with a regular blanket wrapped around you and see what we mean. A wearable blanket is where fashion meets function, and you won't be sorry you snagged one for the upcoming cold months.

What is a wearable blanket?

A wearable blanket is just that: a blanket you can wear. You don't have to expose your arms to type out an email or heat up your lunch. You don't have to feel a chill while walking upstairs to change over the laundry. You can live life while covered in a blanket that won't fall off, and honestly, that can be a really helpful thing when the weather gets cold. A wearable blanket will have a neck hole and sleeves that allow you to feel the comfort of a blanket with the convenience of a big, cozy sweatshirt.

Best ways to use a wearable blanket

At the office: Some offices jack up the air conditioning even when it's solidly winter outside. A wearable blanket helps keep the chill away without breaking any fire safety rules by using a space heater. If you work from home? Even better. Let the dogs out, start the dishwasher, make lunch and sit back down at your laptop all without taking off your wearable blanket.

At the movies: Were movie theaters always so cold? Even in the summer, I try not to wear shorts or a dress to the movies because I know I will freeze. A wearable blanket is the perfect solution.

While camping: You can stay warm by the fire, but what about when you have to get up? A wearable blanket will keep you active and toasty at the same time once the sun sets on your camping trip.

At sporting events: Whether it's your kid's football game in the November chill or an April MLB game in a climate where it's not quite spring yet, a wearable blanket will help you focus on the fun without freezing to death.

Bedsure Wearable Blanket Hoodie

If you want more of a robe vibe, this wearable blanket with an adjustable belt might be your favorite. This model also sports a hood and oversized sleeves with elasticated cuffs so you can stay warm while feeling free to use your hands.



The Comfy Original Oversized Wearable Blanket

With double-layered fleece microfiber on the outside and fluffy sherpa on the inside, The Comfy is here to keep you extremely warm, no matter what you're doing. It features a large hood and oversized fit with ribbed cuffs on the sleeves, so you can still get things done while staying under your wearable blanket.



Catalonia Wearable Fleece Blanket

This wearable blanket features what most others do: a large front pocket, roomy sleeves, and full coverage. What sets it apart? Feet pockets. That's right — just slide your feet into the built-in foot pockets and your entire body is covered.



AmyHomie Blanket Sweatshirt

This oversized wearable blanket sweatshirt features soft microfleece on the outside and thick, warm, sherpa lining on the inside. It hits above the knee for most people, making it the perfect choice for wearing out of the house to sporting events, parades or even on an airplane.



Pavilia Premium Fleece Blanket With Sleeves

With its open back and longer length, this wearable blanket is probably best for at-home use. It is a true blanket that just happens to have sleeves and a front pocket for totting the remote control, your phone and maybe a snack. It's made of warm fleece and comes in a variety of colors.



Snuggie Original Wearable Blanket With Sleeves

The Snuggie is arguably the wearable blanket that started it all. It's extra long, open in the back and has spacious sleeves for the ultimate in snuggly comfort. It's made of super-soft fleece and comes in a wide range of colors.



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FAMILY GAME FROM PAGE 31

as they feature kid-friendly gameplay tweaks so kids and adults can play the game at their respective skill levels.

Choosing games by interests

To choose a game that appeals to everyone, consider their interests and personalities. You can also choose a game based on a preferred gameplay style.

If everyone shares an interest in a sport or TV show, choose a themed or licensed game.

If your family likes card games, opt for a casino game set with poker chips or an Uno deck.

If your family enjoys wordplay games, choose Scrabble or Crazy Letters.

If your family likes trivia, choose games like Trivial Pursuit or the Logo Game.

Choosing games by number of players

Luck vs. strategy games

Luck-based games are generally fast-paced and have a pretty level playing field. Since winning doesn't always boil down to who plays better or smarter than other players, it's fun to let the games unfold. Children benefit from playing games with an element of luck as it helps foster decision-making skills and adaptation to unexpected circumstances.

Strategy-driven games are a bit more cerebral, but it doesn't mean that only older children and adults can play them. There are plenty of kids' games that require some strategic planning, like Monopoly Junior or Stratego. Since these games are more involved and essentially have more moving parts, they take longer to play and require better attention spans.

How much you can expect to spend on a board game

For budget-friendly family games, you can find a variety of board games and simple card games for \$10 and below. Classic board games are typically priced between \$10 and \$20, and newly popular indie family games cost be-

tween \$20 and \$40.

Board game FAQ

Q. What kinds of games are better for a mix of adolescents and adults?

A. Themed board games are a good option, as are trivia games. These involve a combination of strategy and teamwork, so they're more engaging options than some classic board games. Card games with advanced rules, such as poker, also work.

Q. What kinds of games are better for a mix of young children and adults?

A. Picture-based games and card games are fun, especially if kids aren't independent readers yet. Classic board games with familiar characters from TV or movies help kids better connect with the game and understand its rules.

What are the best family games to buy?



Exploding Kittens Card Game

What you need to know: Funny, fast-paced game for those with a quirky sense of humor.

What you'll love: It's for two to five players. The gameplay is a mix of strategy and Russian roulette, which intensifies toward exploding kittens the longer you play.

What you should consider: If you're adding new players, there's a bit of a learning curve to get everyone caught up on the rules.



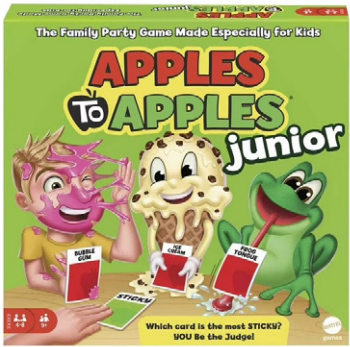
Hasbro's Jenga

What you need to know: This budget-friendly, all-ages game taps into skill, strategy and coordination.

What you'll love: It's made for two to six players. The games are short, and the set-up is simple with the block holder.

What you should consider: Some people had quality concerns with blocks and block holder.

Mattel's Apple to Apples Junior



What you need to know: This is the

kid-friendly version of the engaging word/card game. It's fun for people of all ages.

What you'll love: It's made for two to 10 players, sometimes more, considering the deck has almost 600 cards. The rules are easy to learn, and decks can be com-

bined with other ones.

What you should consider: Reading is required, so it might not be best with younger players who aren't independent readers.

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Shining a light on Chanukah celebrations

Fall and winter provide plenty of opportunities for merriment, including Chanukah, which encourages the Jewish community to gather and celebrate their faith together.

What is Chanukah?

Chanukah (also spelled Hanukkah), is a Jewish festival that lasts eight days. It starts on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, which usually falls within the month of December, and commemorates the rededication of the Jewish Temple in 165 BC by the Maccabees. The Temple had been previously desecrated by the Syrians.

Why is Chanukah eight days?

After the Maccabees fended off the Syrian-Greeks and reclaimed their Temple, they sought to light the Temple's menorah. However, they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination, according to Chabad.org. Miraculously, the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity. Sages subsequently instituted the festival of Chanukah to commemorate and publicize this miracle.



Menorah lighting

The menorah is the centerpiece of the Chanukah celebration. It holds nine flames, one of which is called the "shamash" (attendant). That candle is used to kindle the other eight lights. By the eighth night of Chanukah, all eight lights are lit and glowing. The menorah is placed in a doorway or window.

Oily foods

Since the Chanukah miracle focuses on oil, it is customary to enjoy foods fried in oil. Potato latkes are commonly enjoyed, as are jelly-filled donoughs called "sufganiyah."

Giving

Chanukah really isn't about exchanging gifts. The tradition actually is to give out Chanukah gelt, which is gifts of money to children. Also, individuals reward positive behavior and devotion to Torah study. The cash gifts enable kids to give to charity.

A minor holiday

Although it is a significant and widely observed festival, Chanukah is a historical rather than biblical holiday. It doesn't carry the same religious weight as other Jewish high holidays like Yom Kippur, for example. Its emphasis may be due in part to Chanukah's proximity to Christmas.

Chanukah celebrations enable faithful Jews to celebrate together and focus on their faith during a festive time of year.

BOXING DAY TRADITIONS

The holiday season is filled with activities and steeped in tradition. The magic does not end when Thanksgiving, Christmas or Chanukah have come and gone. While people mark off the days until they can count down the hours on New Year's Eve, another event between Christmas Day and December 31 merits attention as well.

Boxing Day is celebrated in Great Britain, Canada and British Commonwealth nations like Australia and New Zealand. The holiday originated in the United Kingdom but other European nations have since embraced it. Boxing Day coincides with the Christian

holiday Saint Stephen's Day, which is considered the second day of Christmas. St. Stephen was a deacon the Apostles ordained to take care of widows and the indigent.

Boxing Day dates back to 1871, according to Love to Know, and came about as a custom for tradesmen and women to collect "Christmas boxes" of money or presents on the first weekday after Christmas in exchange for good service throughout the year. Many workers, particularly household servants, had to work on Christmas Day, so Boxing Day provided an opportunity for them to visit

SEE BOXING DAY PAGE 35



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Traditions that make Kwanzaa special

Traditions are a major component of the holiday season. No matter which holiday individuals celebrate, chances are they cherish certain traditions that make the season more special.

Kwanzaa celebrants know that tradition figures prominently in this week-long celebration of African American culture that begins each year on December 26. Kwanzaa was created more than half a century ago, and in the years since its creation in 1966 many traditions have been become part and parcel of celebrants' holiday seasons. The following are a handful of Kwanzaa traditions that can make celebrations more special.

- **Lighting the kinara:** Candles feature prominently in both religious and secular holiday season celebrations, and Kwanzaa is no exception. The kinara is a special candleholder with three red, three green and one black candle, and each night during Kwanzaa celebrants light a new candle. The African American Cultural Center-Los Angeles notes that candles are lit beginning with the black candle, which is at the center of kinara. Candles are then lit in alternate left and right, lighting inward to outward.
- **Discussion:** The Nguzo Saba are the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Each principle is named after a Swahili word that expresses a particular concept, including unity (umoya), purpose (nia) and creativity (kuumba). After lighting the kinara each night, families discuss the principle of Kwanzaa that correlates to the candle they lit that night. For example, the black candle that is lit on the first night of Kwanzaa represents unity, so families will discuss that principle after lighting the candle.
- **Family meal:** Feasting with family is



a holiday tradition in many households, including those that celebrate Kwanzaa. The Karamu Ya Imani ("Feast of Faith") typically takes place on the sixth day of Kwanzaa (December 31). Traditional African cuisine is typically prepared for the meal, and each person present may take a turn drinking from the Kikombe cha Umoja (Unity Cup). Some celebrations of the Karamu Ya Imani are community-wide events that extend beyond immediate family members.

- **Gift exchange:** Exchanging handmade gifts known as "zawadi" is another Kwanzaa tradition. Gifts are typically reserved for children, though adults may exchange presents as well. The gift exchange typically occurs on the final day of the week-long celebration of Kwanzaa.
- These are just a handful of Kwanzaa traditions that can make the celebration of African American culture more meaningful this holiday season.

BOXING DAY FROM PAGE 34

with their own families. The workers took home boxes filled with foods and other gifts. In the U.K., Boxing Day is a government-mandated holiday. If it falls on a weekend, then the holiday will be observed on the following Monday. Schools and many organizations are closed on this day. Stores tend to be open, as Boxing Day sales are very popular.

- As with most events, Boxing Day features some notable customs.
- Workers, especially those in service positions, are honored. It's customary to give a financial gift to people who provide services throughout the year. This includes mail carriers, sanitation workers, hair stylists, and others.
 - Contribute to the less fortunate. People often donate food to local food banks and support charities.
 - Watch or attend sporting events. Boxing Day also is marked by sporting events like horse racing and football, with the U.K. often hosting a full day of Premier League games.
 - Take a chilly swim. Some individuals enjoy participating in Polar Plunges to raise money for charities. One annual event features people jumping into the English Channel, and similar plunges are held elsewhere.
 - Head to the stores. Boxing Day is similar to Black Friday in the United States. Boxing Day is filled with slashed prices and bargains for shoppers who are eager to spend holiday gift cards.
 - Meet up with friends and families. On Boxing Day, friends frequently get together to socialize and go out for dinner or drinks.
- Boxing Day is celebrated the day after Christmas and provides a chance to continue the merriment of the holiday season.



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E E C O F T B L K T S Y O T
M B U D S I C L R Q B N W B
B G L I L I R E A U R X M M
E R R E C Y T E T N G L A I
R H G I P N Q U P L K W N T
C O L D I U J Q X L O E L T
I M F W B A F L X N A X T E
C A J R D R K U S V L C Z N
E N I C E S K A T E S C E S
X H O T C O C O A P B B T Y



WINTERTIME	HOODIE	ICICLE	SOCKS
COLD	BLANKET	SNOWMAN	MITTENS
SNOW	CHRISTMAS	ICE	DECEMBER
FIREPLACE	ICE SKATES	HOT COCOA	SNOWFLAKE

Unique Christmas traditions around the world

Christmas celebrations span the globe. According to a 2025 report from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are roughly 2.6 billion Christians worldwide, a figure that undoubtedly contributes to the popularity of Christmas. Christianity continues to have the most adherents of any religion in the world, and the Christian population is expected to top three billion before 2050.

Christians bring unique cultural touches to their Christmas celebrations each year. Celebrations vary widely, and here's a look at some notable Christmas traditions across the globe.

Yule Goat

The Yule Goat is a Christmas tradition in Sweden. The goat is believed to be an invisible spirit that ensures that Yule preparations are done correctly. A popular theory connects the goat to the Norse god Thor, who rode a chariot pulled by two goats.

Krampus

While many people celebrate the benevolence of Santa Claus, some celebrate a much grumpier alter-ego of sort. Krampus is a man-goat, half-demon monster who punishes misbehaving children at Christmastime, says Britannica. He is the evil companion of St. Nicholas, and is believed to have originated in Germany. His name comes from the German word "krampen," which means, "claw."

Christmas chicken

Christmas Eve is a popular romantic occasion for couples and families in Japan. In addition to gift-giving and a romance, many people choose to feast on a meal of KFC fried chicken and strawberry shortcake for dessert.

Roller-skating to Mass

In the city of Caracas, Venezuela, it's customary for Christmas Eve celebrants to roller skate to early morning Mass. Known as "Misa de Aguinaldo," these special church services take place on the days leading up to Christmas, with the most festive held on December 24. On this day, the streets of Caracas are closed to automobiles, enabling revelers to cheerfully skate to church.

Mumming

In Newfoundland, Canada, celebrants known as mummers dress in elaborate disguises featuring mismatched clothing and whimsical accessories. The mummers obscure their identities

SEE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS PAGE 37

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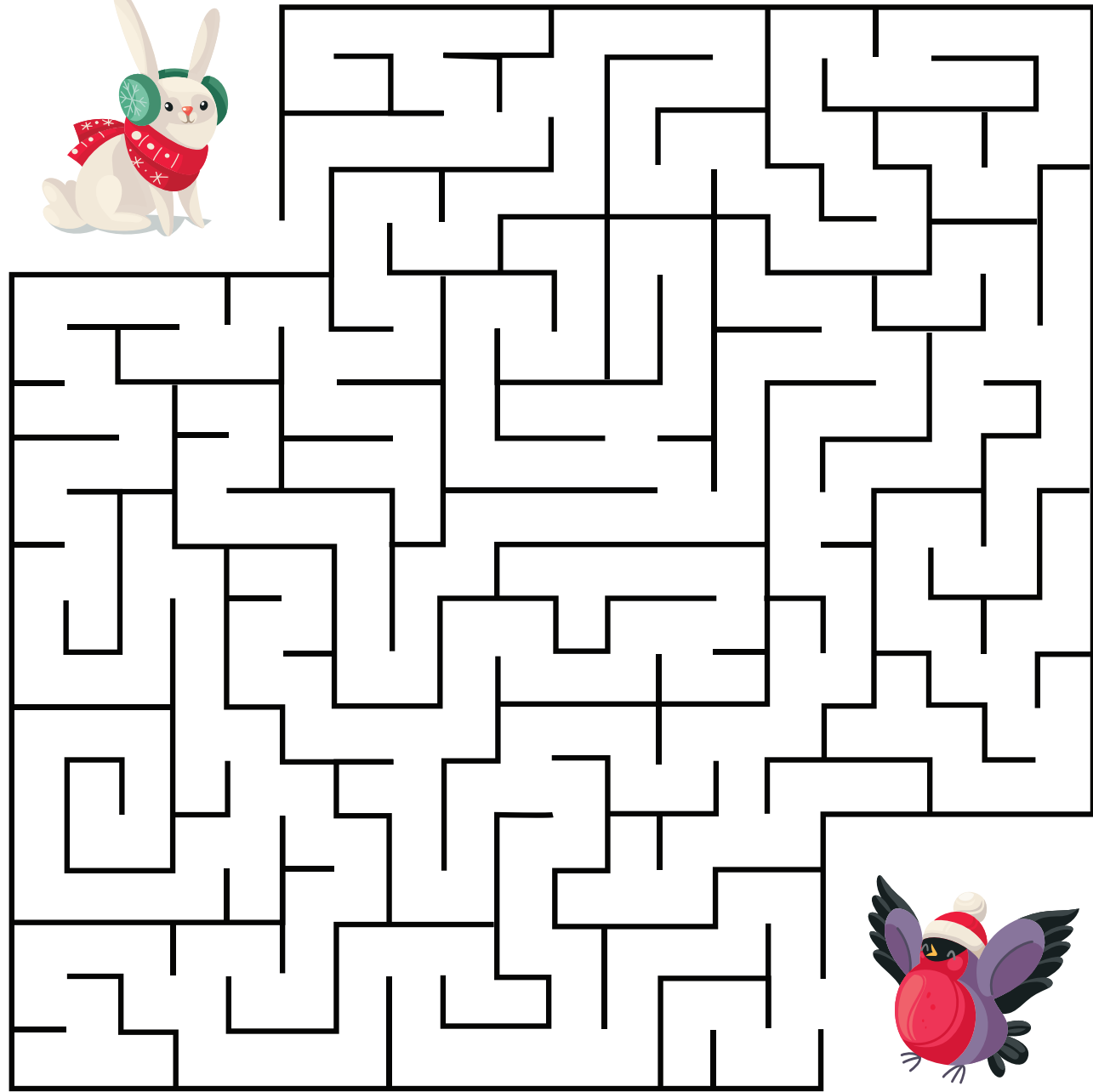
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Holiday Maze



CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS FROM PAGE 36

and visit neighbors' homes during the 12 days of Christmas, performing songs, skits or dances while others attempt to guess their identities.

Las Posadas

In some Hispanic regions, including Mexico, participants reenact Mary and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem through vibrant processions. They travel from house to house, singing traditional songs and requesting shelter only to be turned away until they reach a final home or church that will symbolically welcome them in.

Spiderweb decorations

Individuals in Ukraine decorate their Christmas trees with artificial spider webs. This tradition is inspired by a tale of a poor widow and her children who didn't have money for tree ornaments. Upon waking up on Christmas morning, they found their tree covered in sparkling, glimmering spider webs that resembled tinsel. A spider had spun the beautiful display as thanks for finding shelter and warmth in the family's humble abode. Today's spider webs symbolize unexpected blessings and gratitude.

Plenty of unique touches set Christmas-time celebrations apart across the globe.

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Y I Q L T H F A J T P E A C E C M G B U
X S E F E A S T O I P R E S E N T S R C
R T F E R W V V Y V P V N F W A B C Q M
C M Q Q T P I J M N K C P B K O A F Q T
K A A M A C H H H I S O L V W F K V H Y
Z S G W I B Z M H A H L W U A R I G W W
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T O Z U Q H Y A I E F N E C N Y U J V Q
A S Q B P N M I L L W X X A S Q K H P G
G P H X C H L I D E C E M B E R D Q V G

- BAKING
- CANDLES
- CELEBRATE
- CHANUKAH
- CHILD
- CHRISTMAS
- DECEMBER
- ENJOY
- ENTERTAIN
- FAMILY
- FEAST
- GATHERING
- HOLIDAY
- INVITE
- KWANZAA
- NEW YEARS
- PEACE
- PRESENTS
- TREE
- UNITY

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE ANSWER

Middle row: Picture 5, Missing star, Picture 6, Rug is darker
Bottom row: Picture 7, Woman's hairstyle is different

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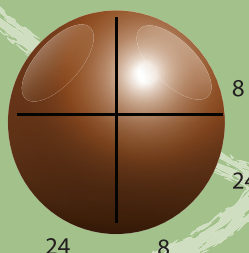
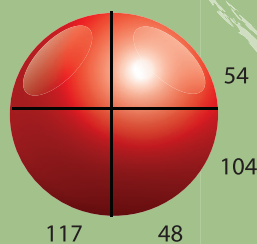
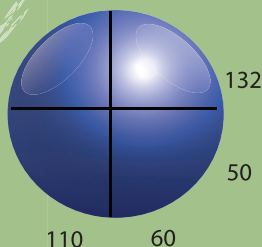
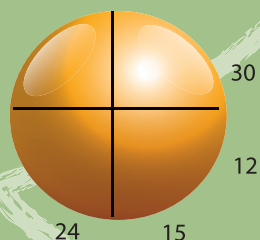
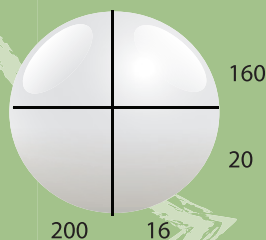
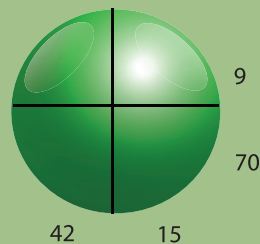
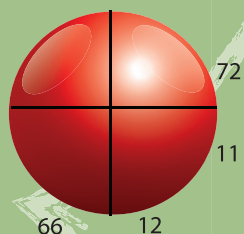
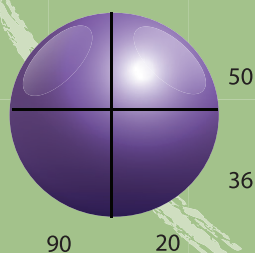
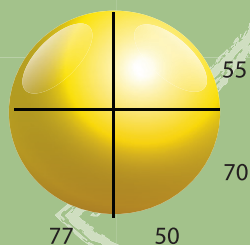
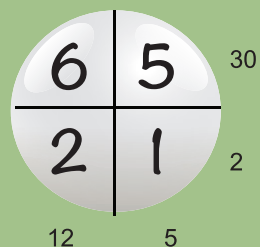
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MULTIPLYING ORNAMENTS

Fill in the factors in the boxes across and down so that the products will be correct.

Example:



SOLUTION ON PAGE 40

A Brief History of Christmas Trees

Towering evergreen trees adorned in lights and other trinkets are a focal point of the holiday season. Christmas trees are placed in prominent locations in homes, typically in front of a large picture window or in the corners of large entryways. These awe-inspiring trees beckon people to inspect all of the ornaments and often are the first thing people envision when thinking of holiday decor. The tradition of the Christmas tree is believed to have begun in Germany in the sixteenth century. However, the National Christmas Tree Association says there may be earlier references to Christmas trees in other parts of the world as well. The first written record of a decorated Christmas tree comes from Riga, Latvia, in 1510. Men of a local merchant's guild decorated the tree with roses and then set fire to it. The rose was considered a symbol of the Virgin Mary. In the sixteenth century in Alsace, France, trees were sold in the marketplace and brought home and set up undecorated. Laws limited the size to "eight shoe lengths" or slightly more than four feet. Early German Christmas trees were adorned with apples, a holdover from earlier traditions when evergreen boughs hung with apples were used as props in miracle plays. These plays took place in churches on December 24, which was Adam & Eve's Day in the early Christian calendar. Evergreens have long been symbolic of life during the cold months of winter, calling to mind the promise of spring to come. Various cultures, including early Christians, featured trees during winter solstice celebrations. Some historians believe Martin Luther, a Protestant reformer who might have been inspired by stars in the night, was responsible for adding lighted candles to the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree was introduced to the United States by German settlers in the 1800s. Soon after those settlers' arrival, trees began to be sold commercially. President Franklin Pierce is credited with having the first Christmas tree at the White House. Today, Christmas trees are wildly popular, with the American Christmas Tree Association reporting that 94 percent of U.S. consumers plan to display one.



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What's The Difference?

Three of these nine pictures are different. Can you find the differences?

ANSWER ON PAGE 38

1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



Did you know?

When making a holiday shopping list and checking it twice, shoppers may want to put more emphasis on experiential gifts over material items. A 2023 survey from GetYourGuide found 51 percent of people prefer some type of travel, 40 percent want to attend a show, 30 percent prefer outdoor activities, and 27 percent want to visit museums. The data is showing more and more people are choosing to share experiences and create meaningful memories with the people they love rather than offering material gifts. The desire for experiential gifts is particularly strong among millennials and Gen Z.

ORNAMENTS SOLUTION FROM PAGE 39

11 5	10 5
7 10	9 4

6 12	3 3	20 8
11 1	14 5	10 2

6 5	11 12	9 6	2 4
4 3	10 5	13 8	12 2

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Tips to make a home more accommodating for holiday guests

Millions of people host family and friends during the holiday season. According to a recent report from the travel and finance experts at Upgraded Points, 57 percent of adults surveyed planned to host a holiday gathering in 2024, while 70 percent of respondents indicated they planned to attend such celebrations.

Hosting is a significant responsibility, but it's also a fun way to catch up with loved ones in a laid back environment. Chances to catch up are even stronger when hosting overnight guests, whose comfort should be a priority as hosts ready their homes for holiday celebrations. Hosts preparing to welcome loved ones into their homes this holiday season can take various steps to make their homes as accommodating as possible for overnight guests.

- **Offer a secluded spot to sleep.** The holiday season can be hectic, and it can be hard to keep things calm and quiet when returning home. That's especially true in homes with young children. Overnight guests who might be a little weary from traveling will undoubtedly appreciate a place away from the hustle and bustle to rest their heads. Though hosts must make due with the space they have, make a concerted effort to ensure residents remain quiet around guest rooms or other areas where overnight guests will be sleeping. If possible, choose a secluded spot away from areas of the home that tend to be noisy, such as the kitchen and living room/game room.

- **Offer some in-room entertainment.** Access to the internet and streaming services is non-stop in the modern world, and it can be a nice gesture to ensure overnight guests can stream their favorite content and stay connected during their stay. Hosts can outfit guest rooms with a smart TV for as little as \$100 and load it up with popular streaming apps so guests can watch an episode or two of their favorite show in private before calling it a night.



- **Offer kid-friendly creature comforts.** Adults may be accustomed to sleeping outside their own homes, but younger guests might not be as familiar or comfortable sleeping somewhere

other than their own bedrooms. If young children will be staying overnight, hosts can consider putting them up in the same bedrooms as their own children, which can be especially fun when kids are roughly the same age. Additional kid-friendly creature comforts include a stuffed animal or two, an in-room night light and some storybooks on a bedside nightstand.

- **Include guests in fun traditions.** Tradition is a big part of the appeal of the holiday season, and hosts can make guests feel more welcome by inviting them to participate in their own family traditions. Expand family baking sessions to include overnight guests, encourage willing loved ones to pitch in when preparing family meals and let guests pick their favorite holiday film for a family movie night.

Millions of people will host overnight guests this holiday season. Hosts can employ various strategies to ensure overnight guests feel welcome and comfortable during their stay.

Kid-friendly holiday traditions

Tradition is a big part of the holiday season. Families lean into tradition each December, and perhaps no people participate in holiday customs with more enthusiasm than children. Whether it's decorating the family Christmas tree or baking cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve, children look forward to various holiday season traditions once the calendar turns from November to December.

Parents of young children can make this unique time of year even more special by engaging in various kid-friendly traditions that are sure to produce lots of fun and even more lasting memories.

- **Advent calendars:** The precise origins of Advent calendars are unknown, but historians believe the tradition was started by German Lutherans in the nineteenth century. More than a century later, roughly 50 million Advent calendars are sold across



SEE TRADITIONS PAGE 42

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Unique places for holiday shopping

Although the holiday season is a relatively brief period, it still can consume months of time in regard to preparation, shopping and hosting. According to a SWNS Digital survey of 2,000 adults in the United States, the average American spends six weeks preparing for the holiday season. Five weeks are devoted to planning presents, meals and other essentials, while an entire week is just for decorating.

Shopping for presents can consume a lot of time, especially for those who aren't quite sure what to get. Thinking outside of the typical retail box may help with inspiration, and shoppers may encounter smaller crowds and find better deals. Here are some unique places to shop to grab great holiday gifts.

- **Pharmacies:** While you're picking up your prescription or medicine cabinet essentials, take a spin around the store to see what else might be available. Typically, pharmacies have entire aisles dedicated to seasonal merchandise, so you might be able to find holiday decorations, gift wrap, candles, pampering items, and even food-related items and gift baskets.

- **Farmer's market:** Farmer's markets pop up in towns on set days of the week. Although plenty of farm-related produce and plants are available, these markets also attract many other small businesses. You can find craftsmen, jewelry makers, niche food sellers, and so much more.

- **School (or church) bazaar:** In an effort to raise funds for the PTA or other organizations, schools and churches often host holiday fairs and bazaars right before the holidays. Area businesses rent table space and set up booths with an array of different products for sale. This is a great spot to grab interesting finds all under one roof. Plus, you're supporting the local community in the process.

- **Home improvement retailer:** Plenty of



people will appreciate practical gifts that they can use in and around the home. A visit to a hardware store or home improvement retailer offers up aisles of essentials for the do-it-yourselfer. While new shelving for the garage or a set of flashlights may not be the most glamorous gifts, these items can come in handy.

- **Craft store:** Cater to recipients' favorite hobbies by ensuring they'll be flush with plenty of supplies. Craft stores have a bevy of items for every interest imaginable. They're also surprisingly good places to grab deals on picture frames, housewares, food-making supplies, and decorative items.

- **Specialty food store:** Head to small specialty food stores to load up on unique items larger supermarkets might not carry. Ethnic markets may have flavorful and interesting ingredients to group together in a food basket that makes an ideal gift for transplants missing the flavors of home.

Before a person logs on to the internet for online shopping or heads to the nearest strip mall, he or she can explore various unique places to shop for holiday gifts.

TRADITIONS FROM PAGE 41

the globe each year, according to Marketplace.org. Advent is a nearly monthlong period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25. Each day during Advent, children open a flap, window or door and find a small gift, poem, candy, or another item that adds to the excitement of the season.

- **Matching pajamas:** Though the tradition of wearing matching holiday pajamas may not have the same lengthy history as Advent calendars, it's nonetheless a very fun custom for families. Parents can decide how frequently their families dress up in matching pajamas at bedtime during the holiday season, but doing so on Christmas Eve is a popular way to make a fun day even more special. Another idea is to host weekly holiday movie nights during the season, which presents a perfect opportunity to don matching PJs.

- **Holiday lights tour:** Holiday lighting displays have come a long way in recent decades. Whereas it might once have been popular to string a few strands of lights around the exterior of a house, many holiday celebrants now beckon their inner Clark Griswold and turn their properties into areas with enough illumination to land a small plane. Holiday inflatables for the yard add to the awe of such displays. Kids tend to be especially fond of these types of displays, so parents can make a point to pick a night each holiday season to go on a tour of their neighborhoods and towns to see this year's offerings.

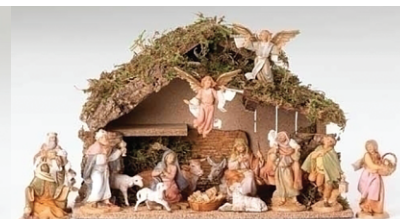
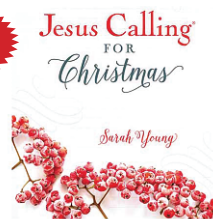
- **Christmas dance party:** Sweets are another staple of the holiday season, and what better way for kids to burn off some of that extra sugar than to dance it away to a holiday music playlist curated by Mom and Dad? Cue up some holiday classics but let kids dance to a few of their own favorites as well.

Holiday traditions help to make the season a special time of year. Families can embrace various kid-friendly traditions to ensure children have even more fun this December.



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The many reasons to support Small Business Saturday

Small business is big business across much of North America. According to a 2024 report from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, nearly 98 percent of all businesses in Canada are small businesses, which the Government of Canada defines as firms with one to 99 paid employees. Small businesses boast an equally notable presence in the United States, where the Small Business Administration reports such establishments account for 99 percent of the nation's firms.

With such a profound presence in both Canada and the United States, it's no wonder small businesses are championed at a point in time when shopping takes center stage. Small Business Saturday occurs each year on the Saturday after American Thanksgiving, making it part of a weekend that is often characterized as the start of the holiday shopping season. With small businesses set to take their well-earned turn in the spotlight, consumers can ponder the many reasons to support Small Business Saturday this year.

- Small businesses are significant employers. The term "small business" can be misleading, particularly in terms of job creation. While small businesses are generally described as firms with fewer than 500 employees, recent data from the SBA indicated small companies accounted for two-thirds of employment growth across the U.S. over the last quarter century, ultimately generating around 13 million jobs during that time period. Small businesses also are big-time employers in Canada, where the ISED notes such firms employed 46.5 percent of the nation's total private labor force in 2023. Those jobs are filled by consumers' family members, friends and neighbors, and supporting these employers ensures those individuals can keep earning.

- Small businesses help to fund vital local services. Another notable reason to support

small businesses is their role in creating strong local tax bases. The revenue generated by successful, local small businesses strengthens communities because it translates into tax income for local towns, which benefits schools, community organizations and public safety.

- Small business spending is more likely to stay in the local community. Another way supporting small businesses benefits communities relates to where consumers' dollars go once they're spent. Data from the American Independent Business Alliance indicates 48 percent of each purchase at a local independent business was recirculated locally. By comparison, just 14 percent of purchases at chain stores was recirculated locally. That means more than three times as much money is staying in communities when consumers buy from locally owned businesses compared to chain retailers.

There's no shortage of reasons to support Small Business Saturday. This year, consumers can do their part and give local small businesses, and the communities they call home, their unwavering support by shopping local on Small Business Saturday.

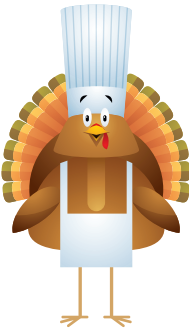


DID YOU KNOW?

A 2024 Economist/YouGov poll found that turkey continues to reign supreme on the Thanksgiving dinner table. When asked what they'll be eating at Thanksgiving dinner, 67 percent of poll participants indicated they plan to eat turkey, making it the most popular food to find its way onto the dinner table for this popular holiday. Additional staples also remain wildly popular among Thanksgiving celebrants, suggesting that food is among the more sacred Turkey Day traditions. When asked what they

plan to eat at Thanksgiving dinner this year, participants noted some easily recognizable favorites:

- Mashed potatoes: 56 percent
- Bread or rolls: 55 percent
- Pie: 54 percent
- Stuffing: 51 percent
- Gravy: 51 percent
- Green beans: 40 percent
- Sweet potatoes: 39 percent
- Cranberry sauce: 38 percent
- Corn: 33 percent



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Holiday Desserts Just Got a Dairy-Forward Upgrade



(Family Features) Holiday desserts set the stage for seasonal delight and add a touch of joy to gatherings. From festive cookies to indulgent dips, these delicious desserts bring people together to create memories that will last a lifetime.

If you're looking to impress guests, Santa Cookies are the ultimate treat. Made with Maple Hill Salted Butter, they're rich, soft and full of festive spirit. For a unique twist, try Gingerbread Dip, featuring vanilla Greek yogurt made with 100% grass-fed organic milk.

Whether you're hosting or deciding what to bring to the potluck, Maple Hill's 100% grass-fed organic dairy makes it easy to whip up desserts that are as wholesome as they are delicious. Rich in nutrients and free from GMOs, hormones and antibiotics, each product comes from farms that prioritize regenerative practices as nature intended. With a 40% healthier ratio of omega 3:6 and 40% higher levels of CLA fatty acids compared to traditional organic dairy, you can feel good about sweet treats at the holiday table.

To find more recipes, visit MapleHill.com.

SANTA COOKIES

Yield: 14 cookies

- 1 cup (2 sticks) Maple Hill Salted Butter, at room temperature
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon red food coloring
- mini chocolate chips
- mini red chocolate-coated candies

Frosting:

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) Maple Hill Salted Butter, at room temperature
- 4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 1/2 cups powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350 F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

In large mixing bowl, beat butter, sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy. Add egg and beat until combined. Add flour and salt; mix until dough begins to form ball.

Remove 1 cup dough and set aside. Add red food coloring to remaining dough.

From red cookie dough, make one 1-inch ball and five 1/2-inch balls. From plain cookie dough, make one 3/4-inch ball and five 1/4-inch balls.

On prepared baking sheet, place red 1-inch ball and gently flatten until 1/2-inch thick. Attach four red 1/2-inch balls for arms and legs. Attach plain 3/4-inch ball for head and gently flatten until 1/2-inch thick. Attach plain 1/4-inch balls for hands and feet. Shape remaining red 1/2-inch ball into triangle for hat and attach. Repeat with remaining dough, arranging cookies 2 inches apart on baking sheet. Add chocolate candies for eyes and buttons.

Bake 12-15 minutes, or until lightly golden.

To make frosting: In medium bowl, beat butter and cream cheese until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla and powdered sugar; mix until combined.

To decorate: Place half of frosting in piping bag with small tip to line Santa's arms and legs. Place other half in second piping bag with small star tip to add Santa's beard, hat and hands. Put small dot of icing between eyes and beard and place red mini chocolate-coated candy on face for nose.

SEE GINGERBREAD DIP PAGE 47

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Eggnog is a go-to holiday beverage

One of the more notable aspects of the holiday season is the re-emergence of foods and beverages that might not be enjoyed at any other point during the year. Eggnog certainly falls into the category. Though it might not be broken out after December, the following recipe for “Eggnog” from Lines+Angles makes a go-to holiday season beverage.

EGGNOG

Makes 4 servings

- 6 egg yolks
- 1/2 cup confectioner's sugar
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 3/4 cup light cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 cup whiskey or rum
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

1. In a medium bowl, whisk egg yolks until light in color. Add confectioners' sugar and whisk together until fluffy. Set aside.
2. In a medium saucepan over low heat, combine milk, cream and vanilla. Stir occasionally and gently heat for 5 minutes. Increase heat to medium and slowly bring mixture to a boil. Remove from heat.
3. Slowly incorporate milk mixture into eggs by adding a little at a time, whisking together constantly to avoid cooking the eggs. Continue to add the hot milk into the eggs and whisking until thoroughly combined.
4. Pour the combined mixture back into the saucepan and heat over medium heat, stirring constantly, until thick, without bringing to a boil, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat.
5. Allow mixture to cool for about an hour, then add to a jar with a tight-fitting lid. Add whiskey or rum. Refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.
6. When ready to serve, shake jar, add eggnog to serving glasses and top with cinnamon and nutmeg.

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4 Travel Tips for Overcoming Holiday Hurdles

(Family Features) A trip to visit loved ones or a holiday-themed vacation with your nearest and dearest can create magical memories, but first, you've got to get there. If the thought of holiday travel makes you nauseous, rest assured - a little planning and the right resources can help your festive getaway go smoother.

Overcome the hustle and bustle of the busiest travel season of the year with this expert advice.

Protect Yourself from Illnesses

The holidays intertwine with cold and flu season, meaning staying healthy on your trip is a must. Travel can be physically draining, which makes you more susceptible to common illnesses. However, some general health tips can go a long way, such as:

- **Wash your hands:** Between plane rides, rental cars and hotel rooms, you're going to handle frequently touched objects in public spaces. Carry hand sanitizer and be sure to thoroughly wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water.
- **Pack medications:** It's critical to pack prescribed medications, no doubt, but consider bringing along over-the-counter vitamins and cold medicine so you're prepared for anything.
- **Consult your doctor:** Ask your doctor about any vaccinations you may need, especially if traveling internationally. It's important to get all recommended shots and treatments prior to departure.

Be Prepared for Delays

Spontaneous moments are often the most memorable, but sometimes unplanned events aren't so welcome. Because it's nearly impossible for an entire vacation to go as scripted, consider purchasing a travel protection plan from World Nomads that includes the travel inconvenience benefit. This benefit may compensate you for unforeseen circumstances like tarmac delays or ski resort closures. Hang on to receipts that show dates and payments to make the claim process a breeze.

Overcome Jet Lag

Air travel can disrupt sleep patterns, particularly if you're flying across multiple time zones, causing difficulty sleeping and irritability. Be mindful of caffeine and alcohol intake, which can further impact sleep patterns. Exposure to light at the appropriate times can help reset your circadian rhythm while a low-dose melatonin can produce mild sleepiness if you're having trouble catching some Z's.

Traveling west is easiest on your internal clock as you "gain time" heading westward; in contrast, flying east requires shifting the timing of your body clock to make up for the "lost time." Leading up to eastward travel, try going to bed and waking up earlier.

Have a Backup Plan

You simply can't predict everything. Standard trip cancellation coverage may only apply to specific events like unexpected illness or injury, or natural disasters. However, the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) benefit from World Nomads may fill the gaps. As a U.S. resident (except if you live in New York), you can add CFAR coverage when you purchase the Explorer or Epic Plan. CFAR may be particularly useful for expensive travel with non-refundable expenses (like cruises or international trips) or trips taking place during economically or politically volatile times.

For those booking multiple trips in addition to holiday getaways, the Annual Plan from World Nomads means one purchase for an entire year's worth of protection. Trip cancellation, emergency medical expenses, rental car damage and more are covered to ensure your plans aren't ruined by the unexpected.

To find more information and a full list of what is and isn't covered, visit WorldNomads.com and check plan documents for maximums, terms, conditions, limitations and exclusions that may apply.

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GINGERBREAD DIP
Servings: 8-12

- 4 oz cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar
- 3 tablespoons molasses
- 1 container (16 ounces) Maple Hill Vanilla Greek Yogurt
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 2 cups whipped cream
- graham crackers
- fruit

In medium bowl using electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream cheese and sugars about 1 minute. Add molasses and mix until combined.

Add Greek yogurt, ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg; beat until combined. Fold in whipped cream and mix until fully incorporated. Refrigerate 1 hour before serving or overnight. Serve with graham crackers and fruit.



Easy Ideas for Post-Holiday Organizing

(Family Features) After the last present has been gifted and guests have said their farewells, it's tempting to settle in for some rest to recuperate from the hectic pace of the holidays. However, if you take time to tidy up after all those good tidings, you can relax with a free conscience.

One especially daunting aspect of post-holiday cleanup is the wrapping supplies and decor. Consider these tips to stash your holiday goodies safely away until next year:

- Take inventory of your wrapping supplies. Note how many boxes, bags and rolls of paper you have. Affix a note to the container where you store these items to give yourself an idea of what you'll need so you can start stocking up early for anything you depleted this year.
- Invest in a gift wrap storage container. They come in many shapes and sizes ranging from

hard plastic bins that resemble trash cans to soft-sided bags with zippers and plenty of pockets inside. Look for a model that allows for storing the wrapping materials you favor, be it bags, bows or simply paper. After the holidays, many of these items are steeply discounted, providing an opportunity to stock up for next year.

• For your decor, get organized by grouping similar items or collecting all the pieces for a single room. Packing things away with a system in mind can make bringing it all out next year easier and protect your treasured decorations. Remember to label your storage boxes so you know which box contains what next year.

Once you're done, reward yourself with a cup of hot cocoa and curl up with a new book or movie while enjoying a relaxing end to the merriest of seasons. Find more tips for managing the holiday season at eLivingtoday.com.

Happy Holidays

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