

The 2010 Holiday Guide

Your Guide To Creating A Great Holiday Season!

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How To Create a Thanksgiving Holiday The Whole Family Will Love

Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that is easily overlooked for its importance. For some people, Thanksgiving meant burnt food at Grandma's and the adults gathered around the television to watch football and sleep. The significance of the holiday was lost. Other households remember Thanksgiving as the day before the big sales and many children see it as another day off from school.

Whether you want to demonstrate the significance of Thanksgiving to your family, create a tradition that your children will remember all their lives, or you simply want to spice up your already wonderful holiday traditions this guide is for you.

Food is of course the main focus of the Thanksgiving Day holiday and we'll of course offer some easy and tasty recipes throughout this guide. In addition to food, Thanksgiving can be a time to get your entire family involved in the planning. Older children can create fantastic food, crafts, and ideas to celebrate the holiday. Younger children can get involved too. To add a bit of lighthearted humor, there's even a guide on how to avoid Thanksgiving disasters!

Let's get started!

Thanksgiving Menus:

No Thanksgiving is complete without a turkey, right? Generally that's the way that many American's feel. However, many smaller families do not like to make an entire turkey, nor do mothers enjoy spending 48 hours pinned to their kitchens. We have included a traditional menu, a menu for smaller families, and a vegetarian turkey menu that doesn't involve tofu turkey!

Traditional Menu:

- Maple Roasted Turkey
- Sage Sausage and Apple Dressing
- Sugary Yams
- Cranberry Relish
- Old Fashioned Pumpkin Pie

Turkey: In a small mixing bowl, whisk together the 1 cup of maple syrup and 1/4 cup hot water until it becomes a thin glaze. Following your turkey's cooking guidelines, use this glaze to baste the turkey every 30 minutes. If the legs or breast brown too quickly because of the sugar content, cover them with foil. When your turkey is done, transfer it to a cutting board and let rest for about 20 minutes before carving.

Stuffing: This stuffing is a classic and you may very well have an old family recipe already. The best recipes use fresh sage sausage, casing removed, and apples like Gravenstein, Rome or Golden delicious. It is generally advised to make your stuffing separate from the turkey and serve it on the side rather than to actually stuff your turkey with the stuffing before you cook it. This eliminates much of the risk of food borne illness.

Sugary Yams: Traditional yam or sweet potato recipes call for tons of brown sugar mixed with sweet potatoes and topped with marshmallows. For a slightly healthier twist on the traditional, mix your yams or sweet potatoes with a tablespoon or two of butter and real maple syrup to taste. Skip the marshmallows!

Cranberry Relish: This is a quick and easy recipe that I love. It marries the flavors of cranberry and orange for a delightful zing. Mix 1 pound of cranberries (fresh or frozen), ½ cup of sugar, 1 tbs of orange juice and 1 tsp of orange zest into a food processor. Pulse until the mixture is blended but still chunky. Cover and let sit until you're ready to serve.

Traditional Pumpkin Pie: It is likely that you already have a favorite pumpkin pie recipe. This recipe uses pre-made crust to make the job easier and fool proof. Prepare your crust per the package indications. Pour your filling into prepared crust and cook for 45 minutes in a 350 degree preheated oven.

Mix together:

1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
2 cups canned pumpkin
1 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 egg plus 2 egg yolks, slightly beaten
1 cup half-and-half
1/4 cup melted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

Small Gathering Menu:

- Cranberry Glazed Turkey Breast
- Whipped Mashers
- Sautéed Green Beans
- Spicy Greens Salad

Turkey Glaze: Blend the ingredients in your food processor until the mixture resembles a glaze. Place mixture into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Let simmer for 5 minutes, strain and allow cooling.

12-ounce bag of cranberries
2 teaspoons orange zest
1 cup sugar
1/4 cup orange juice
1 1/4 cups water
1/4 cup Grand Marnier – optional

Cook your turkey breast until it is almost done. Cooking time depends on the size of the breasts. When you have about 30 minutes left and your turkey breast is beginning to brown, glaze the breast with 1/3 cup of the cranberry glaze. Cook the turkey until it reached an internal temperature of 165 – 179 degrees. Transfer to a cutting board and let it rest. Serve the carved breast with the remaining glaze.

Spicy Greens Salad: Mix together your favorite spicy fresh greens. Consider arugula, escarole and mustard greens. Simmer 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil and 1 clove of minced garlic in a pan over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes. Let cool, whisk 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar into the oil and garlic mixture, salt and pepper to taste. Lightly dress greens and enjoy!



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Vegetarian Menu:

- Potato and Pumpkin Pie
- Spicy Greens Salad
- Sourdough Dinner Rolls

Pumpkin and Potato Pie: Begin by roasting a 3 pound pumpkin, seeded and halved and 2 large russet potatoes also halved in a 400 degree oven for one hour. Let cool and dice pumpkin and potatoes into 1/2 inch cubes. You can make the pie dough yourself or buy premade deep-dish piecrust. Prepare the crust as indicated on the package. Sautée 2 cups of chopped onions, 2 minced cloves of garlic and 1 1/2 cups of corn in 1 tbs of olive oil. Mix potatoes, pumpkin and sautéed onion mixture together. Add 2 cups of Monterey jack cheese and 1 tsp of dried thyme, salt and pepper to taste. Spoon mixture into piecrust and bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

Activities for Older Children:

Expressions of Gratitude

Ask your children to create a gratitude list to share at the table. Invite them to be creative in their expression of it. They can print it, write a story, put on a play or even sing a song. As parents, it is important to also participate in the exercise. Create your own gratitude list and be prepared to share it with your family.

Family Tree

Ask your older children to create a family tree. This project can take several days and may require your assistance. The Internet is a great tool for heritage and family information. Connecting with the past helps children to define who they are, who they want to be, and appreciate the essence of family.

Dinner Plans

Involve your older children with the mealtime planning. Have them choose a recipe, shop for it and follow through on the preparation. Ask them to put some thought into the process and choose a recipe that they would want to make every year – establish a tradition. Remember, boys can cook too!

Charity Begins at Home

Ask your children to devise a way to give back to the community and then support them on the follow through. Ideas can be as straightforward as volunteering at the local homeless shelter to more creative and complicated ideas like raising money for a charity that speaks to them.

Environmentally Grateful

Your children are aware of their impact on the earth. They're being brought up at school and via their peers to be aware of recycling, water conservation, and energy and fuel conservation. Get your children involved in making this holiday and each subsequent holiday an environmentally friendly holiday. Have them come up with ideas to be responsible and ask them to follow through.

Activities for Younger Children

Wreath of Gratitude

Younger children are capable of profound thought and gratitude. Ask the wee ones to create a wreath of their handprints in colorful fall shades. You may need to help them write down their thoughts on each handprint but the end result will be a fantastic table decoration and an expression of your child's views of the world.

Place Cards

If your children are too young to set the table for a holiday meal, have them participate in the table setting duties by making holiday themed place cards. Sit them down at the kitchen table give them myriad tools and resources to let their imaginations soar like a turkey. Okay so turkeys waddle but you get the picture. Allow them free reign and creativity over the process. If your child needs structure and guidance, give them a pre cut turkey, leaf or cornucopia to decorate.

Table Centerpiece

Modeling clay is fantastically fun, safe, and inexpensive. Grab a variety of colors and ask your young ones to create a masterpiece for the table. Give them feathers, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, felt feet and what ever else you can think of and let your little ones have fun. You can also use foam balls or semi circles as a base.

Putting On a Play

Ask young children to dress up and tell the story of Thanksgiving, as they know it. Don't be surprised if they come up with an entirely new story full of princesses, dragons and young wizards. Make sure to keep your recorder handy, if the play becomes a tradition you'll have documented years of fun filled family events.



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Thanksgiving Disaster 101

Many of the Thanksgiving disasters center around cooking the turkey. The thought of placing a 15 pound bird in your oven sends many people to their local grocery for a cooked version – rarely a tasty solution, or to their neighborhood restaurant.

The USDA offers the following turkey thawing and cooking guidelines:

Thawing Your Turkey: There are three ways to thaw your turkey safely — in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave oven. In the refrigerator (40 °F or below), allow approximately 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds. Keep the turkey in its original wrapper. Place it on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days. If necessary, a turkey that has been properly thawed in the refrigerator may be refrozen.

Roasting Your Turkey: Set your oven temperature no lower than 325 °F. Place your turkey or turkey breast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. A whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook turkey to higher temperatures.

Smoking, frying, grilling, and otherwise cooking your turkey: There are a number of ways to cook a turkey and in an attempt to find easier and tastier ways to cook a turkey. These easier and tastier ways often lead to extreme accidents. The instance of household fires related to turkey fryers is proof enough. Regardless of how you plan on cooking your turkey this year, the important thing is to pay attention. Nearly 100% of the accidents, injuries, and downright awful turkeys result from people walking away from their turkey and not paying attention.

Another difficult Thanksgiving task, besides putting up with your in-laws, is gravy. Prepared gravy from the store just doesn't taste good and making gravy can be a lumpy singed mess.

Lumpy Gravy can be resolved by pouring it through a strainer into a clean pan and reheating.

Burnt gravy can occasionally be rescued by pouring the gravy into a new pan, careful not to scrape the burnt stuff off of the bottom of the old pan. The majority of the burnt taste should stay with the old pan.

After the Meal

In order to avoid the football induced turkey laden slumber that my family used to partake in, plan a few after dinner events to keep people active and enjoying the holiday. It can be as simple as a walk around the neighborhood to get the blood flowing and the turkey digesting. You can also engage your family in a game. Pictionary, Trivial Pursuit, and several card games are designed to involve as many players as you have available.

If games and walks aren't your thing, what about a round of touch football at your nearby park?

The point is to stay active after dinner. Dishes can wait, the NFL can wait, and the couch can wait. This is a day to spend with your family being grateful for each other. Thanksgiving is a day to spend together, living, laughing and loving.

Happy Thanksgiving!



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Indoor Holiday Decorating Tips

As soon as Thanksgiving is over, it's time to start thinking about Christmas and Hanukkah. Few things help put people in a holiday spirit more than decorating their home. As soon as the halls are decked, people are in a better mood. There are various styles and ways of decorating making it is easy to find one that fits your lifestyle. Here are just a few of them to help you create the perfect holiday scene inside the house this year.

Candles are a great way to add some holiday cheer. There are many different styles, sizes and scents to choose from. There are even battery powered ones that are safer to use, especially if you have children or pets. Putting candles in groupings looks nice as well. If you put candles in your windows be sure to use the battery powered ones leaving no danger of curtains catching fire.

Wreaths are a traditional decoration that look nice in any home. When choosing a wreath, you need to decide between using real or artificial greens. Real ones look nicer but artificial lasts longer. It's easy to create your own wreath out of all kinds of things. Pinecone wreaths look nice, especially if you add ribbons and ornaments to them. Small lights can be added to a wreath as well to create an even more detailed and eye catching decoration.

A simple addition that is relatively inexpensive is garland. It can be strung around the rooms all around the ceiling, just over the window and doorframes or anywhere you think it might look nice. An easy way to attach it is to put small nails where you want it to hang. Then wrap a rubber band around the garland, pulling it through and making a loop. Hang the loop on the nail. If you use artificial garland you can leave the rubber bands in place for the next year. If the nails are small enough (or painted to match the wall), you can leave them there to use again.

Strings of lights can be placed around the home. Smaller lights work better indoors so they don't overpower the rest of the decorations. The icicles lights are very popular and look nice draped in windows and they can be enjoyed indoors but also from those going past your house.

Deciding on a tree is probably the most important decision when it comes to decorating your home for Christmas. Many people love a live tree but you have to consider the constant watering it will need, as well as the clean up. There are many artificial trees that look almost as nice as a real one. The ones that come with lights already attached are very appealing, especially for those who hate spending hours untangling lights. Try to choose a tree that fits the space well. Too big and it overpowers the room, too small and it gets lost.

While red and green are traditionally Christmas colors you don't have to stick to them. There are many different colors and themes that can be incorporated into your decorations. Blue or purple and silver, just to name a few, are popular combinations among many. Decide what colors you like and make it a theme throughout your house.

The theme doesn't have to be the same throughout the whole house either. Why not try a little something different in each room. For example, stick to more formal decorations in the dining room and more relaxed and fun in the family room. Tie them all together by using the same color scheme throughout but change up the type of decorations.

No matter how the house is decorated this year, let everyone get involved and don't forget half the fun is getting the whole family involved. That being said, why not make a night of decorating complete with hot chocolate, cookies, and tons of holiday music.

Outdoor Holiday Decorating Tips

One of the most delightful parts of Christmas time is driving around looking at all the wonderful displays at the various homes in your neighborhood. It takes some planning to have a nice display that isn't overdone.

Lights are probably the most important part of an outdoor Christmas display. Many lights today are usable indoors or out but be sure to purchase ones that are designed to be used outside. Before hanging the lights, check for burned out bulbs and loose ones. Make sure your ladder is secure before climbing up to hang the lights. There are also tools that can help you hang the lights, without a ladder. There are long poles with a special attachment at the end that holds a bulb on a string of lights. It clicks into place on the pole with a twist, then you attach to the hanger, untwist and the light is in place.

Wreaths are always a nice addition to outdoor decorations. There are many styles to choose from, including those made with natural and artificial greenery. Decide what will look best on your house something with high contrast works best. Make sure it will be large enough to be seen from the road. Some have lights on them and some you may want to light with a spot light.

If you have an evergreen tree or bush in your yard, they are a decoration in the making. Find lights that are the right size for the plant. You don't want the bulbs too heavy that weigh down the branches. Again, be sure they are lights that are made to be used outdoors. Use simple plastic ornaments, as they are safer than glass.

A nice display of large figures is also popular for outdoor decorations in the yard. There are many things to choose from. There are inflatable figures, like Santa and the reindeer. There are also nice nativity sets to choose from. Some people actually put a small shelter to place the figures in and around. Others use simple wood cut out silhouettes and have spotlights on them.

Another idea for decorating is to use a wire frame to make silhouettes of figures, trees, snowmen, anything you can make with a simple line. Attach lights to it and scatter them in the yard. You could have a whole forest if you have enough time and lights.

An important thing to keep in mind is the electric bill that will come with using a lot of lights. Sometimes smaller is better. If the yard is too cluttered, things will be missed. Use a good design and choose something to be the focus of the decorations. Lay out things on paper first to see if you like the way they will look. You might even take a photo of the front of your house, print it out and play with scale drawings of the decorations you want to use to see if you'll like it.

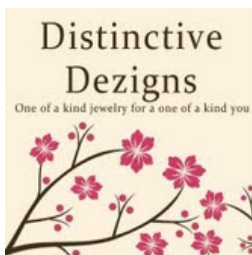


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5 Christmas Crafts for Kids

The kids are home for Christmas break and are bored already. The weather is cold, wet and nasty. What do you do? Keep them busy making something with their hands, instead of you tearing your hair out. Here are some fun ideas that kids will love.

1. Christmas cards are always a great craft. Provide the kids supplies like construction paper, card stock, scissors, glue, glitter (the bottles of glitter/glue in one package are a very nice low-mess way to dress up a project), pencils, crayons or markers and old Christmas cards. Let the kids use their creative energy to make wonderful handmade cards that can be shared with family and friends. By cutting pictures out of old cards, even the younger children can make something really nice (and recycle at the same time).

2. Snow globes are a favorite. If you want to make your own, gather glass or clear plastic containers, like baby food jars or mustard or mayonnaise jars. Wash and dry them completely. Gather small plastic Christmas or winter decorations. Try to find some that float. Winter themed stickers or small foam cutouts are also nice. Decorate the outside of the jar with stickers or glue a few of the foam pieces on it. Attach a couple of the floating pieces (things like snowflakes or stars work well) to string and glue a figure to the inside with the string underneath the figure to anchor it (which will become the base). Fill the jar with water and some glitter. Carefully glue the lid in place using waterproof glue and let dry. Once dry, shake it, set it lid down and watch the glitter swirl around.

3. Candy crafts can be fun, as well as a tasty gift. A train can be a quick craft that can be used as a decoration or gift. Use a roll of hard candy (like Lifesavers) for the main part of the train. Use individually wrapped round candy, like peppermints for the wheels. For the front, glue a square candy, such as a caramel or a Starburst with a Hershey kiss on top. If you add a string, they can be used as a tree decoration. Experiment with other kinds of candy to create other things, like robots, animals or even angels.

4. Garland trees can be a great project for the kids, especially if there is limited room for a Christmas tree. Take a large piece of green poster board and cut a circle, with a slit out to make a cone. Tape it with clear packing tape. Take an artificial pine garland and wrap it around the cone, completely covering it to create a small tree. Fasten the ends in place so it doesn't unwrap. The tree can be decorated with lightweight paper ornaments that the children can also make.

5. A cozy fireplace can warm up any room but not everyone has one. Let the kids make one. Find a large cardboard box and cut an opening in the one side for the fireplace. Using sponges, paint bricks on the box, leaving space in between to be the mortar. Paint the inside black if you want. Paint flames on the inside back section of the box. Use paper towel rolls to stack up in the fireplace as logs. Decorate the top to look like a mantel.

Get creative and think up your own Christmas crafts as well. Children will love the fun involved in creating these crafts and so will you. You can even give the crafts as a gift which will warm even the scroogiest of hearts.



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Tips For Traveling With Your Children Over The Holidays

Anyone who has children knows how stressful it can be to travel with children. There are the myriad stops to use the bathroom, the continuous “Mom, are we there yet?” questions, and families with more than one child probably hear them bickering a lot, too. These tips for traveling with your children over Christmas may help make the trip less stressful for everyone involved.

Your mode of transportation can make or break your holiday travel with children. If you're in a hurry to get to your family's, you'll most likely choose to fly. Use these tips to make flying with your child easier:

- * When you make your reservations, be sure that each person in the family has their own seat. This may cost more, but it is much safer than flying with a child in your lap.
- * Plan activities to keep your child busy while you're waiting to get your luggage checked. Try not to become too irritated or stressed because your child will pick up on that and your mood may have an ill effect on theirs. Have several items that will occupy your child packed in your carry-on bag.
- * Remove your child's shoes during the flight to keep the impact of their kicking the back of the seat in front of them at a minimum.

If you're going to be driving to your holiday destination, you're more in control than if you're flying. Here are some tips for traveling by car with your children:

- * Try to travel at night so the children will be asleep for most of the trip. Of course, this isn't always an option, but it is one way to avoid some of the hassles of traveling with children.
- * Pack a bag of activities for your children. Include cards, books, toys, and hand-held game systems they may have. If you can afford one, a portable DVD player would be a great way to keep children occupied and hopefully happy during the drive.
- * Be sure to allow ample time when driving for bathroom breaks and stretching your legs. It might be a good idea to also let children run around a little to burn off some of their pent-up energy.
- * Take along snacks and drinks to help stave off having to pull into too many fast food restaurants while you're on the road. You'll have more control over what your children are eating and it will cost considerably less than eating all meals out during the trip.

These tips for traveling with your children over Christmas are not exhaustive. You probably already know how well your children travel and what best keeps them occupied so everyone can enjoy the trip. If this is your first extended trip, using these tips may help make the journey less stressful for everyone.

Christmas Party Game Ideas for Kids

What is a party without party games? Boring, right? Why not plan on adding some fun to the party by including a few entertaining games this year. Here are a few fun games to get the party hopping this year.

Dream Gifts - give everyone a slip of paper to write down their dream gift, if money were no object. Put them all in a Santa hat. Have each person draw a gift and then try to match the gift with the person who wants it. It can be fun seeing how well they know each other. The kids may surprise you as to what they come up with for their dream gift.

Pin the Tail Variations - there are many variations of "Pin the Tail on the Donkey" that could be played. Use a picture of reindeer and play "Pin the Nose on Rudolph". Another way to play is to put Santa's hat on his head. You could have a package that needs a bow on top. If you want to make it more complicated, for older kids, have a picture tree with several decorations that need to be hung on the tree. Whoever gets the most on the tree wins.

Shake, Rattle and Know - take some small dollar store type gifts, enough for one for each guest, wrap them in small boxes and number them. Give each guest a piece of paper and pencil. Pass the gifts around and allow them to shake them and see if they can guess what is inside. Once everyone has had a chance to guess all the gifts then start with the youngest to the oldest (or draw numbers) and let each child select a gift. Once everyone has a gift, unwrap them to see how many gifts everyone got right. Each child gets to keep the gift they unwrap.

Snowman Scramble - divide the children into two teams, with one person from each team as the "snowman". Put the snowmen at one end of the room, with a box of clothes and other things to dress the snowman in. You could use hats, scarves, jackets, even a nose on a string, like a clown nose. Have a relay race to see which team can completely dress their snowman first.

Freehand Frosty - give each child a piece of paper and pencil and a blindfold. Tell them to draw a snowman, telling them which part to draw next. Younger children could be given a paper with the outline of the snowman already in place and some eyes, nose and other parts cut out of sticker paper to add to the snowman. The winner is the child who has the most parts in the correct place.

Blizzard Blitz - this is a game for those who have a large area and don't mind a bit of a mess. Get a bag of packing popcorn and spread it out on the floor. Give each child a bucket and a toy shovel. There are a number of ways to play the game, as a relay race (from the pile to the bucket, handing off the shovel), see who can get the most in a certain amount of time or come with another creative variation on your own.

Christmas party games are great for get-to-know-you times and just keeping things moving along and guests entertained. So, why not add a few to your list this year?



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Recycle Your Wrapping Paper

Every year it seems that families spend more and more at Christmas time. Many are looking for ways they can save money. One way to save money is to recycle your wrapping paper rather than merely throwing it away. You've already spent the money, oftentimes quite a bit; it almost seems wasteful to toss it out. Here are some ways you can recycle your wrapping paper by using it for other things after it's already wrapped gifts.

Use crumpled wrapping paper to keep fragile ornaments from being damaged. Sure, you can buy ornament keepers, but a sturdy box and some crumpled paper will do the same job. It will also save you money because ornament keepers can be expensive.

Push crumpled-up wrapping paper into formed hats or purses to help them stay the correct shape when they're stored away for a period of time. This is especially helpful if you don't have boxes to store them in.

Re-wrap presents next year. Of course, this will be difficult to do if the paper is too wrinkled or torn up. If you had wrapped a large present, this shouldn't be too much of a problem; however, it might be if the gift was smaller. If the wrapping paper is wrinkled, you can turn the paper on the wrong side and iron it on low. You can also cut off parts of the wrapping paper that can be used again to wrap smaller presents in the future.

Did someone wrap a present in wrapping paper that's not really limited to Christmas? Iron the back of the wrapping paper with an iron set on low. Find a corkboard that will fit into the paper and wrap it up. This is a great craft for children to try because they can tape the wrapping paper on the back and it doesn't have to be perfect. Hang the corkboard up by a telephone as a message board. You can also cut used, ironed wrapping paper into squares to use for leaving telephone messages.

Learn a new craft and recycle your wrapping paper at the same time. You can find books on origami at the library. If your library doesn't have a book, look online. There are many websites that are dedicated to the art of folding paper.

Use the ironed paper as drawer or shelf liners. Measure the size of your drawers and shelves before placing the paper in them. This will allow the paper to fit as closely as possible. If you have enough wrapping paper to recycle this way, you may be able to place more than one layer in each drawer. Remove the top layer of paper when it is soiled and you'll already have another to replace it.

Make a decision this year to try to save as much wrapping paper as possible so that it can be used again in following years. Of course, if you really want to save money, you could create a fabric bag that can be reused year after year. You can even embroider names on it if you like.

Time Out for Mom During the Holidays

The holidays can be a stressful time for moms. From holiday travel to baking and cooking, you can get overwhelmed and stressed out in a hurry. This holiday season, as difficult as it sometimes is, try to remember to stop and take time for you.

Reduce the Stress:

Do you find yourself so stressed out during the holidays that you can't even enjoy your company? If so, it's time to reduce your stress.

* First, ask yourself what tasks you can delegate to family members. Perhaps you can share the responsibility of your family dinner. Have everyone bring a dish. Maybe you need help at home on baking day. Ask your kids to pitch in and help with making cookies or candy or even with the clean-up.

* Next, remember to breathe. When you are in the middle of a stress-filled moment, stop, close your eyes and take in a deep breath. Remind yourself that this day should be filled with happy, joyful memories.

Be Nice to Yourself:

As women, we tend to take care of everyone first, then ourselves last. The problem with this is that usually after we're finished taking care of everyone else, we have nothing left to give back to ourselves. During the holidays this year, take some time to be nice to you. Here are a few ideas for you:

* Take a coffee break. While you're out shopping for gifts, stop and take a coffee break. Buy one of your favorite magazines to read while you enjoy your favorite latte.

* Read a book. Buy yourself a new book and allow yourself an afternoon of doing nothing but lying in bed, reading your new book.

* Take a bubble bath. Lock the door, turn off the phone and run a bubble bath for yourself. Relax and forget about all the plans, cooking and presents and just enjoy a nice, relaxing thirty minutes alone. It's amazing how much these thirty minutes can re-energize you and help you cope with the tasks ahead.



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Tips For Staying Stress Free During The Holidays

The holidays can cause total chaos and turn into a stressful occasion if you're not careful. This year, take care of yourself and use these tips for staying stress free during the holidays.

Stress Free Holiday Tip #1: Stay healthy. Focus on your health during this holiday season and it will probably make a much bigger difference than you could ever imagine. Pay attention to what you eat. Stay away from junk food and nibbling throughout the day. It's hard not to taste-test your dishes, but remember that every bite adds up to pounds and inches.

Stress Free Holiday Tip #2: Stay fit. Make a special effort to hit the gym as often as possible. The holidays are a stressful time and everyone is rushing around in a flurry of commotion. Stop and make time to stay fit. Even if you can only fit in a 30-minute workout twice a week, that's better than nothing. You can work out a lot of your frustrations in a single 30-minute workout.

Stress Free Holiday Tip #3: Stay calm. When you feel anxiety rising, take a deep breathe and hold it in for a ten count. Slowly release your breathe, then take another deep breath in. Repeat this simple exercise three or four times, until you feel calm again. Remind yourself that you are only one person. You can't do everything all at once or on your own. If you need help, ask for it. Do whatever it takes to keep yourself calm.

Stress Free Holiday Tip #4: Stay happy. When you are stressed out to the max, it is difficult, at best, to find a ray of sunshine. However, if you are unhappy, everyone around you will notice this. Follow the three tips above, then smile. Sometimes smiling, even when you don't feel like smiling, will lighten your mental load. Give it a try. Smile and be happy.

Stress Free Holiday Tip #5: Don't do it all. We often overload ourselves during the holidays, promising to bake cupcakes for school, cook dinner for all the family, volunteer at the shelter and buy gifts for everyone we've ever known. There really is no need to do so much. Yes, it's great to give back but do it within reason and don't stretch yourself too far.

Try to remember what the holiday season really is all about and take some time to relax and enjoy this special time of year.



Gifts for family, gifts for friends, gifts for you! So many choices – dolls, stuffed animals, hats, tote bags and purses, fingerless mitts, pillow covers, aprons and more. Every item is handmade with care for those you love. Old fashioned quality workmanship from Mrs. Talbott's Fresh Ideas. www.mrstalbot.etsy.com

Tips for Making Holiday Shopping a Breeze

Weary of the hassle of holiday shopping? Many shoppers line up for hours on end to get a deal on the hottest toy of the season, or newest fashion craze, then there are those who dread shopping and just put it off until the last minute, or give gift certificates to get out of shopping altogether.

Holiday shopping doesn't have to be a hassle. It can be quickly executed without so much stress and anxiety, if you plan ahead. Try these tips to make your holiday shopping a breeze this year:

1. Set a budget in place. Do you know how much money you can afford to spend on gifts? If not, sit down right now and make that budget. This will be a huge time-saver in the end.
2. Make your list; check it twice. Create a list of who you need to buy gifts for this year. Start with family first, then add friends, co-workers, etc. How does this list look, compared with your budget? Too long? Pare it down. Despite what you think, you don't have to buy as many gifts as you think you do. Trim your list until you have it down to a reasonable number.
3. What do they like? Now that you know who you will be buying gifts for, start thinking about what these people like. You may already have a good idea of what kinds of things they like. If not, do some snooping and find out. Make a shopping list of these things for each person.
4. Shop early. If possible try to avoid the last minute rush and shop early. Another good option is to go late at night. Many department stores operate late hours during the holidays. It's a good time to leave the kids with your spouse and do the shopping on your own without worrying about the crowds or the kids needing to be fed or changed.
5. Shop online. Now that you know exactly what you need to buy, start by shopping online. You can find lots of good deals on auction and discount sites. Many online shops such as Amazon.com give you the option of mailing out your gifts (gift wrap included) to relatives and friends, this could save you a lot of time wrapping presents and fighting the crowds at the post office. Shopping online could save you a lot more money than you'd think, and it will definitely save you the hassle of fighting those Christmas crowds!



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Holiday Organization Tips

Don't let this holiday season be stressful. Simply organize yourself to get it all done with little to no hassle. Get started early with these easy holiday organization tips.

Be a List Writer - Writing lists is an excellent way to keep yourself organized and on track. Write your list by hand then type them into a computer and print a neat copy to keep handy. Some list ideas for you: Christmas gift shopping list, spending budget, holiday cards list, meal planning, etc. Be sure to keep each list separate and mark off every task as it is completed.

Learn to Delegate - When it's time to decorate for the holidays, get your family involved. Delegate specific tasks to each person. This will help you by reducing decorating time. Your family will also have fun decorating the house for Christmas. Your family members can also help get the house ready for Christmas by doing laundry, dusting, clearing snow and shopping.

Order Online - You can cut your shopping time in half (or more!) just by ordering online. After your shopping list is complete, sit down and shop online. You will most likely be able to find the majority of your gift list online. What's even better is that you can save time and money by having some gifts automatically shipped to friends and family afar. You can even order your groceries online.

Think Ahead – Christmas happens every year and every year you swear you will put those decorations back in the right place. This is a good time to think about what you can do this year to make next year easier on yourself next Christmas. Organize your Christmas decorations before storing them in the attic. Jot down any ideas you might have for next year in a special holiday journal. Collect those favorite family recipes you requested this year and save them in your holiday journal for next year's family dinner. And remember to untangle the Christmas lights before putting them away!

Share the Love – Plan your holiday dinner early and share the love (or food). If you're hosting the Christmas dinner ask family and friends to each bring a dish, make sure you ask what everyone is bringing so you don't end up with ten desserts and no main courses. This will take a huge amount of stress off you and your family members can show off their favorite recipes. If you're going to someone else's house for dinner offer to bring a dish along, your offer may be greatly appreciated.

By starting early, doing some online shopping and learning to delegate you can dramatically reduce your Christmas stress this year. Christmas shouldn't be a time of stress and worry, try to slow down so that you can enjoy the sites and festivities around you and more importantly share it with your family. Merry Christmas.

Recipes

Christmas Morning French Toast

Ingredients:

1/2 (1 pound) loaf French bread, cut diagonally in 1 inch slices

4 eggs

1 cup milk

3/4 cup half-and-half cream

1/4 cup and 2 tablespoons butter

2/3 cup brown sugar

1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 tablespoon and 1-1/2 teaspoons light corn syrup

Directions:

Butter a 9x13 inch baking dish. Arrange the slices of bread in the bottom. In a large bowl, beat together eggs, milk, cream, vanilla and cinnamon. Pour over bread slices, cover, and refrigerate overnight.

The following morning, preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a small saucepan, combine butter, brown sugar and corn syrup; heat until bubbling. Pour over bread and egg mixture. Bake in preheated oven, uncovered, for 40 minutes.

Christmas Spirit Eggnog

Ingredients:

4 cups milk

5 whole cloves

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

12 egg yolks

1 1/2 cups sugar

4 cups light cream

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Instructions:

Place a large saucepan over very low heat. Put the cinnamon, 1/2 teaspoon of vanilla, cloves and milk in the saucepan. Heat milk about 5 minutes bringing to a boil very slowly. Whisk together egg yolks and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Egg mixture should become fluffy. Slowly whisk milk mixture into the eggs until blended well. Place egg milk mixture back into the saucepan. Being sure not to allow the mixture to boil and stirring continuously, cook mixture over medium low heat for approximately 3 minutes or until mixture thickens. Once the mixture thickens remove cloves. Let mixture set and cool for about 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Once mixture has cooled stir in 2 teaspoons of vanilla, cream and nutmeg. Blend well. Cover and refrigerate overnight. When ready to serve sprinkle nutmeg over the top.



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Reindeer Bread

Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter, softened
1 cup white sugar
2 eggs
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
3/4 cup pumpkin puree
6 ounces semi-sweet chocolate chips
1 cup chopped pecans, divided
1/4 cup confectioners' sugar
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Instructions:

Cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add one egg at a time mix well after each addition. In a separate bowl blend together flour, baking soda, salt, 1 teaspoon of cinnamon, 1/2 teaspoon of nutmeg and the ginger. Slowly stir 1/3 of the flour mixture into the sugar mixture. Then stir 1/3 of the pumpkin into the sugar mixture. Next stir in 1/3 of the flour and then the rest of the pumpkin. Finally stir in the last of the flour mixture. Gently fold in chocolate chips and 3/4 cup of pecans. Grease and flour a 9x5 inch loaf pan. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Pour mixture into loaf pan and sprinkle with remaining pecans. Bake for one hour until a knife inserted in the middle of the loaf comes out clean. Cool completely. For the icing stir together the confectioners' sugar and heavy cream. Add cinnamon and nutmeg and stir until smooth. Drizzle icing over bread loaf when completely cooled.



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Chocolate Raspberry Ornaments

Ingredients:

1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened
15 vanilla wafers with creme, crushed
1/3 cup seedless raspberry jam
Finely chopped toasted almonds
Toasted coconut

Instructions:

Melt chocolate chips until completely melted and smooth. Allow cooling slightly. Place cream cheese in a large mixing bowl. Pour melted chocolate over cream cheese and mix together until very smooth. Fold in vanilla wafer crumbs being sure to cover all the crumbs with the chocolate mixture. Refrigerate 3 to 4 hours or until chocolate is firm. Once firm, shape chocolate mixture into balls. Roll half the candy balls in the toasted almonds and the other half in the toasted coconut. Store in the refrigerator to keep them from becoming too soft.



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Candy Cane Marble

Ingredients:

1 pound dark chocolate
1 pound white chocolate
30 small peppermint candy canes

Instructions:

Put dark chocolate in a microwave bowl and heat on high setting in microwave 2 to 3 minutes or until chocolate is melted and smooth. Stir chocolate about every 30 seconds to make sure lumps are melting. Put white chocolate in microwave bowl and heat like dark chocolate. Put candy canes in a large freezer bag. Using a rolling pin break the candy canes into different size pieces. Place half the crushed candy canes in a strainer and shake small crumbs into dark chocolate. Place the remaining crushed candy into strainer and shake crumbs into white chocolate. Line a 9X9X9 baking pan with heavy aluminum foil. Spread dark chocolate out into bottom of pan. Spread white chocolate over the dark chocolate in pan. Sprinkle the rest of the crushed candy canes over the top. Cover and refrigerate for about 2 hours. When hardened break up pieces of candy by dropping straight down on the counter.

Easy Crustless Pumpkin Pie

Ingredients:

2 cups canned pumpkin
1 ¼ cups sugar
3 tbsp all-purpose flour
3 eggs, lightly beaten
¾ cup evaporated milk
1 ½ tsp vanilla extract
¼ tsp ground cinnamon

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease 9-in pie plate.

Place flour and sugar in a large bowl and combine well. Then stir in the eggs. Mix in the milk, vanilla extract, cinnamon and pumpkin. Mix well. Transfer mixture into the greased pie plate and place in a 15-in x 10-in x 1-in baking pan. Pour ½ inch of boiling water to the pan and bake for about 50 minutes. Insert a knife into the pie – if it comes out clean, the pie will be done.

Ham and Cranberry Casserole

Serves 4-6

Ingredients:

3 cups cooked ham, cubed

½ cup water

½ cup sugar

2 tbsp butter

1 ¼ cups fresh cranberries, washed

2 tbsp grated orange rind

Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit.

Melt the butter in a large frying pan and sauté ham until browned. Bring water and sugar to a boil in a saucepan und stir constantly. Add ¾ cup cranberries, cover and simmer for about 15 minutes. Then add the orange rind and season well.

Add the cranberries to the ham and combine. Transfer ham mixture into a baking dish and bake for about 20 minutes. Add the remaining cranberries to the baking dish and return to the oven for a further 15 minutes.

Serve immediately.

Basic and Easy Turkey Stuffing

Makes about 4 servings

Ingredients:

1 cup plain breadcrumbs
4 cloves garlic, finely minced
1 large onion, coarsely chopped
1 small apple, peeled, cored and chopped
1 tsp dried tarragon
1 tsp thyme
Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients and stuff your Thanksgiving turkey or chicken.

Luscious Left-Over Turkey Melt

Serves 1

Ingredients:

2 large slices (1/4 inch thick) cooked turkey
1/4 cup left-over turkey stuffing
1 generous tbsp cranberry sauce
1/4 cup turkey gravy (leftover from your Thanksgiving Dinner)
1 slice (1/8 inch thick) Cheddar cheese

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Cut a piece of aluminium foil and place one slice of turkey into the middle. Top with the stuffing, then the cranberry sauce. Place the slice of cheese over the cranberries and top with the remaining turkey slice.

Wrap the foil slightly around the “sandwich” and bake on a baking sheet in the oven for about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, heat up the gravy in a little saucepan until hot.

Remove the sandwich from the foil and arrange on a dinner plate. Pour the gravy over the turkey melt and enjoy!

A great way of using up left-over turkey.

Sweet and Spicy Almond Snack

Ingredients:

¼ cup sugar
2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 tsp cayenne pepper
½ tsp garlic salt
½ tsp chili powder
¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
2 cups unblanched white almonds

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 250 °F. Grease 15-in x 10-in x 1-in baking pan.

Combine all ingredients (except almonds) in a bowl. Then stir in almonds and mix until well coated. Transfer to the greased baking pan and bake for about 30 minutes. Stir occasionally.

A great party snack!

Coconut Shortcake

Ingredients:

14 oz plain flour
5 oz brown sugar
2 tbsp milk
8 oz margarine
Apricot jam
2 eggs
8 oz unsweetened flaked coconut
8 oz “superfine” sugar

Instructions:

Preheat oven to about 350° Fahrenheit.

Mix together flour, brown sugar, margarine and milk and press into a jelly roll pan. Bake until firm, then remove from the oven.

Spread the cake with apricot jam.

To make the topping, whisk together eggs and sugar and fold in the flaked coconut. Spread on top of the apricot jam and return to the oven. Bake at a slightly lower temperature (325 °F) until crisp and slightly colored.