

# HOLIDAY

## *guide*

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November 2023  
Special Supplement To  
**The Journal**  
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# It's holiday show time

BY TONI MILBOURNE

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There are multiple opportunities to enjoy a holiday production around the tri-state area. Local playhouses and theaters have spent weeks rehearsing and setting the stage to offer their best to audiences during the Christmas season. Whether you are an avid fan of the stage production or this is your first time entering the theater, grab your family and head out to one of these holiday events.

Beginning Saturday, Dec. 8 and running through Dec. 17, "A Christmas Carol" is offered at the Majestic Theatre in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Set in Victorian England, the play opens on a busy London street with Christmas Eve shoppers and vendors alike caught up in the holiday spirit. Their enthusiasm is quickly dampened with the arrival of miserly old Ebenezer Scrooge who considers the celebration a waste of time and money. Retiring to his dark, cold rooms Scrooge gets a visit from the ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley who informs him he will be visited by three spirits. Scrooge learns a great deal during that long night and wakes with a new outlook on the holiday season and life itself.

Tickets for the production are available at Ticketmaster or by visiting the Majestic Theatre website.

Dec. 9 and Dec. 10 has the Maryland Theatre presentation of "The Nutcracker" taking the stage, followed on Dec. 12, at 7 p.m. by "A Christmas Carol." The theatre presents Rhythm of the Dance Yuletide Christmas special on Dec. 13 as another holiday offering. Tickets can be found at Ticketmaster or at the Maryland Theatre website.

The entertaining show, "Prancer," will be presented at the Apollo Theater in Martinsburg from Dec. 8-10, highlighting young Jessica Riggs' family that has fallen on hard times. Still, she keeps her belief in Santa Claus and the idea that there are miracles in the world. When an injured reindeer appears in Jessica's backyard, she believes it is Prancer. While she is nursing the creature back to health, the whole community of Three Oaks eventually learns about Prancer, causing big problems for Jessica as she tries to return the reindeer home. Visit [apollocivictheater.org](http://apollocivictheater.org) for more information.

The Old Opera House in Charles Town will perform "Miracle on 34th Street", with showings on Dec. 8, 9 and



10. This beloved holiday favorite features Kris Kringle, an old man in a retirement home, hired to work as Santa for Macy's Department Store. Kris unleashes waves of goodwill when he refers parents to other stores to find exactly the toy their child has asked for. Seen as deluded and dangerous, Kris ends up in a court competency hearing. At stake is both Kris's freedom and one little girl's belief in Santa.

Traveling a little farther from home, but potentially only a train or subway ride away, one can visit the Nation's capital, Washington, D.C., to see the classic

"A Christmas Carol," at Ford's Theater through the end of December. Scrooge's riveting journey alongside the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future is a joy newly experienced in one of the world's most historic theaters.

The Washington Ballet joins the holiday season with their presentation of "The Nutcracker" at the Warner Theater through Dec. 30. The Russian ballet goes local thanks to a Nutcracker Prince in the likeness of George Washington and cherry blossom set designs. This rendition is set in historical 1882 Georgetown. Contact the theater for ticket information.

In a more traditional Christmas offering, The Washington National Cathedral celebrates with Handel's beloved "Messiah." The Cathedral's choir and baroque orchestra gives a stirring performance set against the venue's architecture and Gothic splendor. The performances are to be presented Dec. 8-10.

The traditional musical will also be offered at the Kennedy Center by the National Symphony Orchestra joins with standout soloists and the University of Maryland Concert Choir for shows Dec. 14-17. Visit [kennedycenter.org](http://kennedycenter.org) for ticket information.



# Lighting the way to Christmas

BY TONI MILBOURNE

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Christmas lights adorn not only the decorated tree within the home but also trees outdoors, doorframes, roof-lines, bushes and any other place to which the can be affixed. The tradition of using lights dates back to 17th century Germany where small candles were attached to tree branches with pins or melted wax.

It is also said that as a symbol of light, hope and good in the world, the Christmas lights also served to remind good Christians to provide light to others as a reminder to follow the ways of Christ.

Beginning around 1890, candleholders were first used for Christmas candles and by 1914, small lanterns and glass balls to hold the candles were becoming commonplace. Early electric lights were introduced in the 1880s, establishing the illuminated Christmas tree in the United Kingdom that spread to North America and Australia soon after. Until the early 20th century, as electrical power became more affordable, miniature candles were used in decorating.

The first known electrically illuminated Christmas tree was the creation of Edward H. Johnson, as associate of Thomas Edison. He served as vice president of the Edison Electric Light Company and had Christmas tree light bulbs made especially for himself, in the colors of red, white and blue. The tree was displayed at his home

on Fifth Avenue in New York on Dec. 22, 1882, earning him the title "Father of Electric Christmas Tree Lights."

Businesses soon followed suit, stringing lights in their windows by 1900, although they did not replace the candle for the average person until around 1930.

In 1895, President Grover Cleveland sponsored the first electrically-lit Christmas tree in the White House, featuring over 100 multicolored lights. His use of the lighted tree grew inside the home and business. Outdoor lights did not come into play until later with the first recorded use of outdoor lights recorded in 1912 when usage was recorded in New York.

The Library of Congress gives the credit of decorating outdoor trees to a small town in North Carolina when the McAdenville Men's Club, in 1956, conceived of the idea of decorating a few trees around the McAdenville Community Center.

One of the most famous lighted trees is that in Rockefeller Center in New York. That tree has had "lights" since 1931 but not real electric lights until 1956. It was at this time in history that the average household would begin using lights on a yearly basis.

In today's society, Christmas lights are sold in all fashions, from miniature white lights to those of all colors that have remote control units to add speed of blinking lights, music and more.



Journal photo by Toni Milbourne

Lights adorn doorways, arches, rooftops and more as more and more families get into the holiday spirit with decorations.

See **LIGHTING**, Page 4

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Journal photos by Toni Milbourne

Selecting a puppy or kitten as a holiday gift means a lifetime of commitment.

## Getting a pet for Christmas? It's best to be prepared

BY TONI MILBOURNE

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The “wow” factor of having a wiggly, furry puppy wrapped in a bright red bow is very real and very exciting on Christmas morning. It is fun to be the one to hug and pet and even walk and feed for the first day or so. But then the routine sets in and often becomes a chore rather than a joy. Consider that fact before deciding up on a puppy — or any pet this Christmas season.

A most popular gift — a puppy to join the family — brings a change to the household that should be planned out far beyond the thought of Christmas morning. Dogs (and cats or fish or hamsters) require time, patience and dedication to care for. They require a lifestyle change.

Puppies and kittens are the more popular Christmas pet

to put under tree. But planning for the pet is key to ensuring that it doesn't end up in a shelter.

One should note that new pets are not inexpensive. They require veterinary visits regularly, with annual shots, de-worming and other necessary preventive care. And most times, unless one pays extra for it, there is not insurance to cover the costs.

And animals love to eat! And they need a healthy, constant diet which adds to grocery bill each week.

Add in the cost of training the puppy and the potential of hiring someone to pet sit during family vacations or trips away and the financial burden can become more than initially thought.

But, if the time is ripe for adding another member to the family, Christmas can definitely be the most opportune time to do so.

Be prepared for the changes in schedule and be ready

for the commitment of taking care of another living thing — one that totally relies on you for food, exercise and good health. And more importantly, for companionship and for love. In return, you will receive the same.

Puppies and kittens are ideal as they are young and can adapt more easily to a new home and new training; however, there are many more mature animals who could also use a home. Before selecting a final choice, visit local shelters to see if there is the perfect animal for your family that needs a home.

The Animal Welfare Society of Jefferson County, located at 23 Poor Farm Road, Kearneysville; the Berkeley County Humane Society, 554 Charles Town Road, Martinsburg and Briggs Animal Adoption Center at 3731 Berryville Pike in Charles Town all offer animal adoption of furry friends in need of homes. Plan ahead and visit them who needs a home and whether yours is the best fit.

## Lighting FROM PAGE 3

Outdoor specific lights come in all shapes and sizes from running rope lights to cascading strings to light-up lawn decorations. Many use lights inside the home not only on the tree

but on mantles, around doorways and in windows. Reverting a bit to the days of candles, many of those window lights come in the shape of candles, but are powered by electricity,

offering safer conditions than the open flames of old.

Lights can be found in nearly every store in the area with large sections at many of the big box stores such as Lowe's,

Home Depot and Walmart. Smaller stores, too, offer lights galore in their holiday decoration sections. They can be found in any price range so that one and all can light the way to Christmas.





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# Live Versus Artificial

## *Which tree fits best for your family?*

BY TONI MILBOURNE

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It is clear that gathering as a family to decorate the Christmas tree is one of the most popular traditional of the season. But, the dilemma lies in whether to choose an artificial tree or if a live tree is the way to go.

According to a recent Rocket Homes survey, artificial trees are more popular than real ones with 67.4 percent of Americans saying their main Christmas or holiday tree is an artificial one. That leaves only 32.6 percent opting for a real tree.

There are benefits to whichever side of the live versus fake one goes to.

Artificial trees are more cost effective over time. While they may cost more than a live tree at the outset, the tree can be re-used for years, saving hundreds, if not thousands of dollars over its lifetime.

The artificial tree doesn't need to be watered and it doesn't dry out, creating a potential fire hazard. In fact, the majority of artificial trees are made using fire-retardant materials for safety.

The tree is easy to put away. Clean-up is minimal at the end of the season as the tree simply folds back up and is stored in its original box. It doesn't shed needles and it doesn't wreak havoc on those in the household who may suffer with allergies.

The artificial trees have advanced to the point where they look real or sometimes better than real as they don't have gaping holes in the branches or brown spots. They don't sag or droop and they often come pre-lit which saves on decorating efforts.

The pro side of the debate for live trees shows that while it may be thought to be harmful to cut the trees, in fact it is good for the environment. Each of the more than 300 million real Christmas trees growing in the United States emit fresh oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to global warming. Experts say the tree farms help stabilize the soil, protect water supplies and provide refuge for wildlife.

Live trees are renewable resources and are recyclable. There are approximately 15,000 tree farms in the U.S. where, in order to ensure a constant supply, farmers usually plant between one and three new trees for every one harvested. The trees are 100 percent biodegradable, with many places that recycle them making them into mulch for gardening or landscaping.

The live tree simply smells like Christmas, and unlike the artificial tree, there is no assembly required.

If the choice is made for a real tree, the next step is where to find one and whether it means cutting your own or buying one from a tree lot. Live, cut trees can be found locally at most stores these days including big box stores like Walmart and even the grocery chains. They can also be found at Southern States, Tractor Supply, Home Depot and Lowes. Visiting nurseries such as Meadows Farms, allows for a broader choice of trees.

Or one can go to a tree farm and find the perfect tree to cut yourself. Some local tree farms include Town and Country Nursery in Leetown, Lynch Tree Farm in Martinsburg, Dan and Bryan Trees in Shepherdstown, Allen Dehaven Trees in Hedgesville, Colonial Farm Nursery in Martinsburg, Santa's Woods in Kearneysville and Sleepy Creek Tree Farm in Berkeley Springs.



Journal photo by Toni Milbourne

**While the majority of Americans now select an artificial tree, the tradition of sleeting and cutting down a live tree is still a popular adventure.**



# A guide to dining out for the holidays

BY METRO CREATIVE

For some people there is no better way to celebrate the holidays than to spend time with friends and loved ones around the dinner table. Although cooking and dining at home are popular this time of year, some celebrants may not have the time or the inclination to host the holidays at home. Preparing and serving holiday meals to guests can be time-consuming. In fact, many holiday hosts and hostesses lament that hosting duties can compromise the time they get to spend with the ones they love each year.

Dining out is one way to save time and free up more moments for interacting without the pressure of food shopping, cooking and cleanup. The following are some tips for families who opt to dine out for the holidays.

- Confirm restaurants are open. Many restaurants close on major holidays to enable staff to spend time with their own family members. This may be more so for Thanksgiving and Christmas than with week-long celebrations like Chanukah and Kwanzaa. Verify with restaurants if they have holiday hours, and more importantly, that they will be open on the day you will be dining out. Christmas Day falls on a Monday in 2023, which typically is a day that many restaurants are closed.

- Make a reservation. If you find an establishment open for the holiday, reserve a table early. Also, some restaurants may ask for a deposit on reservations to en-

sure you show up.

- Expect some menu changes. To account for reduced staff or even ease in meal service, some restaurants may opt for a price-fixed holiday menu or a limited menu from their typical offerings. Some may showcase a seasonal menu that caters to holiday favorites they think diners will expect. There also may be fewer substitutions or customizations allowed.

- Avoid peak dining times. Restaurants may fill up after church services or around dinner time. Consider reserving your table for a less popular hour to reduce the propensity for long waits or being rushed out.

- Be patient. Kitchens can get backed up on a holiday, and it may take longer than expected for food to make it out to tables. Cut kitchen employees and servers a break as they are likely frazzled. They are trying their best to service all patrons.

- Plan to tip generously. It's the season of giving, and you should make sure you take care of your server. You can make the day even brighter with some words of gratitude and a nice gratuity.

- Pace alcoholic beverages. It's normal to enjoy some spirited drinks during holiday celebrations. It's easier to indulge a bit more at home and you do not need to get behind the wheel. When dining out, do not overdo things, and have a plan for who will be driving home.

Dining out during the holidays is a possibility with practical planning.

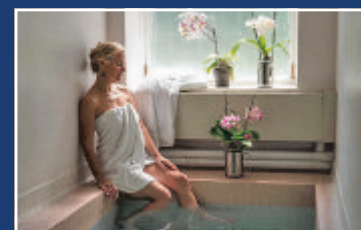
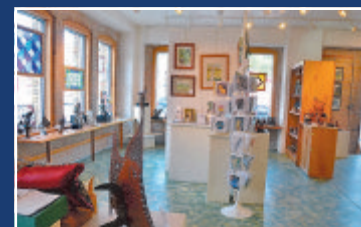


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# Christian holiday season traditions

BY METRO CREATIVE

Many adjectives can be used to describe the holiday season, including festive, jolly and religious. Another word that may come to mind is tradition. Traditions factor heavily into holiday celebrations of faith and family.

According to The Public Religion Research Institute's "2020 Census of American Religion," 70 percent of Americans identify as Christian. Data from the Pew Research Center indicates that 55 percent of Canadians identified as Christians in 2018. Millions of Christians will be celebrating Christmas this year, and many of those celebrations will feature cherished traditions. Here are some popular Christian traditions during the holiday season.

## ADVENT CALENDARS AND WREATHS

The word "Advent" is derived from Latin and means "coming forward." Advent is the four-week period preceding the Christmas celebration. Advent wreaths and calendars typically are part of Christmas in Christian households. Advent calendars are sold in stores or can be made as craft projects. Most of them contain small prizes like chocolate treats or other trinkets behind each date on the calendar. Advent wreaths have four candles (three purple and one pink). One is lit each Sunday of Advent. The evergreen wreath signifies continuous life.

## NATIVITY SCENE

Another popular religious tradition is setting up a nativity scene. A nativity scene places the focus on Jesus

Christ. One tradition involves moving nativity figurines closer to the manger leading up to Christmas, and placing the infant Jesus in the manger on Christmas Day.

Some churches and towns also put on living nativity scenes, in which adults and children dress up, and together with live animals, depict the manger scene.

## CHRISTMAS CAROLING

Caroling has a long history and was originally tied to winter solstice celebrations. Christians started singing carols to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Many of the songs carolers sing are traditional religious hymns. During Advent, carols will herald the coming of Jesus. After Christmas, carols are even more joyous in nature.

## THE THREE MASSES

Midnight Mass is a special celebration that takes place in the late hours of the evening on Christmas Eve. It is the first liturgy of Christmas that begins at midnight. It originated in 430 AD under Pope Sixtus III in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. The popularity of Midnight Mass grew by the 12th century, when the celebration of three Masses on Christmas day was granted to all priests. Midnight Mass is treated as a solemn High Mass, which involves singing and praying by the light of candles. A Mass at dawn is the second Christmas mass, followed by Mass of the Day, which is the midmorning Mass of the Christmas celebration.

Christmas is steeped in tradition. While the secular traditions are well known, Christians also embrace various religious traditions at this time of year.



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# Holiday Events

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**Friday, Dec. 8, 5 to 8 p.m. Holiday Night: Storytime and Hot Cocoa.** Enjoy a festive hot chocolate bar, guided tours of *Childhood Favorites: 100 Years of Children's Book Illustration*, storytime, music and more. Free admission.

**Friday, Dec. 15, 5 to 8 p.m. Holiday Night: Picasso and Mulled Wine.** Enjoy a glass of mulled wine, and nosh from a savory and sweet charcuterie board, then take a tour of *Picasso on Paper*. Mulled wine for visitors over 21. Free admission.

**Friday, Dec. 22, 5 to 8 p.m. Holiday Night: Last Minute Shopping.** Treat yourself to a relaxing moment amid the holiday hustle and bustle. Special discounts in our Holiday Store.

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## Step back in time with Christmas goose

BY METRO CREATIVE

The holiday season is a sentimental time of year. Nostalgia for past holiday seasons and excitement about what's to come make this a particularly special time of year for millions of people across the globe.

It's not uncommon for Christmas celebrants to include a little history in their decorations and celebrations each year. Some families may read Charles Dickens' early Victorian novella *A Christmas Carol* together before watching one of the many film adaptations of the beloved story. Many popular Christmas carols also date back to the nineteenth century if not earlier, adding another degree of nostalgia to the season. Even food can add a touch of the sentimental to Christmas celebrations. This year, holiday hosts can create some nostalgia around the Christmas dinner table by serving this recipe for "Roasted Christmas Goose" courtesy of the Food Network and Mark Slawson of The Wort Hotel in Jackson, Wyoming.

### ROASTED CHRISTMAS GOOSE

Yields 6 to 8 servings

1 14- to 16-pound goose  
1/4 cup sea salt  
1 lemon, halved  
1 apple, cut into chunks  
1 potato, cut into chunks  
1 orange, sliced  
1 cup chopped celery  
Basting Syrup (recipe follows)  
Stuffing (recipe follows)  
Cumberland Sauce (recipe follows)  
Basting Syrup:  
1/3 cup corn syrup  
1/3 cup cane syrup  
1/3 cup melted butter  
1/4 cup light brown sugar  
2 tablespoons brandy  
Stuffing

3 cups whole chestnuts, roasted and peeled

1 14-ounce bag stuffing mix  
1 cup raisins  
1/2 cup chopped celery  
1/4 cup diced apple  
1/4 cup diced onion  
3/4 teaspoon salt  
1/8 teaspoon pepper  
3 cups chicken stock  
3/4 cup melted butter  
1/4 cup heavy cream  
Cumberland Sauce:  
1 1/2 cups beef stock  
3/4 cup port wine  
3/4 cup red wine vinegar  
3 shallots, peeled and chopped  
1 tablespoon crushed black peppercorns  
3 oranges, juiced

1. Place goose in a large pot. Add water to cover and stir in the sea salt. Refrigerate overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

3. Remove goose from water and drain well. Remove all innards and trim excess fat from the tail. Rub inside cavity with lemon juice. Place apple, potato, orange and celery inside the body cavity. Truss the bird like a turkey.

4. Place the goose in the preheated 450 degree F oven. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees F. Cook 20 to 25 minutes per pound. Baste the goose every half hour with the Basting Syrup.

5. Carve goose and serve with Stuffing and Cumberland sauce.

Basting Syrup:

6. Mix all ingredients together in a small bowl.

Stuffing:

7. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

8. Coarsely chop the chestnuts and put in a large bowl. Add the stuffing mix, raisins, celery, apple,



# Americans ditch gadgets for shared experiences this holiday season

BY ALEXANDREA SUMUEL  
Wealth of Geeks

Americans are ditching the old-school gift wrap game. Rather than giving the latest gizmo or gadget, 92% prefer to give and receive experiences they can share with loved ones this holiday season.

Letters to the North Pole are filled with wishes for getaways (51%), concert tickets (40%), outdoor activities (30%), and museum visits (27%), according to a survey conducted by GetYourGuide. Travel is the most coveted experience this year, with millennials leading the charge.

"I'd much rather fly off to warm weather and spend days at the beach with my kids than get jewelry or an expensive holiday gift from my husband. This year, we'll return to the St. Maarten timeshare we fell in love with last Christmas. We'll give each other tiny stocking stuffers like candy or local rum we pick up on the island, but that's it," says Monica Fish, founder of Planner At Heart.

While the instant joy of a physical gift is undeniable, its sparkle tends to fade over time. Sharing an experience creates meaningful memories and a bond between the giver and receiver that lasts a lifetime.

Generation Zers, now in their pre-teens to mid-20s, also share this sentiment. Bella Bucchiotti, founder of xoxoBella, explains, "As a member of Gen Z, I value experiences like outdoor activities, concerts, and museum visits with loved ones over traditional holiday gifts. For me, material possessions hold less value. Experiences provide lasting memories, connections, and fulfillment, enriching our lives in ways possessions simply can't."

## PLANNING HOLIDAY TRAVEL DESPITE ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Despite an uncertain U.S. economy dealing with inflation, high interest rates, a food and energy crisis, labor strikes, fluctuating gas prices, and the restart of student loan payments, Americans still plan to splurge on holiday travel.

According to GetYourGuide, most (57%) respondents plan to keep their travel budget under \$1,000. However, compared to last year, there's a 35% increase in the number of Americans who plan to spend more than \$1,000.

But for some, it's less about the money and more about the precious moments. "We love traveling for the holidays. When we are on vacation, we find that our kids bond with each other in a way they never do at home.

This time is priceless to us. We create photo albums when we get home, and the memories live on," says Karen Kelly of Seasonal Cravings.

Where are Americans going this holiday season? Domestically, those looking to escape the cold are heading to Florida (17%) and California (12%). In comparison, those looking to embrace the chill are headed to New York City (11%). International travelers don't care as much about the weather as they head to destinations like France (13%), Mexico (10%), and Canada (10%).

## AMERICANS ARE FACING A 'FUNFLATION' PHENOMENON

It's the new term economists are using to describe Americans' unusual spending habits on fun experiences during a time of inflation — "Funflation." Typically, consumers only spend money on necessities when costs go up. Yet, consumers aren't tightening their belts regarding their enjoyment this year.

Taylor Swift fans — aka Swifties — shelled out \$1,300 per ticket for a chance to experience the Eras Tour, which generated \$5 billion in consumer spending. Almost 20% report sharing the experience with their parents, 31% said they went with their children, and just about 20% mentioned going with their siblings.

Most attendees (53%) went with their friends, and 42% went with their significant other.

"Funflation," Taylor Swift...those experiences are really where people are willing to pay," Corie Barry told the crowd at Fortune's Most Powerful Women Summit. "Bigger ticket items in electronics are not right now where people are interested."

According to a recent Bank of America report, Funflation is in full force, and live entertainment has taken center stage as consumer spending shifts to an "experience" economy, with millennials and Gen Zs at the forefront.

## AN EXPERIENCE-BASED ECONOMY

An experience economy occurs when there is a shift in consumer preferences from physical products to memorable and immersive experiences. It's not a new concept, initially coined in a 1998 article by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore. The reference has resurfaced over the last few years, as there has been a significant increase in Americans' enthusiasm for authentic experiences.



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Journal photo by Toni Milbourne

One can secure a variety of cookie flavors when participating in a Cookie Exchange.

## A timely tradition: The annual Cookie Exchange

BY TONI MILBOURNE

tmilbourne@journal-news.net

As the holidays approach, the idea of homemade cookies makes mouths water, but the investment of time to bake the variety of the season's traditional cookies often eludes us as tasks mount up. Not to worry, the traditional cookie exchange offers the answer.

A gathering to celebrate the holidays can turn into a saving grace if it is focused around a cookie exchange where each guest brings approximately six or so dozen cookies of their choice along with an empty container. To fill their container, they simply select a half dozen or a dozen of their friends' cookies and everyone has a delightful cookie variety to enjoy during the holiday season.

The history of the cookie exchange goes back for decades. The cookie party has been hosted by relatives, friends, neighbors, women's groups, social clubs, churches and schools and has primarily been a "ladies only" event.

The Syracuse, New York newspaper from 1936 shares

this in the social column regarding the happenings of the Home Bureaus (equivalent to today's CEOS groups): "Erwin Unit meets at the home of Mrs. I.B. Stafford...for a cookie exchange meeting."

Perhaps the most famous cookie exchange was the Wellesley Cookie Exchange that made the practice of swapping the homemade cookies famous.

The Exchange in Wellesley, Mass., wasn't the first, but there can't be many that have gone on as long, spanning milestones and generations. History of the exchange shares that neighbors Mary Bevilacqua and Laurel Gabel began it in 1969, after Mary read a magazine article about some farm women who gathered before Christmas each year to celebrate the season and swap cookies. That November and for years afterwards, the friends mailed invitations to as many as 35 friends and family members, asking them to bring three or four dozen favorite or unique homemade cookies to share.

The mindset of a ladies only event has changed in the modern era and men and women alike join in cookie exchanges today.

Just what type of cookie one brings to the exchange

can vary according to taste; however, the "rules" usually stipulate that the cookie must be homemade. Traditionally there are certain types of cookies that are considered "Christmas cookies" but that does not at all remove any cookie from the table.

Christmas cookies, as labeled today, trace their roots to Medieval European recipes of baked cakes and other goods. Dutch and German settlers introduced cookie cutters, decorative molds and other festive holiday decorations to America.

Gingerbread was probably the first cake/cookie traditionally associated with Christmas and the taste treat making its way to the holiday table still occurs to this day. Sugar cookies, that descended from English traditions, are also a common favorite, often cut into holiday shapes and decorated for serving.

But the standard flavors of cookies are by no means the only types welcome at an exchange. Whatever your favorite, bake up a few batches to share and join a group of friends to alleviate the stress of holiday baking and enjoy some quality time over a cup of tea and a plate of delicious cookies.



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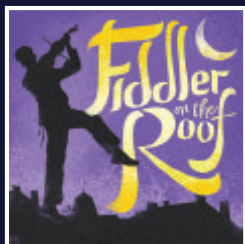
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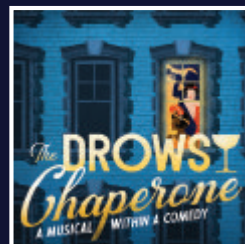
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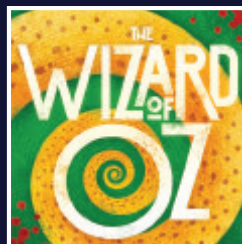
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# Is there a way to enjoy the holidays and not gain weight?

**BY JAYDEE VYKOUKAL**

Wealth of Geeks

Ninety-four percent of Americans admit to gaining weight each holiday season, with the majority (47.1%) gaining 4 to 9 pounds, according to Inner Body. With tempting treats, drinks, cold weather, and a hefty dose of stress, it's no surprise that maintaining a healthy weight during the holidays can be challenging.

What are people doing to keep their health and waistline in check during the holidays?

## AVOIDING WEIGHT GAIN DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Individuals employ various strategies to avoid weight gain as the holidays approach. According to a 2023 survey from wellness site Inner Body, the top options include:

Increasing exercise frequency and intensity (45.7%) Prioritize drinking more water (37.4%) Avoiding holiday parties (36.9%) Abstaining from calories from alcohol (36.5%) Dieting before the holidays (33.6%) Steering clear of sugar and full-fat options (31.2%) Eating smaller portions (29.5%) Regularly weighing oneself (22.4%) Skipping meals before a holiday feast or party (16.9%) With plenty of strategies in place, why are so many people still gaining weight and missing out on the joy of indulging in holiday treats?

## MISMATCH BETWEEN WEIGHT GOALS AND REALITY

Eighty percent of people want to stay fit, yet over 90% gain weight each season. Why is there such a mismatch?

People's desires to maintain weight and enjoy the holidays aren't meshing well. A 2017 review study by the Journal of Obesity looked at behavioral habits during the holidays. Variables that affect weight gain include the prevalence of calorie-dense foods, eating bigger portions, and less activity during the winter months.

The temptations can be significant with the frequency of get-togethers, festivities, and social time. Plus, add the stress of securing holiday gifts, planning meals, spending money, and food — it all adds up to a recipe for a health disaster.

## FINDING BALANCE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

People love to indulge in holiday treats, but data suggests it can lead to stress, avoidance, and restriction. Many people view the holidays as a time to abandon all healthy habits and indulge in the things they usually avoid. Yet, many people will regret their decisions and experience the stress of food guilt.

Finding balance during the holidays may be the key to avoiding weight gain. Instead of throwing all inhibition to the wind, maintaining healthy habits while enjoying treats in moderation might be the best answer.

## HOW TO FEEL IN CONTROL THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

It is possible to enjoy the holidays without gaining unnecessary weight. Fitness and nutrition experts weigh in on the subject.

## MAKE A PLAN

Meal planning on the days leading up to a holiday event can be a game changer. Ali Van Straten, a nutrition coach and

owner of Champagne and Coffee Stains, says, "The biggest tip I have is to meal plan and prep. So, if you know you'll have a huge carb-heavy dinner, try to load up earlier in the day on veggies and protein. Each weekend, I meal plan and look at the events coming up in the week. I can then plan my daily meals around the big meal to balance my eating. I also like to meal prep proteins (chicken, hard-boiled eggs), so I have a quick grab-and-go protein source available."

## FOCUS ON WHOLE FOODS

Chef Tiffany McCauley of The Gracious Pantry shares her practical advice for keeping her eating habits in check. "I maintain my weight during the holidays by making sure that the foods I make are whole-foods based. I keep sugar to a minimum and sweeten desserts with natural sweeteners like maple syrup or stevia. I also make sure not to let myself get too hungry so that I don't get the urge to overeat for the main meals."

## DITCH THE GUILT

Shifting our mindset around holiday eating can also be powerful. Adding stress to holiday eating habits only fuels the weight gain fire due to its impact on hormonal balance.

Karen Kelly, a health coach at Seasonal Cravings, says, "Try to treat yourself with compassion over the holidays. Eat the holiday foods you enjoy, but try to stick to smaller portions, and don't beat yourself up. If you know you will be attending a party at night, have a smaller lunch that day. Know that spending time with family and friends around food is essential to the season, and when you look back, you will remember the experiences with family and not what you ate."



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# Shoppers spending less during the holidays

BY CHHAVI AGARWAL

Wealth of Geeks

According to the latest report on holiday shopping, 56% of Americans won't be able to buy as many gifts as they'd like this year due to inflation. Considering that 96% of Americans buy gifts for their families and spend an average of \$1,000 each Christmas, it can dampen the holiday spirit.

According to Nerd Wallet, 27% of shoppers said they'll probably go into more debt than usual to purchase holiday gifts this year, and 74% said they'll use credit cards to shop. Many Americans say they'll consider dipping into savings or using cash advance apps, personal loans, or payday loans this holiday season.

This year, Americans are leery about inflation and on-going debts. To combat this, shoppers are taking a few steps to ensure they limit debt. While 58% plan to shop on Black Friday, 34% say they have a strict budget. Others plan to either buy fewer gifts or spend less money on those gifts.

## GET CREATIVE WITH GIFTS

People love personalized gifts that go beyond standard purchases. This Christmas, get creative with gifts by exploring thrift stores, second-hand markets, and more. There may be great deals to gift directly, but older items can be refurbished into beautiful gifts.

"I buy 5x7 photo frames when I find them on sale, then I design a graphic that is personal to the recipient, or a collage of graphics of things that are personal reminders of our relationship," says Beth Mueller from Pear Tree Kitchen. "It can be as simple as a saying that is an inside joke between friends. I print them on my home printer and put them into the frames. Of all the gifts I have given throughout the years, these have been the most treasured."

Besides this, people can also make gifts to limit spending and be budget-friendly. Options include baked goods, candles, paintings, sketches, handmade mittens, scarves, gloves, dream catchers, etc.

Anna of Salt In My Coffee agrees. "As a single mom who loves gift-giving at Christmas, I turn to soap making and sewing to shower friends with love without breaking my budget. Everybody loves handmade soap, which feels luxurious, even if it is frugal. And I still get grateful comments about the cherry stone heating packs I gave the teachers at my children's school last year."

People can also turn their creativity into short-term side hustles and help others with creative, budget-friendly gifts. Not only does this bring in a little more money for Christmas, it also helps others stay within their budgets as they give lovely presents.

## GIVE EXPERIENCES OVER THINGS

About 36% of those surveyed said they'd rather have experiences with their loved ones than exchange gifts during the holiday season.

So, instead of buying expensive gifts, give loved ones a meaningful experience. Look into traveling together, eating at their favorite spot, taking a walking tour, baking their favorite dish, watching a movie, or going to a spa. It could also be as simple as spending a day with you.

"For a more budget-friendly Christmas, I have always gifted homemade treats," says Tiffany McCauley with The Gracious Pantry. "Food gifts are always appreciated and can be made affordably for a while. As a massage therapist, I would also gift massages. You have to look at what you can do and go with that. People always appreciate it because the gifts are so personal."

JayDee Vykoukal, founder of Mom Blog Life, agrees. "I have a family with four brothers, and we have al-

ways kept the holidays budget-friendly. When we were younger, there was never even an expectation that we had to get each other anything. As we've gotten married and have kids, I ask them to focus on experience-based gifts for my kids that require time spent together (what my kids want). This means a day at the park, movie, or zoo together — a much more meaningful gift that is budget-friendly."

## USE APPS TO TRACK GIFT PRICES

Price tracking apps can be a great way to save money on holiday shopping, but using them wisely is essential. A few to check out are Camel Camel Camel, Honey and Keepa.

Once you find a few good deals, order multiple items or more than one of the same thing to give to different people. This saves delivery costs and helps you stay under budget.

"Sometimes, when I find a gift item on a deal, I order a few to give different people," says Anika Jain of What Anika Says. "For example, last year, I saw a deal on coffee mugs, and I ordered five of them for all my friends. Usually, I would get different gifts for all, but this not only helped me get budget-friendly gifts but also saved a ton of my time."

## REGIFTING

The last option is to reuse gifts that you already received. Regifting Christmas presents can be a smart way to save money and reduce waste, but it's essential to do it tactfully.

Remember to give items that are new and useful.

With some planning and effort, you can still give meaningful gifts to your loved ones without breaking the bank.

*This article was produced and syndicated by Wealth of Geeks.*



# What's on the list? Games and toys for 2023

**BY AMY POLLOCK**  
Wealth of Geeks

The Sears & Roebuck Wish Book may have gone the way of the dodo bird, but children still make Christmas lists with games and toys at the top. According to a Research and Markets study, the worldwide games and toys market is worth \$342 billion.

The study reports the games and toys market is driven by an emerging middle class in populated areas and the continued growth of legacy brands, among other factors.

## TOP OF THE WISH LISTS

If kids still want toys, what items are most popular? Statista reports the U.S. toy market is seeing a resurgence in traditional toys, like dolls, board games, puzzles, and construction sets.

The Barbie movie topped \$1 billion at the box office, so it follows that Mattel's flagship toy is popular this year. Emma Slessman and Bella Druckman with The TODAY Show interviewed Laurie Schacht, Chief Toy Officer at The Toy Insider. She shared that Barbie: The Movie Collectible Doll, Barbie: The Movie Ken Doll, the

Barbie Dreamhouse 2023, Barbie Fashionistas Doll, and the remote-control Hot Wheels Barbie Corvette are some of the most popular toys of 2023.

Arts and crafts toys are making a comeback, too, according to Schacht. The Make it Real Mini Pottery Studio and Cra-Z-Art The Real Cotton Candy Maker are also a hit with youngsters this year.

Other retailers have released their most popular toys for 2023. Kohl's department store list includes the L.O.L. Surprise Magic Flyers and the Melissa & Doug Stack, Sort & Pound Wooden Toy Collection. The list at Macy's includes a revamped Tamagotchi Uni. Sesame Street's Elmo is still popular and appears as the Elmo Slide Plush.

Amazon reports the Clue Conspiracy Board Game is a popular choice, while Walmart offers the Nerf Elite Junior Flyer.

STEM/STEAM toys are popular, too, including the Educational Insights Geo-Safari Jr. Kidnoculars and the Melissa & Doug Super Smile Dentist Kit.

## TOYS PARENTS LIKE

No matter what toys the kiddos want, mom and dad have the final say on what goes under the tree or in a birthday gift.

Monica Fish, founder of Planner At Heart, says, "Despite my kids' 5-year age difference, they both have LEGOs on their holiday wish list. It is a toy that encourages creative, imaginative play, problem solving, and introduces engineering concepts. But they just think it's an exciting gift from their favorite Disney or video game franchises. Even though LEGOs tend to be a high-priced item, it's one that always makes it under the tree."

For youngsters whose preferences are a little harder to nail down, parents have to watch what the kids are playing with for a better idea of what to buy.

Sarah Gilliland is a travel editor and mom of three kids who owns the On The Road With Sarah travel blog. She's on board with being an observant parent where holiday gifts are concerned.

"The 4-year-old always wants everything he sees: in stores, on TV, you name it," she says. "We usually can't ask him what he wants because it's always a huge list, but we know what he plays with the most. He loves building things, and he recently received a marble run set for his birthday, so we will probably get him more

attachments for that. He also loves LEGO blocks and magnetic tiles for building."

"Pretend play has also ramped up for him," she continues, "and he enjoys being a chef or a doctor, so we will mostly likely add to his accessories for those costumes. Dinosaurs and MatchBox cars are also always welcome. We love the brands Melissa & Doug, VTech, and LEGO."

Sometimes, gifts for youngsters are an easy pick. Gilliland explains, "My tweens want gift cards, money, or accessories for their phones."

Parents also have opinions on gifts they're not sure about.

JayDee Vykoukal, owner of Mom Blog Life, expressed her concerns. "My 5-year-old has two consistent requests this year so far. A tablet, because her other friends have one, and a Llama squishmallow. The squishmallow is an easy win," she explains, "but I'm hesitant to get my child an electronic [device] at such a young age. I've been looking into kid-friendly tablets with educational apps, parental control, and time limits. We'll see as it gets closer to Christmas."

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