

Holidays 2017

# WELCOME TO THE Season

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*page 3 for details*

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**Traditions**

# Put an elf on your shelf

**E**lf on the Shelf has transformed into a 21st Century Christmas tradition with “The Elf on the Shelf: A Christmas Tradition” — a children’s picture book written by Carol Aebersold and Chanda Bell, and illustrated by Coe Steinwart. While forms of this tradition have existed around the world for centuries, this Christmas-themed story of an elf who keeps Santa informed about who is naughty and who is nice exponentially increased the popularity of the tradition.

**INTRODUCING ELF**

While Elf starts off a wonderful Christmas season with a bang, be sure not to introduce him too soon. You don’t want him to run out of ideas or let time steal the novelty out of the activity for your children.

It is customary for Elf to appear no earlier than December 1. Many people also see their Elf for the first time the night the family decorates the Christmas tree.

**STICK TO SIMPLE SHENANIGANS**

Elf should be able to get into her position easily, and she shouldn’t raise the expectation too much, too soon.

If she gets up to very complicated hijinks early in the season, she might

run out of mischievous and creative ideas before Christmas. Pinterest is a great tool for finding out what kind of shenanigans other families’ Elves have gotten into.

**AN ELF IS AN ELF IS AN ELF**

While the commercialism of Elf is deep-seated, you don’t have to have the advertised Elf. Anything can be an Elf. Any small figurine or stuffed animal will do, with a dose of Christmas magic, of course.

**SET A REMINDER**

This is especially important if you’ve set the expectation that Elf is up to something different each night.

Don’t let Elf forget to adventure around the house, so you won’t have disappointed or confused little faces in the morning.

**MAKE IT YOUR OWN**

Remember, there is no official rule book. Maybe your elf appears in a different spot each morning, or maybe he only appears when the kids have been good. Maybe he brings treats or small notes with him. There is no right or wrong way to start an Elf tradition. He is just there to add another dash of magic to the season.

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Statistics

# Holidays by the numbers

Our love of the holiday season can be measured in numbers — how we spend our money and how much we spend decorating our living spaces. Here are 10 interesting details about how we celebrate the season.

- Christmas is the most observed federal holiday, with **94 percent of Americans celebrating**.
- The United States imported approximately **\$1 billion worth of Christmas ornaments** from China in 2014, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **The average person spent \$805** during December in 2015, according to the National Retail Federation.
- According to the National Retail Federation, almost **50 percent of holiday shopping will happen online**.
- Consumers try to keep their costs low by taking advantage of free shipping. According to the National Retail Federation, **93 percent of online shoppers take advantage of free shipping** on online orders, while 47 percent of consumers stated that the offer of free shipping directly dictated where they would spend their dollars.
- Saving on shipping is a must when gift shopping. According to the National Retail Federation, **spending on gifts surpasses food spending six times over**.
- While people travel more for Thanksgiving, they are willing to travel further for Christmas. **The average person travels 275 miles** for Christmas.
- According to the National Christmas Tree Association, approximately **26 million live Christmas trees** were purchased in 2015. Of these, 76 percent were pre-cut, while 24 percent were retrieved from people who prefer to cut their own.
- We all know retailers increase their staffs during the holiday season, but none more so than toy and game stores. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, toy and game **retailers increase their staffs by 38 percent** during the holidays. This is more than double the increase of other retailers.
- **Seventy-seven percent of consumers also treated themselves** in 2015 while completing their holiday gift shopping.

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2017 HOLIDAY

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## Welcome to the Season

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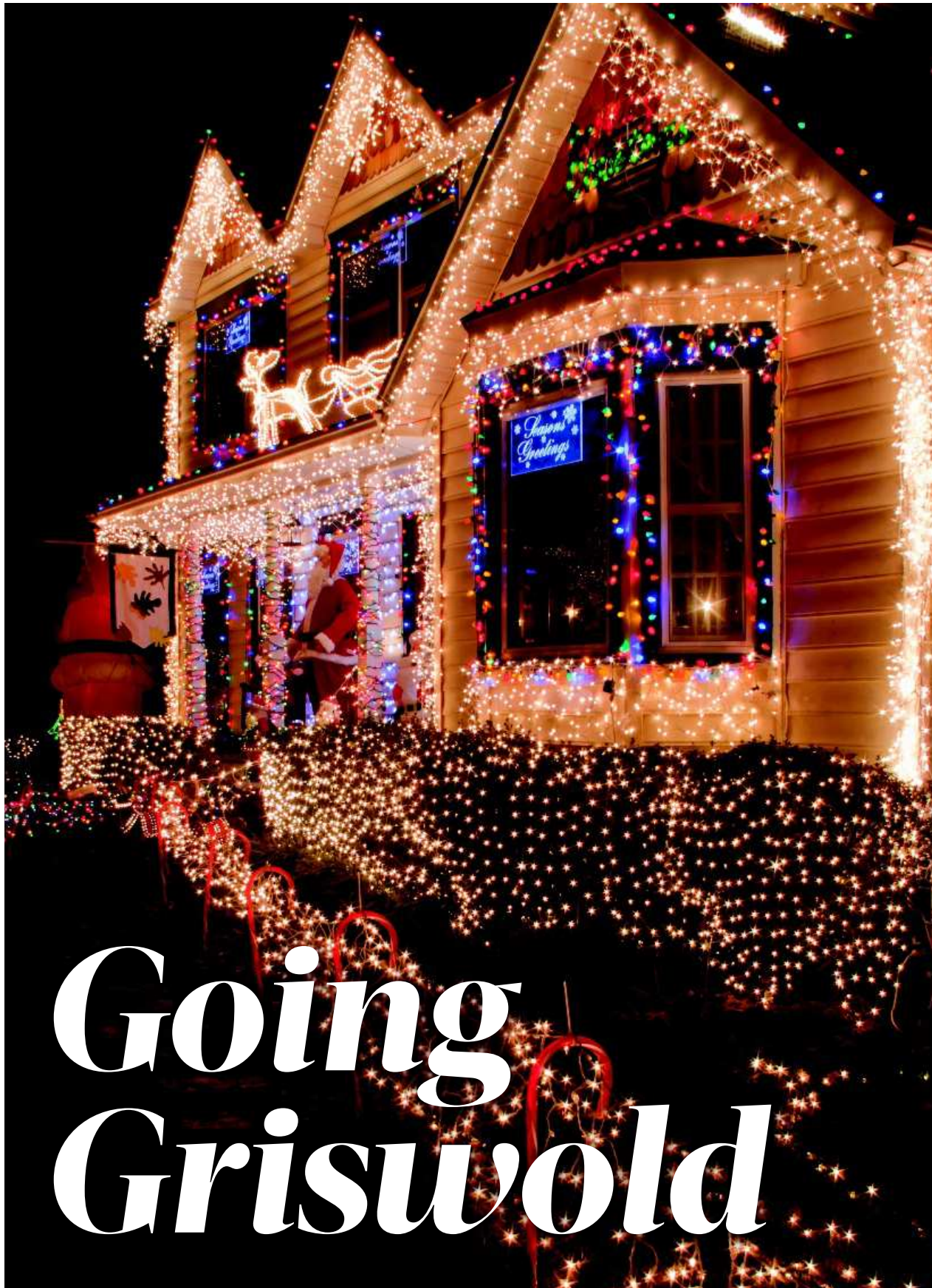
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# Going Griswold

## Decorating

# Light up the neighborhood this season

Decorating for the holidays is a long held and respected tradition. No matter where you live, you can find a neighborhood that is transformed by lights and full of holiday spirit. These neighborhoods often become infamous to locals and become tourist attractions in their own right. For some towns, the pressure is really on.

When Christmas is in your name, you have to do it up right. Here's the rundown on three towns that pull out all the stops. (You also can visit [www.christmaslightfinder.com](http://www.christmaslightfinder.com) to find displays in your area.)

### NORTH POLE, ALASKA

Living in "the North Pole," how can you not feel the responsibility to show off your Christmas cheer? The town hosts what its citizens call "Christmas in Ice."

This is a six-week winter ice park, featuring ice art competitions, ice slides, a maze and ice sculpture demonstrations.

It also has a highly touted kids' park. The festival hosts many other activities, including cookie decorating. The festival concludes with Santa playing in the ice park on Christmas Eve before leaving to make his annual deliveries.

### CHRISTMAS COVE, MAINE

Christmas Cove is an actual cove, which means it is pretty empty at Christmas. (Winter in Maine is not a time to be on a boat.)

However, just North is Wilton, and Wilton Lights has been a Maine holiday tradition for many years.

The Christmas display at a private residence is set to timers and animated by music, which can be heard by tuning in to a local radio station when you are nearby. Think twice before you travel this year, however. The family that displays the lights at its home is moving across town and has decided to postpone the light show this year.

### SANTA CLAUS, INDIANA

If you are ever in Santa Claus, check out its Land of Light — the largest campground holiday light show in North America. The light show tells a story in lights and storyboards, with more than 300 light display pieces stretching more than a mile.

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## Cooking

# Three alternative ways to prepare turkey

Gobbling down a delicious turkey baked in the oven is a holiday tradition around many tables, but you can break the mold with these three flavorful alternatives.

**FRYING**

A Southern tradition that's taking hold, deep frying produces a juicy bird with a crisp outer skin. Frying something as big as a holiday turkey requires a specialized set-up, however,

and needs to be done outside. Peanut oil is the usual frying medium here, as its high smoke point and mild flavor lend itself well to this application. There is a measure of danger involved; a turkey that's even the least bit frozen could produce a dangerous fire. Make sure your bird is completely thawed and patted dry before you fry. Many stores also sell infrared fryers that can accommodate a turkey and cook it without oil. Visit the small appliances section around holiday time.

**SMOKING**

Low and slow gets you a bird with an intense smoky flavor. It's also slightly more involved than popping a turkey into the oven, but it does free up that oven for other uses, such as pies, sides and breads. You can use a grill with an offset smoker or fashion your regular grill into a smoker using a disposable metal pan. The type of wood chips you use will depend on what flavor you get. Finer grocery stores usu-



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ally carry at least a few varieties near the charcoal; outdoor stores may offer more of a selection.

**GRILLING**

If you don't have or don't want to make a smoker, there's always the option of putting the bird on the grill. To be precise, in a roasting pan covered with foil on the grill. Keep an eye on the coals for even heat distribution.

Keep the turkey from getting too dry by using beer or wine as a basting liquid, and don't forget herbs to compliment. Try to keep the lid of the grill closed as much as possible, using a thermometer with a probe to keep an eye on the temperature. As you close in on that magic 170-degree temp, remove the foil and allow the turkey to brown.

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**Canning**

# Give some jars of love this year

Canning might seem to be outdated and hard work, but home-made jams and jellies are easy to make without extra equipment. If you're a beginner, jams are right up your alley. Jams contain bits of the fruit while jellies are made from the strained juice of the fruit (read: more work). Strawberries are a great place to start, as those bright red jars make great holiday gifts.

**HARDWARE**

You'll need a supply of canning jars. Thanks to a resurgence in the craft, most grocery stores now carry a selection of jars and lids, as well as other tools such as jar lifters, funnels and a magnet for fishing out lids. Look for a kit of basic canning tools to get you started.

If you use small, wide-mouth jars, you won't need a special canner; a large Dutch oven or stock pot will



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work fine. Fruit jams and jellies don't need to be canned under pressure.

**SOFTWARE**

While you're in the canning section, look for a liquid or powder pectin. You'll also need sugar, lemon

juice and a fruit.

Strawberries, which have plenty of natural pectin, are a great fruit for the beginning jam maker. You can use frozen berries as they will be cooked.

**SCIENCE**

The first step to safe and delicious canning is to sterilize your jars, lids and gear. Put a large stockpot of water on to boil, then drop all your hardware inside. Allow to come to a simmer — not a full boil, which can damage delicate jars — for about 10 minutes. Sterilize your jar and lid lifters and funnel first, then your jars and lids. Put the jars right-side up and make sure the water covers them by about 1 inch.

Place them on towels to cool and try not to handle them until you fill your jars with jam.

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## Strawberry Jam

**INGREDIENTS**

- 5 cups or 3 pounds crushed strawberries
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 6 tablespoons powdered or liquid pectin
- 7 cups of sugar
- 8 8-oz canning jars with lids (If you don't have a very tall pot, use short, wide-mouth ones.)

**DIRECTIONS**

Combine strawberries and lemon juice in a large pot. Stir in pectin. Bring mixture to a full, rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Add sugar and stir until dissolved. Bring back to a full boil for one minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and skim off the foam. Ladle the hot jam into jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace inside the jar. Wipe the rim, then place a lid and ring on the jar. Don't screw the ring on too tightly. Place the jars back into the boiling water, making sure there's at least 1 inch of water above the top of the jar. You'll notice bubbles coming out of the jars; that's fine, as it's the water forcing air out of the jar for a good seal. Process the jars for 10 minutes. Remove the hot jars to a towel. You might hear popping as the jars cool and seal. After 24 hours, check for a good seal by lightly pressing on the center of each lid. If you can pop it in and out, reprocess the jar. If a jar won't seal, refrigerate and use immediately. Dress up your cooled jars with a sticker or a bit of festive cloth and a bow. Be sure to label your jam with the month and year it was made.

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**Decorating**

# The perfect Christmas tree

The “perfect tree” means different things to different people, and the merits of a fir versus a pine, tall and slim versus short and wide, are argued at length each year.

But one aspect of Christmas trees on which people tend to hold a strong stance is material: Are you a “real” Christmas tree believer? Or do you prefer an artificial tree?

To help you decide (or sway you in a different direction), consider the following pros and cons of both Christmas tree types.

## Artificial Trees

### BENEFITS

- **CONVENIENCE:** Each year, this tree is simply taken out of storage and assembled. Its shape is always “perfect,” it won’t molt its needles, and it never needs to be watered.
- **COST:** While the initial investment might be pricey depending on the size and style you choose (pre-lit, dusted with fake snow, or ornamented with pine cones, for example), it is a cost that is only incurred once, rather than every year.

### DRAWBACKS

- **NON-BIODEGRADABLE:** This means when you throw it out, it will be in the landfill forever.
- **SIZABLE CARBON FOOTPRINT:** More than 85 percent of artificial trees are made in China and shipped to the United States.
- **FIRE HAZARD:** They not only burn easily but act as an accelerant — causing much more damage than if a live tree were to burn in your home.

## Live Trees

### BENEFITS

- **MADE IN THE U.S.A.:** According to the USDA, almost all of the 25 to 30 million real Christmas trees sold in the U.S. every year are grown in the U.S.
- **ECO-FRIENDLY:** Live trees are recyclable.
- **SMELL GREAT:** A natural deodorizer, there is really nothing like the scent of fresh pine or balsam fir.

### DRAWBACKS

- **COST:** YOUR cost will depend on the size of tree you choose as well as where you live, but most trees run anywhere from \$20 to \$200 — a reoccurring cost as one tree will only last the current holiday season.
- **HIGH MAINTENANCE:** Needles will begin to litter the floor almost immediately, and live trees must be watered heavily every day.

— GREEN SHOOT MEDIA





## Decorating

# Uses for all those extra ornaments

**W**aste not, want not — particularly during the holidays. After decorating the large focal areas of your home, such as the tree, it is not uncommon to have decor items left over each year.

This is especially true for ornaments. But before you toss the unused ornaments back into their storage containers, consider other ways you can use them in your decor, other than on the tree.

### CREATE A STRIKING CENTERPIECE

Putting various-sized bulbs in a bowl or glass vase is a quick and festive table centerpiece that is sure to catch guests' attention.

For smaller ornaments, consider putting decorative branches in a pretty vase and hanging mini ornaments from its arms.

### DECORATE A WREATH

Attach unused bulbs to a wreath for a pop of color. If you have many ornaments that have been retired from their place on your tree, consider making a wreath entirely out of ornaments.

You just need a green foam wreath base (found at any local craft store for minimal cost) and a little glue.

### GIVE LIGHT FIXTURES A FACE LIFT

String ornaments of complimentary colors from your dining room chandelier with dark green satin ribbon. Using the fixture over your table, you are free to hang them from varying heights since you won't have to worry about people hitting their heads on them.

### STRING THEM TOGETHER FOR GARLAND

This is a great project if you are overflowing with leftover ornaments. While glass ball ornaments work best for this project, most ornaments will work as long as they are not heavy.

Just loop a piece of wired ribbon through the tops of ornaments and pull them tightly together. You will be left with a length of full, colorful garland to drape over a window or mantle.

### INCORPORATE THEM INTO GIFT-WRAPPING

If you have a lot of mini ornaments, consider using them as gift charms. Attach them to ribbon and wrap around the gift just before it is tied into a bow. This adds a special and finishing touch to your gift-wrapping.

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## Crafts

# Make some keepsake traditions

All Christmas traditions are magical, but keepsake traditions are just a bit more special.

They act as a type of scrapbook or album of moments for us to remember and share with others.

Create memories for the years to come by starting one of these traditions this holiday season.

## CREATE KEEPSAKE ORNAMENTS

Make ornaments as a family every year. You can go to most local craft stores and purchase clear glass bulbs that you can either fill (with glitter for snow) or paint the outside of.

If you're feeling extra crafty, try your hand at salt dough ornaments.

## GIFT AN ORNAMENT

Each Christmas, gift an ornament to each of your children.

Think about the year, and consider what each child has accomplished, overcome or experienced and gift an ornament that conveys a particular memory, or even the general feeling that year evoked.

By the time they are grown, each child will have a full set of ornaments to take with them to start their own family tree.

## WRITE CHRISTMAS LETTERS

Each year, have a member of the family, or several family members, record a bit of family history.

This can be anything from highlights to challenges the family experienced throughout the year.

Place them in a special Christmas box.

Make it extra special by having the kids decorate the box. Over the years, you can pull out the letters and share them.



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## BUILD TREE SKIRT MEMORIES

Purchase a plain tree skirt. Any color will do, as long as it is

a solid color.

Then, every year, trace your child's hand on the skirt and write their name inside the outline.

You can begin a new ring for each child or trace their hands side by side. It will be fun later to look back at the skirt and the growing little hands.

## PRESENT CHRISTMAS PAJAMAS

A wonderful Christmas tradition is gifting Christmas pajamas. These can be wrapped and put under the tree to be opened on Christmas Eve. This way, everyone can wake up Christmas morning wearing their holiday jammies.

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In  
the Air,  
There's a Feeling of  
*Christmas.*

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**Traditions**

# 12 days of fun Christmas activities for kids

**DAY 1:** Help your children write letters to Santa and drop their wish lists in the mail.

**DAY 2:** Build a gingerbread house and have your children decorate it with candies.

**DAY 3:** Go on a Christmas lights tour and vote for your favorite displays.

**DAY 4:** Make your own holiday cards and write a note in each.

**DAY 5:** Make a holiday-themed craft — like a home-

made ornament you can add to your tree each year.

**DAY 6:** Go ice skating or sledding, then cozy up with a steaming cup of hot cocoa.

**DAY 7:** Donate canned goods to a charity or collect old toys and drop off at a toy drive.

**DAY 8:** Watch a Christmas movie. "The Polar Express" and "Elf" are just two holiday classics.

**DAY 9:** Make festive wreaths. Attach some evergreen branches and pine cones to a foam or wire ring, and have your children add decorations.

**DAY 10:** Rehearse a Christmas play to perform on Christmas Day. Opt for a classic like A Christmas Carol, or put on an original production.

**DAY 11:** Organize a Christmas carol karaoke night featuring holiday hits like Jingle Bells, Silent Night and Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, among other classics.

**DAY 12:** Have a holiday-themed pajama slumber party the night before Christmas.

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**Decorating**

# A little window dressing

Dressing up the windows for the holidays can be the perfect finishing touch to any room.

Window decor also is an avenue through which you can keep your decorating fresh every year, and it can be a great outlet to exercise creativity.

Consider decorating the rest of your home and then sprucing up the windows with remnant decorations that did not get used elsewhere. (We all have leftovers.) Here are just a few ideas to get the creative juices flowing.

**ADVENT**

Hang your Advent calendar along a line of windows. Don't have one? This is the perfect time to make one. String clotheslines across your windows and attach your advent items to it with clothespins.

This can be anything from mini stockings to colored dish-towels with numbers ironed onto them.

You can even print the num-

bers of the month onto Kraft paper lunch bags, and put a sweet treat in each one for children or grandchildren to enjoy when they check it each day.

**SNOWFLAKES**

Create your own winter wonderland by attaching homemade snowflakes to your windows. Cut them from delicate, thin parchment for a subtle effect.

You don't have to be an artist for parchment snowflakes to look fabulous, as their thin yet sturdy material is great at hiding imperfections.

**WREATHS**

You can't go wrong with this classic choice. Hanging wreaths in a row over multiple windows can have a striking effect that is enjoyed from both inside and outside the home.

**GARLAND**

Drape greenery over your curtain rods to add a pop of color and fresh scent. If you prefer more color, consider wrapping

curtain rods with thick, lush ribbons and letting the ends curl down to the floor, trimming your curtains. Also don't overlook beaded garland.

**ORNAMENTS**

Ornaments are not just for the tree. Hang glass ornaments at varying heights from a curtain rod using coloring ribbons.

This will allow light to hit them and splash color throughout the room. However, remember if you are attaching them to the curtain rod, it will be difficult to close the drapes.

This option is best on a rear-facing window, or consider attaching a secondary tension rod behind your current one.

**PINE CONES**

Simplistic and stunning, hanging pine cones bring a bit of nature inside to enjoy. The effect is more rustic and down-to-earth and will complement pine or fir swags, wreaths or garland.

— GREEN SHOOT MEDIA



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### The neighborhood

# Decorate your community with spirit of the season

When it comes to starting a new Christmas tradition this year, think about beautifying the area around you with festive decorations. Could your downtown use a bit more red and green? Are there senior citizen centers in the area in need of some Christmas spirit?

There are many ways you can get involved and have a hand in decorating your community. The more people you involve, the bigger impact you can have on spreading holiday

joy through the use of beautiful decorations.

#### START A GROUP

Are you an active member of your church or community nonprofit? Do you run a business or are you a youth sports coach? If so, you likely have the manpower to start a decorations committee focused on transforming various buildings throughout your area.

Recruit your organizational members, employers or players to donate their time to the cause.

You'll likely find that with a little direction and incentive, you can convince a large majority of people to help.

If you aren't part of any local organizations or faith leaders to see if your help is needed. Pitch the idea of decorating specific buildings or areas around town and see what they think. Your ideas could be the springboard to the most community-centered Christmas celebration your area has ever seen.

#### BE EFFICIENT, CREATIVE

When the time comes to start decorating, have a plan in place to make sure things go smoothly. Coordinate with your other volunteers, giving them specific duties and goals. You should also be in close contact with the organization you're decorating for to find out if there are certain designs, colors or themes they would like to see.

Creativity is the key to pulling off great decorations. Does your downtown area have light posts along a town square or circle? Talk with your committee or city officials about hanging colorful wreaths on the posts to set the Christmas mood.

Ask about setting up a nativity scene in a prominent place on the square to remind people about the true reason for the season.

There are many creative ways to showcase Christmas decorations. You just have to have a strong eye for design and the initiative to make your ideas happen.

— GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

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## Crafts

# How to build a Christmas village using glass jars



**D**o you love the many different Christmas decorations that light up the holiday season? Are you an avid DIYer? If you have a few glass jars handy, you can create a magical Christmas village in just five easy steps.

## 5. LIGHT UP YOUR VILLAGE

Once you've displayed your Christmas village, decorate the area with strings of lights or tiny lanterns, and watch your village come to life.

## 1. BRAINSTORM

Determine what kind of village you wish to create (the North Pole, an enchanted forest, a rural town, etc.). Next, think about which elements you'll include in your Christmas village (small houses, snowy trees, little skating figurines, reindeer, elves, penguins, etc.). Visit a Christmas boutique and crafts store in your area to get inspired!

## 2. LOCATE SOME JARS

Next, you'll need to collect a few jars of different sizes. Keep in mind that you'll need one for every wintry scene imagined in the previous step.

## 3. LET IT SNOW

Pour some artificial snow or table salt in each jar to create a carpet of snow for your winter wonderland.

## 4. PIECE TOGETHER EACH SCENE

Place the different elements of your Christmas village in each jar. For a truly magical effect, decorate the jars with bells, holly, pine branches, ribbon, glitter and candy canes, among other embellishments.

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