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# Get Holiday and Gift Ready

## *A checklist to prepare for the season*

### *(Family Features)*

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

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

### ❁ **Clean, Declutter and Restock Ahead of Guests' Arrival**

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

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

### ❁ **Get Gift Ready to Avoid the Rush**

Planning your list in advance can help you avoid the last-minute rush to find thoughtful, elevated gifts for friends and family members. Perfectly gift-ready, Air Wick Essential Mist is an easy, thoughtful holiday

surprise for anyone on your list. Featuring a range of fragrances and portable design, it effortlessly transforms any space into one that feels more elevated, inviting and holiday-ready. With its long-lasting scents and effortless setup, it's an affordable present that delivers a multi-sensory experience.

### ❁ **Stress Less with Smart Boundaries**

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

### ❁ **Wrap Presents as You Go to Stay Ahead**

Wrapping presents as you purchase them can help avoid the stress of last-minute giftwrapping, not only saving time but also allowing you to be more creative with your wrapping style. Keep supplies such as paper, ribbons and tags on hand in an easily accessible location so your gifts are gift ready the moment you bring them home.

### ❁ **Set the Mood with Music and Lighting**

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

Find more information about gift-ready fragrances at [airwick.us](http://airwick.us).

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# Kid-friendly holiday traditions

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

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

- **Advent calendars:** Roughly 50 million Advent calendars are sold across the globe each year, according to Marketplace.org. Advent is a nearly monthlong period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus



Christ on December 25. Each day during Advent, children open a flap, window or door and find a small gift, poem, candy, or another item that adds to the excitement of the season.

- **Matching pajamas:** Parents can decide how frequently their families dress up in matching pajamas at bedtime during the holiday season, but doing so on Christmas Eve is a popular way

to make a fun day even more special. Another idea is to host weekly holiday movie nights during the season, which presents a perfect opportunity to don matching PJs.

- **Holiday lights tour:** Holiday lighting displays have come a long way in recent decades. Whereas it might once have been popular to string a few strands of lights around the exterior of a

house, many holiday celebrants now beckon their inner Clark Griswold and turn their properties into areas with enough illumination to land a small plane. Holiday inflatables for the yard add to the awe of such displays. Kids tend to be especially fond of these types of displays, so parents can make a point to pick a night each holiday season to go on a tour of their neighborhoods and towns to see this year's offerings.

- **Christmas dance party:** Sweets are another staple of the holiday season, and what better way for kids to burn off some of that extra sugar than to dance it away to a holiday music playlist curated by Mom and Dad? Holiday traditions help to make the season a special time of year. Families can embrace various kid-friendly traditions to ensure children have even more fun this December.

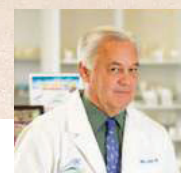
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# Tips for Parents to Minimize Stress and Maximize Joy During the Holidays

## *(Family Features)*

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

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

## *Clarify Priorities*

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

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

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

## *Establish a Budget*

Holiday spending can weigh heavily on your mind. Create a family holiday budget that includes gifts and activities, then stick to it. Use the opportunity to teach your children about responsible spending and gratitude.

Remember, the most meaningful gifts are often those made with time, attention or creativity, not the highest price tag.

## *Set Boundaries*

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

## *Prioritize Your Physical and Emotional Health*

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

- \* Sleep: Aim for 7-8 hours per night whenever possible.
- \* Nutrition: Keep healthy staples in the mix, even if treats abound.
- \* Movement: A short walk, stretch breaks or gentle exercise may help reset your nervous system. Stepping outside can be especially helpful.

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

## *Design a Stress Rescue Plan*

Even the best-laid plans don't prevent tension or unexpected emotional triggers. Anticipate stress by creating fallback strategies. For example, plan to



use a playlist, a quick breathing exercise or a sensory object to help you regroup when your stress escalates. These strategies work for children as well.

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

## *Unplug and Be Present*

Screens are omnipresent. While they serve a purpose, they can be an unwelcome distraction, especially when you're spending time with loved ones you don't get to see often. Try to designate screen-free times, such as during meals, after dinner or when gifts are being exchanged. Use screens intentionally, such as video calling out-of-town family members, rather than passively scrolling. Focus on in-person

connection by playing games, telling stories, making crafts or taking walks. Remember to lead by example, as your children are watching. Being fully present at key moments is the one gift your family will remember above all else.

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

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

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# OMO's a Winner... There's a Reason For That!

By RONA MANN

Special to The Westerly Sun

For the last four years, a wondrous place to discover and shop, while keeping one foot in Avondale and the other in Watch Hill, has earned the coveted award of "Best of Rhode Island" from Rhode Island Monthly Magazine.

No small feat, that, for there's plenty of competition for these awards statewide, county-wide, town-wide. During the month of April each year, readers of Rhode Island Monthly vote with only one vote counted in any category from the same email address. That means there is no ballot stuffing, so this competition is 100% legit.

And in 2022, 2023, 2024, and again this year, making it a quartet of wins, OMO Clothing, Jewelry, & Gifts has consistently left the competition in the dust and won the category of Best Women's Boutique. There's a reason for that—actually, many reasons—just ask their loyal customers.

Owner, Joanna Papineau, describes their selection of clothing as "elevated casual," but lest you think that's just a made-up phrase, think again. "Elevated casual" bespeaks OMO's branding and style, and there's a reason for that, too. The reason is simply their clothing, which, while trendy and stylish to the eye, is also comfortable for the wearer, and comfort is what most women are looking for today, whether they're at the office, traveling, on a date night, or just hanging out. If you like your elevated casual to come with a familiar name, then how about something with the label Frank and Eileen—pieces that are forever timeless, crafted sustainably, and most made in the USA. Or, for the unmistakable sensation that only cashmere can produce against your skin, OMO has a stunning line of Kinross Cashmere sweaters straight from the UK. Then there's Mother, Mother Denim, that is. Anyone can buy a pair of jeans virtually anywhere today, but few have the comfort, the stretch, and the long-lasting

wearability of Mother Denim, made in the USA and just waiting for you to slip into all-day style and comfort from OMO.

All the clothing you'll find at OMO can be beautifully complemented by the jewelry you'll also find right at OMO, which will get you personal compliments. Why? Ah, there's a reason for that as well. Necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and pendants in gold and silver set off by gorgeous gemstones like aqua chalcedony or lapis.

But OMO is not just for what you put on your body; it's also the place to find gifts you give with your heart. Gifts for the home when you're entertaining or when you've been invited and want something wonderful to bring the hostess: candles, ceramic platters and mugs, colorful handblown glass, and right now, OMO has a veritable Christmas shop within the store featuring décor, ornaments, and gifts, gifts, gifts for everyone you love with prices that have been curated to fit every budget...and you'll love that too! And yes, there's a reason for that. Joanna wants people to come to OMO and see all the amazing, dazzling items you can find that will blow your mind—without blowing your budget.

Have you heard all the buzz about Jelycats, those soft, cuddly, huggable stuffed animals straight from London? You might want to gift a little one, and while you're at it, adopt one for yourself. And the reason for that is? You got it—they are so collectible that customers of all ages are coming to OMO to start or add to their growing collection of Jelycat bears, elephants, rabbits, big teddys, little teddys, lambs, kitty cats, and other amuseables.

And wait till you see the cards for every occasion, or just-because. Each time you visit OMO, there's always something new to look at, to find, to treasure, and to buy.

The most successful shops are the ones that are "known" for something, and OMO is known not just for what's on its shelves, hanging on its racks, or adorning its walls. They are known for their gift wrapping! Yes,



gift-wrapping, that incredible throwback to a time when every store did it and now, well, so few do. But OMO is where you can always expect the "something different, the unusual, the little extras that make shopping here a joy. And best of all, there is NO CHARGE for this beautiful service.

"We are known for our gift wrapping as much as our merchandise," Papineau says proudly, holding up a package set off with a distinctive ribbon and bow in fringes of multiple colors. "People always know when they see this that it's a gift from OMO."

There are so many reasons that OMO is a South County favorite. So many reasons that customers return again and again for themselves or for those they love. So many reasons why they keep winning the Best of Rhode Island award year after year.

But this holiday, if you've never been to OMO, you only need one reason. Take a ride, open the door, and you'll find your reason.

Happy Holidays and Happy Shopping from Joanna and the entire staff at OMO, now open 7 days a week right up till Christmas!

*OMO is located at 95 Watch Hill Road and is open every day except Monday.*

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# Budget-friendly holiday shopping tips

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

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

## Set a budget

It's impossible to keep a budget if one is never established

in the first place. Determine how much you can comfortably spend on gifts, travel and entertaining, as well as any other holiday expenses. Once the number is calculated, divvy up spending accordingly.

## Plan your list

Make a list of everyone you need to purchase gifts for, along with gift ideas and estimated costs. Set a dollar amount for each individual, particularly if you will not be spending the same amount on each person. Having numbers in black and white, and comparing them to what you have allocated for gifts, will enable you to see whether you are overspending or on budget.

## Shop early

Begin holiday shopping as early as possible, even months before the holidays arrive. Such

an approach enables you to take advantage of sales as they come up. Also, you will not fall victim to impulse buys or last-minute purchases because you are under a time crunch.

## Track spending

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

## Get coupons

Signing up for stores' loyalty programs can enable you to receive members-only coupons or digital codes to your phone or email. Compare the discounted final price with other stores' offers to make sure that you are

getting the best deals. Browser extensions also can search automatically for coupons and apply them to the checkout when online shopping.

## Use credit cards wisely

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

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



# Take a bite of these holiday gifts for foodies

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

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

## Aspiring cook

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



variety of cookbooks that feature different cuisines can provide endless inspiration.

## Tempting sweets

Cooks and bakers typically fall into two distinctive camps. Baking is an art that marries creativity with science. If a foodie delights in all things sweet, focus on gifts that cater to their sugar-laden passions. Baking essentials like a stand mixer, silicone baking mats, cookie cutters, professional-grade pans,

and gourmet ingredients are sure to please. Don't underestimate the appeal of beautifully packaged candies, chocolates, cookie bars, or even specialty coffees and liqueurs when gifting food.

## Global palate

Some foodies love nothing more than sampling cuisines from all around the world. While you might not be able to offer a ticket to every far-flung region, you certainly can gift flavors from these countries with a well curated gift. Think international snack boxes, a collection of sauces from different areas, unique condiments, or food baskets brimming with items from a particular country or region.

## High-class dining

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

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

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# A beginner's guide to wreath-making

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

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

## **Materials needed**

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

- **Wreath form:** This is the frame upon which the materials will be attached. Choose a form diameter that matches the desired size for the center ring of the wreath, as longer flowers or branches can be attached to create a larger finished wreath. A 10-inch wreath form is good for getting started. The form can be made from metal or grapevine. For a foam form, you'll be poking wire into the form instead of wrapping it around it to secure your greenery and decorations.
- **Paddle wire:** Choose 22- to 24-gauge paddle wire to attach greenery and additional items onto the form.
- **Clippers and wire cutters**
- **Craft scissors**
- **Foliage, flowers and boughs**
- **Decorative items and accessories**
- **Floral tape**
- **Door hanger**

## **Prepare your work station**

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

## **Build bundles**

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

## **Start attaching the greenery**

Begin by laying a bundle onto the form and using a piece of paddle wire to first wrap



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

## **Add your embellishments**

Fill in any sparse areas with some decorations, such as small ornaments, bows, pinecones, ribbons, or plastic gems. Simply wrap a piece of wire around the decoration and attach it to the form as you did the bundles. When adding embellishments, work in

odd-numbered groupings, as they look more aesthetically appealing on a circle, say the floral experts at Team Flower. Twist all wire ends tightly to avoid scratching your door or wall when the wreath is ready to hang.

## **Hang the wreath**

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

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





# Age-based guidelines for toys & gifts

The holiday season involves making holiday gift lists and checking them twice, or even more frequently to ensure that gift-givers find the best fit for recipients. While age may only be a number in certain instances, when it comes to gifting, age should be a consideration — particularly when kids are involved.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that an estimated 86,000 children treated for toy-related injuries each year are younger than five. Toy-related injuries are preventable, and prevention often comes down to choosing age-appropriate toys for kids.

Toys can be choking hazards when small toys or those with small pieces are given to children who are too young to use them safely. Kids are curious and often

put items in their mouths. Choking is the fourth-leading cause of unintentional death in children under age five, indicates The Emergency Center. Falls, eye injuries, drowning, and motor accidents are leading causes of gift-related injuries. Here's how to select age-appropriate gifts.

- **Read the packaging carefully.** Most toys and other children's products will come with an age range recommendation. While some kids may be mature beyond their years, it's best to choose gifts that fall within the recommended range. This is particularly the case for infants, toddlers and any child under the age of five.

- **Avoid fad gifts.** Children often want the latest and greatest gadgets and toys for gifts even if they are not the smartest choices

for their ages. Resist the urge to buy something just to be the "cool parent or grandparent," especially if it isn't age-appropriate. Mermaid tails became popular in recent years, and likely will see increased presence thanks to the home-viewing release of a popular live-action mermaid movie. However, they limit movement and can make swimming more difficult, potentially increasing risk of drowning.

- **Provide safety gear.** As children age, they may be more interested in gifts that appeal to hobbies and abilities. Scooters, bicycles, skates, and other items are popular among older children. These gifts should only be purchased for those with proven ability, and even then, accompanied with the appropriate safety gear. This can include helmets,

knee pads and eye protection.

- **Consider waiting before gifting certain electronics.** Although children may be able to use devices safely, there are many who advocate for waiting to give young children smartphones and tablets due to the consequences of excessive screen time. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry says children ages two to five should limit non-educational screen time to about one hour per weekday and three hours on weekend days. Children should be encouraged to pursue healthy habits that limit use of screens, so gift-givers can look for gifts that help to this end.

Age-appropriate gifts ensure safety for the youngest people on holiday gift lists.



# Maximize Cyber Monday

Cyber Monday is the final book-end to a series of shopping-centric days preceding Christmas. Along with Black Friday, Plaid Friday and Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday presents an additional opportunity to realize great deals on items shoppers may need for gifting or entertaining.

Adobe Newsroom reported Cyber Monday hit a record \$13.3 billion in online spending in 2024, marking an increase of more than 7 percent from 2023. Consumers also spent heavily on mobile devices, which accounted for 54.8 percent of online sales. Each Cyber Monday offers a chance to save big and streamline shopping. Utilizing these tips for making the most of the day can enhance success.

- Make a list of intended purchases. Draft a list of items that you need or want and research their typical prices in advance of Cyber Monday. This enables

you to quickly identify if a Cyber Monday discount is a good deal.

- Safely shop online. Scammers are in the business of taking your hard-earned money or personal data. They mimic the look of popular stores and promote deals that often are too good to be true. Before entering payment information, double-check web addressess, spelling and contact information, warns the Better Business Bureau. Check the website URL to ensure that the site is secure before purchase.

- Look for coupon codes. Check for available promo codes in advance, which can help you get deeper discounts. Utilizing browser extensions that automatically search for and apply coupon codes can streamline this process.

- Be mindful of shipping costs. Shop at online retailers that offer free shipping whenever possible. Double-check the costs of shipping when it isn't free to ensure



that the discount is enough to offset shipping costs.

- Ship directly to recipients. In some instances, you can enter a recipient's address at checkout and have the items arrive directly to friends or family members who live far away. This can be a great way to avoid potentially costly shipping charges.

- Shop during off-peak times. The convenience of online shopping enables shopping for gifts when it fits into your schedule. Online retailers are

open all hours and seven days a week. Save Cyber Monday bulk shopping for the early morning or late evening when you can think through gifts more readily. Although improvements to internet speeds have been made in recent years, online traffic may slow down transactions made during peak hours, so this is another reason to shop during off-peak times.

Great deals can be had on Cyber Monday, and customers can maximize opportunities to save.



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# Cake pops to light up kids' eyes this holiday season

There's no denying Christmas Eve is a little more special in homes where kids are excited about an overnight visit from Santa Claus. Indeed, kids' joy and enthusiasm helps to make the holiday season such a special time of year.

Since kids add so much to the holidays, it makes sense to prepare something special for youngsters. Of course, treats such as these "Christmas Tree Cake Pops" from Lines+Angles also may appeal to festive adults.

## *Christmas Tree Cake Pops*

Makes 24 cake pops

- 1 box vanilla cake mix
- 3/4 cup canola oil
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon milk
- 3 1/2 cups green candy melts
- 24 cake pop sticks
- Icing dots
- Icing stars

1. Prepare cake according to package instructions, adding 3/4 cup canola oil to the cake mix before baking.

2. Once cake is cool to the touch, transfer to a large mixing bowl and break up into crumbs. Allow to cool completely.

3. In a medium bowl, add the butter, sugar, vanilla, and milk. Use an electric mixer and beat on medium speed for about 4 minutes until light and fluffy.

4. Add 3/4 of the frosting to the cake crumbs and mix until mixture can hold together well. Refrigerate for at least an hour.

5. Using your hands, shape the cake pop mixture into 24 conical shapes.

6. Melt the green candy melts. Dip one end of each of the cake pop sticks into the melted chocolate before inserting into the bottom of the cake pops. Dip each cake pop into the melted chocolate, making sure to cover completely, allowing excess to drip back into bowl.

7. Use a toothpick to create the textured look of the tree and decorate with the icing dots and stars before standing upright to dry completely.



# Exterior decorating safety tips

Decorating the exterior of a home for the holiday season is a beloved tradition in countless households. In the movie “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation,” Clark Griswold had “250 strands of imported Italian twinkle lights,” each with 100 bulbs per strand. His grand total of 25,000 lights caused a temporary blackout. While driving around to take in holiday lighting displays, many people may see some that emulate Clark Griswold’s vision and be inspired to create their own designs.

Lights are just one type of home decoration. Wreaths, inflatables, metal or wooden structures, and much more are part of holiday displays as well. While decorating can be fun and festive, it’s also important to ensure that it is done safely. The following tips, courtesy of Travelers Risk Consultants and Meyer Landscaping & Design, can keep family and friends safe during this wonderful time of year.

- Plan ahead. Determine how many electrical outlets you have and plan the display around the accessibility of those outlets. Be sure to calculate the maximum amount of wattage allowed so you do not overload the electrical system. Never exceed the maximum number of strings or devices that may be linked together. Lighting packaging should provide such information. Also, plug all outdoor lights and decorations into ground-fault circuit interrupters to reduce the risk of electric shock.

- Test the lights. Only purchase lights that have been tested for safety. Look for a certification mark from UL, ETL, CSA, or another nationally recognized laboratory.

- Go with LED. Light emitting diode



string lights run cooler, last longer and use less energy than incandescent lights.

- Inspect decorations. Make sure all the lights, electrical cords, lighted holiday decor, and inflatables are in good condition before use. Dispose of anything that has frayed wiring or is broken.

- Use only outdoor-rated products. Be sure the extension cords and any other products are rated for the outdoors. Electrical connections should be kept clean and dry before plugging things in, and an extra step of wrap-

ping plug connections with electrical tape can further reduce moisture.

- Practice ladder safety. Ladders are often utilized when adding lights or other decor to homes. Always be safe on and around ladders. It’s essential to maintain three points of contact while on the ladder. Don’t risk leaning too hard to one side while on the ladder, and always have a spotter. Use wooden or fiberglass ladders when stringing electrical decor and lights, as metal ladders conduct electricity.

- Identify where power lines are located. Be mindful of power lines when decorating outdoors. Keep oneself and decorations at least 10 feet away from power lines.

- Skip staples and nails. Nails and staples should not be used when decorating. Nails and staples can puncture the protective layers of a home, allowing moisture to get in and break down the structure of the home. A nail or staple also may accidentally puncture an electrical cord, increasing the risk of electrocution. Use hooks and other attachment devices specially designed for holiday decor.

- Avoid items that can contribute to roof damage. Heavy items on the roof can cause unnecessary stress to shingles and result in damage. Only use lightweight and appropriately anchored items on the roof.

- Dress appropriately. Before hanging holiday decorations and lights, assess the conditions and wear the proper clothing for the weather. If the weather is especially rough, skip decorating for a safer day.

Decorating safety is of the utmost importance and should be a priority this holiday season.



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