

Home
FOR THE
HOLIDAYS

November 27, 2024

A Special Supplement to
TimesNews


SIXRIVERS
MEDIA

Johnson City Press

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Wrapping *for* maximum wow



The tree is the star of the holiday show, especially what’s underneath. Make that pile of presents part of your decor with these fashionable ideas.

ADD FLORA
Instead of oversized bows, go understated with dried flowers or even fruits for a touch of nature. Keep these out of reach of curious small kids and pets, though, or opt for real-looking faux versions.

USE GIFT WRAP AS TAGS
Assign each person a color

of wrapping paper and use that to wrap their gifts. Set a big reveal on Christmas Eve to keep everyone guessing which presents belong to whom.

PAINT YOUR OWN PAPER
Start with plain white or brown paper and then decorate it yourself with paints. Make it a family tradition and get everyone to help out.

MATCH YOUR PAPER
Let your home’s decor be reflected in your holiday wrapping paper. Choose patterns, papers and bows that comple-

ment your walls, trim, curtains and other colors. And match the theme. If you’ve got a coastal decor, for instance, use seashells or pieces of shells as gift tags.

PULL OUT THE PLAID
Deck your presents with classic plaids. Coordinate with kraft paper wrapping and plaid bows or other coordinating solid colors. Select stockings, blankets, pillows and other accessories to match.

TIS THE SEASON?
It might be the holiday

season, but your wrapping paper doesn’t have to have Santas and snowflakes. In fact, you can save a bundle by buying all-purpose papers that you like and using those year-round.

GO WITH PATTERNED BOXES AND BAGS
Make it easy on yourself this holiday season by choosing coordinated bags and ready-made boxes for quick and easy wrapping. All you’ll need to do is fill each box with tissue and put a ribbon around it and you’re done.

MERRY MONOCHROME
Go all one color under the tree with a variety of wraps in the same color. Pair them with solid white, black or other neutral tones in the ribbons and accents.

ADD TEXTURE
Bring on the velvet ribbons and roll out the burlap for wrap. These textured fabrics can add warmth under your tree and a generally cozy vibe to your holiday celebrations.



LEONID IASTREMSKYI

Why do *we* send Christmas cards?

The first Christmas card was received in 1611 by James I of England and his son, Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales. The handmade card was discovered in 1979 by Adam McLean in the Scottish Record Office.

Since then, people around the world have sent billions of holiday cards to friends and family.

Cards range from expressing joy at the holiday season to sending full updates on family, complete with personalized pictures or a holiday letter.

A HISTORY
Throughout the 20th century, mass-produced, commercial Christmas cards became the norm, with spikes in patriotic themes during both world wars, and humor, even the risqué kind, rising and falling with the times. However, during the late 20th and early 21st century, the number of cards sent each

year started to drop. Email, cell phones, texts and social media mean more contact with our friends and family members, so a handwritten holiday card is often seen as just one more onerous holiday task.

COLLECTOR’S ITEMS
Sure, we all let that year’s holiday cards stack up, but some are worth a pretty penny. Museums even have collections; Queen Mary’s cards are now housed in the British Museum and the University College London’s Slade School of Fine Art houses handmade cards that are displayed during the holiday season. A card produced in 1843 by J.C. Horsely and commissioned by British civil servant Sir Henry Cole was sold in 2001 in the U.K. for more than \$22,000.

TODAY’S CARDS
Still, more than a billion Christmas cards are sent in the U.S. each year,

Hallmark and the Greeting Card Association says. With advances in technology and printing, families can now send season’s greetings with personalized, print-on-demand cards that feature pictures and a message tailor-made for their Christmas list. You can even order pre-addressed envelopes to save your writing hand.

GOING GREEN
One concern with sending Christmas cards is the use of paper. Look for cards that are made from recycled paper, and recycle or reuse the cards you get. Choose the prettiest of the bunch and transform them into holiday decorations, paper ornaments for the tree or even frame them for holiday decor. You can drop the cards off at the nearest paper recycling center or donate unused cards to nonprofit organizations that turn them into new cards.



The *latest* trends in lights

Christmas lights have come a long way from the glowing glass orbs that festooned trees of yore. Now, with advances in LED technology and batteries, strings of lights are longer, cooler and more colorful than ever. Here are some trends to look for in Christmas lighting.

WARM WHITE
Always a classic, warm white lights give your home a cozy glow. Indoors, pick a set that can twinkle or pulse. Outdoors, choose larger bulbs with facets for a luxe look, or go for sets that can run or twinkle for a merry display.

GO BIG ON YOUR HOME
Look for massive single lights this year to liven up a porch, deck, patio or other outdoor space. You can use these lights as pathway markers or hang

them for a gloriously oversized display of holiday cheer.

COLOR CHANGING LIGHTS
Energy-sipping LEDs allow light makers to go crazy with the color palette, offering strings that change between several colors and can even be programmed using your phone into patterns or to move to music.

PROJECTION
Another growing trend is projectors that shoot merry and bright scenes onto the walls of your home. These are best placed where they can beam their images over a garage door or open wall space; avoid parts of your home that have a lot of plants or windows.

SOLAR LIGHTS
Tired of stringing extension cords? Look

for solar-powered pathway and LED lights that can show off your holiday spirit without plugging into your electricity.

TWINKLES, ICICLES AND STARS, OH MY
More strings of lights are coming in complex shapes, such as icicles, stars, snowflakes and more. Some are even programmable to change color in a pattern or with music in your display.

FINDING A PROFESSIONAL
During the holiday season, many lawn and landscaping businesses use the slowdown caused by the cooler weather to switch to putting out holiday decor for their clients. If getting up on the roof is out of the question (or should be), think about asking local landscapers to help spread the cheer at your house this year.



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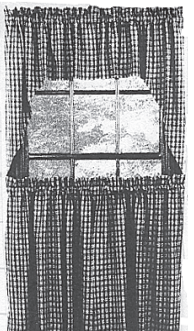
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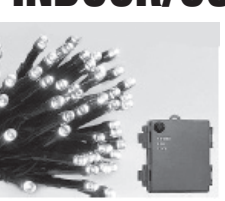
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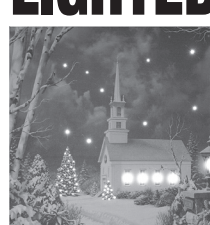
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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Get hygge with it



We’ve heard a lot about hygge in the past few years. It’s a Danish and Norwegian word that means a cozy, content mood that springs from comfort and friendship. It’s thought to originate from a Danish word that means valiant, comfort and joy, or maybe from hug, meaning to embrace or to comfort. Either way, hygge is right at home with the holiday season.

HOW TO HYGGE
Hygge can be anywhere, but it starts at home, where many of us are most comfortable and happy. Think about the things in your space that make you happy and calm. Soothing, Nordic colors like calming blues and grays, cozy textiles in the form of rugs and blankets, scented candles that soothe your mind through smell, and provide a touch of warmth with their flame. Use your hygge time to tick off slow-burning tasks, like handwriting thank you letters or working in the garden. Anything that refills your cup. Laying in bed is also a viable option, as is reading those books you’ve meant to get to, watching a TV series that’s been on your list or just lazing on the couch.

INVITE OTHERS IN
Hygge doesn’t mean becoming a hermit. It encompasses spending time with family and friends, and if that isn’t the holiday season, we don’t know what is. Choose filling, nutritious meals that leave you feeling contented, then gather your loved ones around for a favorite board game or a movie. Light a fire in the fireplace, share a blanket and a bowl of popcorn, anything that gives you the warm fuzzies can be hygge.

UNPLUG
Consider putting the phones up, even if it’s just for the duration of a board game or a family movie time. Disconnect from email, including work, and focus on letting go of the feeling that you might be missing out. Remember, if the grass looks greener somewhere else, make sure you’re giving yours enough water and sunlight to grow. Make it a family event by taking up phones, tablets and other devices for a while. Set aside some time to reflect on what you all mean to each other. Get out old photo albums or make time to sit around and decorate the tree, reminiscing about each ornament that comes out of the box.

Make the most of your mantel

Fireplaces are often the heart of the holiday season, hosting not only the pleasant, crackling blaze that keeps our toes warm, but also stockings and all sorts of holiday mementos and decor that make the season bright.

SWITCH OUT YOUR EVERYDAY DECOR
Clear the mantel by packing up your everyday decor — yes, even the big piece above the mantel — and swapping it out with holiday cheer. Look for a large-scale painting to go on the chimney or wall above, then decorate with some of your favorite holiday pieces below. Or string twine and hang holiday cards for a warm and personal touch.

BRING THE FOREST INDOORS
Set up a whole forest of

holiday trees on the mantel by making cardboard Christmas trees in varying sizes and colors. Make cones out of cardboard (make sure it’s not too thick so you can easily shape and cut it). Then cut scale-like shapes out of cardboard and, working your way around the cone from bottom to top, glue them on side by side. Give each tree a quick spray of white, then top it with whatever color you want. You can even brush them with glue and glitter for a special sparkly touch.

GO BIG WITH GARLAND
Starting with a garland in the right length for your mantel, keeping in mind if you want it to swag or not and how far you want it to extend down the sides, affix battery-operated LED fairy lights and giant, over-

sized plastic ornaments for a bold statement of holiday cheer. You can coordinate the colors to your tree’s theme or just pick whatever you like. Remember, Christmas decorating is about making you happy. Finish off the garland with a bow in the middle to bring the eye back to the center of the fireplace.

SHOWCASE A COLLECTION
If you’ve got a winter village or candlesticks gathering dust, set them out with some simple greenery along your mantel. Use varying heights and odd numbers for an understated, aesthetically pleasing effect. If it needs a little more cheer, run a string of battery-operated LED lights in and out of the pieces.



Types of Christmas trees



Each holiday season, Americans snap up between 25-30 million real Christmas trees. These trees, the National Christmas Tree Association says, are grown in all 50 states and Canada and are a renewable resource that are often recycled in one of more than 4,000 tree recycling programs. Here are some popular types of Christmas trees you may find near you this year.

BALSAM FIR
This classic Christmas tree is a dense, dark green tree that’s similar to another classic, the Fraser fir. It has a pyramid shape with a spired tip. Needles are somewhat flat and may be blunt on the end. They’re usually dark green on the top and lighter on the bottom.

CONCOLOR FIR
Also called the white fir, this tree is native to the western U.S. and can reach

350 years of age. These trees have a straight trunk with a spire-like crown and small, narrow needles. Young needles are bluish green and turn dull green with age. It makes for a fine ornamental tree that provides a contrast to darker evergreens.

SCOTCH PINE
This tree sports a bright green needle that doesn’t drop, even when dry. It’s the most common Christmas tree in the U.S. and is easy to replant, being hardy to a variety of soils and climates. It’s native to Europe and Asia and came to America with European settlers. It takes 6-8 years to grow a 7-8 foot Scotch pine Christmas tree.

COLORADO BLUE SPRUCE
As the name suggests, these trees are found from western Wyoming and eastern Idaho, south to Colorado and central Utah.

These trees grow at elevations of 6,000-11,000 feet and are gaining popularity as a Christmas tree. They have blueish foliage with excellent needle retention and natural shape.

ARIZONA CYPRESS
These steeple-shaped trees are a pale green color with tiny leaves and a pleasing aroma. Native to west Texas, southwest Mexico and southern California and Arizona, it’s also been successfully grown across the southern U.S. Its wood is durable and has been used for fencing and in mine shafts.

EASTERN REDCEDAR
These dark, shiny trees are compact with a classic pyramid shape, but it’s not a true cedar. Instead, it’s a member of the juniper family, closely related to the Rocky Mountain juniper. As a planted tree, it’s good for erosion control and it provides cedarwood oil for fragrances.

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Sustainable holidays

More than just recycling wrapping paper and cards, a sustainable holiday is a great gift to give the planet this year. Here are some ways you can go green this holiday season.

ELECTRICITY USE

Opt for solar-powered Christmas displays or use all LED lights, which don't use as much electricity as traditional incandescent bulbs. Set timers to turn your displays and tree lights off and on at dusk and before bed at night.

GIVE GREEN GIFTS

Instead of buying things, consider giving your loved ones experiences. Museum or zoo memberships are great ideas, as are pre-paying for movie tickets, plays, restaurant reservations or other experiences. You can also give to a

charity in someone's name or adopt an animal from a zoo or wildlife nonprofit.

CUT DOWN ON FOOD WASTE

While the holiday season is a time when we want to lay out a table of plenty for our friends and family, try to be realistic about the food you need. Have a use for any leftovers, and give your guests to-go boxes so your holiday celebrations waste as little as possible. Eat seasonally when you can, choosing locally produced goods when possible.

SHOP LOCALLY

Try to cut down on your holiday travel by sticking close to home when shopping. Choose to support small and independent businesses. Or get creative and make your own holiday gifts. Just make sure you plan enough time to have everything finished.

Another idea is to shop secondhand stores for thrifted gifts and Christmas decor. Sometimes, these are the most meaningful gifts you can give.

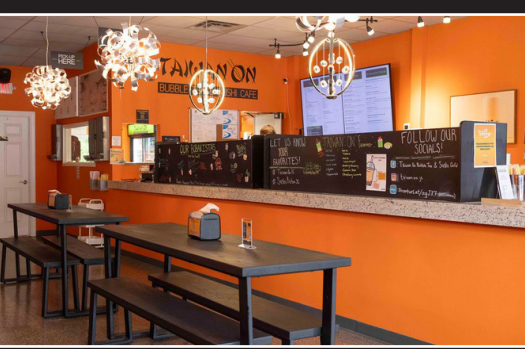
O, CHRISTMAS TREE

Pick a sustainable Christmas tree. That is, one that comes from a sustainably grown forest, and make sure you recycle it afterward. If you want an artificial tannenbaum, pick one you're sure you'll use for at least 10 years. Another option for a smaller tree is to look for one still in the pot so it can be planted after the season's over.

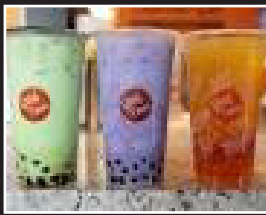
You can decorate your existing houseplants or go for another type of tree than the traditional evergreen. That way, it can stay inside and brighten up your space all year long.



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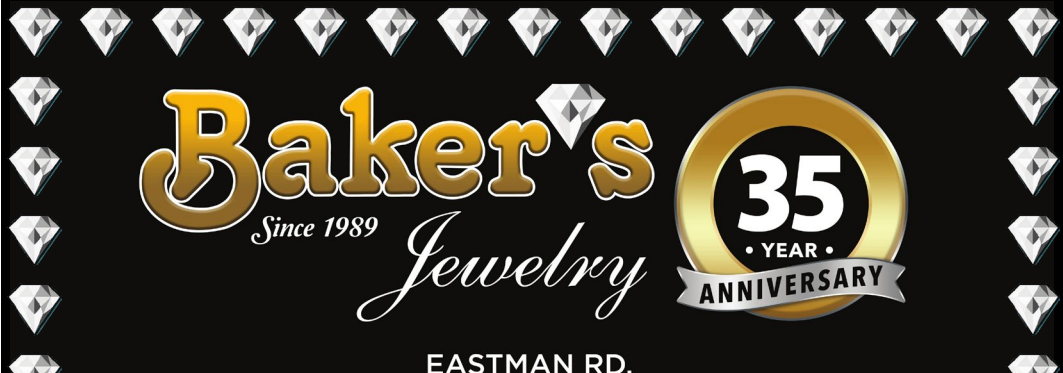


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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

For the person with everything

Let's face it, some people seem to have everything. If you have one in your friends and family group, consider giving the gift of support for their favorite cause.

With more than one and a half million U.S. charitable organizations, there's a dedicated non-profit to suit every interest or goal. Begin by determining which cause they are consistently passionate about. They might tell you in conversation and in deeds.

THE RIGHT FIT

Your gift recipient may be the parent of a premature child. Or perhaps they're always fostering rescue animals. These kinds of connections, where a cause aligns with individual experiences or value systems, lead to many charity donations. Others may want to build better community support through local projects. If the recipient has always been concerned with food security in your town, for instance, consider donating to a food pantry on their behalf.

GETTING STARTED

If you're concerned about finding the right charity to support, turn

to platforms like Charity Navigator which help potential donors discover reputable, effective organizations. They provide suggestions based on various interests, allowing you to explore different areas of need. Many charities offer specific examples of how donations are used.

After selecting a charity, decide on the amount you wish to contribute on your friend's behalf, keeping in mind that even small donations make a difference. Afterward, most organizations will reach out to notify the person you've donated for, typically with a thank you card. Others may share small gifts, discount coupons or codes and other special offers.

LONGER-TERM COMMITMENTS

If you'd like to connect your gift recipient with a charity on a longer-term basis, many offer the option to set up monthly, quarterly or annual gifts on their behalf. Even if the amount may be less than a lump-sum gift, a long-term commitment can be a huge help in planning their programs and furthering their causes – particularly for smaller organizations.

The gift recipient

might also prefer their donation spread over the entire year to potentially do the most good. In either case, the results have been proven to bolster a general sense of well-being. In fact, a study conducted by psychologists from Northwestern University and the University of Chicago shows people have a marked increase in happiness levels when making charitable donations instead of spending money on themselves.



Buying for the traveler

If you're struggling to think of what to buy that special someone who's always on the move, try focusing on their travel experiences.

Whether traveling for business or pleasure, they'll appreciate a gift that provides comfort and convenience while away from home.

Spending a lot of time in the air or on the road can be quite tiring, and might even spark feelings of homesickness. These gift ideas will help smooth the way for weary travelers.

ON THE FLIGHT

Getting a little shuteye can be quite the challenge for frequent flyers and those who often find themselves waiting around in far-flung airports. Look for modern neck support options made of memory foam that can be adjusted to various positions for the ultimate in comfort. Beyond adjustable pillows, consider noise-canceling headphones or the latest

sleep masks to create a sense of calm no matter how long the layover or how bumpy the flight.

ON THE GROUND

If they're often in far-away locations where the local language is unfamiliar, look into translators. These handy devices can greatly improve any traveler's comfort level when navigating through unfamiliar situations. There are non-talking options where users input a word from their language and receive the translation in a digital format. Text-to-speech devices offer an audible translation and you input the terms, providing an accurate pronunciation guide that can be crucial.

Speech-to-speech options are the most user-friendly. These translators use software that listens to a word or phrase and provides an audible translation in the desired language. Whichever option you choose, remember

that they're not designed to fast-track fluency in a new language. They simply make communicating far more convenient in the meantime. Also, the software may not be familiar with every phrase.

AT THE HOTEL

Frequent travelers naturally miss their loved ones and the familiarity of home. Consider loading a digital picture frame with their favorite memories. These lightweight devices can be taken everywhere and displayed on the nightstand at their hotel. Create a more personal gesture by preparing a care package filled with favorite snacks and goodies that are only available locally. Just remember to include only non-perishable items so they'll last throughout their adventures. If they are flying, don't include bottles of liquid that won't make it through security in their carryon.

Buying for the busy one

With our busy lives, most everyone wishes they had more time. You can offer people just that during this holiday season by placing the gift of time under the tree.

HOUSE CLEANING

Regular chores can eat away a large portion of the weekend when your recipient might rather be doing something else. Purchase an introductory visit from a house cleaning service to give them some of those precious hours back. These initial cleanings take longer and are typically more expensive than regularly scheduled stops – and that can cause people to shy away. Look for well-rated service providers who will take their time, and ask about future rates and availability so you can share that with the recipient.

BABYSITTING/PET SITTING

If you have busy parents on your holiday list, offer them a chance to enjoy a night out by arranging a few hours with a local babysitter. You could personally volunteer to take care of the kids. Consider booking a pet-sitting service for their next trip, if there are furry or feathered friends who need looking after. Get a voucher from their preferred boarding kennel or veterinarian. There are home-based services like Rover to consider.

AUTO DETAILING

Life's jam-packed schedules can make it difficult to keep a sparkling-clean, tidy vehicle. Schedule a detailing service so the gift recipient can experience that new-car sensation without having to do all the work. For extra convenience, opt for a mobile detailing service that will come to their office or home, eliminating the need to go out of their way or face a lengthy wait without the vehicle.

LAUNDRY SERVICE

One of the more tedious time-consuming chores can be handled by others: Arrange a few weeks of laundry service, including washing, drying, ironing and folding. As with any in-home service, however, be sure to select a reputable, experienced service provider – and then make sure the recipient feels comfortable with their presence. Or select a laundry service such as Laundryheap that offers free pickup and delivery while caring for clothes at commercial facilities.

GROCERY DELIVERY

Order a week's worth of groceries to be delivered to their doorstep. It's a luxury that some busy individuals might not easily handle. You could opt for a gift certificate at their favorite grocer, if you're unsure what to buy. Some stores have premium membership opportunities that provide additional year-round savings.



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Buying for bookworms



If you have a friend or family member who loves to read, why not enhance the experience with gift ideas that are specially geared for bookworms?

LIGHTING
A portable book light can make all the difference for a dedicated reader. Look for options with LED lights for energy-efficient brightness and clips that can tightly grip onto the book.

ACCESSORIES
Consider other accessories to complete the look,

like tiny plants or creative bookends. Journals and notebooks can add pops of color and texture to any bookshelf, reading nook or desk. You can explore a range of book-themed gifts, including postcards, tote bags and card games. There are even candles that are said to smell like books or the library.

COZY ADDITIONS
Help ward off the chilly winter season with a snug

and soft new blanket — or two! Look for options that are comfortable and easy to maintain, while complementing the home decor of your gift-receiving reader. Special reading pillows are always welcome. For an extra touch of warmth, toss in some comfy new socks, as well.

OTHER OPTIONS
Buy new noise-canceling headphones for

readers who may be fans of audiobooks or part of a large, bustling family. Some models will stop playing the audiobook when one of the buds is removed, ensuring listeners will never lose their place. For something completely different, there's a clock that uses book quotes to tell time. Thousands of quotes are pre-loaded, with new ones added daily.

MORE BOOKS!
Of course, at the end of the day, this is all about reading. So, don't forget to pay a visit to your local bookseller and ask for recommendations. Don't be afraid to move off the best-sellers list. Just remember to keep your friend's favorite authors and genres in mind. If you're still struggling to decide, give your favorite bookworm a gift card so they can do their own exploring.

Buying at the office

Buying the perfect item for the office party can be a frustrating experience. You might not be familiar with your co-worker's individual tastes and there can be restrictions on what you can buy and how much can be spent.

Here's how to navigate this sometimes-difficult process:

KNOW THE RULES
Don't begin your search without a complete understanding of the company guidelines involving holiday gift-giving. Some companies may have specific limits on the amount spent. Only some types of gifts may be permitted.

Make sure that everyone on your team is included and that the gifts chosen are thoughtful and inclusive. It's not necessary to give identical presents to everyone, of course, but put equal costs, thought and effort into each gift.

GET SOMETHING YUMMY
Who doesn't appreciate delicious treats like cookies, cakes and candies during this time of the year? Consider assembling a variety of sweet and savory goodies in a grab bag, ensuring that there is something for everyone's taste. Just remember to be mindful of any food sensitivities or allergies that some coworkers may have. You may need to plan

for alternate gifts to accommodate someone's dietary needs.

GET SOMETHING PRACTICAL
There are certain tools of every trade. Eliminate the cost and hassle of buying or replenishing them for a coworker by putting an assortment together as a gift. That might include special pens, notebooks, highlighters or sticky notes. You can find pencils with amusing phrases – just make sure they're suitable for work. A whimsical tape dispenser or colorful collection of paper clips can complete things. Then arrange them in a special coffee mug or basket in advance of the holiday party.

GET SOMETHING FUN

Gift cards are always a good idea. Make the daily coffee run more enjoyable with one from the nearest local shop, purchase movie or sports passes — or consider chipping in on a trip to a local museum or park. Even if the gift amount is limited by management, every little bit can contribute to a fun outing. Feel free to place each gift certificate inside a holiday card, but be aware that some offices have rules about the content inside these cards.

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Getting *out* of the house

Some people are always itching to get out of the house. The holiday season is a perfect time to enrich that experience with special memberships, smart gear and other thoughtful gifts.

PASSES

Seasonal passes at state or national parks grant adventurous individuals free entry for a period of time, often an entire year. National park passes cost \$80 for the general public and can be purchased online at the USGS store, at federal recreation sites themselves or by calling 888-ASK USGS, ext. 2. Depending on the park, there may be discounted or free passes available for seniors, military personnel and others. Contact individual parks or your state's division of state parks for more details on passes.

MEMBERSHIPS

Consider buying a yearly membership to a museum, aquarium, zoo or other local activities for a family – especially if they have young kids. These can pay for themselves after just a few visits while providing year-long entertainment. Make sure to choose the appropriate level of membership based on the size of the family, since some have a limit on the number of family members. If the family is larger or if you think they will frequently visit with friends, you may want to upgrade to a higher level.

VOUCHERS

The holiday season is filled with gift certificate options for personal services or specific items. You can typically purchase vouchers for things to do, including tours of historic sites, cooking classes, movie theaters

and amusement parks, among many others. These passes are particularly useful because they allow a recipient to select the most suitable time to redeem their gift.

ALL-IN-ONE PLAN

If you'd like to take a more personalized approach, plan an entire trip that's centered on something they like to do – whether that's an area festival, an outdoorsy activity or a trip to the beach. Begin with breakfast at a favorite restaurant, followed by a picnic lunch and perhaps a memorable dinner under the stars. In between, they can enjoy the trip's main activity, but be sure to incorporate passes for unique experiences that they wouldn't typically indulge in. Then you can add an element of excitement to the gift wrapping by including clues about the day's surprises.



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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Buying for furry friends



In the rush of this gift-giving season, don't forget about your friends and family's four-legged and winged companions. Including a thoughtful present for them will complete the occasion for their thankful owners.

If you're unsure what to get, ask other members of your social circle or visit a local pet store to get advice from the staff. In the meantime, here are some helpful suggestions to get the ball rolling:

DOG PRESENTS

Treats are always a favorite for dogs, and they're a welcome gift this time of the year. Many local bakeries offer special cookies or cakes designed specifically for canine companions. Buy a selection of these delectable treats in case you encounter a picky holiday eater.

While you're at the pet store, take a look at other related items like collars, leashes, pet wear and harnesses. If your friend's dog has a thick coat, pick up helpful grooming supplies like brushes, shedding spray and combs. Water and food dishes are always practical and thoughtful options. Choose from various materials and styles that match the recipient's home decor.

CAT PRESENTS

Cats love toys that spark their natural hunting instincts so look for crinkly toys, small balls, feathers and other objects that can be chased and played with. Other great options include scratchers and interactive cat houses, loungers, poles or tunnels. Just make sure the recipient has plenty of room to accommodate your new gift. Another popular choice is a laser pointer, since they can provide endless entertainment for feline pals.

OTHER PETS

If your friend or family member owns a bird, select toys that are suitable for their specific type of bird. Find out which seeds and dried fruits are appropriate for their specific diet. Several toy options can aid in maintaining their claws and beaks. Other popular gift items include perches, nesting boxes and cage accessories.

Many pet stores sell special toys, enclosures and helpful grooming tools for other types of pets. With the more exotic examples, you may have questions that can't be answered by others in your friend group. Consult the experts at the pet store to ensure that the items you have chosen are suitable for the intended pet.



Unique gift ideas

The holiday season is one of the best times to celebrate local talent and artistry, since you have a built-in opportunity to share one-of-a-kind handmade pieces with friends and family.

You'll be giving back by supporting local businesses and artisans, while contributing to the prosperity of your community.

Why not take advantage of these unique gift ideas rather than settling for another mass-produced item?

THAT SPECIAL GIFT

Local makers, vendors and growers are out there offering a wide selection of unique gifts, services and delicious treats. Make this season that much more special by exploring this wealth of local creativity and talent. Start by looking for neighborhood holiday markets and fairs.

During this time of the year, you'll often find artisans gathered for these

events as city streets are suddenly transformed into lively centers of festive spirit.

Because everything on sale has been made locally, you're likely to find special gifts that are not available in mainstream stores.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Shopping locally allows you to connect directly with creators, building relationships based on stories surrounding their products and personal creative journeys.

Ask whether they handle custom orders, create personalized gifts or accept commissions. Many local businesses specialize in items like engraved jewelry, monogrammed products and custom artwork.

Personal expressions of love and appreciation for friends and family add another layer of meaning to any gift. Remember to respect the artist's policies for commissions and to

order well in advance, since you're purchasing their time and creativity as well as a gift.

EXCITING NEW CHOICES

Shopping locally can lead to fun and exciting new choices. Handmade items that you might never have considered could include unusual jewelry, hip clothing designs, exciting artwork or unique decorations that add a special touch to the home. Local artisans and crafters will often be plugged into the latest new trends well before they've reached large retail store shelves — and they always have their own unique point of view. Some hold on to treasured older traditions long after mainstream stores have moved on.

Either way, you'll be going home with items that have a story to tell while adding a one-of-a-kind flair to every gift-giving occasion.

The gift of experiences

Some people seem to have everything. You may worry about older items finding their way into landfills when recipients find that they no longer need or have space for them. If so, consider giving the gift of local experiences this holiday season.

You'll be creating lasting memories while supporting people in your local community.

HISTORY

What has brought your area the most renown? The site of a significant historical moment or person? There may also be special events and festivals devoted to the history and culture of your town. Is there a museum or landmark dedicated to something unique? What about home tours or distinctive architecture? Too often, those who live near these interesting tourist attractions have never taken the

opportunity to visit them. Consider buying passes as gifts for people on your list. You'll bolster local museums, historical sites, state parks and events — and everyone might learn something new.

SPORTS

The holiday season is often marked by huge nationally televised sporting events, including football, basketball and hockey.

Bring special joy to sports enthusiasts by purchasing tickets to their favorite bowl game, playoff contest or match.

You can also buy advance tickets for the next season of games at the nearby college, local minor league park or municipal facility.

Don't forget community events like pickleball contests or a local golf tournament. Create a package that includes game tickets and team merchandise —

then get ready to score that autograph from the local sports star!

THE ARTS

The holidays are a great time to purchase individual tickets or season passes for local arts events. Explore options for community and regional theater, touring acts, museum events, dance and opera performances, local symphonies and community bands or choirs. Some arts organizations offer special packages aimed at holiday gift-givers.

You could also simply make a donation to a favorite organization as a holiday present. These gifts are often accompanied by special discounts throughout the rest of the year. Create a special package for a night on the town, with two tickets for an arts event and a gift certificate for a restaurant that's nearby.







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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Strengthen *your* community



When you focus on shopping locally this holiday season, you help foster a deeper sense of community. This simple act contributes to the betterment and well-being of your town, as you support your neighbors and the local economy.

Local vendors and service providers are an integral part of every business ecosystem. You can contribute to them finishing

the sales year on a high note. This, in turn, provides jobs and financial support through wages and taxes, of course, but they're also part of your town's story. These homegrown shops are part of a larger narrative of growth and innovation. Together, they create a sense of place.

SPREADING THE WORD

Help spread the word by becoming a local storyteller. Sharing your experi-

ences about shopping local can help grow the small businesses you patronize while empowering others to become more conscientious and better informed. Don't hesitate to tell others about special finds, personalized service and the kind of deep community involvement that helps make your hometown unique.

One study found that these stories are particularly effective in attracting

new customers to businesses owned by members of under-represented communities. Everyone is more apt to shop with businesses that have an intriguing vision or shared mission, in particular during the holidays.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Have you had a unique experience at a store? Did you connect with an owner or manager who went above and beyond to cater

to your needs? Share it with others. Tell friends, write a letter to local media, post about it on social media, call into a radio show or email the business directly to provide a testimonial in your own words. Don't forget the old saying about a picture conveying a thousand words: Capture and share festive images from your holiday shopping.

These recommendations are more effective if you

leave genuine consumer reviews that go beyond a simple thumbs-up. Keep in mind, too, that every experience won't be positive. If you have a negative experience, discuss it with the owner or sales representative in a detailed, honest and fair manner. Reviews go a long way toward guiding others to become local shoppers – so it's crucial that your reviews are presented authentically rather than as an attack.

Shop local to help our planet



We all play our own unique role in keeping the planet healthy. One perhaps overlooked way is to shop locally. Consider keeping your holiday spending dollars at home this year.

SMALLER FOOTPRINT

Frequenting local sellers this holiday season gives you the opportunity to enjoy excellent personal service while supporting your community. You'll be reducing your carbon footprint. This concept refers to the environmental impact our activities cause, typically measured by the amount of greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere.

You may think you're doing your part by shopping online. But this popular buying activity actually creates many more unwanted outcomes through the shipping process. Research has shown that people tend to make smaller purchases each time when shopping

online, leading to more deliveries and more packaging. Items from a single order might also come from different warehouses, causing more greenhouse gas emissions per item.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Buying local products benefits the economy, minimizes fuel consumption and reduces the depletion of natural resources. If you drive less, focusing on nearby local offerings, you're helping save the planet. Those who shop online should purchase from local businesses that deliver directly from their store. You'll be supporting your own community and reducing the environmental impact of transportation.

Try to buy only food that's in season, as out-of-season produce often needs to be shipped from far away or is grown in greenhouses – and that further contributes to carbon emissions. Track what's in season and consume locally grown

options. You'll be reducing the carbon footprint associated with food transportation and supporting sustainable agriculture.

OTHER KEY TIPS

Expand your shopping list and buy more items at the same time to help reduce the number of trips. Instead of driving to the store multiple times for milk, consider buying three gallons once a week. Combine other shopping trips with your grocery store run to minimize fuel consumption. Carpool, if possible, with others who need something from the store.

When shopping, prioritize items that use recycled packaging, as indicated by a recycling symbol. Consider investing in sturdy tote bags made of nylon or cloth when shopping, since this reduces the need for disposable bags. By implementing these small changes, we all can create a more earth-friendly shopping experience.

More than brick and mortar

Holiday shopping can become one of a family's most treasured annual traditions, creating lasting memories from each season. Those memories become even more vibrant at annual holiday markets, fairs and festivals.

These events provide a one-of-a-kind atmosphere away from brick-and-mortar stores. Let's dive into this unique buying experience.

RICH HISTORY

Holiday markets have a rich history dating back to the Middle Ages in Germany. They've long transformed streets and downtown squares into winter wonderlands adorned with lights and decorations. Vendors originally sold holiday items like ornaments, as street vendors offered beverages and seasonal treats. Festive music and carolers added to the merry atmosphere.

Germany still hosts thousands of holiday markets each year, but the tradi-

tion has become more widespread – and far more varied in its offerings. Markets in America often have many craft items for sale that aren't holiday themed.

WHY THEY MATTER

These markets and fairs can serve as the financial lifeblood for local makers and growers. Some may not work out of their own storefronts, or even have a website. You're getting a one-of-a-kind gift in a one-of-a-kind setting. You won't get that kind of buying experience in the aisles of a cookie-cutter big-box store. Meanwhile, you're supporting neighbors who are pursuing their dream as a small local business person.

WHERE THEY ARE

Look for flyers or ads for annual events when you're out and about. Parks and venues may post calendars of events with more information. The FairsandFestivals.net website can help with locating these events, offering

detailed lists of upcoming events within a specific distance from your home. Festivals and fairs may post a complete list of vendors and their wares, providing helpful information if you'd like to plan your shopping experience. If they don't, be ready for a fun exploration!

PRO TIPS

Bring both cash and credit cards, since some markets may be cash only. The venue may also have limited WiFi access, making credit transactions more difficult. If possible, visit these fairs at quieter times when you can have meaningful interactions with vendors. Ask about their creative inspiration, how long they've been creating, and the possibility of custom work. All this information goes into your buying decision, while providing context for the gift itself. Remember these are pop-up retail events, not garage sales. Haggling is not usually part of the process.





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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Handmade gift ideas

Unique handmade gifts help demonstrate how much you care about your loved ones, while offering a chance to give something with a personal touch.

There can be nearly countless possibilities, however, so you may find it difficult to narrow it down. Here's a deeper look at a few handmade items that each make the best gift for the right person:

SHOPPING LOCAL

Aside from boasting loads of charm and a very special point of view, handmade gifts often incorporate locally sourced products or materials. In this way, every one-of-a-kind item brings happiness to the recipients while also supporting multiple layers of local makers and growers. What better way to celebrate the holiday season?

CANDLES

Illuminate the season with the cozy glow of homemade candles. Many use beeswax that's sourced locally. That adds a delightful fragrance and supports local beekeepers. Look for scented candles made with essential oils, or makers who experiment with different molds and colors. Each hand-poured candle will end up as its own celebration of the local makers' community.

JOURNALS

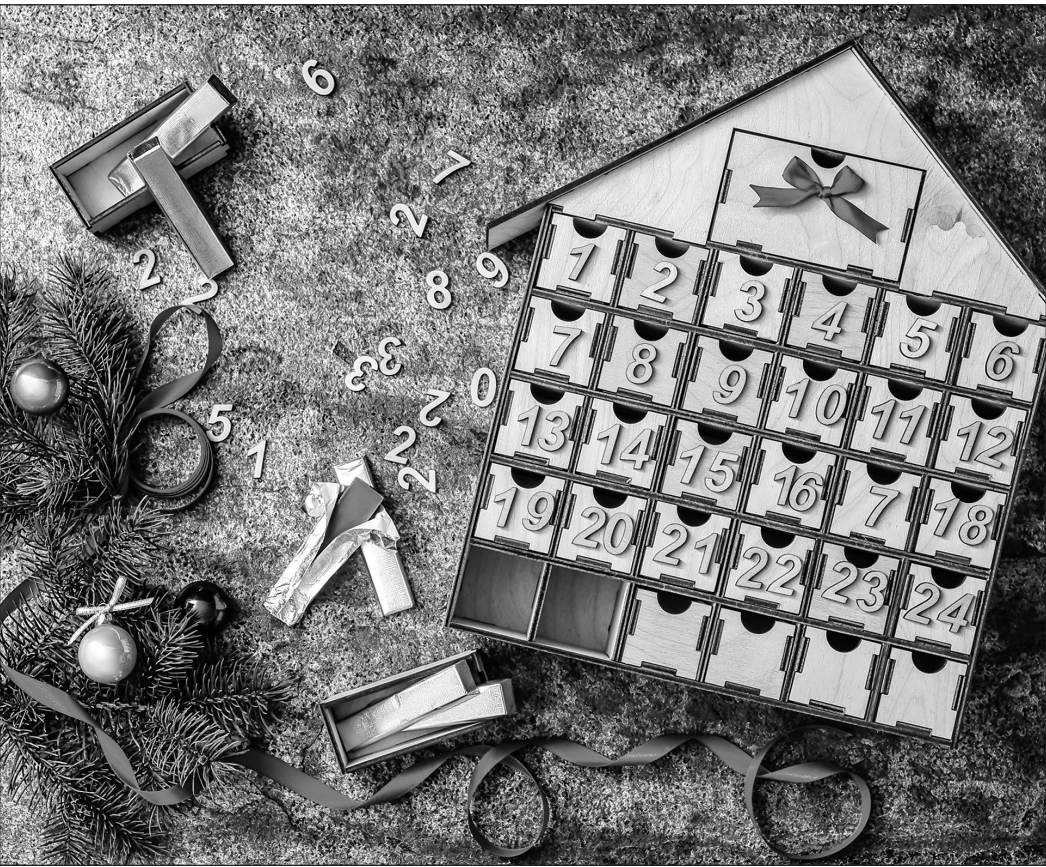
Preserve cherished memories, family traditions, creative writing or timeless recipes by seeking out journals with creatively crafted covers. The best employ designs that reflect the artist's unique point of view; others might be inspired by your local area. You'll often find these special books at local markets and hometown bookshops. There's almost no end to the number of ways the cover of a journal can be adorned. Once it's been gifted, the book becomes even more precious as it's filled. Pair the new journal with other small locally purchased items to add even more regional flavor to the gift.

BATH AND BODY

Local makers continue to create a remarkable array of luxurious hand-crafted bath and body products. Head to local boutiques, farmer's markets and specialty stores to find invigorating scrubs, soothing bath salts, healing balms and aromatic lotions. They can create a blissful spa-like experience in any home. Be on the lookout for items with a local flair, such as those that have been infused with regionally grown herbs. You'll be honoring the area's contributions to agriculture while tapping into the calming powers of nature.



Counting down to Christmas



Whether young or old, it can be hard to wait for Christmas. It might be why the tradition of Advent calendars has lasted so long and is so popular.

This festive practice, which builds anticipation for Christmas Day, has a rich history and deep cultural significance that spans over a century.

The origins of Advent calendars can be traced to 19th-century Germany. Advent, derived from the Latin word "adventus" meaning "coming," is a period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Traditionally, Advent spans the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, a time observed with various customs and rituals in Christian communities.

The first known Advent calendar dates to the early 1800s. German Lutherans are credited with creating the earliest versions, which involved marking 24 chalk lines on a door and erasing one each day in December. Another early tradition included lighting a candle or hanging a religious picture for each day of

Advent. These simple acts were intended to help children count down the days to Christmas and to foster a sense of anticipation and spiritual readiness.

The printed Advent calendar as we know it today was introduced in the early 20th century. Gerhard Lang, a German printer, is often hailed as the father of the modern Advent calendar. Inspired by a homemade calendar his mother made by attaching small candies to a piece of cardboard, Lang produced the first commercial Advent calendar in the early 1900s. His design featured small doors or windows that children could open each day to reveal a Bible verse, poem or picture. This innovation quickly gained popularity and became a cherished part of Christmas traditions in many households.

Advent calendars continued to evolve throughout the 20th century. During World War II, the production of Advent calendars was temporarily halted due to rationing and paper shortages. However, the tradition quickly revived

post-war and spread beyond Germany to other parts of Europe and North America. In the 1950s, the inclusion of small chocolates or toys behind each door became common, adding an extra element of excitement for children.

Today, Advent calendars come in a wide variety of themes and styles, ranging from traditional religious calendars featuring nativity scenes to those with popular characters, luxury beauty products or gourmet treats.

Advent calendars serve as a daily reminder to reflect on the meaning of the holiday season, encouraging moments of family togetherness and mindfulness amidst the hustle and bustle of December. For many, the ritual of opening a new door each day is a cherished childhood memory and a tradition they pass down to their own children.

Advent calendars offer a way to slow down and savor the season. They remind us to appreciate the small joys of each day, fostering a spirit of gratitude and anticipation that enriches the holiday experience.

Holiday wreath symbolism

Holiday wreaths, with their lush greenery and festive decorations, are a beloved symbol of the Christmas season.

This timeless tradition, which dates back centuries, is rich in historical and cultural significance. From their ancient origins to their modern-day interpretations, holiday wreaths represent a blend of celebration, welcome and spiritual symbolism.

ANCIENT TRADITIONS

The use of wreaths can be traced back to ancient civilizations. In classical antiquity, wreaths were often worn as crowns and garlands during various celebrations. For the ancient Greeks, laurel wreaths symbolized victory and achievement, while in Roman times, they were used to honor emperors and military commanders. The circular shape of the wreath, with no beginning or end, symbolized eternity and the cyclical nature of life.

The tradition of holiday wreaths specifically during the Christmas season has its roots in pre-Christian Europe. Pagan rituals celebrated the winter solstice with evergreens, which were seen as symbols of enduring life amidst the

barren winter landscape. These early wreaths were used to ward off evil spirits and to celebrate the return of the sun after the darkest days of the year.

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

As Christianity spread across Europe, the wreath took on new meanings and became integrated into Christian traditions. The Advent wreath, which originated in 16th-century Germany, is one of the most significant adaptations. Comprising a circular garland of evergreen branches, the Advent wreath holds four or five candles. Each candle represents one of the weeks of Advent, the period of preparation for the birth of Jesus. The lighting of these candles symbolizes the light of Christ coming into the world.

The evergreen branches used in holiday wreaths are particularly meaningful. Evergreens, such as pine, fir and holly, remain vibrant and green throughout the winter months, symbolizing eternal life and the triumph of life over death. Holly, with its bright red berries, is also thought to represent the blood of Christ and his sacrifice, while the prickly leaves can signify the crown of thorns worn during the crucifixion.

HOSPITALITY

In addition to their religious connotations, holiday wreaths also serve as symbols of hospitality and welcome. Hanging a wreath on the front door is a gesture of inviting friends and family into one's home during the festive season. The circular shape is often interpreted as a symbol of unity and inclusion, reflecting the warmth and togetherness that are hallmarks of the holiday season.

Modern holiday wreaths come in a variety of styles and designs, reflecting both traditional and contemporary tastes. While some people prefer classic wreaths adorned with ribbons, pinecones, and berries, others opt for creative interpretations using materials like ornaments, artificial snow, or themed decorations. Regardless of the design, the essence of the wreath as a symbol of celebration and continuity remains unchanged.

Crafting and displaying holiday wreaths is a cherished activity for many families. It is an opportunity to engage in a meaningful tradition, create beautiful decorations and share the joy and spirit of the season.



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Giving to the Armed Forces

We'd all like to make this season brighter for veterans, service members and their families.

Gift-giving for military personnel and their loved ones, however, can be a real challenge. After all, there are numerous regulations regarding what service members can and cannot receive as a present.

FOR THE DEPLOYED

Their jobs often take place in rugged conditions, so focus on things that provide protection and comfort. Consider impact-resistant sunglasses with high-definition optics to protect their eyes, or a sturdy water bottle that is insulated to keep their drinks at the desired temperature. High-quality multi-

tools are specifically designed for emergency preparedness and outdoor survival.

Portable power banks with durable cords help ensure all their devices stay charged. An adjustable headlamp offers various angles, brightness levels and light colors. Look for one that's water-resistant. Travel organizers are a big help. Make sure they are easy to clean and durable enough to withstand wear and tear. Noise-canceling earbuds can provide a relaxing, immersive audio experience.

FOR VETERANS

Help our nation's veterans commemorate their service this holiday season with a custom phone case,

flask or wallet showcasing their branch of service. Purchase and decorate a display case for medals, ribbons, patches and other mementos.

Buy products like coffee from companies started by veterans and focused on supporting veterans' causes. Other stocking stuffers might include challenge coins and a coin holder, a special koozie or tactical stockings.

FOR FAMILIES

This can be an especially difficult time of the year for families of service members. Kindle their holiday spirit with special photos, gifts or plants. Consider setting up an appointment with a local photographer or the Portraits of Love program, which organizes photo shoots for service-member families nationwide. Create a special album with these new images as the centerpiece. The USO Wishbook located at usowishbook.uso.org provides a way for you to purchase gifts for service members to celebrate special occasions like these.

The Hug-A-Hero program focuses on young children who are missing someone who is deployed, offering dog tags, security blankets and pet pillows. Trees for Troops provides free farm-grown Christmas trees to families of those serving in all branches of the military. Smaller gestures mean so much, too: Gift cards can be very useful – especially for the base exchange store – or you can sign families up for helpful meal delivery services.



Reaching out

It's easy to feel disconnected when away on service duty. Thankfully, there are several thoughtful and easy ways for those who love and miss them to bridge the gap.

NOTES FROM HOME

Deployments are often lengthy, and service members' friends, family and hometowns can undergo significant changes. Stay connected by providing them with regular news updates. Include notes about marriages, births and graduations. Clip newspaper headlines covering local news. Keep them up to date on things like new businesses, new buildings and new residential developments. These care packages can help with feelings of homesickness while they're away and perhaps help with transitioning back once they return.

FAMILIAR TASTES

Along with updates about their hometown,

consider purchasing preferred non-perishable delicacies that are only available locally. That might include treats like beef jerky, jams and jellies or hot sauce. Only send products with a long shelf life, since overseas mail can take a significant amount of time. Ensure that all containers are securely sealed when shipping these items.

PICTURE PERFECT

Include photos when you can. Deployed service members often can't take part in the holiday traditions that make this season so special. So, bring along a camera to capture all the festivities on film – including holiday lighting displays, parades and parties. Pay close attention to children and older relatives, since their joy at this time of year can be contagious. Add special messages to the back of the images, along with names and dates.

BOOT CAMP BASICS

If your family member is still in boot camp, remember that most service branches won't allow care packages for recruits. Wait until they finish basic training before sending any packages. In the meantime, ordinary mail is always allowed. Letters typically take around two weeks to be delivered.

PACKAGING EVERYTHING

For others who serve, combine your notes, newspaper clippings, photos and tastes of home with other small necessities to complete your special holiday care package. That might include extra socks and lip balm, or games like playing cards, crosswords or puzzle books. Don't forget to send things like paper, envelopes and pens – since they are likely to be unable to respond if you don't.

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Grieving during the holidays



Those grieving for a lost service member may struggle even more during the holiday season.

UNDERSTANDING THE LOSS

There are four levels of acceptance during the grieving process, as outlined by the Department of Veterans Affairs. First, work to accept the reality of the loss, moving past denial and acknowledging that death is sadly permanent. It's important to mourn the loss and not become distracted from the pain. Healing can't occur without facing our grief. Adjusting to this new reality without your loved one will take time. Seeking support from others is crucial while moving into this next unknown phase of life.

GETTING SUPPORT

There are numerous support groups available for those mourning loss. That includes counseling ser-

vices, online resources like webinars and bereavement camps. Many are specifically designed to help service members and their families during the grieving process.

FIND A PATH FORWARD

It's important to set realistic expectations, beginning with the reminder that the holidays can be difficult. Accept helpful offers from others to cook, decorate or shop. Their company will be especially welcome during the holidays — and memories are sometimes a source of comfort. It might be tempting, but avoid the temptation to “cancel” the holiday.

Allow yourself to feel your authentic emotions. That means sadness, but also joy and anger. No one path is the right one for getting through these tough times. Consider giving a donation in memory of your lost loved

one. Remember that physical exercise can be an antidote for depression.

Create a new ritual if honoring older traditions are too painful. Discuss these decisions openly with friends and family.

HONORING THEIR MEMORY

Make time for personal moments of solitude and remembrance, but don't isolate yourself. Building a strong support network is essential in your healing journey.

Get together often to honor your loved one's memory. It can be one of the most meaningful ways to cope with grief. Look over treasured photo albums and share memories.

Add commemorative ornaments to your tree at home — or create special Christmas gifts for the families of other fallen soldiers. Finding new ways to honor these brave men and women can help with closure and healing.



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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Wreaths Across America

Each holiday season, Wreaths Across America coordinates an extraordinary display of military appreciation as wreath-laying ceremonies are held in 50 states and beyond.

This non-profit organization gathers on a designated Saturday with the assistance of numerous selfless volunteers to place these commemorative items at gravesites in hundreds of locations.

To put these efforts in perspective, the program began with 5,000 donated wreaths in 1992. Now, more than 140,000 wreaths are annually placed at Arlington National Cemetery alone. Tens of thousands of patriotic Americans take part, and more than 1,000 local fundraising groups have joined in to coordinate local wreath-laying ceremonies.

HOW IT BEGAN

The owner of Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, Maine, initially established Wreaths Across America in the early '90s. The idea originated when Morrill Worcester had an excess of wreaths and decided to donate them as a tribute to local veterans, according to the Worcester company's official website. Wreaths Across America obtained official recognition in 2008.

They later made arrangements to place wreaths in one of the older sections of Arlington National

Cemetery, with the assistance of Maine's U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe and local volunteers. The advent of social media helped the effort grow by leaps and bounds. Today, thousands take part in this coordinated ceremony to show heartfelt holiday appreciation for those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

GETTING INVOLVED

The Wreaths Across America theme for 2024 is "Live With Purpose." Karen Worcester, the organization's executive director, said, "Over the course of the last year, and then especially on the escort to Arlington last December, I listened to people who had gone through great adversity, and they'd taken that adversity and turned it around as a call to action to spend the rest of their lives making sure that every day was meaningful and that they lived with purpose."

Anyone can take part individually by placing a wreath as a tribute to veterans in their local community. You can join or help organize larger wreath-laying ceremonies, or contribute directly to the Wreaths Across America program. They offer special wreath sponsorships at Arlington National Cemetery. The organization encourages everyone to invite friends and family to take part in honoring fallen service members, this and every year.



Giving back to *our* heroes



You can make a difference in the lives of service members and their families — and it doesn't matter if you have a direct connection to the armed forces or not.

There are several important ways everyone can express gratitude for their service, including volunteering, charitable donations and holiday-themed outreach programs. During a time when family means so much, don't forget those who keep everyone safe.

ADOPTING A FAMILY

Families who are left to celebrate the holidays without their service member might be experiencing even more stress and loneliness. There may be new financial burdens, and that is even more painful during the gift-giving time of year. So, consider brightening the season by "adopting" these families. That might involve lending a helping hand with household chores, yard work, babysitting or caring for their pet. Help alleviate their financial burdens by purchasing prepaid gift cards for everyday necessities like groceries, gas or household essentials.

If the family has young children who will miss a parent during the holidays, consider buying a special present just for them. You could offer to support the child's personal interests or hobbies. Their remaining parent might need assistance with tasks such as carpooling. Offer to purchase related materials or serve as an assistant coach. Helping to fill these temporary voids can also provide a sense of relief for brave members of the armed forces, while also easing the pain of separation for everyone.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Local Veterans Administration hospitals are always in need of volunteer assistance, espe-

Vacations with a purpose

With time off for the holidays, there's time to schedule that much-needed vacation. Why not create a travel itinerary based on honoring patriotic members of the armed sources?

These monuments and memorials are their own source of inspiration.

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Arlington, Va.

This well-known military cemetery of our nation is situated on land that was once owned by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. Arlington serves as the final resting place for hundreds of thousands of military veterans and their dependents. Visitors are urged to pay their respects at the solemn Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a white marble sarcophagus established in 1921 to honor unidentified service members who died in action.

NATIONAL WORLD WAR II MUSEUM

New Orleans, La.

The National World War II Museum previously known as the National D-Day Museum before being officially recognized as the nation's World War II memorial by Congress in 2004.

The museum was established in New Orleans to acknowledge the city's significant contribution to the victory in Europe, as the local Higgins Industries designed and constructed amphibious boats used to transport troops.

NATIONAL WORLD WAR I MUSEUM

Kansas City, Mo.

The Liberty Memorial was unveiled in 1926, then officially designated by Congress as the nation's World War I memorial in 2004. The museum showcases exhibits that recount the events of the Great War and its aftermath.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARCH

Valley Forge, Pa.

During the harsh winter of 1777-78, the fledgling Continental Army lost more than 2,500 soldiers due to disease, exposure, and starvation at their encampment in Valley Forge. The National Memorial Arch stands as a tribute to their service and sacrifice.

NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR CENTER

Chattanooga, Tenn.

The National Medal of Honor Heritage Center opened in 2020 as a lasting tribute to the recipients of the Medals of Honor. Their legacy is honored along with sacrifices made by recipients from the Civil War through the War on Terror.

USS ARIZONA MEMORIAL

Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii

This memorial commemorates the nearly 2,000 crewmen who lost their lives during the December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, which led America into World War II. Designated as a national shrine in 1962, the memorial pays tribute to what President Franklin D. Roosevelt described as "a date which will live in infamy."



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Three ways to cook turkey

Tom Turkey is the centerpiece of many a holiday table. Here are three ways to cook your Christmas bird.

TRADITIONAL ROASTED TURKEY

Recipe is from Food Network and Ina Garten.
Ingredients
1 12-pound fresh turkey or thawed frozen turkey
Salt and black pepper, to taste
1 large bunch fresh thyme
1 lemon, halved
1 onion, quartered
1 head garlic, halved crosswise
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
Directions
1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Take the giblets out of the turkey and wash it inside and out. Remove excess fat and leftover pinfeathers, if there are any, and pat the outside dry.
2. Place the turkey in a large roasting pan and liberally salt and pepper the inside of the turkey cavity. Stuff it with thyme, lemon, onion and garlic. Brush the outside of the turkey with butter and salt and pepper again. Tie the legs together with string and tuck the wing tips under the body of the turkey.
3. Roast for 2 1/2 hours, basting occasionally with pan juices, until the juices run clear when you cut between the leg and thigh. Remove the turkey to a cutting board and cover with foil. Let it rest for 20 minutes before slicing.

GRILLED WHOLE TURKEY

Recipe is from Epicurious.
Ingredients
1 14-16-pound turkey, neck and giblets removed
2 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 1/2 teaspoons black pepper
Directions
1. Rinse the turkey inside and out and pat dry. Mix the salt and pepper in a small bowl and sprinkle it evenly in the turkey’s cavities and all over the skin. Fold the neck skin under the body and, if desired, secure with a metal skewer. Tuck the wing tips under the breast and tie the drumsticks together with kitchen string.
2. Preheat the grill burners on high, covered, for 10 minutes. Turn off the middle burner if there are three or one burner if there are two. Put the turkey on an oiled rack in a roasting pan. Add two cups of water to the pan.
3. Set the pan over the off burner and close the lid. Grill the turkey, adjusting the burners to maintain 450 degrees. Rotate the pan 180 degrees halfway through. The turkey is done when a thermometer in the thigh registers 170 degrees, usually about 2 hours.

DEEP-FRIED TURKEY

Recipe is from Allrecipes.com.
Ingredients
3 gallons of peanut oil for frying
1 12-pound turkey, neck and giblets removed
1/4 cup Creole seasoning
1 medium white onion
Directions
1. Fill a turkey fryer or large stockpot with enough oil to fry the turkey. Be sure to leave enough room so the oil doesn’t spill when you put the turkey in. Heat the oil to 400 degrees. Layer a large platter with food-safe paper bags.
2. Rinse the turkey and pat dry with paper towels. Rub the seasoning inside the cavity and over the outer surfaces. Make sure the hole at the neck is open at least two inches so oil can flow into the cavity.
3. Turn off the heat. Place the whole onion into the drain basket followed by the turkey, neck end first. Lower the basket into the fryer until the turkey is completely submerged. Turn the heat back on and cook, maintaining a 350-degree temperature for about 45 minutes or 3 1/2 minutes per pound of turkey.
4. Remove the basket from the oil and drain the turkey. A thermometer inserted at the thigh should read at least 165 degrees but no more than 180 degrees. Allow turkey to rest and drain for 10-15 minutes.



Cookies to ring Santa’s bell

Christmas cookies are an American tradition, and leaving a plate for Santa with a glass of milk is the highlight of many holiday celebrations. Try these festive eggnog cookies this year.

EGGNOG CUTOUT COOKIES
Makes three dozen.
Recipe is from The Pioneer Woman.
Ingredients
For the icing:
4 cups powdered sugar
1/4 cup light corn syrup
1 tsp. vanilla extract
Food coloring, as desired
For the cookies:
3/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
3/4 cup sugar
2 large egg yolks, room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract
3 cups flour, plus more for dusting
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/3 cup eggnog, room temperature
Directions
To make the icing:
1. Whisk together the powdered sugar, corn syrup and vanilla. Add 1/4 cup water, a tablespoon at a time, until the frosting is smooth but thick. It should fall off the whisk in a thick stream with the fallen ribbons of icing holding their shape for about 10 seconds before sinking back into the frosting.
For the cookies:
1. Beat the butter and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer until creamy, 3-4 minutes.

Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl, then add the egg yolks and vanilla. Mix on low until fully combined, scraping the sides and bottom of the bowl occasionally.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt and nutmeg. With the mixer on low, gradually add the flour to the butter mixture, alternating with eggnog, beginning and ending with flour. After each addition, beat until just combined.
4. Place the dough on a floured work surface. Divide it in half and form disks. Wrap each disk in plastic and refrigerate until firm, up to an hour. Working with one disk at a time, and keeping the second one refrigerated, lightly flour a work surface. Roll the dough out until 1/8-inch thick. Use cookie cutters to cut the dough then, using a spatula, transfer to a baking sheet. Space the cookies about 2 inches apart. Refrigerate the scraps.
5. Bake until the tops are dry and the edges begin to turn golden, 10-12 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes on the pan, then move to a cooling rack to cool completely. Repeat with the remaining dough and scraps, re-rolling only once for smooth cookies.
6. Color the frosting with food coloring, as desired, and frost using zip-top or piping bags. Allow the cookies to dry completely, 8 hours or overnight. Store them in an airtight container at room temperature for up to a week.





Getting started

Getting information about local businesses, their offerings and the quality of their services can be a bit of a challenge, but the results are worth the extra effort. Here’s how to get started.

HEADING OUT

The average local company will provide an opportunity to buy online, in the same way those big-box stores do. But why not take advantage of the opportunity to explore your area this holiday season? Rather than clicking on their website, go see them in person. You’ll enjoy improvements in your own health while bolstering the economic well-being of your community. You’ll also be spreading some good cheer! Start learning more about small businesses in your community by dedicating a day to looking

around, either on foot or by bike. Access online maps through your phone or tablet to locate fun new places for shopping, dining and entertainment. Make notes about favorite stores, while taking time to engage with the staff.

WHAT TO ASK

Online platforms like Yelp and Google can provide insights into hometown stores by pairing search results with reviews highlighting your neighbors’ opinions. Yelp also features a tab where you can find information about nearby establishments and local deals. While you’re there, ask about the company’s founding and vision, as well as key products and their areas of expertise. Gather information including their operating hours, website details and phone number.

OTHER RESOURCES

Another valuable resource is your local chamber of commerce. You can typically find maps or shopping guides in their offices and chamber personnel can provide key perspectives. For instance, they might connect holiday shoppers with long-standing local companies that bring a wealth of knowledge to their processes and services. If the chamber isn’t nearby, remember that your phone can be a useful tool for learning about local businesses. Other sites that may provide basic shopping information include Facebook, Nextdoor and the Better Business Bureau. Some may not differentiate between local shops and national chains, but you’ll have a list that addresses specific gift-buying needs.

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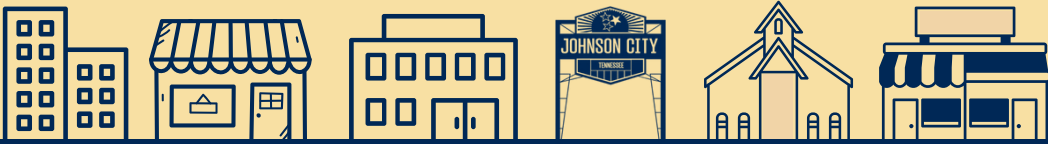
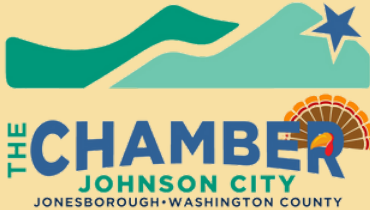


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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Punches for any party

There’s nothing like a shining crystal punch bowl and glasses anchoring a laden holiday table. Get your guests talking with these punchy (get it?) Christmas flavors to quench a crowd’s thirst.

MILK PUNCH

Makes 9 1/2 cups. Recipe is from Spice Islands.

Ingredients

3 cups powdered sugar

1/2 gallon whole milk, cold

12 ounces bourbon

3 tablespoons vanilla extract

Grated nutmeg, for garnish

Directions

1. Whisk powdered sugar and milk together in a large pitcher until the sugar dissolves.

2. Add the bourbon and vanilla extract and whisk well. Chill thoroughly. Serve over crushed ice with grated nutmeg sprinkled on top.

CHERRY PUNCH

Makes 8 servings. Recipe is from The Pioneer Woman.

Ingredients

1 16-ounce jar maraschino cherries

3 limes, thinly sliced

1 orange, thinly sliced

6 spiced hibiscus tea bags

1 12-ounce can frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed, strained if desired

2 liters ginger ale, chilled

2 12-ounce cans seltzer, chilled

1/4 cup grenadine

Directions

1. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Drain the cherries and reserve the juice. Spread out the cherries, limes and oranges on the sheet and freeze until solid, at least two hours and up to overnight.

2. Bring four cups of water to a simmer. Remove from the heat, add the tea bags, and steep for five minutes. Discard the tea bags and let the tea cool, then refrigerate until cold.

3. Pour the tea and cherry juice into a punchbowl. Add the orange juice concentrate and stir. Add the ginger ale, seltzer and grenadine. Add the frozen fruit just before serving.

GIN-CIDER PUNCH

Recipe is from Real Simple.

Ingredients

6 cups cold apple cider

3 cups gin

1 1/2 cups tonic water or elderflower tonic water

3/4 cup elderflower liqueur

3/4 cup fresh lemon juice

1 Honeycrisp apple

Directions

Combine all the ingredients except the apple in a punch bowl or large pitcher. Thinly slice the apple and add it to the punch. Pour over ice to serve.

HOLIDAY PUNCH

Makes 16 servings. Recipe is from Kroger.

Ingredients

Ice cubes

4 springs rosemary

1 orange, sliced

1 cup cranberries, fresh or frozen

1 64-ounce container cranberry juice cocktail

2 6-ounce cans pineapple juice

1 16-ounce container lemonade

1 16-ounce container ginger ale

Directions

In a large punch bowl or pitcher, add ice, rosemary, orange slices and cranberries. Then add the juices, lemonade and ginger ale. Serve.



Party foods to drool over

Make your holiday party the talk of the town with these party foods guaranteed to impress. Even better, these recipes can be made ahead for easy entertaining.

GRUYERE, ANCHOVY AND OLIVE STRAWS

Makes 18 straws. Recipe is from Martha Stewart.

Ingredients

Flour, for dusting

3 sheets all-butter puff pastry, thawed

1 large egg yolk

5 ounces Gruyere, coarsely grated

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Freshly ground pepper

Flaky sea salt

4 ounces anchovy fillets, from two tins, drained and halved lengthwise

Freshly ground pepper

4 ounces pitted Nicoise olives

2 tablespoons capers, rinsed and drained if salted

2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves

Freshly ground pepper

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out to a 15x18 rectangle. Cut in half crosswise. Whisk the egg yolk with a teaspoon of water. Brush one piece of dough with the egg wash, reserving the remainder. You’ll do this for each variation of the straws.

2. For the Gruyere straws: Sprinkle half each of the cheese and cayenne over the egg-washed dough, then season with pepper. Top with a second piece of dough and dust off any excess flour. Brush with egg wash. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese and cayenne, season with salt.

3. For the anchovy straws: Place half of the anchovies over egg-washed dough and arrange them

vertically along the length of a single layer. Season with pepper. Top with a second piece of dough. Dust off excess flour and brush with the egg wash. Top with remaining anchovies and season with more pepper.

4. With a floured rolling pin, roll over the dough gently to compress the fillings slightly and ensure toppings adhere. Cut the dough lengthwise into scant 1/2-inch thick strips. Transfer to prepared sheets, 1/2 inch apart. Refrigerate until firm, 10-15 minutes.

5. Bake until the straws are golden brown and crisp, 16-18 minutes. Let cool completely on sheets and store in an airtight container until ready to serve.

MEATBALLS WITH CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

Makes about 20. Recipe is from Taste of Home.

Ingredients

1 22-ounce package frozen, fully cooked Angus beef meatballs

3 garlic cloves, peeled

1 cup packed Italian flat leaf parsley

1/4 cup packed fresh cilantro leaves

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

Directions

1. Prepare meatballs according to package directions.

2. Put the garlic in a food processor and pulse until chopped. Add the parsley, cilantro, salt and pepper and pulse until chopped again. Add the vinegar and, while still processing, add the oil in a steady stream.

3. Toss the meatballs with a little more than half of the chimichurri sauce. Transfer to a platter and serve with the remainder of the sauce for dipping.



***Happy
Thanksgiving
From Our Family
To Yours!***

***We Would Like to Wish You
and Yours the Best This
Holiday Season!***



Steve Huff

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