

# The Magic of the Holidays

## 2024 Holiday Gift Guide



### Stuff that isn't stuff

**You can find the gifts they'll value, whether it's a thing or an experience, in the greater Cortland area**

By **TODD R. McADAM**  
Managing Editor

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My wife doesn't like "stuff." If it's a thing, it needs to serve a purpose.

At our age, we have just about every piece of stuff we could ever want, and a few pieces of stuff that we don't. The holidays have become a challenge in finding ways to show our love without creating one more thing to dust, wash, pick up or stash in a closet.

That said, some stuff isn't stuff. We use it. We appreciate it. It brings value, both aesthetic and ease of life. So what do we think about as the gift-giving season comes along? Mostly, about not repeating whatever we did last year, at least not until next year.

#### **SOMETHING HANDMADE**

The greater Cortland area has so many craft fairs this season, one begins to wonder if organizing a craft fair isn't an art form in itself.

Pick your craft. A hand-crocheted sweater is a work of art you can wear, or the tie-dyed dress shirts that brighten up an office (if one has a sense of humor about it.) Or simply get the supplies: local wool dyed and perfect to crochet a scarf, or any other textile art. Your secret Santa partner may appreciate learning how to make soap or other fragrant things. You can find that around here, too.

#### **SOMETHING PRETTY**

My son is fond of art by Homer native Luke Dangler, and you don't have to look far to find something pretty around here. The jewelers have won awards for their designs; and art hangs in a number of artisan shops and galleries. Perhaps photography is more your style, or hand-carved wooden things, or pottery.

You can even make a day of it,

touring galleries from the south side of Cortland, like the Ake Gallery, to Sikora Arts in Cortlandville, Frog Pond Folk Art Gallery in Little York or Alice's Dowry in Cincinnatus. (Hey, maybe a gallery tour in itself would be a pretty good gift, accompanied by a lunch at a bright cafe or bakery.)

#### **SOMETHING EDIBLE**

The cool part about some-

thing edible is that you can give it again next year. Bring the pie to the holiday dinner, or maybe a selection of local cheeses from Groton, Interlaken, Cuyler and beyond. (Well, that's really not that far.)

I like organic, grass-fed meats, and those are available, too. Several farm stores sell locally sourced foods, and you can get some straight from the farmers.

Or how about a subscription to a CSA, community-supported agriculture, where you buy a share of a farmer's crop and get weekly distributions for months in return. Not a bad gift for a person who likes vegetable variety.

Life's too short for bad beer, but the greater Cortland area has at least six good brewers. Life's long enough for that. Growlers are even reusable. Say Finger Lakes and wine comes to mind.

If you're thinking about gifts that ship, imagine what a bottle of real, actual, New York maple syrup might mean to someone across the country, where the closest thing to maple is actually brown-tinted corn syrup.

#### **SOMETHING PRACTICAL**

Snow tires may not be sexy, but it's hard to resent someone saying "I love you and I'd rather you not be a splatter on the wrong side of the road." There's nothing wrong with a practical gift; they can even be luxuries.

Try a certificate to a vehicle-detailing, or even an oil change. Or, for the person who has everything, someplace to put it — as small as a nice, artisan-made jewelry box or maybe a rental at a self-storage place.

#### **SOMETHING FUN**

The spouse and I had a great time watching "Hometown" in Syracuse this year. So much so, that we went to see "Six" and



Sarah Bullock/file photo

Crystal Young of Groton admires a handmade table-topper she bought in 2021 at a craft fair in Cortlandville. Want a very personal gift? Get something handmade.

Continued on page 2

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Why you should shop local  
for the holidays and beyond

Various components come together to make the holiday season a festive time of year. There is a lot to get done in a short amount of time during the holiday season, and part of that includes shopping for all of the family members and friends on your shopping list. Shopping can be a complicated process that involves identifying which stores will be the best places to shop. Local retailers make the perfect place to shop for holiday items.

According to the American Express Business Economic Impact Study, more than two-thirds of every dollar spent with a local business stays in the community. Indeed, shopping local benefits consumer and community alike. The following are some of the many perks to shopping locally throughout the holiday season.

- Personalized attention: Small businesses are known for their personalized customer service and owners and staff are often lauded for taking the time to interact and learn about their customers, a dynamic that is impossible at larger retailers.
- Meet and interact with people: Shopping in-person at local stores, you'll see faces from your community and become better known in the local area.
- Shorter lines: Local stores are bound to have smaller crowds and thus shorter lines. That translates to less stress and hassle when it comes to getting in and out with holiday gifts.
- Smaller carbon footprint: Pollution, traffic congestion, habitat loss, and resource depletion may not occur on the same levels when shopping locally compared to patronizing big box stores. That's because local retailers tend to create or source their products locally, whereas many big box stores secure their goods overseas.
- Easier parking: This goes hand-in-hand with smaller crowds, as shopping locally does not typically require driving up and down endless aisles at malls or standalone retail stores in an effort to find a parking spot. Local retailers in town may have on-street parking or closed lots that are convenient to shoppers.
- Small batch shopping experience: Consumers can secure items in small businesses that are not carbon copies of those found across the country at major retail chains. When seeking a unique, thoughtful gift, shopping locally is the way to go.

Shopping locally this holiday season provides an array of benefits to consumers, and helps to solidify a strong Main Street in communities.

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**STUFF THAT ISN'T STUFF** • from Page 1

“Les Miserables,” too. It revived my appreciation of musical theater, dormant since I was a high school student performing in “Oklahoma!”

Concerts, comics and personalities are good experiences easy to wrap. I saw Cherish the Ladies in concert some years ago, and they're playing in December at the Center for the Arts of Homer. A co-worker is looking forward to “The Little Mermaid” next year at the Cortland Repertory Theatre.

A day of skiing or golf may be what they want, or perhaps an evening of painting an sipping, or learning how to make some art at a greater Cortland artisan space.

**SOMETHING FOR SOMEONE ELSE**

Melanie Littlejohn of the Central New York Community Foundation — a \$434 million organization that administers private funds to help improve communities — came to Cortland recently to see what the community needs, how the non-profits might collaborate and how the foundation might be able to help.

She pointed out that gifts need not be large to be effective, and sometimes the best gift to a person is something for someone else. Imagine what your gift recipient cares about, and maybe help that cause along. Consider a gift to a greater Cortland non-profit.

Toys for Tots, of course, is popular this time of year. It prefers cash, because it can buy gifts wholesale, whereas you'd be paying retail, so the dollar goes further. But there are any number of organizations that could benefit from a dollar or two. The Cortland Area Chamber of Commerce lists 64 non-profits in Cortland County, but there are probably more.

At the end of all this, the idea is to get people gifts they'd appreciate. And perhaps they'd appreciate your gift helping other people, too.

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# Put it on your calendar

Here's a sampling of what's going on in the greater Cortland area during the holiday season.

**Nov. 28:** Thanksgiving Dinner, 11 a.m., Virgil Community Living Center, Virgil. Cost: \$14.95.

**Nov. 29:** Black Friday Craft Extravaganza, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., Virgil Community Living Center, Virgil.

**Nov. 29:** Cortland Christmas Tree Lighting, 6 p.m. Courthouse Park, Cortland.

**Nov. 29-Dec. 1:** Holidays on the Farm, Daisy Hollow Farm, Daisy Hollow Road, Dryden.

**Dec. 5:** Cocktails with Santa, 7 to 9 p.m., Cortland Repertory Theatre, Cortland.

**Dec. 6:** Virgil Tree Lighting, 5:30 p.m. Virgil Community Living Center, 1208 Church St., Virgil.

**Dec. 6:** Tinsel and Canvas: An Artful Winter Display, 4 to 6 p.m. Cortland County Historical Society, 25 Homer Ave., Cortland.

**Dec. 6:** Friday Pipe Organ Adventures, 12:15 to 12:45 p.m., United Presbyterian Church, 25 Church St., Cortland.

**Dec. 6:** Whitechapel Ringers handbell concert, 7 p.m., United Presbyterian Church, 25 Church St., Cortland.

**Dec. 6:** Who Let the Dogs Out? Portraits of Our Best Friends, exhibit and sale, 5 to 7 p.m., Cortland Free Library, 32 Church St., Cortland.

**Dec. 6-8:** Photos with Santa, 6 to 8:30 p.m., Dec. 6, 10 a.m. to noon and 2 to 4 p.m. Dec. 7, 1 to

3 p.m. Dec. 8, Cortland Repertory Theatre, Cortland.

**Dec. 7:** Holiday Workshop, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Southworth House, 14 North St., Dryden.

**Dec. 7:** Christmas At The Train Station, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., 90 Central Ave., Cortland.

**Dec. 7:** Annual Holiday Open House, noon to 5 p.m., Cortland County Historical Society, 25 Homer Ave., Cortland.

**Dec. 8:** Holly Tour of historic homes, 1 to 4 p.m., followed by reception at Southworth house, 14 North St., Dryden.

**Dec. 8:** Wreath-making Workshop, 1 to 3 p.m., Lime Hollow Nature Center, Cortlandville.

**Dec. 8:** Wassail at the 1890 House, noon to 4 p.m., 1890 House Museum, Tompkins Street, Cortland.

**Dec. 10:** Cherish the Ladies Celtic Christmas, 8 p.m., Center for the Arts of Homer.

**Dec. 13:** Christmas With the Celts, 8 p.m. Center for the Arts of Homer.

**Dec. 13:** Friday Pipe Organ Adventures, 12:15 to 12:45 p.m., United Presbyterian Church, 25 Church St., Cortland.

**Dec. 14:** Holiday Brunch, with Todd Meredith and the Rave-Ons, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Cortland Repertory Theatre, Cortland.

**Dec. 14:** Christmas Cookie Cafe, 9:30 a.m. to noon a Columbian Presbyterian Church, routes 11 and 20, Lafayette.

**Dec. 14-15:** Holiday Market, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Lime Hollow Nature Center, Cortlandville.

**Dec. 15:** Bones East Christmas Concert, 2 p.m. United Presbyterian Church, 25 Church St., Cortland.

**Dec. 18:** Solstice Lantern Festival, 4 to 7 p.m. Lime Hollow Nature Center, Gracie Road, Cortlandville.

**Dec. 20:** Friday Pipe Organ Adventures, 12:15 to 12:45 p.m., United Presbyterian Church, 25 Church St., Cortland.

**Dec. 20:** Cocoa, Caroling and Candlelight, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Cortland County Historical Society, 25 Homer Ave., Cortland.

**Dec. 22:** Cocoa and Carols Holiday Event, noon to 2 p.m. YMCA, Tompkins Street, Cortland.

**Dec. 31:** Dancin' Through the Decades, 9 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Cortland Repertory Theatre, Cortland.



Cortland Standard file photo

Santa bearing gifts for kids in 2015, including Calob Caulkins, 6, of McGraw, as they visited the Loaves and Fishes Christmas dinner at Grace Episcopal and Holy Spirit Lutheran Church in Cortland. A variety of events this holiday season range from concerts and Santa meet-and-greets to New Year's Eve dancing.



## 7 ideas for a festive holiday fete

The holiday season has arrived and with it comes many opportunities to socialize. With so many events on people's calendars, holiday party hosts may wonder what they can do to set their gatherings apart from others to make them memorable. Read on for seven festive ideas that can set a holiday season party apart from the rest.

- 1. Cook ahead.** Being able to mingle with guests and guide conversation or activities is the key to being an excellent holiday host. By cooking foods that can feed crowds ahead of time, you won't be stuck in the kitchen when you should be out and about. Casseroles, stews, soups, and quiches can be cooked in advance and then warmed (or set in a slow cooker) to bring to temperature.
- 2. Choose a color scheme.** Choose a color scheme that really pops and sets a festive tone. For a holiday cocktail party, consider bold reds and pinks and add a burst of gold for that contrast of color that adds impact.
- 3. Hire some entertainment.** Conversation and reminiscing can fill some time, but allot some of the party budget to entertainment. Perhaps hire a DJ who can keep the music flowing, or a karaoke professional who will have guests up and singing holiday (or non-holiday) tunes?
- 4. Create a signature cocktail.** An open bar can be expensive,

especially if you want to stock it with top-shelf offerings. Wine and beer is more affordable, and hosts who want to offer something a little different can create a signature cocktail for the party. Tie in seasonal flavors, whether you go sweet with a chocolate cream liqueur and mint or something more tart like a cranberry-based drink.

- 5. Rearrange the furniture.** If the music is playing and guests are fired up, you'll need a spot where they can dance. Move large furnishings out of the main gathering space to create room to cut a rug; otherwise, create an outdoor gathering area complete with stringed lights so guests can take the fun outside, if necessary.
  - 6. Plan for prizes.** Guests always appreciate some sort of takeaway. Gifting is commonplace this time of year, but perhaps have guests work a little to reap the rewards? Simple trivia games or a scavenger hunt can increase the fun and make it possible for guests to walk away with some swag.
  - 7. Have at least one unexpected item.** This can be anything from a very clever and cute dessert to a special guest to an over-the-top decorative item that gets people talking and ensures the party is one no one will forget.
- Throwing a festive holiday party is easier than one may think. With some creativity, hosts can plan a party to remember.

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Children typically want to treat their parents to something special during the holiday season. Parents do a lot for their children, and when those kids become adults, a desire to express their appreciation for Mom and Dad grows.

According to The Wrap Up: Snappy's 2022 Holiday Gift Report, the majority of Americans (64.2 percent) report they need help when it comes to holiday gifting. They may want to carefully consider a recipient's interests, as the report also discovered more than half of all Americans want a gift that reflects their personal interests and hobbies. When shopping for elderly parents, it may not be as simple as identifying interests, particularly if Mom and Dad are experiencing age-related health issues. Consider these gift ideas that may be ideal for the aging adults in your life.

★ **Cozy blanket:** Older adults may have trouble regulating their body temperatures, which can translate to feeling cold a lot of the time. A new blanket or throw for a bed or to cuddle up with in a favorite recliner might be the perfect gift.

★ **Family history book:** Budding writers can interview their aging parents and jot down family stories. Those stories and anecdotes can be compiled into a book and combined with photos to make a family history log, which can be gifted back to the interviewee.

★ **Gripping slippers:** Slips and falls can injure aging adults and put them out of commission for quite some time. Sturdy and secure slippers with anti-slip soles are good for getting around the house and making quick trips to take out the trash or get the mail.

★ **Robotic vacuum:** Keeping up with the household chores is easier with a robotic vacuum that automatically scours carpets and hard-surface floors. This eliminates having to wrestle with a cumbersome vacuum.

★ **Key finder:** A key finder can help adults find their keys if they are misplaced. Some employ radio frequency, while others utilize Bluetooth technology and can be paired to a smartphone.

★ **Magnifying light:** Older parents who like to do puzzles or close-up work like knitting or stitching can benefit from an LED lamp that also has a magnifying glass built right in.

★ **E-reader:** Avid readers may enjoy an e-reader because they don't have to find spots to store even more books in their homes. E-readers can be customized so the print is the right size for the reader's needs. Also, the devices are lightweight and easy to stow in a bag.

★ **Automatic card shuffler:** Parents who are known card sharks around the community can use an automatic card shuffler to make card play even easier.

★ **Resistance bands:** Resistance bands are like large rubber bands that exert force to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility. They can help aging adults stay in shape in a low-impact way.

★ **Dining gift cards:** When parents do not want to spend additional time in the kitchen, they may opt to visit a favorite restaurant. A combination of a gift card to a favorite establishment as well as pre-paid taxi or ride share service ensures a good meal and a safe ride home.

Although they seem to have everything, aging parents still can benefit from some thoughtful gifts.



## How do Gen Z and millennials discover new stores and brands?

**By just walking around, it turns out**

By SAM BECKER  
 Fast Company Magazine

Businesses spend billions of dollars trying to get the attention of younger consumers, namely members of the Gen Z and millennial cohorts. But a surprising new study finds that a majority of those consumers are learning about new businesses and brands the old-fashioned way: They're just walking around their communities.

That's one of the takeaways from the 2024 American Express Shop Small Impact Study, released on Tuesday. Specifically, the study finds that 90% of Gen Z and millennials have found new businesses while hoofing it—which is more than the 80% who said they've discovered new small, independent businesses through social media.

It begs the question: Have younger consumers short-circuited entire marketing departments with their low-tech sauntering?

Sort of, says Elizabeth Rutledge, chief marketing officer at American Express. "While technology and discovering businesses online will continue to be crucial, after COVID we have in fact seen a shift in younger consumers' behaviors as they desire more IRL, human connections," she says.

The trend has translated into more people wanting to support small, local businesses—or at least saying they want to—this holiday season. Amex's study finds that 85% of consumers overall say they're "likely" to "shop small" this year, which is an increase of 11 points over the past decade.

Furthermore, 55% say they plan to make shopping small "a priority." That's cascaded into optimism for business owners, too—95% of which have a positive outlook for their holiday sales this year, which is up 12 points over last year.

"From a global pandemic to an ever-evolving macroeconomic environment, the past few years have tested small businesses," says Rutledge. "They've had to be scrappy, savvy, and flexible, and we expect this sentiment to continue based on our conversations with business owners. . . . They've told us that taking on new challenges every year makes them feel even more confident in their skills as business owners and in their ability to grow their businesses for the future."

Banking on 'Small Business Saturday'

Those business owners may be banking on a big holiday. According to the data, the average small business owner expects that roughly a quarter of their annual revenue will be due to sales on Small Business Saturday, which is the day after Black Friday, or November 30 this year. Such sales can make a big difference since shopping at local businesses tends to keep money in local economies.

"Our previous studies have shown that for every dollar spent with a local business, 68 cents stays in the local community," says Rutledge. "That's why we're focused on building excitement and engagement around Small Business Saturday: reminding consumers of the real impact their dollars make in local communities."

# Notable Chanukah traditions

Each year on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, which typically falls during the month of December, adherents of the Jewish faith celebrate the festival of Chanukah. Although Chanukah may not bear the same religious significance as other Jewish holidays, it is a well-known celebration.

Chanukah commemorates the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees in 165 BC after its desecration by the Syrians. Although there was not enough oil left to light the Temple for even one night, lamps remained illuminated for eight straight days and nights. Thus Chanukah is known as the Festival of Lights, which incorporates many unique traditions.

## Lighting the menorah

Perhaps the most visible and important Chanukah tradition involves the menorah. While traditional Jewish menorahs have seven branches, the Chanukah menorah, known as the hanukkah, actually has nine branches. There are eight candles and a ninth, which is called the shamash, is used to light the other eight. The menorah is lit each night after sundown.

## Giving of gelt

Chanukah gelt is money given as presents during the festival. It is typically offered to children and sometimes to teachers. Other

gifts have now largely replaced the coins once offered, and gelt is sometimes chocolate.

## Playing dreidel

Greek-Syrians outlawed Jewish studies at one point, so the Jews spun dreidels to pretend they were only playing games. Really they were engaged with their scripture. The tradition of spinning the dreidel endures as a Chanukah tradition.

## Foods fried in oil

The miracle of the burning oil extends to the foods enjoyed during Chanukah. Many of the holiday foods are prepared in oil, including latkes (fried potatoes) and sufganiyot, which are fried, jelly-filled doughnuts. According to Town & Country magazine, millions of jelly doughnuts are consumed in Israel throughout Chanukah.

## Serving brisket

An authentic Chanukah celebration often includes traditional dishes served in the spirit of celebration and gratitude. Brisket is frequently prepared for Chanukah dinners. Brisket was adopted because it was affordable and delicious. Jewish brisket is braised, and served with carrots, potatoes and other vegetables. Brisket may be served alongside another Chanukah dish, kugel, which is

a casserole made from eggs and noodles

## Making cookies

Although Christmas cookies may be ubiquitous this time of year, cookies often are part of Chanukah traditions as well. Some cookies are cut to look like dreidels or stars. Those who want to incorporate the

miracle of oil into their baking can seek recipes that use oil in place of butter in the cookie batters, something that can make them dairy-free and also vegan.

Chanukah begins on December 25, 2024, and will last through January 2, 2025. It's a festive time to embrace many time-honored traditions.



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## Notable Christmas celebrations around the world



It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas all over the world. Christmas celebrations include various time-honored traditions that celebrants hold near and dear to their hearts. Depending on where someone lives, their Christmas traditions may look quite different from those in other parts of the globe.

It can be enjoyable to learn how Christmas is celebrated elsewhere and perhaps even incorporate a few new traditions into your celebrations. Take a peek at these customs near and far.

- Seafood and beachside celebrations: Australia is located in the southern hemisphere, which means Aussies are enjoying the peak of their summer come December 25. A white Christmas is unlikely, unless the ÖwhiteÖ refers to white, sandy beaches. Santa is probably swapping his thick coat for a pair of board shorts, and heavy, roast-laden meals are unlikely to make it on to the menu. Instead, Australians dine on seafood feasts and spend Christmas outdoors camping or at the beach.

- Krampus parade: Some Christmas elves are not so jolly. Just ask residents of the Austrian, German and Hungarian Alps. Each year in this region, a true Öbad SantaÖ is the talk of town. Villagers believed that Krampus, a half-man, half-goat creature with a legion of ill-tempered elves, roamed the mountains wreaking havoc. Krampus was said to abduct miscreants and set unruly youth or even intoxicated adults straight. Today, Krampus is more the Öbad copÖ to Santa's Ögood copÖ persona. Krampus is celebrated as an antihero at parades and other events.

- Las Posadas: According to scripture, Joseph and Mary had

to make an arduous journey from their hometown to Bethlehem for census purposes while Mary was pregnant. When the couple arrived, they found lodgings were nonexistent, and Mary ended up giving birth to Jesus in a manger surrounded by animals. In celebration of that journey, people in Mexico and Guatemala celebrate Las Posadas, a procession representing Mary and Joseph's journey and their struggle to find lodging.

- La Befana: In Italian folklore, La Befana is a witch-like old woman who, like Santa, delivers gifts to children throughout Italy. Instead of this gift-giving taking place on Christmas, La Befana hands out gifts on the Epiphany Eve in a similar way to how the Three Magi brought presents to Baby Jesus. Le Befana also is believed to fly through the night sky to sweep away all the troubles of the old year and clear the way for a fresh start.

- Move over reindeer: Although reindeer often garner fanfare this time of year, the Yule goat is a Christmas symbol and tradition in Scandinavia and northern Europe. Each year in towns throughout Sweden and other areas, large statues of Yule goats are built on the first day of Advent and stand throughout the holiday season. This tradition dates back to ancient Pagan festivals, and some believe the goat is connected to the Norse god Thor, who rode in the sky in a chariot pulled by two goats.

Holiday traditions differ considerably in various regions of the world. Celebrants may want to consider incorporating foreign traditions into their own Christmas celebrations this year.

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# Make holiday crafting a family affair

Families gather frequently during the holiday season as everyone enjoys the feasts and festivities that are synonymous with this time of year. Families often bake and decorate together, as these activities are inclusive of people of all ages.

This time of year also is one for dabbling in creative pursuits. Now is a prime opportunity to bond with children over a table full of paint, glue, beads, and other crafty supplies. The crafts made during the holidays often become cherished mementos that will be regarded fondly for years to come. Here are some ideas to inspire holiday creativity.

## Snowman family

Handprint crafts are popular among children. Adults and children can dip their hands into washable white paint and make a handprint stamp on a small canvas, wooden palette or even a terracotta flowerpot. Decorate the white fingerprints with black dots to look like the faces of the snowmen and paint on top hats and scarves. In the years to come, artists can marvel at how small their hand prints once were.

## Wine cork reindeer

Repurpose wine corks by crafting adorable little reindeer. Two corks make up the head and the body, and four vertically will comprise the feet. Stick on googly

eyes, and add a small red or black bead for the nose. Pipe cleaners can be bent to form the reindeer's antlers.

## Family garlands

This craft also makes use of handprints. Ask all family members to trace their handprints on different colors of construction paper or card stock. Cut out all of the paper hands, punch holes in the tops and then string a ribbon through. Decorate the Christmas tree or a mantle with this garland.

## Miniature Christmas trees

Paint the tips of gathered pine cones with green paint and allow to dry. Add white glitter or paint as snow. Glue the pine cones

to wine corks that will serve as the tree trunks, and attach a small wooden star to the top of the trees for the finishing touch.

## Decoupage ornaments

Purchase wooden or plastic ball ornaments. Cover with small scraps of cut fabric or paper dipped in craft glue or Mod Podge, and attach to the ornament in an overlapping fashion. Remember to add a string from which the ornament can be hung on the tree. Allow to dry completely before use.

## Paper chain Advent calendar

Cut strips of paper to make a link for every day of Advent. Advent begins on Sunday, December

1, 2024, and lasts until Christmas. The top link can be any design artists prefer, but those who need a little inspiration can consider a religious symbol, the face of a reindeer, a snowman, or a Christmas tree. Hang the chain and then children can take turns ripping off a link from the bottom each day as they count down to the holiday.

## Popsicle stick snowflakes

Paint four popsicle sticks per snowflake in desired colors. Decorate with glue, pompoms, beads, or other trinkets. Add small looped strings to hang the ornaments.

Parents, grandparents and children can have fun crafting holiday decorations this December.



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## Add seasonal bazaars to your list of holiday shopping locations

There is no shortage of options to find every item on your holiday shopping list. Shopping malls, online retailers and mom and pop stores along Main Street can be great spots to grab holiday deals, but shoppers also can find great gifts at holiday fairs and bazaars.

Bazaars are found all over the world, but are notable to Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Bazaars are marketplaces that feature several small shops or vendor stalls. In some countries, bazaars are outdoors and covered by tents, while in others they feature several stalls set up in large rooms.

Holiday bazaars often pop up during the holiday season and mimic international marketplaces. They may be hosted by cities or towns, schools or places of worship. Sometimes they are fundraising opportunities, with nonprofit organizations charging a stall- or table-renting fee for bazaar participants. Holiday fairs and bazaars often bring together an array of different retailers,

many of whom are small businesses selling interesting wares. Shoppers should take advantage of every opportunity to visit these holiday bazaars because they will only be around for a short time. Here's a look at some of the benefits of bazaar shopping for the holidays.

• Patronize small businesses. Holiday bazaars often bring together small businesses that may not normally have storefronts. This allows shoppers to meet the individuals behind businesses they already patronize or discover new firms they were previously unacquainted with.

• Shop unique wares. Holiday bazaars may showcase items not easily found elsewhere, from handcrafted jewelry to unique soaps to custom woodworking items.

• Develop new relationships. Shopping at holiday bazaars enables you to meet and interact with new people. This can expand your social circles and may even expand your professional network.

• Enjoy the shopping experience. Shopping away from the bustle of larger, busier retail stores gives you a break from the harried shopping experience many experience during the holiday season. Rather, holiday fairs and bazaars typically are less crowded and engage at a slower pace. Plus, they may have a more homespun decorating design that can have you feeling like you're shopping in a Christmas village.

• Take advantage of food vendors. Food vendors likely will be mixed within the offerings of the holiday bazaar. That gives you opportunity to take the day off from cooking and enjoy some savory and sweet bites while grabbing gifts.

Holiday shopping bazaars are great places to shop for the holidays.



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# 9 ways to get through the holidays when you're just not feeling it

By LAURA SAMPSON  
The Associated Press

The holidays can be tough when things haven't been great or if you're simply not in the mood for the usual traditions. It's important to know that it's OK to do things differently. Whether you're going on an outdoor activity or skipping the whole thing entirely, you can switch things up this holiday season.

It's often the expectations of others that drive us to keep celebrating the same way year after year. When you're family has suffered a loss or a change in situation, you may just need to take a break. And that's okay.

Whether overwhelmed with feelings or things to do, these are both great reasons to consider changing your tradition. This can be a real change for the holiday moving forward. Or it can be a change for just one year. Your life is up to you.

## CHANGE THINGS UP

If the situation above describes you, you're not alone. Many families adjust their celebrations as life moves along.

Change the food you serve or the time you serve it

If the traditional holiday meal doesn't feel right this

year, change it up. Instead of turkey, try roast beef. Instead of stuffing, potatoes and sweet potatoes, consider simple baked potatoes. Several pies can be simplified to one perfect pecan pie.

Switch it up entirely and serve your favorite comfort foods instead of the usual feast. Consider moving dinner to lunch or brunch. It's your holiday, and no rules say you should stick to the same old routine.

## MAKE A SMALLER FEAST

If a big holiday spread feels overwhelming, opt for a more intimate, scaled-back version. Skip the turkey and cook your favorite dishes in smaller portions or make a cozy meal with a roasted chicken for just a few close friends or family members. Simplifying can take the pressure off and let you enjoy the day more.

## MAKE IT A DAY OF SERVICE

Sometimes, giving back is the best way to get through the holidays. Spend the day volunteering at a local shelter or helping an organization in need. Turning the day into one of service can shift the focus from your own chal-

lenges and bring a sense of fulfillment.

## TRY A CHANGE OF SCENERY

If the holidays at home feel too heavy, go simple. Consider escaping to an Airbnb for a change of scenery. A quiet retreat, a cabin in the woods or a beachside getaway can be a refreshing break from the usual holiday chaos and give you time to relax and reset.

## TAKE THE DAY OFF

Buy a pre-made holiday meal from a local restaurant, grocery store or butcher shop to take the stress out of holiday cooking. This lets you enjoy the holiday without spending hours in the kitchen, freeing up time for rest, relaxation or whatever you'd rather be doing.

## HAVE SOMEONE ELSE HOST

If you're not up to hosting this year, don't be afraid to pass the torch. Let a family member or friend host the holiday gathering. Consider a potluck where everyone contributes their favorite dish. You can still be part of the celebration without taking on all the responsibility. Stepping down allows others to explore cooking their favorite

dishes, their version of mashed potatoes or give them space to become great bakers.

## SKIP THE WHOLE THING ENTIRELY

This one takes some dedication but it can also be curative. If you're really not feeling the holidays, it's okay to skip the work altogether. Spend the day watching your favorite movies, and enjoying potpies in your pajamas. Sometimes taking the pressure off and treating it like any other day can be the most comforting choice.

## SPEND THE DAY IN NATURE

Instead of staying inside, consider spending the holiday outdoors. A peaceful walk, a hike or even just sitting in a quiet park can be a soothing way to celebrate the day on your own terms. A refreshing outdoor activity can help you face whatever you're feeling.

## CELEBRATE ON A DIFFERENT DAY

If the actual day feels stressful or overwhelming or just too much, consider celebrating on a different day when things are calmer. Spacing out the festivities can take the pressure off the

actual holiday and let you enjoy a more relaxing day.

## BREATHE EASY

It's important to remember that you don't have to stick to the same holiday traditions every year, especially when life has changed or you're simply not feeling up to it. Whether you're overwhelmed, grieving or not in the mood, it's okay to adjust how you celebrate or take a break from it all.

You have the freedom to change things in a way that feels right for you, whether it's making a smaller meal, turning the day into one of service or even skipping the holiday altogether. You might find peace by spending the day in nature, getting away or celebrating on a different day. However, if you choose to approach the holidays, know that there's no right or wrong way to do it - what matters most is taking care of yourself and honoring what you need during this time.

Laura Sampson of Little House Big Alaska is on a mission to teach modern family-oriented home cooks how to make old-fashioned foods new again. She shares her passion for home cooking, backyard gardening and homesteading on her website and blog.

# How to participate in Giving Tuesday

The excitement of the holiday season is palpable. Many people look forward to this time of year so they can deck their homes in lights and find gifts that will delight friends and family.

The spirit of giving that pervades the holiday season extends to Giving Tuesday, which comes on the heels of the busiest shopping days of the year. According to the Giving Tuesday website, Giving Tuesday is a movement that "imagines a world built upon shared humanity and generosity." Organizers feel that generosity is the avenue through which humanity can collectively strengthen its social fabric. Those who would like to harness the spirit of charitable giving can explore these ways to give back.

## Get involved where it started

Giving Tuesday started with a team from the Belfer Center for Innovative & Social Impact in New York City. In November 2012, these individuals explored nonprofits, influencers and businesses to inspire others to get involved with acts of giving. The organization has many initiatives that people can support in addition to the original Giving Tuesday.

Learn more at [www.92ny.org/belfer-center](http://www.92ny.org/belfer-center).

## Plant a community garden

Food insecurity is a problem in many neighborhoods across the country. Petition local city councils for a portion of green spaces to devote to a community garden to grow produce for those who may need it. Doing so can foster a sense of camaraderie in communities.

## Start a caremongering movement

Caremongering began as a community-led social movement to address health and social needs during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Caremongering is designed to help vulnerable people and can include anything from grocery shopping for those with mobility issues to virtually or physically socializing with others to combat social isolation.

Those who want to caremonger can do many other things, like run emergency errands or help with childcare.

## Donate goods and supplies

Areas of the southern United States experienced extreme devastation with the one-two punch of hurricanes Helene and Milton in early October. Natural disasters can displace families and

push individuals to the brink as supplies become scarce. It is likely recovery efforts in areas wiped out by these storms will take months, underscoring the importance of continued support via donations and volunteer efforts.

Getting involved on Giving Tuesday is easier than one may imagine. Let this day sow the seeds of generosity for the entire year.

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# Small businesses can capitalize on Small Business Saturday with planning

By MAE ANDERSON  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Small Business Saturday — the Saturday after Thanksgiving — is coming up. But it doesn't always translate to big sales for small businesses. There are some things small business owners should keep in mind when marketing themselves for the big holiday shopping weekend.

American Express introduced a marketing promotion called "Small Business Saturday" 15 years ago. It has been co-sponsored by the Small Business Administration since 2011. The idea was to promote smaller shops over the big box chains like Walmart and Best Buy that typically get the lion's share of business on Black Friday, the Friday after Thanksgiving that is typically the biggest shopping day of the year.

So how can small businesses capitalize on the Saturday — and the rest of the weekend? First, shop owners should make sure they have a strong line of communication with customers. Broadcast deals via customer email lists and social media to entice shoppers into the store.

Create your own marketing campaign — or use free marketing assets offered by American

Express that are specific to different industries, including dining, beauty and retail. They include posters and suggested social me-

dia posts.

Team up with other local businesses. Many communities offer a map of local retailers for cus-

tomers on Small Business Saturday — make sure you're on it.

Finally, stock up. If you're offering a promotion, ensure

that you have enough stock to deliver on the promotion so customers aren't turned away empty handed.



Greg Eans/The Associated Press

Ashley Crafton looks at tennis shoes at at Shoe Stop while shopping during Small Business Saturday in Wesleyan Park Plaza on Nov. 25, 2023, in Owensboro, Ky.

## 'Slow Shopping' Is Transforming Holiday Spending Habits

By MICHAEL DINICH  
Wealth of Geeks

Americans are not holding back on holiday spending this year — but they are taking a more deliberate approach to the pur-

chases they make, according to new research.

The study of 2,000 Americans who celebrate a winter holiday, revealed the growing trend of "slow shopping," with nearly

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Photo provided by Wealth of Geeks

A study shows more people this year are using "slow shopping," several smaller holiday shopping treks focused on value and intent.

three in four respondents (73%) saying they have adopted this approach for the holiday shopping season.

Additionally, three in five respondents (60%) said they're starting earlier, making more frequent, smaller trips and being mindful of what they buy this year.

Conducted by Talker Research on behalf of Affirm, the survey asked why purchasing habits have changed — and respondents pointed to value and intention.

The Rise of "Slow Shopping" This Holiday Season

More than one in two of those embracing the "slow shopping" trend (53%) said they're doing so to ensure they're only purchasing items they truly want, and more than one in three (36%) said it helps them take more time to research their purchases in advance

and compare different brands and styles.

At the same time, more than half (51%) said they're using "slow shopping" to take advantage of more deals and promotions.

"Every year, we see shoppers starting their holiday shopping earlier, but this time it's different — they're also taking their time. Over 50% plan to finish their purchases on or after Black Friday," shares Vishal Kapoor, Affirm's SVP of Product. "With just 27 days between Thanksgiving and Christmas this year, expect consumers to use this time to carefully weigh their options and hunt for the best value from retailers, including more flexible ways to pay offered via longer payment terms and unique credit offers." Flexible Payment Options Gain

Popularity Among Shoppers

Americans may be pacing their holiday spending, but they are not cutting back. Nearly seven in 10 consumers (68%) plan to spend the same or more than they did last year — fully aware of higher costs.

For those planning to spend more this year, over one in three (34%) cite inflation, saying they expect to pay more for the same number of gifts.

Against this backdrop, budgeting and affordability are among respondents' top priorities this holiday season. Results revealed that over half of Americans surveyed (55%) prioritize finding value for money — that's the top thing they're looking for from retailers.

Half of respondents (50%) consider 0% APR financing options to be just as, if not more, valuable than traditional discounts.

And of the subset of respondents planning to use pay over time options this holiday season, over half (53%) of those are doing so as it can make the cost of a purchase more affordable, closely followed by the ability to help them budget (52%).

**Survey Methodology:**

Talker Research surveyed 2,000 Americans who celebrate a winter holiday; the survey was commissioned by Affirm and administered and conducted online by Talker Research between Sept. 30 and Oct. 2, 2024.

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# Are you a lazy cook?

Here's how to lighten your load through the holiday season

By **JESSICA HAGGARD**  
The Associated Press

Let's face it, not everyone loves spending hours in the kitchen - especially during the busy holiday season. Between gift shopping, parties and family gatherings, meal prep often feels like just another item on the to-do list - but it doesn't have to be that way! With a few clever tricks, you can put delicious meals on the table without the stress.

## Research recipes ahead of time

Planning ahead is key to stress-free holiday cooking and researching your recipes in advance can make all the difference. Take a bit of time to find simple, reliable recipes that require minimal ingredients and preparation.

Focus on dishes that can be made in batches, repurposed as leftovers or even prepped ahead of time. Remember to consider food allergies and sensitivities your family might have. This way, when the busy holiday season arrives, you'll have a go-to collection of festive and easy-to-prepare meals.

Kristin King from Dizzy Busy and Hungry attests to this strategy, "I look for recipes I can prep ahead, freeze or double up for leftovers or multiple gatherings," she says. "Simple sheet pan dinners or slow cooker meals keep things quick and hassle free with minimal cleanup, so I can enjoy the season without getting overwhelmed by all the cooking!"

## Choose ingredients you can freeze

To make holiday meal prep easier, focus on ingredients that freeze well, like meats, cooked grains, hearty vegetables and sauces. Frozen veggies, shrimp and even meatballs are lifesavers when you're pressed for time. Keep your freezer stocked with these basics to whip up quick stir-fries, pasta dishes or protein-packed salads.

Shopping ahead and freezing key ingredients means fewer trips to crowded stores, where items may be sold out and check-out lines are long. By stocking your freezer with versatile, freezer-friendly foods, you'll save yourself time and stress when the holiday rush kicks in.

## Go for recipes with overlapping ingredients

You can also make holiday cooking easier by picking recipes that share similar ingredients. For example, if you're roasting parmesan potatoes as a side dish, boil extra for mashed potatoes and

save leftovers for mashed potato waffles. Grilled chicken can serve as a main course one day and be repurposed into a chicken salad or lettuce wrap later in the week.

This tip can help you reduce the number of things you need to buy, simplifying your meal prep. You'll have a variety of dishes without the extra work.

## Create your shopping list early

One of the easiest ways to simplify holiday meal planning is to create your shopping list well in advance before needing to go to the store. Start by planning your meals and breaking down each recipe into ingredients, organizing them by section - produce, pantry items, meats, etc.

This method saves you time during the actual shopping trip so you can quickly navigate the aisles without forgetting anything. Having a list ready also helps you stick to your budget and avoid impulsively buying. Plus, if you start early, you can watch for sales or pick up non-perishables over time.

## Lean on pre-made grocery items

Pre-made sauces can be a game-changer. Keep a few go-to jars of marinara, pesto and teriyaki sauce on hand. Toss them with pasta, drizzle over roasted veggies or add them to a quick stir-fry for a boost of flavor without any fuss.

Likewise, there's no shame in buying pre-chopped onions, peppers or broccoli. It's a major time-saver and can make the difference between cooking at home or ordering takeout when you're facing burnout.

## Consider doubling recipes

You don't always need an overcomplicated menu with a dozen different dishes. Another option is to double your recipes instead. Simply make twice as much when cooking a dish like a casserole, soup or baked item.

You can serve one portion immediately and freeze the rest for a quick, ready-made meal later. Doing so not only saves you from cooking multiple times but also helps you make the most of bulk ingredients, cutting down on grocery trips.

Some recipes are already written for a large number of servings. Seek out a soup, chili or stew that serves six to eight. Then, you'll have enough to reheat for lunches throughout the week and still freeze some for later even without doubling the recipe.

## Get an appliance on your counter

Not all appliances are worthy of dedicated counter space. However, when it comes to cooking with a busy holiday schedule, some are worth their keep. Consider a slow cooker or an Instant Pot as a first choice.

These appliances are ideal for hands-off cooking, whether it's a one-pot stew, salsa chicken or a cozy pork roast. Just dump in your ingredients and walk away while the machine does all the heavy lifting.

Michelle Price from Honest and Truly gets it right when she says, "With everything from kids' events to holiday parties, it can be hard to find the time to balance this with meals at home." Her solution relies on "soups, stews and slow-cooker recipes that use a lot of seasonal vegetables and make big batches that I enjoy for a couple of days and then freeze for later."

The payoff for her is clear: "The



Depositphotos/Associated Press

If you feel like a lazy cook, you're not alone. There are plenty of shortcuts to keep meals simple and stress free this season

best part is that all these types of foods tend to not require much effort or stove babysitting. The quick prep is less stressful, and I feel better about what I'm eating because it's homemade from scratch."

## Prepare for a hassle-free holiday

Meal planning through the holidays doesn't have to be stressful. By researching recipes in advance, choosing freezer-friendly ingredients, leaning on pre-made grocery items and double-batch

cooking, you'll set yourself up for success. With a little preparation, you can focus on the fun and joy of the season without feeling overwhelmed by all the cooking.

Jessica Haggard is dedicated to helping people cook easy everyday recipes focusing on bioavailable and nutrient-dense foods. She helps people overcome food allergies and discover healthy recipes that make a difference in their health with gluten-free, low-carb and keto cooking at Primal Edge Health.

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# Festive holiday sips that won't break the bank

By **CASEY ROONEY**  
The Associated Press

The holidays are known for indulgence - presents, food, decorations and, of course, drinks. The good news is festive drinks don't have to break your holiday bank. Delicious, budget-friendly alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks are definitely within reach.

## Budget-friendly wine and cocktails

When planning cocktails for holiday gatherings, remember: Quality over quantity. To keep costs low, keep your drink selection to a minimum with one red and one white wine and one to two simple cocktails or mocktails. Perhaps find one signature cocktail to feature and use good-quality liquor. This is much more cost-efficient than buying five different mediocre varieties, not to mention tastier.

## Less is more

Ashley Berger, who writes Sweetpea Lifestyle, says, "I love serving a batch cocktail for holiday gatherings. Not only is it economical, it's easy on the host."

Sparkling wine cocktails are a budget-friendly batch cocktail idea. While Champagne is the ultimate indulgence, lesser-priced prosecco, cava or cremant make a perfect alternative for holiday drinks.

The formula is simple: For every 25-ounce bottle of sparkling wine, use 16 ounces of fruit juice and 8 ounces of liquor. A festive option is a cranberry spritz made with sparkling wine, cranberry juice and Grand Marnier.

Another option is to make a big batch of mulled wine for a fantastic holiday treat. Mulled wine is the cozy cousin to summertime sangria. Like with sangria, you do not need an expensive wine for it to be delicious. One magnum of red wine can be picked up for as low as \$12.99.

Add the red wine to a crockpot, along with warm spices like cinnamon, cloves, anise and a splash of brandy. Cook on low for about an hour. Another great tip is to purchase small airplane-size bottles of brandy so there's zero waste.

## Budget-friendly wine

There's no reason to feel like you have to spend \$50 to get a great bottle of wine. Warehouse stores and Trader Joe's have an incredible selection of good-quality, budget-friendly wines curated by their in-house wine experts. Don't be afraid to branch out and try varietals of wine you've never had.

Tony Kilgallin, sommelier and wine expert at the Trader Joe's store in Napa, California, sug-

Continued on page 12

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# How to celebrate sober this New Year's Eve

Revelry and New Year's Eve tend to go hand in hand. When the world-renowned ball drops in Times Square at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, many a celebrant toasts the arrival of a New Year with a glass of champagne, a tradition that underscores the role alcohol plays on the final day of the year.

Though alcohol is readily available on New Year's Eve,

there are still plenty of ways for individuals to celebrate sober. This New Year's Eve, individuals looking to avoid alcohol can consider these fun ways to ring in the new year.

★ Make it a marathon until midnight. Time zones feature prominently on New Year's Eve, but the excitement sci-fi fans feel come New Year's Eve has everything to do with a more unique

zone. "The Twilight Zone" is a beloved fantasy science fiction horror anthology television series that ran for five seasons between 1959 and 1964. In years past, the SyFy channel in the United States has run a "The Twilight Zone" marathon each New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Fans of the classic show can cuddle up and watch all the classic episodes. Viewers who don't

necessarily want to watch "The Twilight Zone" can take inspiration from the SyFy channel and create their own themed movie or television show marathon and invite like-minded friends over for a fun night in.

★ Host a sober party. Parties are popular on New Year's Eve, and there's nothing stopping sober celebrants from getting in on the fun. Host a party at home and let guests know the party will be a sober affair. Prepare or cater a sit-down dinner for guests, who will have plenty of time before midnight to engage in conversation with their hosts and fellow celebrants. Arrange for games to be played throughout the night after dinner and be sure to have a television showing a broadcast of coverage from Times Square or another notable locale where people gather to ring in the new year.

★ Travel overseas. If you typically spend New Year's Eve in your home country, consider an

overseas trip to take in how people in another part of the world usher in the new year. There's no shortage of locales with memorable celebrations. Some spots to consider include Sydney, Australia, which hosts a breathtaking fireworks show each New Year's Eve, and Edinburgh, Scotland, where a three-day festival culminates with a fireworks display near Edinburgh Castle.

★ Take in some entertainment. Many concert venues are booked on New Year's Eve, when a mix of new and old musical acts take to the stage and typically play until the clock strikes 12, if not beyond. These shows tend to be memorable affairs and make for an ideal way to ring in the new year without alcohol.

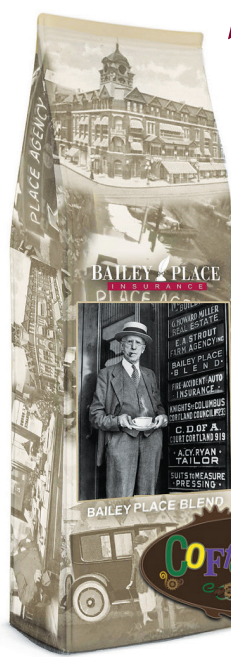
Alcohol may seem like a must-have on New Year's Eve. But individuals aspiring to stay sober this December 31 have many options to celebrate without having a drink.

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## Frumpy Mom: Grateful stories for Thanksgiving

By MARLA JO FISHER  
The Orange County Register

It's hard to believe that it's already time for Thanksgiving. I hope you have something to be thankful for this year. I'm grateful that I'm about to have a new granddaughter, who will be born by the time you read this. My daughter, Curly Girl, will be thankful that she finally got that baby out of her, because the kid kicks her innards unceasingly now demanding to be released from her maternal prison.

Last week, I asked you for some incidents where strangers helped you for no reason, to cheer us all up from recent stressful events. I didn't have room for all the great responses, but here are a few, edited for length.

Hedy Williamson, Laguna Woods: In 2000, my husband and I (retirees) were in a rented RV in the Tasmanian backcountry. At twilight on a narrow winding road, we got a flat. Just then, a logging crew pickup truck came by. The driver called out "What's the problem, mate?" In the time it took for my husband to say "I think we've got a jack here somewhere", we had our own personal pit crew of five orange-suited lumberjacks who had their own tools out and the spare installed, refused payment or even some beers and were off down the road. When we told other Aussies about our experience and how amazing it was that the crew helped us, their uniform answer was "Amazing? Why? Of course they helped you".

Gloria, Mission Viejo: About 6 months ago, our little chihuahua/papillon dog was attacked by a coyote. After a very expensive vet bill to suture and add drains to her neck, she was recovering at home. Despite the cone of shame, she still tried to scratch the area with her hind feet. I went to our local pet store to buy doggie booties and realized I had forgotten my wallet. The nice clerk knew I was having a bad day, so she used her own money to buy the booties and she gave me a big hug. Of course I paid her back the next day, and wrote the store a nice "kudos" for her.

Tom Wright, Fountain Valley: During the 1967 spring break from Cal Poly Pomona, some friends and I unwisely drove to Mazatlán in my 1955 VW van.

We were on our way home when the flywheel on the van broke off. The six of us were now stranded on the side of the road about 75 miles from any town. After about 30 minutes, an old man driving a large old stake truck stopped and offered to tow us by a rope he had in his truck. Just as we got to the next town, the rope broke and the van rolled into a closed gas station where several men were partying. They came over and saw our problem, and immediately started pushing the van into an adjacent residential area where they stopped in the front of a house. One of the men went in and came out with a man who had a napkin tucked into his shirt. He was in the middle of his dinner! He had someone bring out his oxy acetylene machine and he welded the flywheel back on the van. He didn't ask for anything but we gave him all the money we could spare. Every time I think about that experience I am filled with gratitude to God and to those who helped us.

John Ruffner, North Hollywood: When we adopted two infants from Russia, at the airport, we had to strip almost naked, and I forgot to gather up my fanny pack containing our all-important documents. On the plane, the pilot made an announcement in Russian. By grace or luck, the three lovely Russian angels sitting behind us happened to speak English and asked me if I was missing a fanny pack. After reuniting me with my infinitely valuable purse, they were also happy to entertain our new children while we ate lunch somewhere over the Ural mountains.

Denise Mentz, La Mirada: Something so simple but sweet. I'm 59, and an older couple came into the bank. The husband sat down. No other chairs. I got up and gave my seat to his wife. She was thankful. Another man sitting down went to the conference room area to get a chair and brought it for me to sit. I was being considerate, and it came right back to me!

Reading Denise's story reminded me of the gazillion times that young guys got up and gave me their seats on crowded buses when they saw that I was gimp, mostly in Mexico and other countries where guys learn this as basic courtesy.

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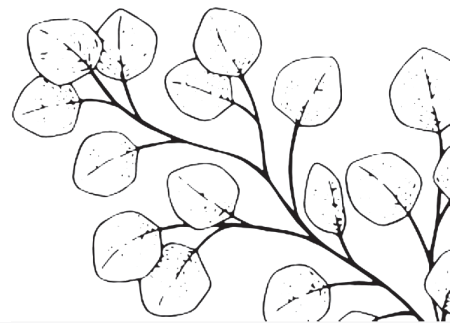
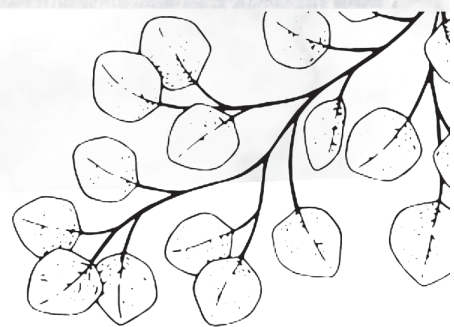
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# Want to save Thanksgiving?

## Put away your phone

By MANY APPLGATE  
The Associated Press

When the crisp autumn air settles in, you know it's Thanksgiving time. A day meant for connection, gratitude and togetherness, this holiday invites you to trade in the glow of your screens for the warmth of family gatherings around your Thanksgiving table.

For many, stepping away from technology, even for the day, can feel surprisingly difficult. However, making the effort for a tech-free Thanksgiving offers a rare chance to reconnect, refresh and be fully present. With a few thoughtful strategies, you can plan this holiday to ensure you celebrate togetherness and gratitude in the purest way.

### Making time for what matters most

In a time when screens are your constant companions, it's easy to forget the power of undivided attention. Doom scrolling through social media and promptly answering notifications is often second nature. However, when you choose to disconnect, even for a day, you remind your friends and family that they are a priority. This simple act of putting away your phone is a meaningful gesture of respect and affection.

At its heart, Thanksgiving is a celebration of family time and gratitude. For those wishing to make the most of this holiday, you can create new traditions focusing on device-free time together. When made yearly rituals, these customs have the power to deepen the family ties and ensure the day is focused on what truly matters. By making technology a part of what gets left behind, you can make this Thanksgiving a celebration of authentic connection.

### More than a meal

While Thanksgiving might be a food-focused holiday, it is about more than just what you eat. Creating an environment that fosters connection and shared experiences makes the dinner table a centerpiece for family traditions.

### Building bonds in the kitchen

The real magic begins in the kitchen, where cooking together transforms holiday prep into a bonding experience. Too often, one or two family members are chained to the stove all day, while others laze around the television, leaving the family disconnected until dinnertime. However, bringing everyone into the kitchen gives life to cherished recipes, makes the meal more meaningful because everyone has contributed to cooking it and offers a pleasant distraction from your devices.

Making delicious Mississippi mud potatoes is a great way to get everyone involved in cooking, regardless of culinary skill. Tasks can vary from chopping ingredients to stirring the casserole, and this rich, savory dish is perfect for any crowd. Whipping up a chicken pot pie casserole brings the same sense of teamwork, allowing family members to do tasks like kneading dough, filling the casserole, and everyone's favorite job: Taste-tester.

Children especially love baking - perhaps because it allows them to contribute in a playful and rewarding way. From measuring ingredients to mixing the dough, baking offers kids a chance to participate and experience the delicious fruits of their labor. For instance, preparing chocolate chip cookies together adds a festive touch to the meal that everyone can enjoy. Most importantly, by the time your cookies are done, the kitchen is filled with the tantalizing aroma of oven-fresh baked goods.

### Making a mindful meal

When it's time to sit down for the Thanksgiving meal, designate the dining room a phone-free zone. This allows everyone to remain fully present and ensures

that the meal can be a time for connection and conversation. Creating this focused environment removes the usual distractions, ensuring that the whole family feels valued and appreciated.

Adding a gratitude-sharing ritual before the meal can also set the tone for an evening centered on thankfulness. Invite each person to share something they are grateful for, customizing your prompt to reflect the personality and traditions of your family. You may want to ask everyone to share something related to a family member or perhaps a round of storytelling where each person shares a favorite holiday memory. These shared anecdotes can bring laughter and deepen bonds, ensuring everyone leaves the table with a sense of gratefulness, nostalgia and joy.

### Activities to embrace the digital detox

After the meal, staying committed to a phone-free day can be difficult. However, with some simple planning, you can organize easy activities that engage the family, inviting all of you to enjoy some old-fashioned fun and quality time with loved ones.

### Indoor fun for homebodies

Step up your Thanksgiving traditions with fun, unplugged indoor activities for the whole family. Classic games like charades, mafia or board games can create a fun and lively atmosphere that encourages laughter and light competition. For the creative types, storytelling games can provide a great outlet for imagination, allowing everyone to craft a funny story together.

For a holiday-specific activity, consider creating Thanksgiving-themed trivia with small prizes like seasonal chocolates or cute hats awarded to the winners. Another great option is a shared reading session, where one person or each person reads a passage from a favorite book. These activities can create a sense of intimacy, making the day more joyful.

### Outdoor adventure to embrace the season

For those who may enjoy the outdoors, a nature walk with the family can be a refreshing way to experience fall while enjoying time together. Anything goes: From a short stroll through a local park or a hike in a nearby nature area. If you have some extra time to plan, you can even set up a fun scavenger hunt, searching for seasonal items like pinecones or certain types of trees.

Touch football is another Thanksgiving classic that can get the whole family up and moving, working off the post-meal slumber that's sure to set in soon. For those who don't enjoy sports, lower-stress activities like catch or frisbee can be a fun alternative.

### Reconnect this holiday season

Thanksgiving is a great opportunity to reconnect, slow down and focus on the people that truly matter. By embracing a holiday removed from technology's looming presence, you can transform your Thanksgiving into a day of genuine connection, laughter and gratitude.

So this year, consider embracing the digital detox and creating traditions that bring the family together. These memories made through conversation, teamwork and friendly competition will be sure to last longer than any post on social media.

*Mandy Applegate is the creator behind Splash of Taste and four other high-profile food blogs. She's also a co-founder of Food Drink Life Inc., the unique and highly rewarding collaborative blogger project. Her articles appear frequently on major online news sites and she always has her eyes open to spot the next big trend.*

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## Fun ways to make Christmas Eve even more special for kids

Parents know that nothing quite matches the excitement young children feel on Christmas Eve. On the day before Christmas, youngsters anxiously anticipate the arrival of Santa Claus that evening, and are perhaps even more excited by the prospects of the following morning, when they'll race into the living room and discover all that the jolly old elf left behind.

Christmas Eve seems to have some built-in magical components, but there are a handful of ways parents can make the day even more special for children.

★ Track the big guy's movements online. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and its predecessor, the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD), has tracked Santa's Christmas Eve flight for more than 60 years. Be-

ginning on Christmas Eve, families can track Santa's movements across the globe at [Noradsanta.org](http://Noradsanta.org). Kids can visit the site to see where Santa is at any given moment on Christmas Eve, growing more excited as the big fella gets closer and closer to their own region.

★ Create a Christmas Eve craft. Gather children and their cousins and/or friends to create a special Christmas Eve craft or decoration that can be displayed next year. This is a great way to channel youngsters' nervous Christmas Eve energy into something productive, and it can make for a great tradition families can continue even after kids are grown.

★ Watch a favorite Christmas movie. Hollywood has never shied away from holiday fare, so there's no shortage of festive films to enjoy with youngsters on Christmas Eve. Enjoy a classic like the 1947 film *ÓMiracle on 34th Street* starring Natalie Wood as the adorable *ÓSusan Walker* and Edmund Gwenn as *ÓKris Kringle*, or go with something more recent, such as *ÓThe Grinch*, the 2018 adaptation of the Dr. Seuss book *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.

★ Take a nighttime stroll or drive to see the lights. Lighting displays are another component that makes the holiday season so special. After Christmas Eve dinner, take a stroll through your neighborhood to see the lighting displays or climb into the car to take in a different neighborhood's offerings if you're already familiar with those in your own neck of the woods.

Christmas Eve is a magical day for youngsters and their parents. Some simple ideas can make the day even more meaningful for children and their families.



## FESTIVE HOLIDAY SIPS • from Page 9

gests: "For \$8.99 you can buy a nebbiolo that tastes like a sophisticated pinot noir." He also recommends stocking up on Geyser Peak sauvignon blanc that's a very solid and budget-friendly wine for the holidays.

He also mentions, "Don't be afraid to ask people who work at the store what their favorite budget-friendly suggestions are. That's why we're there!"

If you don't have a warehouse store or Trader Joe's nearby, many grocery stores have BOGO deals around the holidays. This allows you to get great bottles of wine at half the cost.

### Non-alcoholic options

It's always a good idea to have a non-alcoholic option or two. Luckily, these drinks are very budget-friendly.

Apple cider is a quintessential, cozy holiday drink, but buying top-quality apple cider can be pricey. Instead, opt for a lower-priced store brand or plain apple juice and jazz it up to make a memorable holiday drink.

Start with 1 or 2 quarts of apple cider or apple juice in a crockpot and add flavor and spices to make it fun and festive. Caramel apple cider is a warm, decadent option. Add about a cup of store-bought caramel syrup and a tablespoon of vanilla extract to the crockpot with the apple cider. Cover and cook on low for two to three hours. Serve with a pinch of cinnamon.

Spritz-type mocktail drinks are delicious, festive and very cost-efficient. The idea is simple: One part juice and one part fizzy drink, such as sparkling water. To make it festive, add a fun garnish. Cherry grape juice, sparkling water and a sprig of rosemary is a tasty combination and beautiful if served in a stemmed wine glass.

Remember that glassware works wonders in elevating a drink. Use your best stemware or borrow a set from friends or family. Thrift stores and consignment

shops can be goldmines for finding affordable, unique glassware and stemware.

### BYOB can be a win-win

Although it may not be the most popular option, BYOB, or bring your own beverage, can be an advantage. The host saves money, while the guests get peace of mind knowing they'll have their favorite drinks on hand.

As a host, you can create a drink station with festive decorations, nice glasses, garnishes, bottle openers and plenty of ice. This makes guests feel special and gives them a place to gather and share their libations.

### Holiday cheer without breaking the bank

Saving money on holiday drinks doesn't have to be difficult. Keep your holiday drink budget in check by shopping strategically and asking store personnel for budget-friendly recommendations. Simplify your offerings with just a few well-chosen cocktail and wine options and embrace simple garnishes like fresh herbs and fruit to add a festive but affordable touch. And don't forget, you can also ask guests to bring their favorite drink to share.

Remember, the true spirit of the holidays is sharing joyful moments with loved ones. You don't have to spend a ton of money on holiday drinks and libations. With a little creativity and these budget-friendly ideas, you can easily craft delicious and festive beverages without overspending. So raise a glass to a season filled with warmth, laughter and affordable, festive sips.

Casey Rooney is a recipe developer and the creator of *Get On My Plate*, where she shares easy comfort food and Trader Joe's recipes to help make everyday cooking stress free. With a focus on familiar flavors and using pantry staples, her recipes are down-to-earth and approachable - perfect for busy home cooks.

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