

December 2015 | A Special Supplement to

**DELAWARE GAZETTE
THE SUNBURY NEWS**

Holiday Gifts & Lifestyle

On the Road Again

*Tips for holiday
travelers*

A Season to Sing

*The history behind
some beloved
Christmas songs*

Go Green

*How to save
energy when
decking the halls
this holiday season*



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Christmas tree varieties and care

An evergreen tree decked out in lights and ornaments is one of the universal symbols of the holiday season. The Christmas tree tradition is believed to have originated in Germany in the 15th or 16th centuries, when trees were decorated with edibles, such as nuts and fruits. They were later decorated with candles and eventually lights.

Through the centuries, people have trekked to forests, Christmas tree farms and commercial lots to pick the perfect trees for their holiday displays. The National Christmas Tree Association says more than 33 million real trees are purchased each year, making the tree business a billion-dollar industry. While there are scores of evergreen varieties, certain tree types are more popular

than others and thus more available for purchase. The following are some of the more popular trees come Christmastime.

Eastern Redcedar: Branches of the tree are compact and form a pyramid-shaped crown. The trees should be a dark, shiny green color. The eastern redcedar is not a true cedar tree, but a member of the juniper family. This tree can make a great cut tree with a homespun look and a pungent fragrance.

Leyland Cypress: This cypress is one of the more popular Christmas trees in the southeastern United States. The tree will be very dark green to almost gray in color. It has little aroma. Some people choose the Leyland because it does not produce sap, which is great for those with sap allergies.

Colorado Blue Spruce: An attractive blue-green foliage and a good symmetrical form is what attracts many people to the blue spruce. The Colorado Blue Spruce has an excellent natural shape and requires little pruning to look like the perfect Christmas tree. It's not very fragrant, but the tree needles may give off an unpleasant odor when crushed.

Scotch Pine: A classic conical shape and very good needle retention help make the Scotch pine a popular tree to cut for the holidays. Scotch pines also are quite prevalent thanks to the tree's adaptability to a wide range of climates.

Eastern White Pine: A delicate green color and long needles are found on this tree. Another popular pine, the rich fragrance of the white pine may make it preferable to those who like their homes to smell of evergreen.

Douglas Fir: The Douglas fir is one of the foremost Christmas tree species in the United States. It has soft needles that are dark green in color. Those needles radiate in all directions from the branches to give the tree a full look. The needles, when crushed, have a sweet fragrance. Douglas firs tend to live long when cut.

Fraser Fir: Another popular fir for Christmas is the Fraser fir. The needles are bicolored, with dark green on top and silver on the bottom. More fragrant than its cousin, the Douglas, the Fraser also boasts a slender profile, which makes it suitable for smaller rooms.

Christmas tree maintenance

Nothing can guarantee the health and appearance of a tree after it is brought into a home. But choosing a recently cut tree that has good needle retention can help. Here are other tips for a long-lasting tree.

- Use a sharp saw to cut an inch off of the trunk base to remove the sappy covering that forms from cutting. This will improve water intake.
- Fill a tree stand reservoir with warm water. Expect the tree to drink heavily in the beginning.
- Keep the reservoir filled every day and check to see how much water the tree is using.
- Place the tree far from heaters or other drying sources.



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Sending greeting cards

Greeting cards are a popular method of correspondence throughout the year. Cards are purchased for birthdays, graduations and milestone events. One of the more popular times of the year to find cards purchased and sent in bulk is during the holiday season.

The Greeting Card Association claims 1.6 billion Christmas card units (including boxed cards) are purchased for Christmas. Many people consider sending cards essential to their holiday traditions.

Here are some statistics on greeting cards and ways to improve upon your Christmas card sending process.

- Women purchase an estimated 80 percent of all greeting cards and will spend more time choosing a card than men.
- The vast majority of individually purchased cards are between \$2 and \$4 in price. Christmas card economy is found by purchasing boxed cards in bulk.
- The visual design of a greeting card is the first to capture a person's attention, but the saying within will have a greater impact. Consider purchasing cards that are blank inside so you can add your own personalized sentiments.
- For the perfect balance of imagery and verse, try a photo greeting card. This way you can customize both the image and the wording. They're even effective for business correspondence. Simply use a picture of your office team or other workers in place of a family photo.
- Personalized cards need to be purchased early to allow for production. Try to get your orders in by early November to leave you time to address and mail them.
- Buy extra cards than you think you need. This way you can send reciprocal greetings to a person who has mailed you a card this year.
- If you want your card to stand out from the masses, consider sending it separately from the big holidays. Thanksgiving or New Year's cards can be unique.
- Try your hand at creating your own greeting cards from papercrafting materials. You also can embellish ready made greeting cards with stamps, glitter, stickers, and other customized effects.
- Keep a database of addresses saved on your computer. Then you can print address labels and save much time hand-addressing Christmas cards. Your address list can later be customized for other friend or family events.
- Check the postage of your card. Oddly shaped envelopes or even square cards may require extra postage because they could be processed by hand at postal facilities.
- The Greeting Card Association says that even though many people use digital means of communication, greeting card traditions are still popular and even are being adopted by today's youth.



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Make sure gifts arrive on time

Come the holiday season, shipping companies work around the clock to ensure packages, merchandise and more make it to their destinations on time. What would December holidays be without gifts under the tree?

In 2013, overtaxed carriers failed to meet Christmas deadlines for many packages. Some analysts say big retailers and carriers may have underestimated consumers' growing reliance on online shopping — especially for last-minute presents. Since those mishaps, both UPS and FedEx have spent millions on upgrades. More fuel-efficient planes, upgrades to air cargo networks and improved infrastructure and ground shipping operations have helped shipping companies better handle the increased volume.

As shipping companies work harder to ensure holiday packages arrive at their destinations on time, there also are things consumers can do to increase the chances that gifts make it under the tree before the big day.

Shop as early as possible. If you plan to buy online or ship gifts to family and friends, shop early so the gifts have time to make it to their destinations. Make a list of all the people whose gifts you will need to mail, then shop for their gifts first so you will have ample time for them to arrive on time.

Double-check all mailing addresses. Make sure you have the correct addresses for all friends or family members you will be sending gifts to. An incorrect address can result in packages being returned to sender or floating around in shipping limbo. All of this only decreases the likelihood that gifts will arrive on time.

Consider a ship-to-store option. A number of big retailers now offer various options that allow customers to purchase items online and pick them up in a nearby store. In-stock items may be available the same day, while others may have to be shipped to the store for a later pickup.

Enter shipping parameters. Signing up for either My FedEx or MyUPS gives you a little



When buying gifts online or mailing them to faraway loved ones, consumer must leave ample time for shipping.

extra control over how packages are sent to you. For example, you can request that packages be held at a delivery center or you can presign for deliveries. These perks can help limit some lost or delayed packages.

Use proper postage. Bulky envelopes or large packages are better off brought to the post office for shipping instead of mailing them from home. Inadequate postage could stall delivery of your items and have them returned to you.

Research shipping cut-off dates. Shipping carriers often list the "last days to ship" for their services so that packages will arrive by the date you need them. This way you can plan around the cutoffs.

Sign up for membership programs. Online retailers, such as Amazon, offer expedited shipping on many products as part of their membership programs. For example, Amazon Prime-eligible products will generally arrive within two business days as part of your annual membership fee. The added cost may be well worth the peace of mind fast shipping provides.

An increase in online shopping as well as families living further apart has led to a high volume of gifts being shipped around the holidays. Plan accordingly so that gifts will arrive on time.

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A gift epiphany for Three King's Day

Although many people are ready to take down their trees and pack away their holiday decorations once December 25 has come and gone, millions of people wait to remove such decorations until the Epiphany, which occurs on January 6 each year.

The Epiphany, also referred to as Three Kings' Day, celebrates the day the Three Magi visited the baby Jesus and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Although any Christian can celebrate the Epiphany, the holiday is most embraced by the Hispanic community in the United States and in Spanish-speaking countries. In Latin America, for example, many children receive gifts on Three Kings' Day, rather than Christmas.

Certain traditions are essential to Three Kings' Day. In the week preceding, children

may write letters requesting gifts they would like, especially if they have behaved well over the last 12 months. Children also are urged to share how they intend to improve their behavior or practice good deeds to others in the upcoming year.

Figurines of the three wise men are placed in nativity scenes on January 5, and children may leave out grass or other food to feed the animals of the magi, particularly the camels.

Those visiting another person's home on Three Kings' Day may want to bring the gift of a "King's Ring," also known as a Rosca de Reyes. This is a sweet bread shaped like a wreath that is adorned with candied fruit. A figurine of baby Jesus may be baked inside. Tradition states the person who finds the figurine is expected to host a party on Candlemas on February 2.

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The history behind some beloved Christmas songs

material when it comes to Christmas songs, ensuring there's something for everyone. In 2014, Time magazine researched records at the U.S. Copyright Office to determine the most popular and most recorded Christmas songs since 1978. When copyright registrations were digitized. The following are some of the more beloved holiday tunes and a bit of history about each song.

- **"Silent Night"**: One of the most rerecorded songs in history (733 versions since 1978), "Silent Night," was composed in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber and put to lyrics by Joseph Mohr. It was first performed on Christmas Eve at St. Nicholas parish church in Oberndorf, a village in Austria. Today's version is a slow lullaby, but it's believed the original was a dance-like tune in 6/8 time.
- **"O Holy Night"**: This popular song was composed by Adolphe Adam in 1847 to a French poem titled, "Minuit, chrétiens (Midnight, Christians)." Many notable performers, including

Perry Como, Céline Dion, Josh Groban, Michael Crawford, and Lea Michele, have performed "O Holy Night."

- **"Silver Bells"**: Now a Christmas classic, "Silver Bells" originally was written for the Bob Hope film, "The Lemon Drop Kid." Songwriter Jay Livingston wanted to title the song "Tinkle Bell," but his wife dissuaded him from using the word "tinkle."
- **"White Christmas"**: Irving Berlin believed his song "White Christmas" would be an instant hit. His prediction was correct, especially after singer Bing Crosby recorded it.
- **"Jingle Bells"**: Although it has become one of the more popular Christmas songs, "Jingle Bells" really was written for Thanksgiving. It's also one of the oldest holiday songs of American origin. James Lord Pierpont, the song's author, was inspired by the famous sleigh races of Medford, Massachusetts.
- **"Do You Hear What I Hear"**: Noel Regney

wrote this song as a call to peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The original context has long been forgotten, and "Do You Hear What I Hear" is now a staple of holiday celebrations.

- **"Santa Claus is Coming to Town"**: James Gillespie wrote this tune while riding a subway and reminiscing about his childhood with his brother. It became a hit after being performed at the famed Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.
- **"The Christmas Song"**: This classic Christmas song was written in 1944 by Bob Wells and Mel Tormé. It's usually subtitled "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire." The song was written during a heat wave as a way to think cool thoughts. It only took 40 minutes to write the music and some of the lyrics. Nat King Cole's rendition of the song is among the more popular versions. Christmas songs are enjoyed and performed year after year. Popular songs continue to endure and attract new fans.

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'Christmas Vacation' still a top pick for holiday flicks

Holiday films hold a special place in many people's hearts, and perhaps no holiday movie of the last 30 years has resonated as much as "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." The oft-quoted holiday favorite turned 25 years old in 2014, yet the film remains as popular as ever.

Fans of "Christmas Vacation" can no doubt quote their favorite lines from the film, but the following are a few tidbits that even the most ardent "Vacation" fan might be unfamiliar with.

- The movie is based on a story titled "Christmas 59," which was written by the same man, John Hughes, who wrote and produced the film. The film pays homage to this story when Clark Griswold is rummaging through the attic and finds a movie reel named "Christmas 59."
- Frank Capra III worked as an assistant director on the film. In one scene of the film, "It's a Wonderful Life," which was directed by Frank Capra III's grandfather, is on a television in the background.
- Actress Mae Questrel (Aunt Bethany) provided the voices for Betty Boop and Olive Oyl in the 1930s. "Christmas Vacation" would be her final film.
- "Christmas Vacation" featured a handful of "Saturday Night Live" alumni. In addition to the film's star, Chevy Chase, SNL alums Randy Quaid, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Brian Doyle Murray appeared in the film.

- The role of Cousin Rocky had no lines in the film.
- In the "Lampoon" films that preceded "Christmas Vacation," Rusty was the older child of the Griswold clan. However, he is the younger sibling in this film.
- "Christmas Vacation" marked the directorial debut for Jeremiah Chechik, who went on to direct "Benny & Joon" and 1998's "The Avengers."
- The movie had a large budget (\$27 million) for a comedy with no special effects.
- Surprisingly, "Christmas Vacation" had its own sequel that few are familiar with. The made-for-television "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation 2: Cousin Eddie's Island Adventure" was released in 2003.
- Cousin Eddie's fashion style, in particular the sweater/Dickie combination, was the brainchild of actor Randy Quaid's wife.
- No part of "Christmas Vacation" takes place on Christmas Day. The film culminates with the antics that take place at the Griswold home on December 24.
- Brian Doyle-Murray, who played Frank Shirley, is the brother of another famous comic actor: Bill Murray.
- "Christmas Vacation" was the only movie in the series up until then that did not feature Lindsey Buckingham's song, "Holiday Road."

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Holiday travel tips



The right tablet and smartphone apps can make holiday travel a lot less hectic.

The holiday season is rife with tradition, and traveling to visit family and friends is a tradition shared by many people.

Holiday travel can be hectic, as millions of people take to the airways, highways and railroads in the days before and after Christmas.

But travelers whose patience is annually tried by airport security checkpoints and holiday traffic jams can employ several strategies to make holiday travel more palatable.

Let apps do your legwork. Technology has made life easier in many ways, and smartphone apps can even help travelers make holiday travel less stressful. A free app such as FlightView provides smartphone and tablet users with real-time flight information and even provides travelers with flight status alerts. Travelers or men and women trusted with picking up family and friends at the airport can check gate assignments, delays and cancellations and even follow the flight's progress while it's in the air.

And it's not just air travelers who can put their apps to work for them. Drivers who are on a budget can download the free GasBuddy app, which finds the cheapest gas in a given city or postal code. Traveling apps are quite popular, and many are free, saving travelers money while making holiday travel that much easier.

Bring along your own sustenance. Hunger pangs are sure to arise during your

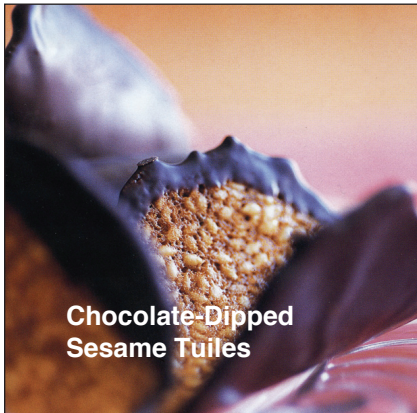
holiday travels. Airports and roadside truck stops are not exactly known for their healthy fare, so pack your own nourishing foods that can help you maintain your energy and stay healthy. Packing your own meals and snacks also saves you money and, if you're driving, time.

Ship gifts. Shipping holiday gifts is another way to simplify holiday travel and save money. The lighter air travelers can pack, the more quickly they can make it through the airport. Shipping gifts saves you from paying excessive bag fees, and it also saves you the trouble of checking bags and waiting in baggage claim. Drivers also may benefit from shipping gifts, which can give everyone in the car more room to relax and also save the driver some money on gas.

Switch up your travel schedule. If possible, take an extra day or two off during the holidays so you aren't forced to travel on the busiest travel days, which tend to be the days that immediately precede and follow the major holidays. If you must travel on busy holidays, hit the road or the friendly skies as early as possible. Book an early morning flight so you beat the crowds at security checkpoints or begin your drive an hour or so before sunrise when many of your fellow travelers are still asleep.

Travel is a holiday tradition for many people. While airports and highways are especially congested during the holiday season, there are many ways for travelers to make their trips less hectic this year.

Treat holiday guests with this chocolate confection



Chocolate-Dipped Sesame Tules

No holiday celebration is complete without dessert. The holiday season is one time of year when no one seems too worried about indulging in dessert or having an extra cookie. Many families have their own traditions when it comes to holiday fare, but those who want to wow their guests with something new this holiday season can try the following recipe for “Chocolate-Dipped Sesame Tules” courtesy of Michael Recchiuti and Fran Gage’s “Chocolate Obsession” (Stewart, Tabori & Chang). Inspired by the classic French tulle cookies, these delectable treats are sure to draw a crowd to your holiday dessert table this season.

Chocolate-Dipped Sesame Tules *Makes about 48 cookies*

- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sesame seeds, preferably unhulled
- ½ cup granulated cane sugar
- ½ cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 extra-large egg whites, at room temperature
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter with 82 percent butterfat, very soft
- 8 ounces tempered 70 percent chocolate for coating cookies
- Flavorless vegetable oil for the pans

To bake the cookies:

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line the bottoms of four 12-by-18-inch sheet pans with parchment paper. Lightly coat the paper with flavorless vegetable oil. Put a

rolling pin on a work surface. If you have two rolling pins, ready both.

Combine the sesame seeds, flour, sugar, and salt in a medium bowl and whisk by hand until combined. Mix — don’t beat — the egg whites into the sesame seed mixture with a rubber spatula. Stir in the butter with the spatula until no streaks of butter remain.

Measure 2 level teaspoons batter onto a prepared sheet pan. Using a small offset spatula, spread it into a round about 3½ inches in diameter. Repeat with the remaining batter, putting 8 rounds on each pan and leaving 1½ inches between the rounds.

Bake the trays, one at a time, until the cookies are a uniform golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes. Remove from the oven and, while the cookies are still warm, run the offset spatula under each cookie and place it upside down on the rolling pin so that it curls around the pin. (You should be able to do 5 cookies on a rolling pin, so by the time the sixth cookie is about to be draped over the pin, a few should be ready to be moved. Ideally, though, you will have two rolling pins.) If some of the cookies are not a uniform color, or if some cool too much and are no longer pliable, return them to the oven for another minute until evenly golden brown and again pliable.

Leave the cookies on the rolling pin until they cool completely and have become brittle, a matter of seconds. Carefully lift them off and store them in an airtight container at room temperature until you are ready to dip them. They will keep well for up to 3 days.

Dip the cookies in chocolate:

You can store the cookies and dip them on a day when you have tempered chocolate for another use. Or you can temper chocolate specifically to finish the cookies. Use a tempering machine to temper the chocolate.

Dip the convex (smooth) side of each cookie into the chocolate and then smooth the chocolate with a small offset spatula. Place on a work surface, chocolate side up, and let sit until the chocolate sets, about 30 minutes.

Store in an airtight container in a cool place, not in the refrigerator. They will keep for up to one week.

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Preparing your home for new gifts



Clean out closets and other areas of your home in preparation for holiday gifts.

Are you ready for the boxes and packages that are set to arrive under the tree? If your home annually bursts with everything from children's toys to electronics to clothing, it may be time to take inventory and prepare for the gifts that have yet to find their way into your home.

Before the first strand of garland goes up and before you begin thinking about holiday wish lists, set a plan in motion to reduce what you already have in the house. This project can include the entire

family and tie into holiday volunteerism that highlights this season of giving.

There's a very good chance that your closets are brimming with items that are collecting dust or haven't seen the light of day in some time. Make these the first things to go. If something hasn't been used in a year or more, add it to the donation pile.

Kids' rooms and play areas may be some of the areas most overrun with belongings. Children are likely to get many new toys and other gifts throughout the year, so focus most of your energy on these spaces, cutting kids some slack if they don't want to part with certain items. If children are reluctant to part with some of their belongings, stress the point that donating helps others who are less fortunate. Involve kids in the donation process, letting them see where their unused clothes and other supplies will go. This can make giving away older toys less traumatic and more personal.

Adults also should pay attention to any belongings they can spare. Take advantage of holiday donation trucks in the area to clear your home of bulky sweaters, linens, older furniture, or kitchen supplies. These trucks service some well-known charities and associations, and items will be appreciated and put to great use. Use the weeks prior to the holiday rush to create space for any gifts that might be arriving under your tree before Christmas Day. A little cleaning and decluttering can go a long way toward helping the less fortunate in your community.

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Traditions behind holiday gifts



The holiday season is a time to celebrate with friends and family. Several holidays are celebrated in this relatively short time period, making this one of the most festive times of the year. Many holiday celebrations focus on the exchange of presents, which may be exchanged with relatives, friends and even coworkers. But are you familiar with the origins of exchanging gifts? Gift exchanges trace their origins to both religious and secular traditions, each of which has helped shape the holidays into what they are today.

Christmas

People exchange gifts on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day all over the world. For Christians, Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe was a gift from the Creator.

From a religious standpoint, gifting others around Christmastime can be traced back to the stories of the Three Kings (also referred to as the "Three Wise Men") who visited Jesus after his birth. Frankincense, a fragrance involved in worship; gold; and myrrh, an incense associated with funerals, was presented. These gifts symbolized worship in Christ, that He would be the King of Kings, and that suffering and death would come to Him.

Another giver of gifts is part of many Christmas celebrations. St. Nicholas, a fourth century saint, is a beloved figure across the globe who has a reputation for giving gifts in secret and helping the needy. The figure of "Santa Claus" is based on St. Nicholas, and the blending of the two has

evolved as history has mixed with folklore and personal traditions.

Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish celebration that commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. The word "hanukkah" actually means "dedication" in Hebrew. The Jews, including Judah Maccabee, helped drive the Syrians out of Jerusalem. In one of Judaism's most central texts, Maccabee and others witnessed a miracle at the temple. Even though there was only enough oil to keep a menorah's candles burning for one day, the flames continued for eight nights.

Traditionally, gelt, or money, was given as a Hanukkah gift. Many Hanukkah gift givers aim to give gifts that are thoughtful and sweet. Money is not exchanged as much today, with other gifts taking its place.

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is an American holiday that pays homage to traditions and cultural influences from Africa. The holiday was developed in 1966 by Maulana Ndabezitha Karenga. The focus of Kwanzaa is on family and the harvest as well as certain principles, such as unity and faith.

Gifts make up one of the seven symbols of Kwanzaa celebrations. However, gift-sharing is not the central part of this special holiday. Gifts are symbolic of the labor and love of parents and the commitments made and kept by their children.

Gifts are exchanged in abundance this time of year. The traditions behind the giving of presents is far-reaching and based in religious, secular and cultural traditions.



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Save energy with holiday decorations

The holiday season allows people to transform their homes into wonderlands of lights, garlands and poinsettias.

Each family has its own holiday traditions, and decorations are a part of many of those traditions.

Decorations might be awe-inspiring, but those that include lights often lead to substantially higher energy bills. Fortunately, there are ways for homeowners, whether they prefer subtle displays or more over-the-top arrangements, to save money and still celebrate the holiday season in style.

Switch to more efficient lights. A great way to ensure holiday displays consume less energy is to change the bulbs being strung. Incandescent lights can use 80 to 90 percent more energy than LED lights. Gradually replace older light strands with newer, energy-efficient LEDs. Not only do LEDs require less energy, but they also can last longer than incandescent bulbs, meaning you won't have to replace them as frequently as more traditional bulbs. Furthermore, lower wattage

usage means you can attach more strands of lights together safely.

Use timers. Timers can be set to turn lights on and off at specific times, ensuring lights aren't turning on during the daytime or being left on into the night by forgetful homeowners. Timers also are a good safety precaution. A dark house that is normally lit up can advertise to thieves that no one is home. When lights turn on with a timer, it will create the illusion that it is business as usual in your residence.

Use homemade decorations. You also can save energy and money by recycling materials into holiday décor. Trim branches from trees and use them in vases for an instant wintry look. Prune an evergreen on your property and make your own wreath with some wire and twine. Shop yard sales for gently used decorations that still have years of utility left. Sew ornaments from scraps of fabric or clothing that no longer fits. Each of these ideas reduces reliance on manufactured decorations that consume energy during production and fuel



while being transported from factories to store shelves.

Rely on extension cords. You can extend the length of displays without using more lights by spacing out light strands with extension cords. Intersperse spotlights to add

attention to key elements of your display as well.

Turn off interior lights. If a Christmas tree is illuminating a front window, turn off the lights in your home, as the tree may provide enough light to make a living room or den extra cozy.



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Ways to stay healthy this holiday season

With the holiday season upon us, many people's schedules are hectic once again. There are social events and family gatherings to attend, shopping ventures to make, and decorating to be done. While fun, the holiday season can be a time of added pressure, which leads to stress and other unhealthy situations.

At a time when you want to be at your best, stress can affect your physical well-being. The American Psychological Association says the hustle and bustle of the holidays has psychological consequences for some people. More people are inclined to feel that their stress increases, rather than decreases, around the holidays. The National Institute of Mental Health says chronic stress can lower immunity and cause excretory, digestive and reproductive systems to stop working properly. Stress also may cause you to eat unhealthy snacks to cope, and that can lead to unwanted weight gain.

Stress is not the only potential health hazard that can arise around the holidays. A greater number of parties expose you to an abundance of foods and drinks you may not consume on a regular basis, and that can lead to a lot of mindless eating. Weight gained during this time of year can be difficult to shed come January, when colder temperatures challenge many people's motivation to exercise.

Also, social settings put you in close contact with a greater number of people, potentially increasing your exposure to germs. You can still feel your best during the holidays. Follow these tips for maintaining a healthy mind and body.

Get the flu vaccine. The flu vaccine can protect you against various strains of the flu. Get a flu shot before the holidays so you are ready for cold and flu season.

Carry disinfecting wipes. Germs can linger on surfaces long after an infected person has come and gone. Studies from researchers at the University of Arizona in Tucson have found the flu virus — and even the antibiotic-resistant bacteria MRSA — on airline tray tables. Buses, trains and doors all may be harboring germs. Wipe down surfaces with disinfecting wipes and allow them to air-dry before touching them. This can help you avoid coming into contact with germs.

Balance your activities. It can be tempting to overbook your schedule with a ton of activities, but this may ultimately prove stressful. Leave days open to relax and do things you want to do, such as viewing Christmas light displays or even just unwinding at home with a good book. Try delegating some tasks to others in the household so you don't take on too much responsibility.

Keep up an exercise routine. Don't stray too far from your exercise schedule. You may have to move workout times to free up other time later in the day for shopping or parties. Early morning is a good time to exercise



Do your best to avoid stress or illness around the holidays.

because it gets you moving first thing in the morning and might even encourage you to hit the sack a little earlier each night, ensuring you get all the sleep you need. Exercise also can improve energy levels and relieve stress.

Don't focus on food. Focus more on enjoyable activities that keep you moving rather than always being seated around the table for a big meal. Save indulgences for one or two treats on the holidays and eat sensibly otherwise.

Talk to someone. If the holidays have you feeling blue, talk to a friend or family member. If you need more professional support, find a social worker or psychologist that can help you work through stress and other feelings.



Hold on to wrapping supplies

In addition to the billions of dollars shoppers spend each year on holiday gifts, quite a lot of money is spent on the bags, boxes and paper used to wrap those gifts. Unity Marketing says the average person spends between \$70 and \$100 on wrapping supplies during the holiday season. While it is nice to add some new items to the wrapping mix each year, collecting and conserving bags and tissue is a wise and eco-friendly, cost-saving measure. For those hosting the holidays this year, set up two storage bins in the room where you and your loved ones will be unwrapping presents. One bin can be used to collect clothing boxes that are in good shape, while the other can be used to organize gift bags and bows. Encourage guests to take some of the used wrapping paper to use again next year.

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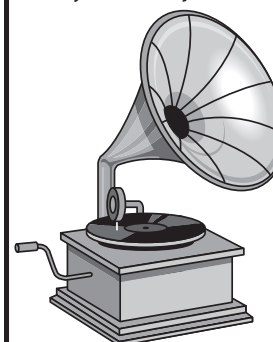
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How to organize a donation drive or another charitable event

The holiday season is a time of giving — especially the charitable kind of giving. Many people's thoughts shift to the less fortunate during the holiday season, and those thoughts spur many to do more than make financial contributions to their favorite charities.

The Blackbaud Index, a firm that specializes in developing software and services for nonprofit organizations, says about 34 percent of all charitable giving is done in the last three months of the year. Of those donations, about 18 percent are given in December alone.

Charitable giving can help nonprofit organizations realize their missions, but donors who want to go the extra mile can organize a donation drive or another charitable event to lend an even bigger hand to an organization that's special to them.

Pick an organization to partner with.

When deciding where to focus your efforts, look for an organization or group whose story or mission resonates with you. A personal connection to the cause may prove motivational, and others whose help you seek when organizing the event may be more likely to participate if they see the passion you have for your cause.

Explore different donation options.

Asking for financial donations is an effective and straightforward way to support a great cause. But you also can focus your efforts on encouraging local businesses and professionals to donate their products, time and services. Toy and food drives are

popular this time of year, when donors want to make sure less fortunate families can share holiday gifts and meals. Speak with the organization you choose to work with about their most glaring needs, and then organize a benefit that can help to fill those needs.

Enlist a group of volunteers. Charitable giving can provide an emotional boost to people of all ages. It also can instill a sense of purpose in you and your friends, family and neighbors. Despite the often hectic pace of the holiday season, many people are eager to lend a hand and support a good cause during this time of year. Employ people in their areas of expertise. If someone is good with accounting, have him or her keep track of the money raised by your efforts. If another person is an excellent event planner, put that individual in charge of managing the details of your event. Everyone can contribute in one way or another; it's just a matter of putting people in a position where they can be of the most help.

Spread the word. Effectively advertising your charity event will attract many participants. Ask that your local priest or pastor make an announcement during church services or place an ad in your local paper. Put up signs where they will be seen, such as inside supermarkets. And don't forget to take to social media, where you can encourage others to share the details of your event.

Organizing a charity event is a heartfelt way to help people in need during the holiday season.



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Things to consider when hosting for the holidays



should consider in the weeks before their guests show up.

Accommodations

It's hard to overlook accommodations when hosting for the holidays, but it's best to inspect linens and other items that might go largely unused throughout much of the year. Check foldout couches or air mattresses a few weeks before your guests are slated to arrive. This gives you ample time to address any issues and also allows you to comparison shop and find great deals on any items you need to replace. Hosts who are parents to young children may want to discuss sleeping arrangements before guests arrive if kids will be asked to sleep in different beds. Kids might embrace the change, while others might be less enthusiastic. If younger cousins will be staying over, let kids choose their new roommates, which might make them more excited about sharing rooms with their guests. Explaining the situation in advance gives youngsters time to ready themselves for their temporary move.

Diets

Ask guests before they arrive if they have any particular food allergies or items they need to avoid because of any medications they might be taking. This is especially important for youngsters, who may forget to avoid homemade cookies with nuts despite having nut allergies. By asking in advance if your guests have any food allergies or foods and ingredients they must avoid, you will know to avoid serving particular

dishes so no one accidentally eats foods that might make them sick and you can prepare alternative dishes for people who must avoid certain foods.


Activities

If guests will be staying for several nights, explore a few local activities so everyone can get out of the house for a night or two. Time spent with family is one of the best parts of the holiday season, but spending all of that time inside in cramped quarters can grow uncomfortable over time. Plan a family night or two out that everyone can enjoy.

Pets

When hosting for the holidays, let your guests know if you have any pets. Some people have dog and cat allergies, and those allergies may make it difficult for them to enjoy their stay. Others' allergies might be so severe that they have to find alternative lodging. Let guests know about your pets when you invite them to stay at your house so no one is surprised at the last minute. In addition, let guests know if they can bring their own pets along to your house.

Hosting for the holidays is a great way to welcome loved ones into your home. Considering and discussing a few factors before your guests arrive can ensure everyone enjoys their stay.






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Keep poinsettias looking great through the holidays

Along with the fragrant evergreens and twinkling lights synonymous with the holiday season, poinsettias make up a key component of holiday decorating. Unlike holly and some of the other greenery that is commonly associated with the holidays, poinsettias do not naturally thrive in the colder temperatures. These plants originate in southern Mexico and were considered an exotic plant when first introduced to the United States by Joel Robert Poinsett, the first American ambassador to Mexico.

Poinsettias can be fickle plants and ones that gardening novices may find challenging to maintain. The plants are comprised of green foliage, colorful (often red) flower bracts, and the actual flowers of the plants, which are the red or green buttonlike parts nestled in the center of the bracts.

Because they are a tropical plant, poinsettias can be damaged by exposure to low temperatures, even if they are only exposed for short periods of time. They should be wrapped and protected against the elements when brought home. For maximum plant life, poinsettias need to be placed near a warm, sunny window, or another area that has ample amounts of light. They thrive in temperatures between 60 and 75 F and should be kept away from warm or cold drafts.

Water the plant whenever the surface feels dry to the touch. Water until it drains out the bottom, but don't let the plant sit in water. Over- or under-watering can cause leaves to drop prematurely and wilt. If your home lacks in humidity, you may need to water the plant more frequently. Poinsettias do not need to be fertilized while the plant is in bloom.

The Ohio State University Extension says poinsettias can be reflowered the following Christmas, but unless a yearlong schedule of care is observed, the results usually are not good. You can speak with a gardening expert or consult online resources for the proper care schedule. Caring for a poinsettia year-round involves gradually drying out the plant and storing it in a cool location. The plant later will be moved

outdoors and then back inside and pruned to keep a full shape.

Poinsettias are short-day plants, which means they flower about 10 weeks after the daylight shortens to about 12 hours or less.

Therefore, to have the plant in full flower by Christmas, it will have to be kept in complete darkness between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. from the first part of October until Thanksgiving. Many people find the affordability of poinsettias makes it more convenient to buy new ones each year than try to foster regrowth.

Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous to humans or animals, but they should not be ingested due to the potential for allergic reactions. Poinsettias can help remove pollutants from indoor air, which is advantageous during the winter months when doors and windows are typically kept closed.

Select plants that have dark green foliage and no low or damaged leaves. This ensures the best success for keeping poinsettias looking healthy and vibrant throughout the holiday season.



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