The Christmas Companion:

Make Your Christmas Unforgettable
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THE TRADITIONS AND
HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

Every country, nation and even local community has their own unique interpretation and celebration of the Christmas season. These celebrations may be religious or more based in the festivities of the season but they will always be just a bit different and truly unique from other celebrations around the world, or even in a neighboring community. Some countries have very traditional celebrations for the seasons whereas other countries have Christmas festivities that are a combination of the influence of several other areas.

Regardless of where the Christmas tradition originated it is part of a very special time of year where people are more considerate of others, more charitable, and where they look for the good in people, rather than the less positive attributes. This feeling of goodwill and peace is one reason that the Christmas season is so special around the world. One of the many wonderful aspects of the Christmas season is the opportunity to be generous and considerate to others. The history of Santa Claus is one of benevolence and caring for others less fortunate and this continues to this day at the heart of most Christmas celebrations.

Christmas has always been a time of bringing families together. Many families plan reunions or even contact extended family members and invite them to Christmas dinners and events. There are even those that use the internet and other communication devices to reach out to family all across the world on this special holiday. Finding extra time and making extra efforts to contact family and friends helps to make this a memorable holiday season.

It is always interesting to find out about Christmas festivities around the world, so the following chapter provides information on how this special season is celebrated in many different countries. You may find some traditions and historical facts that you can include in your Christmas traditions in the future, or you may just find out the origins of the traditions you practice within your community or family.
CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

North America is a vast country with many different ethnic backgrounds and each bring some of their own Christmas traditions. Christmas in North America is on December 25, which is the anniversary of Christ’s birth and extends to January 6. Some people call this period the Twelve Days of Christmas while others call it Christmastide. In North America, it is the most significantly celebrated event of the year. Along with Christmas being a religious holiday, it is also a widely celebrated festive event. People celebrate this wonderful holiday season by getting together with family and friends, exchanging gifts and eating their Christmas meal together.

Until the nineteenth century in North America, people did not celebrate many of the modern Christmas elements. To many groups, Christmas became a very boisterous event with immense feasts and often drunkenness. In some parts of North America, merrymakers dressed in costumes went door to door to get drinks and food. Normally among families, they did not exchange Christmas gifts but some of the wealthy gave modest gifts of money and small presents. With the industrial economy expanding, this helped build a new middle class that valued family and home life. Christmas became increasingly important because many believed it would honor children and draw families closer together. Giving gifts to loved ones and children replaced drunken public festivals and Christmas became a family holiday.

They added new customs as Christmas evolved in North America. Dutch settlers brought the Santa Claus legend, with European origins, to North America. Santa Claus was a distinguished, tall, religious figure who rode through the air on a white horse. It was in North America that Santa developed into a jolly, fat, old gentleman. In 1823, a poem written by Clement Clark Moore, and published by a New York newspaper, introduced Santa as a kindly saint. In a sleigh pulled by reindeer, he could fly over rooftops. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Thomas Nast, an American illustrator, strengthened the legend further by drawing and doing portraits of Santa Claus. The modern Santa made toys, assisted by elves, and delivered them to all the good boys and girls.

The Germans transformed the Christmas tree, considered a pagan symbol of fertility in the 17th century, into a Christian symbol. Legend has it that it was Martin Luther, founder of German Protestantism, who saw starlit fir trees and moved by their beauty, brought one inside. Queen Victoria of England received a Christmas tree from her husband Prince Albert of Germany in 1841. Some believe that in England, this was the first Christmas tree. The custom spread quickly and German immigrants brought the Christmas tree to North America where it became a very popular tradition. People decorated
their trees with tin angels, paper chains, candles, blown-glass ornaments and other decorations.

It was John Callcott Horsley, an English illustrator, which made the first modern card in 1843 depicting a family Christmas celebration and reading “A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to You.” In 1875, Louis Prang mass produced a beautiful, colored Christmas card that became extremely popular. This started the custom of giving Christmas cards to each other.

Because many of the North American inhabitants emigrated from different parts of the world, numerous traditions mingled, to create modern Christmas folklore and celebrations. In the southwestern parts of the United States, many Mexican Americans have festivals or posada. This festival recreates Joseph and Mary’s search for a place to stay to give birth to Jesus. Hanukkah and Kwanzaa concur with the Christmas season. Some other traditions and popular celebrations are:

- The Moravians in Pennsylvania build a putz or landscape under their Christmas tree.
- In the south, European settlers would light fireworks and shoot firearms to send Christmas greeting to neighbors far away.
- The Hawaiian Christmas starts with a Christmas tree ship, which brings Christmas fare. Santa Claus arrives in a boat and people eat their Christmas dinner outdoors in Hawaii because the weather is so hot and sunny.
- In Washington D.C., the President of the United States presses a button to light up an immense, spectacular Christmas tree.

Most Americans celebrate by exchanging Christmas gifts, greetings, and visiting family, and friends. Many families go to Midnight Mass or Candlelight service on Christmas Eve. A typical Christmas dinner is turkey, ham, duck or goose served with gravy and cranberry sauce. Pumpkin pie, Christmas cake and plum pudding usually follow the meal. Christmas is definitely a wonderful time of year.

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA

Of the Worlds seven continents, South American is the forth largest, occupying almost seven million square miles and a population of approximately 376 million people. South American is comprised of twelve nations, with the first ten being Latin, which are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname.
Christmas in most of South America is a deeply religious celebration whose focus throughout the continent is the presepio or the manger. Many families devote an entire room to the manger display, complete with tiny figures and landscaped. Elaborate scenes include shepherds gazing upon their heavenly host, water mills, electric trains, the Wise Men on camels crossing the desert and grottos.

ARGENTINA

Christmas Eve in Argentina is when the whole family goes to church followed by family gatherings at home. They dance to Christmas music and put on a fireworks display to celebrate Christ’s birth. Christmas trees have ornaments, sparkling colored lights and Father Christmas as the tree topper. Usually white and red garland make up the Christmas decorations. A traditional Christmas dinner is roasted pork, stuffed tomatoes, roasted turkey and mince pies. As a beverage, they have beer, cider and juice. At midnight on Christmas Eve, everyone drinks a toast, made from chopped fruits mixed with cider and juice, and then open their presents from under the Christmas tree. Family is extremely important in Argentina, so after everyone opens their gifts they spend time talking and playing games. The children’s shoes, placed outside, are for Father Christmas.

BOLIVIA

More as a harvest festival than a traditional Christmas celebration, native Bolivians celebrate Christmas in Bolivia by giving thanks for finishing a year’s work. They describe the work they finished during the year and discuss plans for the following year. Bolivians hold feasts of adoration for Goddess Mother Earth and ask her to keep plagues away, bring them a fruitful harvest and prosperous new year.

BRAZIL

Many Christmas traditions in Brazil have a Portuguese heritage. In northeastern Brazil, people prepare a nativity scene. Santa Clause, known as Father Noel or Papai Noel wears silk clothes because of the heat and lives in Greenland. He brings gifts for all the children. A traditional Christmas dinner is ham, turkey, vegetables, colored rice and fruit dishes for dessert. At midnight on Christmas Eve, Catholics attend midnight mass, which ends on Christmas morning at 1 AM. In the late afternoons on Christmas day, so people can go to the beach or sleep in, the Catholic Churches hold mass again. Most families decorate their homes with fresh flowers, often from their own gardens. In Rio de Janeiro, San Paolo and other large cities, fireworks are set off. Festivities such as singing and dancing continue until January 6 knows as the Three Kings Day, which is the day the three wise men visited Jesus bringing gifts.
**CHILE**

In Chile, Viejito Pascuero is Father Christmas. Under their Christmas trees, they place tiny figures made from clay.

**ECUADOR**

In Ecuador, instead of writing a letter to Santa, children there write a letter to the Christ-child. Hoping for toys and gifts as he passes by Christmas Eve, children put their shoes in the window. Christmas morning, noise-making toys fill the air with sound. Because the weather is extremely warm, they hold their celebrations in the streets with brass bands, firecrackers and dancing. Families go to mass together and then enjoy their family dinner.

**PERU**

Priests’ traveled around on festival days, carrying small alters. Changing into portable alters over time; they depicted saints above and scenes from daily life below the altar. These portable alters or retablos now show Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus with local people gathered around.

**VENEZUELA**

December the sixteenth is the day that families in Venezuela bring out their depiction of the nativity scene, called a pesebres. Most people observe the tradition of attending at least one of the nine carol services. Bells ring and firecrackers explode to wake worshippers in the predawn hours. Christmas Eve is the last mass to take place, which families attend and then follow with a fancy, huge dinner. Children leave straw beside their beds and awake in the morning of January 6 to find gifts where the straw was which Magi and his camels left. If the children awake with a black smudge on their cheek it means Balthazar, who is king of the Ethiopians, kissed them while they were asleep.

There are many other local traditions celebrated throughout South America over the Christmas season.

**CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS DOWN UNDER**

Christmas in Australia is a wonderful, magical, exciting time of year. Summer holiday season is beginning and students are not only happy because it is Christmas but because school is closed for six weeks holiday. For many students this means surf, sun, shopping and spending time with their family and mates. Because Australia is located in the Southern Hemisphere, Christmas takes place in their summertime. Depending on your...
location in Australia, the temperatures range from the high seventies to over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, so there is definitely no chance of a white Christmas. From Christmas Eve until January 26, which is the Australian Day Public Holiday, many professionals close their doors to spend time with their family over the holiday season. Offices and stores close for Christmas and Boxing Day while some of the major retailers open December 26 to start their big clearance sales. Because Christmas falls in Australia’s summer months and is an extremely hot, people spend a lot of time surfing, swimming and fishing. Many people head for the beachside caravan parks and coastal resorts for some of the Christmas holidays.

Many of Australia’s Christmas traditions go back to their British beginnings but later European and American traditions also had an influence. Since Australia has such a harmonious mixture of ethnic groups with varied backgrounds they bring with them their festive rituals and customs. This variety is certainly one aspect of Christmas that Australians appreciate.

At the beginning of December families start decorating their homes by bringing out and setting out the Christmas ornaments and decorating their artificial Christmas trees, unlike the American tradition of real trees. Often the children help their parents decorate the family Christmas tree although few people do decorate gum tree branches. Many people also decorate the outside of their homes and yards with lights and decorations. A few even go to great lengths to make fabulous Christmas displays that become local attractions appreciated by many locals and tourists.

Children sit down and write their letters to Santa Claus including a list of toys and items they would like. People Christmas shop, buying gifts for family and friends, which they wrap and place beneath the Christmas tree. Because it is hot this time of year, many shop wearing shorts and t-shirts instead of winter coats and boots like in many other parts of the world. Friends and family get together and visit. People mail Christmas cards to family, friends and relatives that they may not have been in contact with since last Christmas. Many enclose pictures and letters catching up on the news and events of the last year.

Many of the cards sent follow the western tradition and picture people ice-skating, winter scenes and Santa wearing his traditional Santa suit pulled in his sleigh by reindeer. Children hang their Christmas stockings and leave out cookies or cake and milk for Santa. They believe that Father Christmas will leave them sweets in their stockings and gifts under the Christmas tree. Christmas is a time to remember the spiritual meaning of Christmas for many Australians. Approximately seventy percent are Anglican, Lutheran or catholic. There are midnight church services held Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
One tradition that a radio announcer by the name of Norman Banks started in Australia in 1937, was an evening Christmas carol service lit only by candles. Each year on Christmas Eve “Carols by Candlelight’, held in Melbourne’s Sidney Myer Music Bowl, attracts crowds of well over thirty thousand people. For people that are unable to attend, they now televise it to over two million Australian homes. They sing carols by candlelight while holding candles that illuminates the sky. Performers at Carols by Candlelight perform both traditional and contemporary favorites. This tradition has become very popular across Australia with many places holding Christmas carol, candle lit events leading up to Christmas.

Christmas morning is an exciting time, with children waking up early and opening their stockings and gifts. Family and friends get together and exchange gifts. Many make early morning phone calls to friends and relatives that are often scattered worldwide. For Christmas dinner, which many people have at noontime Christmas Day, the whole family gathers to give thanks and share food. Traditionally they served roast turkey, ham, Christmas pudding and pies but because of the very hot weather, many prefer lighter meals, such as cold turkey, seafood or barbeques.

On Christmas day, many people spend it out of doors and head to the beach for either the day or camping grounds for a longer Christmas break. Up to forty thousand international visitors in Sydney head for Bondi Beach on Christmas Day. Although Christmas in Australia is very warm it is still a wonderful, magical time of year.

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom is comprised of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

ENGLAND

The most popular holiday in England is Christmas, which has traditions that go back hundreds of years. The United States practices many of the Christmas customs originating in Britain. In 1840, they mailed the first Christmas card in England, which became a common tradition, with over a billion cards posted annually in the United Kingdom. Many Christmas decorations have very early origins dating back to the Dark Ages. Some of these decorations are ivy, holly and kissing under the mistletoe, which was an ancient pagan tradition. Each year, Norway, in honor of the memory of
Anglo-Norwegian cooperation in the Second World War, donate a huge Christmas tree. This tree stands in Trafalgar Square for everyone to enjoy.

Pantomimes are very popular at Christmas time among children, so they dance and sing to favorite fairy tales while the audience also participates. Carollers go door to door and sing to their neighbors on Christmas Eve. Excited, happy children hang up their Christmas stockings for Father Christmas to fill before bed and wake up to gifts under their Christmas tree. Many people faithfully go to church services on Christmas day.

Families sit down to a traditional Christmas dinner of roast turkey, chicken or goose with wonderful stuffing and vegetables. Dessert is pudding flaming with brandy, mince pies and Christmas cake. They make the Christmas pudding weeks ahead of time and each member of the family stirs it as they make a wish. Inside the Christmas pudding, many hide lucky charms or coins for the children to find. In 1846, a London baker invented a rolled, brightly colored tube of paper, tied at both ends and called this a Christmas cracker. Two people pull the cracker, which makes a bang, and inside is a party hat and trinkets.

Every year on Christmas afternoon the Queen of England makes her traditional televised Christmas speech to the nation. Boxing Day, which is the day after Christmas, got its name from a previous tradition where delivery and trades people received a Christmas box containing either money or food. This custom survives, as people tip their mail carriers, milkman and dustmen at Christmas for great service during the year.

SCOTLAND

At one time in Scotland they celebrated Christmas very quietly because the Presbyterian Church or Church of Scotland placed very little emphasis on this holiday festival. Christmas Day is now a holiday but only since the 1950’s. In Scotland, Hogmanay, their bigger celebration took place on New Year’s Day. Nowadays their traditions are very similar to American traditions such as putting up and decorating Christmas trees, hanging mistletoe and homes decorated with Christmas lights. Family and friends exchange Christmas gifts and Father Christmas or Santa Claus leaves gifts for all the boys and girls. Christmas dinner is a big family meal where they usually serve turkey, stuffing and all the trimmings. They call the Christmas pudding that the entire family helps make ahead of time, on a Sunday, “stir-up Sunday.” This fantastic tasting Christmas pudding contains raisins, almonds, cinnamon and currants among other ingredients.

NORTHERN IRELAND
Christmas season in Northern Ireland traditionally begins December 8 and ends January 6. Choir’s sing on sidewalks while street musician play popular Christmas carols. Most people only put a festive wreath up to decorate their home. In December, they light the streets in towns and cities with beautiful Christmas lights, decorations and live trees. Shops and department stores have animated Christmas figures and scenes in their windows for people to enjoy. Santa and his elves arrive at the large malls and department stores. Family and friends exchange gifts, which they place under their Christmas tree and do not open until Christmas morning. Some families hang Christmas stockings for Santa to fill. Midnight Mass is a very strong family tradition held on Christmas Eve. Santa leaves the children’s presents in their room instead of under the Christmas tree. Christmas dinner is usually stuffed turkey or goose, ham, vegetables with Christmas pudding, cake or small mincemeat pies for desert.

WALES

Because the Welsh love music, Christmas carols and singing, accompanied by a harp, are extremely popular traditions. They sing in church, around their Christmas trees and at concerts. The Welsh make taffy by boiling butter and brown sugar and this is of the most popular and important Christmas traditions. Along with a meal of Christmas goose, their traditions are very similar to the English ones. On Christmas morning at dawn carolers awake families with their singing.

Christmas traditions in the United Kingdom vary from location to location but the spirit of caring and goodwill extends all over the region at this special time of year.

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS IN TROPICAL CLIMATES

Warm tropical climates have unique and very creative ways of celebrating the traditional winter festivals around Christmas. While the celebrations may look a bit different the children and adults that live in tropical climates have just as much fun with their traditions as those that live in colder climates.

BAHAMAS

Junkanoo is what they call holiday celebrations that people in the Bahamas observe on December 26 and January 1. They have an immense parade between two o’clock in the morning and dawn with people dressed in vibrant costumes, music and dancing. There are troupes of people, numbering close
to one thousand members each, that have decorations and a theme of their own. These troupes compete with each other for prizes and cash. Some creations take up to a year to complete. They make these colorful, big, works of art made of such things as crepe paper, tissue, feathers, fabric and wood. The troupes dance through the street, accompanied by music, in perfect practiced formations. Many people believe that this tradition originated from joyous festivals practiced by the slaves, when they received a few days off to spend time with their families around Christmas. These spectacular celebrations are similar to Brazil’s Carnival or New Orleans Mardi Gras and certainly express the culture of the Bahamas.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa’s Christmas is unique as it falls during their summer season. Like many other places, they celebrate Christmas by starting to prepare for in well in advance. Because it falls during their annual holiday season, schools close as well as many small businesses. Many people head to Kruger National Park or camping in the shade on riverbanks and mountain slopes because the people of South Africa love the outdoors. Their lush green plants and beautiful exotic flowers make up for their lack of having snow. The urban areas across South Africa celebrate a modern Christmas with carollers singing on Christmas Eve and special church services held on Christmas Day. Most homes have a fir tree or pine branches, beautifully decorated for Christmas, and gifts for the children under the Christmas tree. Their Christmas dinner, served out doors at lunchtime, usually consists of roast beef, turkey, suckling pig, yellow rice, plum pudding and other wonderful foods. Often people play games during the day but on December 26, it is strictly a time for relaxing.

PHILIPPINES

Land of Fiestas is what people call the Philippines at Christmas time. Their Christmas formally starts on December 16, with nine early morning or pre-dawn church masses, which end on the first Sunday in January, with the Feast of the Three Kings ending the season officially. Most Filipinos are Roman Catholic, as Christians dominate this country, unlike other Asian counties so Christmas is a revered and significant holiday. This is a time when family and friends get together and share meals, gifts and friendship. It is the biggest holiday of the year so people have wonderful celebrations. This tropical island has fabulous landscapes and lovely flowers. Because of their true devotion to faith and family, they celebrate these Christmas holidays in the wonderful Philippines festive tradition.

NICARAGUA
Nicaragua keeps several of the traditions of old Spain, similar to many Latin American countries. In the weeks before Christmas, people buy many things such as nativity pictures, candles, food and toys. Children sing carols while leaving fragrant bouquets of flowers at altar for the Virgin, while singing Christmas carols. Church bells chime to let people know it is time for Midnight Mass. On January 6, the three wise men deliver gifts to the children at the feast of the Epiphany. Christmas season ends with a huge fireworks display.

COSTA RICA

In tropical Costa Rica, bright, beautiful tropical flowers make beautiful Christmas decorations. In the jungle areas where wild orchids bloom, people gather these gorgeous flowers, along with fresh, colorful fruit to decorate the manger scene, which the Costa Rican’s call a portal. After Midnight Mass, people have a Christmas feast of tamales and other traditional dishes. At one time children left their shoes out for gifts from the Christ child but now Santa Clause has taken over.

VENEZUELA

Early each morning from December 16 to December 23, people attend a church service they call Misa de Aguinaldo or Early Morning Mass. In Caracas, Venezuela’s capital, they close many neighborhood streets to cars and open them to people roller-skating to Mass until 8 A.M. each day. Children tie strings to their big toes, hang the string out the window and people roller-skating by give it a tug. People enjoy coffee and tostados after Mass.

UNIQUE CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

There are numerous traditions around the world associated with Christmas, such as buying gifts and sending Christmas cards, which you may observe or have heard of. There are also many unique, strange Christmas traditions or facts that people have never heard about. These certainly make interesting and fun conversation to share with family and friends. Here are some unique and interesting facts about Christmas traditions.

Many people love taking a drive and looking at the wonderful Christmas light displays during the festive holiday season, but did you know:
In the early 1900’s, a Christmas tree electrically lighted was considered a status symbol.

The earliest Christmas lights made, to replace candles, were so hot when they burned that they were actually as dangerous as candles.

Because Christmas lights were so expensive early in their history, instead of buying them, most people rented them.

Three years after Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, a colleague of his, by the name of Edward Johnson, was the first person to display lights on his Christmas tree at home. These lights were hand wired onto the tree in red, white, blue, and alternately flashed as the tree turned.

It was not until after World War II that Christmas trees, electrically lit, became popular in the United States.

Many people believed that early Christmas light bulbs burned longer when positioned upright on the Christmas tree. This was incorrect but people were very careful about keeping the lamps upright.

By the late 1920’s, milk glass was used to make figure Christmas lights. Turning the lights off and on caused them to expand and contract making the paint on the figure bulbs to peel and flake off. The industry felt that it looked better with milk glass showing, instead of clear class, when they flaked. The early lights, often in shapes such as holiday figures, fruit and flowers, were blown in the same molds as small ornaments and unbelievably, painted by the toy makers.

The ancient Welsh had a few unique and strange Christmas and New Years customs such as:

Mari Lwyd or Grey Mare was a pre-Christian custom and still acted out by some in Wales even today. Around Christmas, a man accompanied by a frightening horse with a skull head, knocks on a person’s door and then challenges them to do battle. The battle he challenges the person to is exchanging rhyming insults. A different version of this is when a person hides under a horsehair blanket and carries a spike with a horse’s skull. Accompanied by a group of mummers you must pay a cash fine if bitten by the horses jaw.

On New Years Day, from dawn until noon, young boys carrying three-legged totems called calennig, would go from home-to-home and splash people with water or chant rhymes and then ask for small gifts of change.

On Christmas morning, before dawn, men would gather in country churches and sing harmony carols unaccompanied by musical instruments. Called Plygain, some still practice this service, which lasts about three hours.

Two weeks before Christmas in Lebanon, people plant wheat grains, beans, lentils and chickpeas in wool. They place these sprouted shoots around the manger in their nativity scenes.

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In Winchester, England, Pilgrims’ school provides choirboys for Winchester Cathedral on Christmas Day. It is a tradition for the choirboys to start Christmas day waking up their headmaster by singing Christmas carols outside his window.

A unique Christmas tradition in Greenland is taking the raw flesh of an auk, which is a diving bird, and wrapping it in sealskin. Placed under a stone for several months until it decomposes, they say this gastronomical Christmas treat smells like old blue cheese and has a very pungent taste.

Christmas morning in Portugal, they have the ‘consoda’ feast where they set extra places at the dinner table. They offer food to the souls of the dead and ask for good luck in the coming year.

Two Sundays before Christmas in Yugoslavia, children sneak in and bind their mother’s feet to a chair. They chant, “Mothers Day, Mothers Day, what will you pay to get away?” Their mother then gives them gifts. They do the same to their father the following Sunday and he gives them more presents.

There are many different countries that celebrate their own unique versions of Christmas traditions. A wonderful activity is to research some less well know Christmas traditions and share them with the family every day of the Christmas season.
If there was ever a holiday that was designed for children, Christmas is certainly it. The wonderful colors, the mystery of the wrapped presents, and the toys and games are all things that make the holiday special for children. In addition many families focus on helping children understand both the religious aspect of the holiday as well as the underlying message of goodwill to man and peace on earth for everyone.

Many families involve the children in all aspects of the Christmas season from decorating the house through to preparing and presenting the Christmas meal. Of course children are usually the first ones up on Christmas morning to see what Santa has delivered overnight.

There are several traditions that involve children over the Christmas season. A few of the more common traditions or family events that children are involved in are:

- **Advent Calendars** – these special calendars have a window to open to reveal a prize, toy or treat for every day of the Christmas season. Children love to wake up each morning and open the little paper flap to find the prize hidden beneath.

- **Carolining** – children love to go outside and sing favorite classical and even more modern Christmas carols and songs to a variety of neighbors and friends. Phoning ahead will assure that someone will be home and the children will receive a treat or a cup of hot chocolate to warm them and reward them for their singing.
• **Decorating** – children of all ages love to make the house, tree, yard and even their own rooms look festive for the Christmas season. Give the children lots of opportunity to get involved in Christmas decorating; you may be surprised at how creative they can be.

• **Helping with food preparation** – there are so many wonderful foods associated with Christmas that children will want to be involved in both the preparation and the enjoying.

Allow the children to work with you in preparing your home for Christmas. While you work together it is a wonderful time to talk of Christmas traditions in the family as well as talk about all the wonderful events of the season.

### GETTING CHILDREN INVOLVED IN FAMILY TRADITIONS

Children grow up move away from home and start their own families. At Christmas time some of the family traditions the couple learned growing up becomes their family traditions. It is important, as you start having children of your own, to create some new Christmas traditions along with carrying on many of the old ones. It is the family traditions that make Christmas holidays so special and appreciated, passing down great family values, creating wonderful, fond memories that will carry over into your own children’s adult life. Children love rituals and find comfort and security in them and there is no reason you cannot start new ones. Getting your own children involved in creating new family traditions at Christmas time is not only exciting but also memorable. Some families that already have several family traditions add a new one each year as part of their Christmas tradition. Here are some suggestions that might lead to new Christmas family traditions for your family, which your children will pass on to their children.

1. Before the snow begins to fall, take a family hike to a park or woods and look for pinecones or other items that would make wonderful Christmas decorations or Christmas crafts. Dried branches tied together with Christmas ribbon and adding colored tree ornaments makes a wonderful centerpiece. Children have wonderful imaginations and they will surprise you with their great decorating ideas.

2. Plan a family night a few days before Christmas, where everyone gets together and makes holiday crafts, plays games, puts together a Christmas themed puzzle or even watch an old Christmas movie together, such as ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’.
3. A wonderful tradition is taking a family drive or walk to see the wonderful, twinkling holiday lights and Christmas displays put on by people in the neighborhood. Let your children choose the route you take to look at the Christmas lights.

4. Adopt a needy family or give to a special charity each year at Christmas time and have your children help shop for the gifts or food. Another great tradition is to have your children go through their toys and clothes they no longer play with or wear. Take your children with you go to drop these items at a charitable organization, which distributes them to people less fortunate. In other words, teach your children about giving to the underprivileged as part of your family tradition.

5. Have each member of the family make or buy a special Christmas tree ornament each year, which holds special significance or represents a memorable event.

6. Each year, in front of the Christmas tree or a special spot, take your children’s photo. Have them make the picture into a tree ornament or put it in an album. The entire family will love the new Christmas tradition that shows the changes, as the children grow and eventually have children of their own. You could have the whole family in the picture, including the family pets. Have a friend of neighbor take it annually and enjoy looking at the many changes over the years.

7. On Christmas Eve, after the evening meal is finished and cleaned up, gather the family together around the Christmas tree. Let each of the children open one of their Christmas presents early. You decide whether to let the children choose the gift he or she wants to open or pick it for them. Kids love this and even as they get older, they are still as excited about opening one gift on Christmas Eve, as they were when they were younger.

8. Pick a specific date, such as the first weekend in December, to put up and decorate the family Christmas tree. Make this a fun family tradition by having Christmas cookies and hot chocolate for the children.

9. A fun family tradition is taking the children to the dollar store, letting them buy gifts for each other and their parents, then wrapping them, and placing them under the tree. Most children get as excited watching someone open a present from him or her as they do opening the gifts they receive.
Family Christmas traditions are such an important and special part of the holidays. Children not only love family traditions but also remember them fondly as adults.

**KIDS AND SANTA CLAUS**

Saint Nicholas, Father Christmas, Kris Kringle and Saint Nick are all names referring to Santa Clause but most children usually call him Santa. Historically they are actually two different people. Saint Nicholas of Myra was a Catholic bishop that lived in the fourth century in what is now modern day Turkey and got the reputation of giving gifts to the needy. People knew, loved and appreciated his charitable gift giving. Before people celebrated our modern day Santa and Christmas, they celebrated St. Nicholas Day in memory and honor of St. Nicholas. The story goes that Saint Nicholas saved three young women that were in his parish from a life of slavery because their father became impoverished. To improve the family’s dire situation, the poor father planned the he would sell his daughters. In ancient times, it was common for a daughter’s dowry to help support her parents. Saint Nicholas provided a gift of gold so the father did not sell his daughters into slavery.

There are many versions; some say that Saint Nicholas threw a bag of gold through a window the first night and again the next night for the second daughter. On the third night, he climbed up on the roof and tossed a sack of gold down their chimney because the window was closed. Admired for his kindness and piety, many legends say he gave his inherited wealth to the sick and poor across the countryside. The story of Santa Claus delivering presents to children Christmas Eve developed from this historical and renowned Saint.

Just mentioning the word Santa to children brings a smile to their faces. They think of Santa Claus as that jolly old fellow that says ‘Ho Ho Ho’ and brings the excitement and wonderment of Christmas to life for them. Every year millions of young children write a letter to Santa Claus telling him that they have been good all year and provide a list of what toys they would like. You find Santa and his elves in stores and shopping malls across the country. A child sits on his knee, while Santa listens to the little one ask for a special gift they want. You also see Santa wearing his red suit, swinging a bell and collecting money for the less fortunate. This certainly makes it a very busy time for Santa.

The story of Santa completely captivates children. The image of Santa living in the ice and snow of the North Pole, his elves busy helping him make toys all year long to bring to children around the world Christmas Eve, fascinates them. Most children know the names of Santa’s reindeer but in case they forget, the names of the reindeer that pull the sleigh are:
Because children are so inquisitive, they often ask many questions about Santa Claus that sometimes stump the parents. Here are a few ideas that may help you out when you are completely at a loss for an answer:

**HOW DID RUDOLPH GET A RED NOSE?**

Rudolph was born with a bright, red nose just as Dumbo was born with huge ears. His nose glows brighter when it is snowy or foggy and this helps Santa guide the sleigh. That is the reason Santa always has Rudolph lead instead of one of his other reindeer. Rudolph is such a happy, friendly reindeer that the others love him and never get jealous.

**DOES SANTA REALLY KNOW IF YOU ARE BAD OR GOOD DURING THE YEAR?**

Santa’s elves are very busy all year getting toys ready for Christmas but Santa does have some elves whose job is to check on children, to see if they are being naughty or nice. They keep a list of the naughty ones and Santa looks it over and decides if they get a piece of coal or a present. Luckily, Santa does not have to give out coal very often.

**IF A HOUSE HAS NO CHIMNEY, HOW DOES SANTA DELIVER HIS GIFTS?**

Santa has been delivering gifts to children for so long that he really does not need a chimney to place their gifts under the Christmas tree. The fastest and easiest way for Santa to deliver presents is to go down the chimney, but with his magical powers, he always finds a way, so he do not disappoint any boys or girls.

Make sure the children leave out something for Santa and his reindeer to eat because he does not have time to stop for a meal Christmas Eve. Keeping Santa alive in our hearts all year is a wonderful way to keep the spirit of Christmas thriving every day.
GREAT GIFTS FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES

Christmas is a wonderful time of year when family and friends get together to celebrate. Gift giving is a great way to show others how important they are to us and how much we care. It is a time for sharing and showing the caring spirit we all have. Many people dread shopping for kids because they feel like they have run out gift ideas. Shopping for and finding the perfect gift for a special child is fun and very rewarding. There are several ways to come up with Christmas gift ideas, such as asking children old enough to give you suggestions, but be prepared to receive a list as long as your arm with this option. Narrowing the list down is fairly easy with the younger children, as a pet dinosaur, live pony and a castle to live in, can be crossed off immediately. You can find great Christmas gift ideas for kids by looking through magazines, Christmas catalogues, talking to other parents or friends, television and even on the internet. For new toys that are extremely popular this year, it is best to shop early so some are still available and your child does not end up disappointed. In addition, the suggested manufacturer’s ages for the toys do not fit every child in that age group. Some children could be bored quickly with the toy while others may be frustrated because it is a little difficult for them, so consider this when shopping. In addition, one size does not always fit everyone, so that is something you should remember while you shop. Here are some great Christmas gift suggestions:

INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Infants up to around a year need colorful, textured toys that stimulate their sense of sight, touch and sound. A musical teddy bear dressed up like Santa or an elf is a great gift for a baby’s first Christmas. You can have the child’s name added to make the gift very personal. Leapfrog Toys makes a three in one learning book called Touch & Tug Discovery Book for children from zero to 12 months. Roll-A-Round, Look Arounds by Fisher Price is another great toy for children to twelve months. Toddlers up to around two years of age are very inquisitive, so educational toys, activity centers and shape sorters are a smart choice. Great gifts for children from two to four are tricycles with training wheels, sleighs or educational toys.

KIDS FROM FIVE TO TWELVE

Children in the five to seven age groups are developing their interests and individual personalities, so toys that are engaging and hold their attention are great. Shop around for remote control toys, dolls, and video or computer games. Bratz dolls by MGA Entertainment come with a lot of accessories and fashions. Megaplay Adventure Castle by Mega Bloks is sure to provide hours of entertainment while your child builds and rebuilds their own castle. Even
older children enjoy these huge blocks. By the time children reach the age of ten or twelve, they usually know exactly what they want for Christmas but if you have no idea, an adorable robotic dog or soccer game table may be perfect. Look at interactive scientific games, a beginner’s electric guitar, keyboard or a video game.

**BIG KIDS TO SIXTEEN**

Teenagers are very difficult to buy Christmas gifts for, especially if you want it to be a surprise. A TV Star Video Camcorder is great for kids and their friends getting together and making movies and music videos. It is a color high-resolution camera with a cool special effects lens. Included is a handheld microphone with a mixer. You can connect this to a television, external CD player or VCR. Electronic games such as soccer or hockey are always a hit and a lot of fun. MP3 players or iPods, that also receives radio broadcasts, keep teens from getting tired of the same songs. A great leather wallet or beautiful designer purse, for a girl, gives a teenager a way to carry their personal papers, address books and money. Many parents do not want their son or daughter to have a cell phone because they do not want them tied into a contract or are concerned about huge bills. A great alternative is a pre-paid cell phone where you buy cards with minutes on them. If they already have a pre-paid cell phone, they will always appreciate a gift of pre-paid minutes for their cell phone.

Spend a little time deciding what to buy each kid and then have a great time shopping.

**CREATIVE CHILDREN’S CRAFTS FOR CHRISTMAS**

A wonderful way to spend time together and celebrate Christmas and the holiday season is to make creative children’s crafts for Christmas. It is a fantastic way to spend quality time together as a family while making ornaments and crafts that create lasting memories. Every year when you bring these hand-made Christmas ornaments and crafts out of storage and display them for everyone to enjoy, you will probably end up reliving the memories of when the family made them. This is not only a wonderful tradition to start but you may want to pass the ornaments down to the next generation.

Because the holiday season is so rushed and stressful, pick a specific day for the family to sit down and do crafts together. Choose a time when everyone is available and able to relax, as you do not want your time together rushed. There are many ways to find great craft ideas such as arts and craft shows, magazines, television, craft shops, craft books and the internet. Put out a
few refreshments and have a table set up large enough for the entire family to work together. Make sure that the creative Christmas crafts you choose are suitable for the age of the children making them.

**BEAD CHRISTMAS TREE ORNAMENTS**

An easy craft for even younger children to make are bead tree wreaths, candy canes and ornaments. For this craft, you need pipe cleaners in various colors, a ribbon to hang your finished ornament and colored beads in different colors, shapes and sizes. Start stringing the beads onto the pipe cleaner. You can pattern them any way you would like and shape the wires into whatever you want. Younger children can make the basic shapes such as a candy cane while older ones may try a reindeer. Twist the ends together or separately when finished.
RUDOLPH THE RED NOSE REINDEER

This easy by fun craft requires candy canes, wiggly plastic eyes from a craft or dollar store, small red pom poms, pipe cleaners, ribbon and craft glue. With the wrapper still on the candy cane, glue two eyes on the curved part and a red pom pom at the end of the curve for Rudolph’s nose. On the straight part, take the ribbon and tie a bow around the middle. Cut one pipe cleaner in half and wrap it around just behind the eyes forming Rudolph’s antlers. These look great hung on the Christmas tree.

PRE-BAKED GINGERBREAD HOUSE

A fun Christmas craft to make and eat is a gingerbread house. You can bake your own but there are wonderful kits available with pieces pre-baked. These kits are great for younger children. They come with all the decorations necessary such as icing mix, gumdrops and candy cane pieces. If your children are older, bake your own gingerbread pieces to make a house, mansion, castle, fences, people, animals or even Santa with his sleigh. Your imagination is the only limit. Use whatever decorations you like to finish your project.

PINECONE CHRISTMAS TREE

This delightful little pinecone is gorgeous hanging as a tree ornament or sitting on a table. All you require is pinecones, paint, glue, ribbon, glitter and sequins or any other decorations you like. Take six or eight inches of ribbon and tie it in a circle. Glue the tied part of the ribbon to the top tip of the pinecone. Holding it by the ribbon, paint the pinecone whatever color you like. Sprinkle glitter on your tree while it is still wet or wait until it dries and glue sequins or any other ornaments you like on your tiny Christmas tree. At craft and dollars stores, they sell tiny Christmas tree ornaments that are perfect for a tiny pinecone tree. Small ribbons also look cute glued on the tree branches. A decorated tree skirt made of felt and glued onto the bottom of the pinecone or sitting your decorated pinecone in a tiny painted pot, adds a little extra pizzazz. Cotton stuck on the branches, or white paint on the tips gives the illusion of snow. Add as much detail as you like and have fun with this craft because there is no right or wrong way to decorate your beautiful pinecone Christmas tree.

The crafts the children make are perfect gifts for their teacher, bus driver or friend and relatives.

CHRISTMAS COOKING AND KIDS
Christmas is a beautiful, exciting, busy and highly anticipated time of year. Everywhere, people rush around picking up last minute items so they are all set for the big day. Along with cleaning, decorating, Christmas cards sent to loved ones and gift shopping, many people plan their Christmas menus and food shopping. Some have their family Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve while others celebrate with their main meal on Christmas day. Often, families have guests staying for a few days or more, so there are many meals to plan for ahead of time. Christmas cooking plays a major role in this festive holiday and for parents with children, instead of trying to keep them from being underfoot, a wonderful idea is to have your children help you with the planning and cooking at Christmas time. Cooking with your children is a fun, amazing process where you watch them learn organizational skills, accept responsibility, and learn about safety in the kitchen. Both you and your children get to spend quality time together, while having fun creating wonderful main course dishes and fabulous desserts. Cooking together not only brings you closer but also becomes a unique experience that many turn into a family tradition.

It is extremely important to teach your children food safety in the kitchen, which includes always keeping the kitchen area clean. Use paper towels to clean up spills and always wash the work area, utensils and your hands with antibacterial soap, especially after working with raw meats and vegetables. Bacteria love sponges, cloths and towels, so keep your kitchen linens extremely clean. Cover any cuts or open sores on the hands with gloves or bandages. Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot as bacteria thrives in lukewarm food or at room temperature. These are just a few of the many safety tips you should teach your children.

One fun idea that makes a wonderful Christmas tradition is having your child or children plan one complete meal, where they choose the menu, shop for the ingredients, cook and then serve the meal. This includes making dessert such as a pie, cake, cookies or Christmas pudding. Teach your children to understand how to read a recipe from start to finish so they know what is required to make that specific dish. Help them make a list of all the ingredients needed, grocery shop to pick up the supplies and then put everything away where it belongs. Making the dessert the day before is a great idea if you need the oven for the main course.

Discuss with them what they need to make first and then have them gather all the food ingredients, along with the proper size mixing bowls, pots and pans, utensils, measuring spoons, cups and anything else required. Give your kids advice on where to find everything they need to prepare the dish. For older children that you have already taught properly, using equipment such as an electric mixer is safe, but you need to work the equipment for younger children. Now, it is time to follow the recipe and measure, mix and prepare the food. Your children will not only love this but also learn to appreciate your everyday work making their meals.
Setting the table is part of their Christmas meal preparation so show them how to set the table properly. Have Christmas napkins and decorations available so your kids can make it a very festive table setting. Once all the preparations are complete and you gather the rest of the family for this wonderful Christmas feast, help your children by carrying out the hot dishes or ones that require an adult to bring them to the table safely. The pride and joy your children show in their achievement will make every second spent preparing and working with them in the kitchen a fabulous experience. The part the children will enjoy most is when they get to sit while everyone else clears up after dinner because they made the meal.

Another great way to spend fun time with your kids is having them help make the Christmas cookies, Christmas cake or desserts that are prepared ahead of time. Have various Christmas decorations available, such as red and green sprinkles, Christmas cookie cutters, icing in festive colors, candied cherries and edible decorations. This is not only a wonderful family Christmas activity but will always hold fond memories both for your children and for you.

**CHILDREN’S CHRISTMAS PARTIES**

The most exciting time of year for adults and children is definitely Christmas. Right after Thanksgiving each year, parents tell their children that they had better behave or Santa will leave them coal in their stockings. The children are thinking of all the wonderful gifts to ask for from Santa Claus while parents start shopping and making Christmas plans that include family and friends. Many families go together to pick out or even cut down their perfect Christmas tree. It is an extremely busy time of year but also such a beautiful, mystical time. A yearly tradition many families love, is taking a drive in the evening to look at the thousands of sparking lights and decorations on homes and in many of the large parks.

Children’s Christmas parties are very exciting for both the children and the host of the party. As emotions run high this time of year you are sure to have energetic, giggly, happy children as well as some that are a little hyperactive. This is just part of the festive excitement so you need to be prepared. Here are just a few of many children’s Christmas party ideas:

**COOKIE CHRISTMAS PARTY**

Your children, and you if they require help, can make party invitations in the shape of Christmas cookies, inviting their friends to a cookie making party. Plan an easy menu for lunch, such as pizza or hotdogs and ice cream. There is no need for a cake as there will be plenty of cookies for the children to eat. Put together a Christmas grab bag for each of the children to take home with
them and in the bag put candy canes, small toys or even their very own Christmas ornament. Be sure you have some little boxes set aside for the children to take some of the cookies they made home with them. Mix up a few batches of cookie dough beforehand. Both sugar cookie dough and gingerbread cookie dough are a great choice. Set up a large table with rolling pins and many Christmas cookie cutters. Have decorations for the cookies such as sprinkles, candies and icing, in little cups on the table. Once the children cut out the cookies and you bake them, the fun of decorating begins. All the children will definitely love a cookie Christmas party.

**SANTA THEMED PARTY**

A great way to bring the excitement and magic to a Christmas children’s party is by having a theme. Of course, a Santa themed party is perfect this time of year. Send out either hand made or store bought Santa invitations. Once you have chosen the party food, keep it simple; add a great desert such as individual Santa party cupcakes and ice cream or a Santa cake. Make a red or green fruit punch and add a few grapes or pieces of fruit. The children will love this. With the Santa theme in mind, keep your Christmas party decorations simple by using cutouts of Santa, red and green balloons, streamers, and a Santa paper tablecloth for a festive looking room. Do not forget Santa paper cups, plates and napkins. To keep the children entertained, play a few party games such as pin the red nose on Rudolph or musical chairs. Play Christmas music to keep with the theme of the Christmas party. Another great idea is to rent a traditional Christmas movie as children never get bored watching them. The highlight of the day could be a visit from Santa with a small gift for each of the children.

**CHRISTMAS CRAFT PARTY**

Set up a large table for making Christmas ornaments. Some supplies you might want to put out are:

- Safety scissors
- Washable markers and crayons
- A paper punch
- Yarn or string to hang the ornament
- Felt, old Christmas cards, pieces of paper
- Paint and brushes
- Glue, beads, popcorn and other items to decorate with

Another great craft for the children to make and take home is a bird or squirrel feeder. Give the children a pinecone and have them tie a piece of string to the end to hang the finished pinecone up. Using a plastic knife, cover the pinecone in peanut butter. To finish this project, children roll their pinecones in birdseed. They now have a great bird treat to take home with them and hang outside for their feathered and furry friends.
Be creative and even with a modest budget, you can come up with fantastic, fun ideas for a children’s Christmas party. By putting a little effort and a lot of imagination into the Christmas party, the children will have a party that they remember fondly forever.

4
PREPARING A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS

Since Christmas is a holiday that is very treasured and special to most families, it is important to make it memorable and fun. Often this can be very challenging, especially if you are new at having the Christmas celebration at your house or if you are trying to do something complete unique this Christmas holiday. There are many different ways that you can make your Christmas wonderful with just a few easy and relatively inexpensive ideas. In addition it is possible to really pull out all the stops and prepare an extravagant Christmas for all to remember.

There are some Christmas holidays that are usually considered milestones in a person’s life. These may include:

- First Christmas in your own home or apartment
- First Christmas with a fiancée or boyfriend or girlfriend
- First Christmas with your spouse
- First Christmas away from home
- Babies first Christmas
- First Christmas in a new home

You may also be interested in creating your own unique Christmas traditions and this may be the first year that you are starting your own new “old favorites”.

Many professional party planners consider the best advice to planning a large event like a Christmas party and meal is to do as much advance preparation as possible. This means planning menus, shopping, decorating and even as much advance food preparation as possible prior to the Christmas season or
meal. Thankfully microwaves, convection ovens and even many wonderful prepared foods have made Christmas cooking much simpler. Don’t worry about doing everything from scratch, try using some of the wonderful time saving products and services on the market to cut down on your stress and time. Consider having a cleaning service come it to give your house a complete cleaning, perhaps even a decorator or party planner to help with the décor and menu, and even perhaps a chef or bakery service to prepare some of the foods that you may want to serve.

For those that like to do things themselves, the following pages contain information on everything from decorations for the home to traditional and international recipes and even ideas for hard to buy for friends and family members.

**UNIQUE DECORATIONS FOR THE HOME**

Making your home look truly wonderful for the Christmas is not as difficult as it often seems. There are many simple techniques to provide unique and eye-catching decorations using a variety of items that you may find you already have in your cupboards and storage areas.

Often the center focus of the holiday decoration in the house is the Christmas tree. The next section will describe several themes for Christmas trees, but there are some general guidelines for buying just the right tree. The tree should be well shaped and the branches evenly distributed around the trunk if at all possible. The tree should also be the correct size for the room or space it will be displayed in. Avoid trees that are too large for the space as they look cramped and out of place rather than attractive and festive. It is always a great idea to have more than one tree. Artificial trees are wonderful for guest rooms, bedrooms and other smaller rooms in the house.

**USING NATURE**

Depending on where you live you may find some naturally occurring items that make wonderful Christmas decorations with a bit of imagination. Pinecones are very popular both in decorating the tree and in providing wonderful colors and textures to Christmas pot pouri mixes and even table centerpieces. Simply take well dried, nicely shaped pinecones and spray paint them various Christmas colors such as red, white and green. While the paint is still damp sprinkle gold, silver or red and green glitter onto the surface, especially near the edges of the pinecone. The painted and decorated cones can be place in a large clear glass bowl around a pillar candle for a dramatic Christmas center piece, or they can be used to hold name place holders at the Christmas dinner table.

Holly branches can be brought in and used to add wonderful greenery to Christmas floral arrangements. Holly grows in most areas and it is extremely
suitable for decorating as it retains in rich deep color for long periods of time, even after being cut.

Poinsettias are a popular Christmas plant and are very hardy and easy to care for. New varieties of poinsettias are available on the market as well as some specially colored poinsettias in pinks, lilacs and even blue shades. These elegant and festive plants can turn the front of a fireplace into a blaze of deep red and green. Christmas cactus plants and amaryllis bulbs can also be grown indoors to bloom at Christmas time. Children love watching amaryllis grow as they simply seem to spring up overnight. There beautiful flowers are very showy and the plants can be moved outdoors in the spring in warm climates.

NATIVITY SCENES

In many Christian countries nativity scenes are a popular decoration over the Christmas season. While the traditional nativity scenes are very popular there are also some wonderful international nativity scenes available made out of a variety of unique materials. The internet is a wonderful place to find nativity scenes made of:

- Paper meche
- Sugar palm
- Ceramic
- Carved wood
- Glass
- Stone

Some people find collecting these nativity scenes from around the world a wonderful way to provide unique decorations for the home.

LIGHTING

One way to decorate the home for the holiday season is to make some changes to the lighting that you use. Changing the bulbs in accent lamps to red or green lights, or even changing the shades to Christmas scenes on the fabric is an inexpensive way to add that extra detail to holiday décor. Most department stores sell the Christmas lampshades as well as the colored bulbs that are the correct ones for indoor use.

Candles are also a wonderful way to decorate the home for Christmas. There are many different scented candles that can be used to provide the wonderful smells of Christmas throughout the house. Some of the more popular Christmas scents are:
There are also many Christmas candles that come in specialty decorative jars and holders that add that extra bit of detail. Floating candles in the shape of Christmas ornaments, Christmas trees and even candy canes make a wonderful addition to the buffet table or to a coffee table.

**THEMES FOR TREES**

Theme Christmas trees have become increasingly popular over the years. Originally Christmas trees were decorated with natural materials such as fruits, nuts or even strings of dried berries threaded together to make garlands. As Christmas trees became more popular commercially available ornaments were made. The original tree ornaments were very decorative and delicate, and are much sought after as collector’s items today.

Currently there are many different types of themes for trees. Department and Christmas stores actually sell tree kits that provide all the ornaments, lights, garlands and accent pieces that are needed to create a specific theme tree. For those people that like to create their own themes there are virtually limitless options.

Some traditional themes for trees include:

- Angels
- Snowmen or snowballs
- Miniature toys
- Santa and his helpers
- Fruit
- Ribbons and lights

Often white flocking or snow is sprayed on traditional theme trees to give the appearance of a beautiful tree just brought in from outside. Lights and tinsel complete the effect.

There are also some easy to make modern themes or themes that are a bit less traditional. These can include:
• **Mexican** – use Christmas lights shaped like chilli pepper and small Mexican ornaments and miniature sombreros to complete the look. Red and green ribbon can be used in place of traditional silver tinsel.

• **Monochromatic tree** – choose your favorite color and use that exclusively on the tree. For example, all the ornaments, lights, ribbons and decorations could be blue, purple, white or gold. This makes for an extremely dramatic effect especially if the tree is large.

• **Artificial trees** – artificial trees can come in many colors besides green. Although white artificial trees have been around for many years you can also now purchase pink, purple, blue or even orange colored Christmas trees. These trees, when used with the monochromatic color scheme can be very eye-catching and memorable.

• **Pet lovers** – many pet lovers enjoy a theme tree that includes their favorite animals or animals. Pictures of the pet can be easily mounted or glued into small frames or a Christmas balls to make one of a kind and unique decorations. Dog and cat Christmas ornaments, dog bones tied with bows and even some small cat toys can finish off the theme. A dog or cat angel or tree topper is a wonderful touch for the top of the tree.

• **Birds** – bird ornaments of all kinds can be purchased for a theme tree. In addition seed balls can easily be made by simply rolling a Styrofoam ball in glue and then through birdseed. A bright red ribbon can be used to attach them to the tree. Green lights give the appearance of lights shining through the branches onto the birds. Nests can easily be made with moss or small twigs and placed selectively among the boughs.

• **Winter beauty** – this is a very dramatic presentation that is not at all your typical Christmas tree. Using a white artificial tree use only icy-blue colored balls and decorations, or make the decorations clear plastic or glass. White lights or icicle lights finish off the impression of a tree frozen in beauty.

• **Beach Christmas** – using an artificial white, pink or blue tree make or purchase seaside ornaments from seashells, sand dollars and sea horses. Don’t forget that pet stores often sell decorations for aquariums that would look wonderful on this creative theme tree. Fishing lures, with the hooks removed can also be added for a whimsical touch. Instead of the traditional tree skirt around the bottom use a colorful beach towel and maybe even a bit of sand.

There is no end to the variety of theme Christmas trees. Remember that Christmas is meant to be fun and enjoyable and your tree should reflect what interests you and your family. Traditional trees or trees that hold family
favorite ornaments are also a popular style of decorating and often these trees are fondly remembered throughout the year.

With all Christmas trees be sure to have the tree securely anchored to prevent it from tipping over. Also remember to keep a live Christmas tree well watered both to keep the needles soft and pliable as well as decrease any fire hazard the tree may pose. Do not use candles on the tree as they are too great of a fire hazard, even when the tree is constantly monitored when they are lit.

SONGS AND MUSIC FOR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

Of all the holidays during the year, Christmas definitely has the most songs. Every year they add new songs to the already huge list of Christmas songs recorded over many years. These songs are as varied as there are people that listen. Once thanksgiving ends, every radio station in the country starts playing new Christmas songs along with the classic ones. People still go out singing Christmas carolling just as they did many years ago. Almost everyone looks forward to hearing Christmas songs and carols because they represent such a magical, festive time of the year.

Some of the many interesting Christmas music facts are:

- The song ‘Jingle Bells’, was actually written for Thanksgiving. This song went on to become an extremely popular Christmas song.
- In the Christmas song ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’, if a person received all the presents in the song, you would end up with 364 gifts.
- ‘I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus’ was a Christmas song that made it to the top of the pop charts. The person singing that song was Jimmy Boyd when he was just under thirteen years old.
- Called Wassailing, Christmas carolling began in England. It was an old custom to toast neighbors and wish them a healthy, long life.
- In Pensacola, Florida in 1996, two major malls banned Christmas carolling. Merchants along with many shoppers complained that the carollers were too loud.
- An Austrian priest named Joseph Mohr wrote the song ‘Silent Night’ because the organ at his church broke and they were unable to fix it by Christmas Eve. Upset by this, he wrote three stanzas of ‘Stille
Nacht’ or ‘Silent Night’, so people could sing with the guitar accompanying them in his Austrian church.

- The custom of singing Christmas carols dates back to 1521, when they published the first English collection.
- In 1857, James Pierpont composed "Jingle Bells" but he originally named it “One-Horse Open Sleigh.”
- The puritans forbade people to sing Christmas carols.
- In 1943, the Christmas song “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” was first published.

Twenty-Five very popular Christmas carols and songs we hear at Christmas are:

1. Away In A Manger
2. Silent Night
3. Joy To The World
4. Oh Come All Ye Faithful
5. O Little Town of Bethlehem
6. Angels We Have Heard On High
7. God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen
8. It Came Upon The Midnight Clear
9. O Holy Night
10. Hark The Herald Angels Sing
11. The First Noel
12. What Child Is This
13. Do You Hear What I Hear
14. We Three Kings
15. Winter Wonderland
16. Silver Bells
17. The Little Drummer Boy
18. Jingle Bell Rock
19. Jingle Bells
20. Holly Jolly Christmas
21. O Christmas Tree
22. Santa Claus Is Coming to Town
23. White Christmas
24. Sleigh Ride
25. I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Clause

In Australia, some traditional Christmas carols are ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem and ‘Once in Royal David’s City’. Because it is summer in Australia, people listen to Bing Crosby croon ‘White Christmas’ in air-conditioned shopping malls. Other Australian Christmas songs are The North Wind, Santa Never made it into Darwin, The Carol of the Birds and Six White Boomers.
Normally radio stations and other musical venues play Christmas songs leading up to Christmas or shortly after. The lyrical content of Christmas songs is most often addressing the winter season, the holidays and sometimes both. We associate Christmas music with the holiday spirit and cheer and each year we hear new Christmas songs. Along with these, we also hear Christmas hymns and carols played on the television and radio. They often call traditional songs, Christmas carols, while hymns are songs with any religious reference or praise. Some of the more current songs, often heard in films, refer to Christmas and the joyful celebrations. These are not usually classified as Christmas carols. One exception is a song from the 1920’s called White Christmas. Along with Christmas songs, carols and hymns, there are many funny Christmas songs that people love such as Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer, The Chipmunk Christmas, All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth and I’m Getting Nuttin for Christmas.

It is all types of Christmas music that adds to the excitement and joy of Christmas.

**TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS RECIPES**

Some of the most memorable things about the Christmas holidays and the season are the wonderful foods that are prepared every year. Despite the fact that they have been made over and over again, just the scent of them has us thinking about Christmas and mouths watering. While not all cultures make the same foods for Christmas the traditional Christmas dinner usually includes turkey, goose or ham, a variety of vegetables, stuffing, salads, rolls or dinner buns and Christmas pudding for dessert.

There are family variations on all recipes but most use the same general ingredients. The following are some traditional Christmas recipes that are tried and true favorites.

**POPYCOCK**

This is a sweet and salty appetizer that is great to have for guests to nibble on before dinner is served.

- 2 cups brown sugar
- 1 cup butter
- 1/2 cup corn syrup
- 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 16 cups popped popcorn
- salt as desired
- Nuts as desired
Heat the brown sugar, butter and corn syrup to a boil. Boil for five minutes stirring constantly. Add the cream of tartar and the baking soda to the mixture off the heat. There will be some foaming. Add the sugar mixture to the popped popcorn and nuts, stir gently to coat and then spread on a cookie sheet. Bake at 300 degrees for 20 minutes and separate any clumps. Allow to cool before serving.

**CORNBREAD STUFFING**

This recipe is from the southern United States and uses cornbread rather than the traditional white bread of many types of stuffing. The stuffing is not cooked inside the turkey, but rather in a separate pan in the oven.

- 2 (8.5 ounce) packages dry corn muffin mix
- 1 (8 ounce) can cream-style corn
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 celery, finely chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 cups chicken broth

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Lightly grease a 9x13 inch baking dish. In a medium bowl combine muffin mix, corn, eggs, yogurt and milk; stir just until moistened. Pour into prepared pan. Bake in preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until golden brown. Meanwhile, in a large saucepan over medium heat, melt butter and sauté onion, celery, green pepper and garlic. When onions are tender stir in thyme, basil, oregano, salt, pepper, cayenne and broth. Bring to a boil and then remove from heat. Crumble the cornbread and stir into broth mixture; mix well. Add more broth or more bread, as necessary, to achieve desired consistency.

Place back into oven in the greased 9X13 inch pan at 350 degrees for 60 to 75 minutes or until golden brown on top. Cut into squares and serve.

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GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE

This has been a traditional favorite for most families. This recipe has a new twist to add a bit extra to the dish.

- 4 slices bacon
- 1 (10.75 ounce) can condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 1 (8 ounce) can water chestnuts, drained and chopped
- 3/4 cup milk
- 2 (15 ounce) cans green beans, drained
- ground black pepper to taste
- 1 1/3 cups French-fried onions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Place bacon in a large, deep skillet. Cook over medium high heat until evenly brown. Drain, crumble and set aside. In a 1-1/2 quart casserole dish, mix together the bacon, soup, water chestnuts, milk, green beans and pinch of black pepper. Bake for 30 minutes or until heated through. Stir and top with French fried onions. Bake for 5 additional minutes or until onions are golden brown.

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

While this is a more complicated dessert it certainly is worth the time and effort.

- 1 1/2 cups self-rising flour
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1/2 cup prepared mincemeat pie filling
- 1/2 cup whole cranberry sauce
- 1/2 cup pumpkin puree
- 1 (8 ounce) container sour cream
- 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese
- 1/3 cup confectioners' sugar

Grease one 2-quart lidded pudding mold. Sift together the flour, sugar and cinnamon; set aside.

In a large bowl, mix together the eggs, butter, mincemeat, cranberry sauce and pumpkin. Add to flour mixture and mix until smooth; pour into pudding mold.

Place a rack in the bottom of a large pot, over medium heat, and fill 1/2 way up with boiling water. Place the pudding on the rack. Steam for 2 1/2 hours.
Check the pan occasionally and add more water if needed. Check for doneness by inserting a toothpick in the center. When firm, place the pudding mold on a rack outside of the water for 10 minutes and unmold.

Prepare a sauce by blending together the sour cream, cream cheese and confectioners sugar. Spoon dollops over warm pudding and serve.

Remember that family favorites may change over time but the traditional recipes always seem to be popular.

**INTERNATIONAL RECIPES FOR CHRISTMAS**

There are many different international recipes for the Christmas season. Bookstores, libraries and internet search engines all provide a wide range of specialties for the season from different countries around the world. Some international dishes that work very nicely with a traditional Christmas meal include Borscht soup from the Ukraine, Tourtiere or meat pies from Canada, Carrot Gratin from Finland and Stollen, a traditional German Christmas cake.

The recipes all use ingredients that are relatively easy to find no matter where you may live. If you are having trouble finding ingredients for international recipes try ordering off the internet or ask your grocer to bring in the items in advance.

**BORSCHT SOUP**

- 2 large onions, chopped
- 3 large carrots, chopped
- 1 cup coarsely shredded cabbage
- 3 cups of beets, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- 1 can of lima beans, with liquid (optional)
- 2 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- ½ tsp dill weed
- sour cream or whipping cream

Cover onions, carrots, cabbage and beets with water or chicken stock and allow to simmer for approximately one hour. Add the additional vegetables, salt, pepper, vinegar and dill weed, simmer for 5-10 minutes. If desired stir in ½ cup of whipping cream and serve in bowls with a dollop of sour cream in the center.
Traditionally the borscht at Christmas is served without meat, but other times of the year short ribs are often simmered with the vegetables for additional flavor.

TOURTIERE

This is a wonderful meat pie that uses a combination of ground pork and beef, vegetables and spices to create a memorable side dish or main course.

- 8 pounds ground pork
- 8 pounds ground beef
- 4 cups finely chopped onion
- 6 cups water
- 2 1/2 tablespoons salt
- 2 teaspoons pepper
- 2 teaspoons allspice
- 1 3/4 teaspoons ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup liquid chicken seasoning
- 8 (15 ounce) packages pastry for double-crust pie

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C).

In a large pot, mix the pork, beef, onion, and water. Season with salt, pepper, allspice, cloves, cinnamon, and chicken seasoning. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer 30 minutes.

Drain liquid from pot into a bowl. Transfer remaining meat mixture to a separate bowl and chill until ready to use. Place bowl with liquid in the refrigerator and chill 1 hour, or until fat has congealed on the surface.

Scrape and discard fat from the chilled liquid. Spoon the meat mixture into pie crusts. Add 1 tablespoon of reserved liquid to each pie. (This prevents them from becoming to dry.) Place top crust on top of each pie and pinch edges to seal. Cut slits in top crust so steam can escape.

Bake in preheated oven until golden brown, about 50 minutes. Serve immediately or freeze until ready to use.

This recipe can easily be adjusted for smaller amounts.

CARROT GRATIN

- 1 (16 ounce) package baby carrots, sliced
- 2 medium onions, sliced
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
3 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups milk
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 tablespoon butter
1 cup fine dry bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).

Place carrots and onions in a pot with enough lightly salted water to cover, and bring to a boil. Cook 5 minutes, or until tender but firm. Drain, and spread 1/2 the carrots and onions in a baking dish. Cover with 3/4 cup cheese, layer with remaining carrots and onions, and top with remaining cheese.

In a saucepan, melt 3 tablespoons butter and mix in flour until smooth. Gradually stir in milk until thickened, and season with salt and pepper. Pour over the carrots, onions, and cheese in the baking dish.

Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a small pot, and mix in bread crumbs. Sprinkle evenly in the baking dish. Bake 20 minutes in the preheated oven, or until bubbly and lightly browned.

**STOLLEN**

This very traditional Christmas cake is served in almost every home in Germany over the holiday season.

- 1/2 cups milk
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 3/4 cup butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
• 2 egg yolks
• 5 2/3 cups all-purpose flour
• 1 ounce active dry yeast
• 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
• 1/2 cup raisins
• 1/2 cup candied citrus peel
• 1/2 cup candied cherries

Scald milk. Add sugar, butter, and salt, and cool to lukewarm. Add 2 whole eggs, and 2 yolks. Mix. Add to 3 cups flour and yeast in food processor. Process and let rise until double. Add cardamom, raisins, citron, and cherries, and rest of flour. Process and put on floured board and knead. Let rise in greased bowl. When raised, cut into 3-4 pieces. Roll each into an oval, butter, and fold in half lengthwise. Put on greased baking sheet, cover, and let rise until double. Bake at 375 degrees F (190 degrees C) for 25 minutes. Remove to rack. When cool, frost with white butter frosting and decorate with candied cherry halves and sprinkle with colored sugar.

Finding new Christmas favorites from around the world is a wonderful way to learn about traditions and foods from other countries. Be sure to get the children involved in the cooking as well.
CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR HARD TO BUY FOR FAMILY

It always seems like there is someone on the Christmas gift list that is much more difficult to buy something for than others. Often people decide to give these family members gift certificates or other generic gifts that usually end up in the bottom of a drawer or up on a closet shelf.

If you want to make sure that your gift is meaningful and welcomed, try asking yourself a few questions about the person that you are buying for. By taking the time to answer these questions you will have a good basis of ideas to start your gift search.

1. **What do I know about this person?**
   What is the kind of hobbies, interests, sports, crafts or other activities that the person likes to be involved in? Sometimes talking to other family members can help you out with this question.

2. **What does the person enjoy?**
   Have you noticed that the person enjoys a particular type of cooking, or maybe they love to go to the movies. Do they seem to be a collector of anything? Many people get involved in collecting certain items that are rare or hard to find, which can make gift giving a bit difficult, but might give you other ideas. Fishing, hunting, hiking, bird watching and camping can all prove to be great starts to looking for a gift.

3. **What colors and clothing styles does the person wear?**
   If they wear a lot of ties or sweaters that could help you out. Maybe they always have on a baseball cap whenever they come to visit. Often people really like a particular color. This can sometimes make gift giving really simple if you can find a gift in their color. For example, a golfer might really like a one-of-a-kind purple golf bag if purple is a favorite color.

4. **Do they have any children or favorite pets?**
   Sometimes gift items with pictures of children, grandchildren, favorite pets or even favorite places can be a great idea. T-shirts, sweatshirts, posters, framed pictures, personalized mugs all can be very welcome gifts, especially if the picture is of one of their favorite things.

5. **Do they travel?**
   Usually those that travel can always use space saving devices and items that are functional for travelers. Often new luggage or even a new briefcase is a great gift and something that is often not considered.
6. **Are they indoors or outdoors people?**
   Indoors people may enjoy reading, crossword puzzles, crafts, movies, puzzles or other activities. Outdoors people may prefer bird watching books, hiking trail guides, tickets or lessons to a particular sport or event.

7. **Do you have anyone you can talk to about them?**
   Sometimes the reason someone is hard to buy for is that we don’t really know him or her as well as we should. Doing a bit of investigating and talking to others in the family can be a great source of information.

One key to purchasing gifts for hard to buy for family is to not wait until the very last minute. Usually those hard to find gifts result in a last minute scrabble to find something, literally anything, to give as a Christmas gift. Instead of handling your difficult to buy for person’s gift this way, try buying for them first.

Use magazines, the internet and even catalogues as sources of inspiration for gifts. In addition don’t forget that gift giving comes from the heart, and a well thought out give will be appreciated no matter how much or how little it costs.
CRAFT IDEAS FOR GIFTS AND DECORATIONS

One of the many wonderful ways to add a personal touch to your Christmas decorating and design is to make some of your own crafts. These easy to make yet elegant decorations can be used in your own home or can be given away to family, friends and coworkers as Christmas gifts. It is amazing how a handmade gift can bring a smile to a friend and how children and adults alike enjoy that extra effort that you made.

Handmade crafts and gifts don’t have to be extravagant, nor do they have to be expensive. If you don’t want to start the craft from scratch consider buying one of the many kits that are available in craft stores and online craft websites. These kits contain all the necessary items to make the specific craft, as well as detailed instructions and often a support number incase you have any difficulties or problems. If you have not used a kit before or the craft is something that you have never done before you may want to start early to avoid any possible last minute stress if the kit or project takes longer than you anticipated.

Some Christmas crafts such as candle making can be done easily in one or two days, whereas a craft such as knitting or constructing a model may take up to several weeks to complete. Be sure to plan ahead especially if you are making your own gifts for several people.

CHRISTMAS CANDLES

Making Christmas candles is a fun activity to do for both adults and children. If you are making the candles with the kids be sure to supervise them closely especially during the melting of the wax or the heating of the gel if you are making the gel candles.

There are three types of candles that can made at home. The first kind is beeswax candles that are rolled and shaped by hand. This style of candle looks very elegant as a tapered candle but can also be made into a pillar style candle. Poured candles can be made into any shape you desire depending on the container that you use as a mold. Gel candles usually use a glass jar, vase, bowl or wine glass as the container and additional items can
be added to the gel to add interest to the candle. All candles except for the beeswax candles can be scented and colored as required.

**BEESWAX CANDLES**

Beeswax comes in sheets of different sizes. The sheets will either be honeycomb textured or flat. For very ornate candles it is possible to use both types of wax sheets to create the candle. Kids love to make beeswax candles since they are relatively easy and require no adult supervision.

To start the candles place one sheet of beeswax down on the table. Measure a length of wick that extends at least an inch below the top and the bottom edges of the beeswax sheet. Rub your hands together to cause friction and heat. Using your warm hands tightly roll the beeswax sheet around the wick and continue rolling. At the end of the roll simply pinch the edge of the end of the sheet gently into the candle if necessary. If the wax sheet starts to crack or tear rub your hands together again to create more heat.

To make a multicolored or textured taper or pillar style candle simply cut both sheet of the beeswax diagonally from corner to corner, one larger than the other. Starting with the full edges of both sheets together roll both simultaneously around the wick. As the candle rolls the diagonal cut will allow the other color or texture to show through. After the candle is finished the wax sheet edges that go around the candle can gently be bent out to further accent the candle.

**POURED CANDLES**

To make poured candles you will need to purchase paraffin from a craft store. In addition you will need wax dye, wicks and weights, as well as containers or molds to use. If you wish to scent the candles be sure to purchase wax candle scents. Do not use other fragrances to scent candles as they can cause fire hazards both when heating the wax as well as when burning.

Using an old pan, double boiler, or even a metal coffee can slowly heat the paraffin until it is liquid. Do not overheat the wax, as this is a potential danger. Add dye and scent to the wax while it is off the heat. Stir the liquid until the color is uniform.

Tie a small washer or other weight to the bottom of a piece of the wick string. Place an object like a pencil or knitting needle across the center of the container or mold with the weight at the bottom in the center. Cut the wick with enough extra to tie it to the pencil or knitting needle in the center of the container. Pour the wax into the container to the desired height. Adjust the wick to the center if necessary. Allow to complete cool before taking the
candle out of the mold. Cut the wick just below the pencil and the candle is finished.

**GEL CANDLES**

Gel candles are made very similar to poured wax candles, although great care needs to be taken when heating up the gel. Follow manufacturers instructions carefully and only use dyes and fragrances that are specifically for gel candles. Since gel candles cool and stay clear and soft, objects can easily be placed against the sides of the glass jars for an interesting Christmas display.

Some objects that can be placed in gel candles include:

- Miniature plastic poinsettia flowers and leaves
- Small Christmas balls
- Metallic plastic objects such as bell shapes, Christmas tree shapes or other holiday themes
- Pine cones
- Cinnamon sticks

Be very careful to keep all objects against the sides of the glass and well away from the wick area.

**MAKING GIFT BASKETS**

The option of not just getting someone one gift but rather taking a selection of items and turning them into one gift has become increasingly popular. Buying pre-made gift baskets is always an option but often the commercially available baskets are considerably more money than one that you could make at home.

Making gift baskets is a wonderful way to involve children. They can make items to go in the basket or can make cards or decorations to be used in the presentation of the basket. The gift basket itself can be made from a variety of items. Some are more traditional than others but all can be used in very creative ways. A sample of items that can be used as gift baskets includes:

- Traditional wicker baskets
- Vases
- Ceramic bowls
- Mixing bowls
- Painted terra cotta flower pots
- Cake pans
Fisherman’s creels

The next step is to find some colorful Christmas tissue paper to act as packing to hold the items upright. Red, green and white tissue is nice for a fun gift basket, but an elegant or romantic Christmas gift basket may use white or cream and gold colored tissue. Cut or tear the tissue into fine strands or simply scrunch it up loosely and line the inside of your “basket”.

Add a variety of small and large items to the packing, either placing items strategically or randomly. Often a larger or taller item is set in the middle to pull the plastic wrapping up and over. For adults a Christmas gift basket may include:

- Various types of coffees and biscotti
- Wine and cheeses
- Cheeses and meats
- Seasonal and exotic fruit
- Candles and bath items
- Aromatherapy items
- Christmas ornaments and decorations
- Homemade jellies, jams and preserves

Baskets can be of a theme or can be a mixture of several different types of items. For example, a “pamper yourself” basket might include:

- A loofa sponge
- Several varieties of body lotions, bath oils or bath salts
- Several scented candles
- A classical music CD
- A coupon for a day at the spa

For a man that enjoys fishing a great basket would be made from a fisherman’s creel with the following:

- Several types of lures and flies
- A book or DVD on fishing
- A pass or ticket to a favorite resort or fishing spot
- Fishing equipment such as knives or a fishing net

Remember that baskets can be fun too. Children love to get assortments of small toys, candies and special miniature books, puzzles and games in a Christmas basket.

CREATIVE CRAFTS FOR EVERYONE
Besides just making baskets there are lots of crafts that the whole family can work together on. You may be amazed at what you find that you are talented in. Children as well as adults enjoy making their own Christmas gifts and decorations, and there are several projects that are wonderful for the whole family.

**PUZZLES**

Puzzles can be fun as a craft for the whole family. Not only can everyone work together to complete a very detailed Christmas theme puzzle but the puzzle itself can be mounted and saved to be displayed for many Christmases to come. Some families have made this such a tradition that they literally have a puzzle for every year that they have celebrated Christmas together. These framed puzzles can then be used as seasonal decorations. Small plaques can be added to the bottom indicating the Christmas season they were completed in.

**RAG RUGS OR HOOKED RUGS**

A rag rug or a hooked rug is a wonderful Christmas gift or as a piece of family tradition. Rag and hooked rugs don’t need to be completed by just one person; everyone can work together on the project. There are several pre-printed kits for hooked rugs that feature a Christmas theme. Even small children can take a turn participating in completing the family project.

**STAMPED CHRISTMAS CARDS AND GIFT WRAP**

Children and adults alike love the creativity of making their own cards and gift wrap. A simple set of pigment inks, some stamps and either cardstock for cards or roll paper for gift wrap and you have all you need for basic stamping. Felts or pencil crayons, wax crayons or paints can be used to add background or the color in the stamps. Grandparents and other family members will love to get their very own handmade wrapping paper made by your children. Remember that for most children too much of the same thing is not fun anymore, so keep the projects small and allow the children lots of breaks between crafts.

For more advanced stamping and card making embossing powders and a heat gun can be used to give the stamped image a raised look. There are also several other techniques that can be used to create just the look that you want with your cards and gift wrap. Most techniques can be found in basic stamping books, on stamping DVD’s and on the internet.
No matter what type of craft you undertake for the Christmas season be sure to include your children in the activity. They will gain an appreciation for the time and effort you put into your projects plus they may discover that they have a hidden talent themselves. Kids should always be encouraged to do the best they can at Christmas crafts, but don’t worry if they aren’t perfect, that is part of what makes a gift from a child so special.

THE LUXURY OF ARMOMATHERAPY AND OTHER NATURAL GIFTS

Aromatherapy items such as candles, soaps, room sprays and lotions have become very popular in the last few years as gifts for both men and women. Each one of the aromatherapy scents is believed to have different interactions with the senses leading to either increased relaxing, energy, attention or even promoting restful sleep. While there are also combinations of scents most aromatherapy scents are relatively pure without being combined. The scents are produced by essential oils that are extracted from various plants and plant parts. The basic scents and their effects include:

- **Relaxation** – jasmine, lavender, bergamot, mandarin, ylang ylang, grapefruit, geranium

- **Energy** – basil, ginger, grapefruit, lemon, peppermint, sandalwood, rosemary

- **Happiness** – lemon, orange, rose, sandalwood, frankincense, neroli

- **Confidence** – cypress, bergamot, bay laurel, orange, grapefruit

- **Stress relief** – benzion, bergamot, roman chamomile, patchouli, sandalwood, lavender, rose, and vetiver

There are many other types of essential oils, and many oils that are used for more than one type of sensation. One of the reasons that aromatherapy has become so popular is because the scents are usually very mild and are not overly sweet or floral so they are great in an office setting as well as in a home.

Aromatherapy products can be purchased in most department stores and health related stores and retailers. In addition there are many different websites dedicated to promoting aromatherapy products.

Besides aromatherapy there are many other natural types of gifts that are often forgotten in the rush to buy the latest product out on the market. The
following natural products are excellent Christmas gifts for young and old alike:

- **Houseplants** – while Christmas cactus and poinsettias are often the most popular there are a wide variety of houseplants that make wonderful gifts at the holiday season. Amaryllis, miniature lemon and orange trees and even pothos plants are wonderful additions to a home and they live for many years with just a bit of care. Before buying a houseplant be sure to check that the plant is not toxic if the gift is intended for someone with children or pets in the house.

- **Natural beauty care products** – there are several brands of all natural health and beauty products on the market for both men and women. These gifts are often lightly scented and are non-allergic, perfect for those family members and friends that have sensitive skin.

- **Green Tea Products** – a gift basket made up with a variety of all natural green or herbal teas is just the thing for a stressed out coworker or family member. A good selection allows them to sample several varieties of the items and pick the flavors they like the most.

- **Natural sea salt and grinder** – this gift is perfect for health conscious individuals that love to cook. It is possible to buy small samples of different types of natural salts from around the world to provide a gift with many different flavors.

- **All natural soaps** – there are many companies that specialize in making all natural soaps. Some may use traditional products and methods whereas others may contain soy products. By shopping around online it is possible to get natural soaps from around the world.

- **Personal massagers** – these little hand held and hand manipulated devices are great for rubbing along the neck and shoulders to relieve tired muscles. They use the pressure from the individual plus perfectly smooth, round balls to gently massage away stress. Used for many years in Asian countries these small personal massagers come in beautifully designed gift boxes that make a perfect gift for anyone that has a bit of stress in their life.

Finding all natural products and gifts for Christmas takes a bit of time, but it is well worth the effort. Any friends or family on your Christmas list that have sensitivity to perfumes and soaps may find that they can easily use the all natural products with no side-effects or problems.

If you are ordering in natural products from the internet or mail order catalogues be sure to check with your customs agency to ensure that there will be no difficulty bringing the items into the country. While this is rarely a problem it is still a wise decision to avoid being disappointed. In addition be
sure to order well in advance to avoid delays in customs during this busy shipping time. For international Christmas orders it is usually recommended to order the product at least six weeks prior to Christmas to avoid any delays.

5
CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINING

Normally you can expect a certain amount of stress when planning to entertain for Christmas. There is always the worry that the turkey will not be cooked right, the gravy will be lumpy, or the guests won’t enjoy themselves. Thankfully these nightmares are very rare, usually the turkey is delicious, the gravy is smooth as silk, and everyone has a fantastic time.

With a little advance planning and a bit of creativity it is possible to change even the most challenging of the Christmas parties and entertainment into an easy to manage event. The key is to be prepared, have a plan, and keep yourself and your helpers as organized as possible. Another strategy is to let everyone that is coming to the party or dinner contribute, that way there is less stress on you as the host or hostess, and more time for everyone to enjoy contributing to the event.

Below you will find several ideas for potentially challenging types of Christmas entertaining including office parties, family outings, theme parties, making room for all your guests, keeping visitors entertained and lastly some ideas for keeping yourself relaxed through it all.

UNIQUE CHRISTMAS IDEAS FOR OFFICE PARTIES

When people talk about office parties the one thing most agree upon is that the office Christmas party is usually boring. It is not because they are attending the party with their workmates but because, year after year, the party is the same. Coming up with unique or different Christmas ideas for your office party will make people look forward to future parties. If you want to do something different and exciting for the party this year, that people will remember fondly and be anxious to attend again next year, here are some ideas to consider when planning the party.
Instead of holding the annual Christmas party at the office or workplace hold it in a different location each year. Most people find it difficult to relax, get into the partying mood and have a real fun time when they are in their everyday work setting. One great idea is to rent a hall for your employees and their spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends. Have a draw a few weeks before the Christmas party. On pieces of paper, write different things such as sing a song, tell funny jokes, share a funny story, put on a skit or play charades. This will be their contribution to the party. Have the Christmas party a casual affair instead of dressing formally. People usually attend many parties during the Christmas season, where they have to dress formally. Holding a Christmas office party where everyone is required to dress casually is far more relaxing and less stressful. Depending on the number of people that are attending, have the tables pushed together so people eat at one or two very large ones as this is much more festive and fun than eating at individual tables. It also allows employees, who do not usually have a lot of contact in the office, get to know each other better. After the meal is over, have three judges rate each employee’s performance, which they drew at the office. Keep score and present the top three winners and the people in last place with gag gifts. This will certainly be an entertaining and fun night, which everyone remembers for a long time.

An office party is a fantastic way of saying thank you for all the hard work your staff put in over the last year. Unlike years ago, most employers feel a Christmas party, which includes their staff’s spouses or mates, is far better and causes fewer problems than one for employees only. Hold the office Christmas party at a restaurant that has a private banquet room. Make sure you find a restaurant that supplies a karaoke machine for your party or allows you to bring one. A karaoke Christmas party is a fantastic way to let your hair down and have a terrific time. You may find that some people really do have talent or, on the other hand, you may find that some people had better not give up their day jobs.

Another great idea is holding your office Christmas party in January or February, when the busy Christmas season is over. People are usually exhausted by the time the Christmas holiday season is finished. Between planning, shopping, cooking, cleaning, family get-togethers, Christmas and New Years Eve parties, most people would be thrilled with having their office party held in January or February. Hold your office party out of town. This is a great idea that more companies are now starting to consider. By holding your Christmas office party out of town, everyone is going to have fun, relaxing time and, in some cases, gets them away from their children for a few days rest.

A fantastic place to consider is a skiing location close to home, where everyone can bond while skiing down the slopes. Some people may choose to sit in front of a roaring fire in the lodge, having a few drinks and great conversation with co-workers or their boss. Arrange with the lodge to have a
banquet room available for a dinner party for the office. Have them serve a
traditional Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. Do not forget to have
door prizes, wrapped in Christmas paper, for employees.

This is just a few of many unique and fun ideas for holding the annual
Christmas office party.

**IDEAS FOR NOT-SO-USUAL FAMILY GET TOGETHER**

A family get-together around Christmas is a wonderful way to spend some
quality time with your loved ones and reminisce about the past. Christmas is
the perfect time of year to celebrate the holiday season, family, love and
togetherness. Most people have a traditional family Christmas party, but this
year hold a unique, fun get-together, creating fond and long-lasting
memories for all your family members. Send a unique invitation to each
member of your family that has something to do with the type of party you
are hosting or even create your own invitations.

Instead of a family Christmas party, have a Christmas brunch. Make sure
you put the time of day for your brunch on the invitations, such as 10:00
a.m. until 2:00 p.m. If you do not put an ending time, you may still have
family there at midnight. Some advantages to hosting a brunch are; you get
to bed earlier than with an evening party and there are no worries about
anyone drinking and driving.

For your Christmas family brunch, prepare everything you can the day
before, and keep the menu simple. Have it buffet style with a Christmas
tablecloth, centerpiece, candles and napkins. A good choice for food is
pancakes and waffles with different toppings such as, whipped cream, real
maple syrup, different flavored syrups, raspberry sauce, applesauce,
blueberries and other fruits. Serve muffins and croissants and instead of
frying bacon, make a ham, which you bake ahead of time, slice and then
warm up. A fresh fruit salad with red and green grapes or a fruit platter is
always a hit. Have a table set up with desserts such as pumpkin pie, Danish,
muffins, mincemeat pies or plumb pudding. Great beverage ideas are
eggnog, orange or apple juice, tea and flavored coffee. For this Christmas
brunch menu, you can also make and family favorites that they love. Set up
a separate table for the children and make a small Santa’s sack for each one
with little gifts, games and goodies inside. They cannot open their presents
until after they finish their meals.
Have a family get together doing volunteer work at one of the many organizations that are extremely busy around Christmas time and appreciate any help they receive. Here are a few great ideas for family get-togethers where you do volunteer work together:

- Adopt a needy family at Christmas time; find out how many people are in the family and their ages. You can find a family to adopt at Christmas, through your church or charity organizations. Send out invitations or phone everyone and invite them to a family to get-together at your place a few weeks before Christmas. Explain to them about the needy family and ask everyone to bring one item to donate to this worthy cause. You could ask each family member to bring something different such as a gift for the children, canned vegetables, Christmas tree ornaments, a turkey, small artificial tree, stocking stuffers and a gift certificate for the family to see a movie. Have a cold buffet lunch for your family the day of the party and then let everyone help make the Christmas basket, wrap the gifts and put together a stocking for each of the children. Once everything is ready, take the basket and Christmas tree to the family. You will be amazed at how wonderful you and your family feel making another families Christmas a happy one.

- Have your whole family meet at the food bank and work together getting packages ready for those less fortunate than yourselves.

- Hold a family dinner a few days before Christmas. After the meal is finished, put your winter coats on and go caroling together around the neighborhood or at a senior citizens home.

Book a cabin in the woods for a weekend and invite your whole family. Have them bring sleeping bags if there are not enough beds and have a giant pyjama party complete with a Christmas movie. Toast marshmallows and drink hot chocolate while everyone tells stories about their favorite Christmases. During the day, if the weather permits, take a hike and enjoy nature at its finest. If the family get-together is before Christmas, you might tell Santa where you are and have him make a special visit with Christmas gifts for all the children.

**Ideas for Theme Parties over the Christmas Season**

Christmas is that wonderful time of year when families get together to celebrate their love and good wishes. A family and friends Christmas party is a great way to spend time together laughing and having fun. Many people go to several parties during the holiday season, so they will definitely
appreciate a party that has a few unique or different ideas. For someone that has not held a party before or finds it overwhelming and is not sure where to start planning, here are a few guidelines to follow that make it easier to prepare for.

First, it is extremely important that you send out your party invitations at least six weeks to two months in advance, especially if the party is large or one with a theme. Include all the pertinent information so nobody is upset or embarrassed because he or she dressed inappropriately or did not bring a dish to a potluck supper.

If you are not having a potluck dinner, plan the menu well ahead, so you have plenty of time to order such items as a cake from the bakery, or a fresh turkey. Grocery shop early and prepare any dishes you can make in advance or even the day before. Buy your party decorations and again, put them up the day before if possible. Do whatever you can ahead, so you have time for any last minute preparations the day of the party. When you choose a theme for your party, make sure all aspects of the party tie into the theme such as invitations, decorations and food.

One Christmas party theme that both adults and children will enjoy is a Christmas tree ornament exchange party. Send out theme party invitations shaped like a tree or ornament and send them out well before the day of the party. Be sure to include the time, date, party location and the Christmas party theme. Ask each guest to bring one wrapped Christmas tree ornament, that is either handmade or store bought, to the party. When decorating for the party, adorn the tables with festive table clothes and Christmas tree centerpieces. You can go all out and hang paper tree ornaments or air filled balloon tree ornaments from the ceiling. Place miniature Christmas trees with tiny Christmas ornaments around the room. Remember, the theme is Christmas tree ornaments so your main decorations should be either trees or tree ornaments.

Put out appetizers such as cheese balls shaped like a Christmas ornament or a Christmas tree, chips with red or green dip made by adding a drop of food coloring, and cheese and fruit trays. Make a green punch and add red cherries or a red punch with green grapes. After the main meal and dessert is finished, it is time for the Christmas tree ornament exchange to begin.

Start the Christmas tree ornament exchange by having ‘Santa’ give each guest his or her tree ornament gift. After everyone has opened their present, let those who would like to, swap with each other so everyone ends up with an ornament they love.

Another great theme for a party during the Christmas holidays is an ice-skating party at your local indoor rink. Rent the rink for an hour or two on the day you are holding your party. Send out invitations to everyone in the
shape of ice skates, paper snowflakes or some other winter theme. People that do not skate can watch their family skate. After the party, invite everyone back to your place for hot chocolate and Christmas cookies. Have a movie for the children to watch while the adults relax and spend time talking and visiting. If there is snow outside, you could hold a toboggan party instead of a skating party. Pick a park close by that has some great toboggan slopes. Send out toboggan party theme invitations planning to meet at your place for a pizza or hotdog lunch and then off to the park to toboggan. Take along hot chocolate for everyone to warm them up during the afternoon. You could hold toboggan races with little prizes for the winner.

No matter what kind of theme party you plan, make sure you send out the invitations well before the party. By spending a little time planning your theme party carefully, everyone will have a wonderful, fun time.

**MAKING ROOM FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

Often one of the more stressful aspects of having out of town guests over the holiday season is simply deciding where to put them. This becomes more of a problem if you live in a rural area where there are no hotels or other accommodations close by. The good news is that with a bit of sharing and planning it is easy to accommodate several extra people, even if you only have a small space.

If you do happen to live close to a hotel consider simply booking a block of rooms for family and friends to stay. Often hotels are willing to give a reduced rate over the Christmas season as they traditionally have vacancies. By purchasing a block of rooms you may find that you can get a reduced rate. Another great option is to consider booking the rooms through one of the many online hotel sites. These sites may have room rates even lower than what the hotel will offer as a room block discount.

Another option is to consider asking other relatives and friends to have your guests stay over with them. This option gives you some additional space and freedom to get meals and activities planned during the day, prior to guests arriving for Christmas dinner. In addition your friends and relatives can get to know one another and you will not be required to provide activities for guests when you are trying to get ready for the meal and the party. If you are planning on doing this try planning events that your friends and family members can go to during the day. There may be museums, parks or malls that could be spots of interest. Perhaps there are ski resorts or even hiking trails that they would love to investigate. If you are planning this make sure that you compensate the friends both for their time and for any costs involved.
Renting a guesthouse may be an option, depending on where you live. Often there are seasonal cabins and houses available in many areas that can be rented for a week or less. This can be a wonderful option for both you and your guests as they have a whole house to themselves without having to feel that they are imposing on you and your family. If this is a possibility perhaps the cost of the rental could be split or you may wish to pay for it as a gift.

It there is no option of having the guests stay somewhere else, the only remaining choice is to somehow make room in your house. Air mattresses are relatively inexpensive, even very good quality air mattresses are affordably priced and can be used every year as needed. Storing the mattresses completely deflated and away from direct heat and light will help them last for many years.

Children are often willing to double up in rooms when company is staying over. Kids often enjoy sleeping in the basement or even in the living room for special events like Christmas. This can be an easy way to allow adults to use bedrooms while kids have a Christmas camp out in the living room. Plan to make it as festive as possible. Hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows or s’mores can make the living room area seem like the perfect Christmas campground.

Be creative with space. Couches and chesterfields, reclining chairs and even loveseats can all make comfortable beds with a few extra blankets and some soft pillows. Planning as much in advance as possible for overnight guests is the best way to avoid problems with too many people and not enough space. As the host or hostess you may have to limit the number of people that can stay at the house or apartment to make sure that everyone has the space that they need.

**STRESS RELIEVERS FOR BUSY PEOPLE**

Throughout the Christmas season you may find that the stress just seems to build as the big dinner or party approaches. While you may have done all the planning in advance and know that everything is under control you may still find that you are feeling very tense and anxious. There are some simple, easy to do stress relievers to help you stay calm and focussed and be the most relaxed host or hostess that your guests can imagine. The following stress relief activities can be completed almost anywhere, at almost anytime.

When you find yourself becoming stressed or worried over the Christmas season or any other time for that matter try:

- **Deep breathing** – this is a simple way to relax anywhere. Simply close your eyes and take a deep breath in through the nose, counting to three. Hold your breath deep in your lungs, and then slowly exhale
through the mouth for the count of three. Try to feel the air entering and leaving your body and focus on that, rather than anything else. Do this for several inhalations and exhalations, until you feel comfortable. Not only does this simple exercise relax your muscles but it also clears your mind of stress and allows you to think through problems more effectively.

- **Exercise regularly** – research shows that those people that exercise on a regular basis tend to report less stress or problems that are stress related. If you don’t exercise on a regular basis plan to start slow. Take a 30 minute walk outdoors or try walking up and down a flight of stairs several times every day. As you gain strength gradually increase both the duration and the intensity of the workout.

- **Plan for fun** – do something fun with your kids. Play a game or watch a favorite movie together. Maybe think about going skating or sledding as a way to just get away from decorating and planning for awhile.

- **Plan to relax** – find something that you enjoy doing and schedule time to do it everyday. This may be reading a book, working outside, doing a hobby or talking to a friend.

- **Ask for help** – everyone can use help, so don’t be afraid to ask. Most people are more than willing to provide some extra help getting things organized over the Christmas season.

- **Eat right** – overeating carbohydrates, overly processed foods as sweets can be a problem over the holiday season. A sudden change in diet can result in fatigue, irritability and general overall complaints of not feeling well. Try balancing your diet as much as possible while still allowing yourself some treats along the way.

- **Drink lots of water** – winter dryness and constant heat from a furnace can increase dehydration. Drink at least eight large glasses of water every 24 hours. If you are exercising be sure to drink one more large glass for every 15 minutes of exercise.

- **Limit alcohol consumption** – too much alcohol over the Christmas season can lead to general dehydration, fatigue and increased susceptibility to flu. Always drink moderately and responsibly and try to limit yourself to two drinks per evening.

- **Get rest** – don’t try to stay up all night getting last minute things done. Plan to get the same amount of sleep that you normally require to keep yourself feeling upbeat and prepared.
Remember that Christmas is a fun time of year. Don’t let stress and worry make it a challenging time, instead enjoy all that the Christmas season has to offer.

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CONCLUSION

The Christmas season is both joyful and challenging. By following the tips and ideas outlined in this ebook you will find that you are better organized and prepared for all the entertaining and planning that is involved in preparing your home and family for the Christmas holiday.

Making a plan and following a budget are important to making your Christmas a wonderful event. In addition there are all the wonderful gifts to buy, the decorations to make and put up, and all the fun and games with children, grandchildren, family members and friends.

Plan to have a safe, fun and relaxing Christmas - and make it unforgettable!