

# Holiday Gift Guide II

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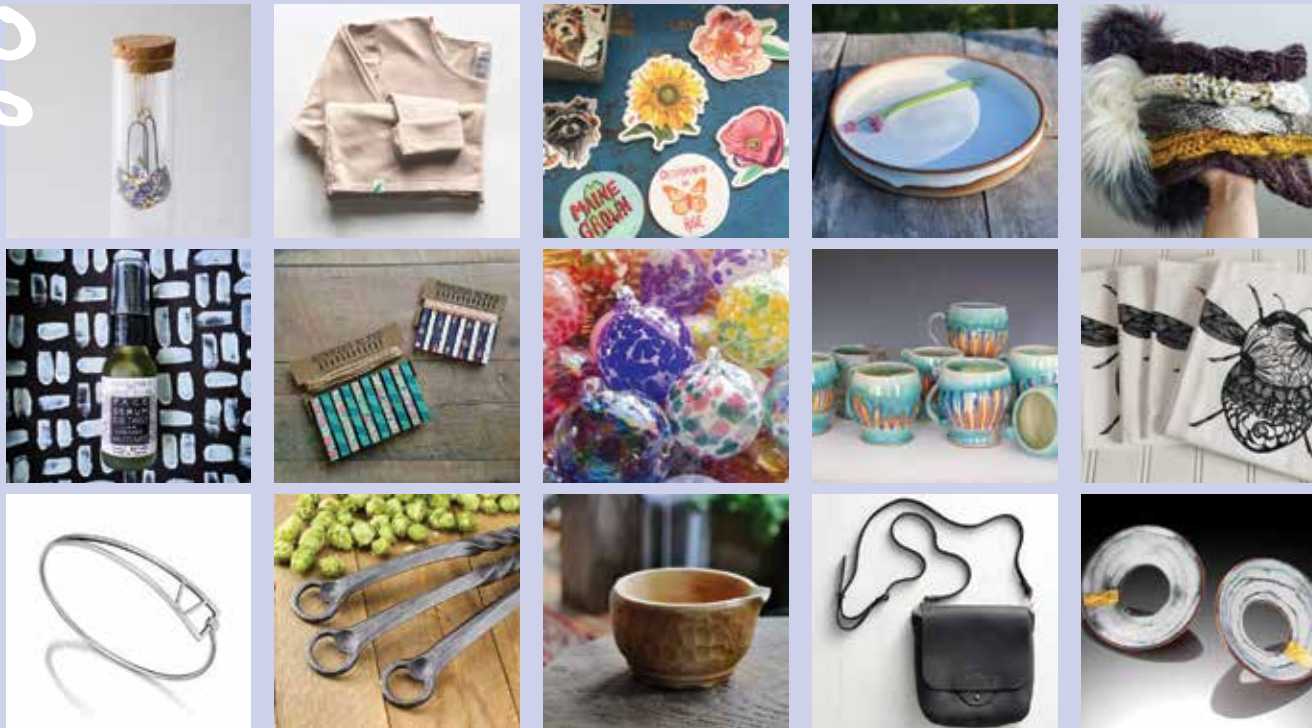


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# Holiday hosting in small spaces

**G**atherings of family and friends are a big part of the holiday season. Hosting such gatherings can be a great way to show loved ones how much you appreciate them, and hosting also saves hosts the trouble of traveling during one of the most hectic travel seasons of the year.

When hosting a large crowd at home, space can be a difficult hurdle to clear. However, a few helpful strategies can help space-starved hosts pull off a holiday soiree where everyone is comfortable.

- **Pare down the menu.** Holiday feasts don't have to resemble medieval banquets with excessive amounts of food and drink. Hosts with small kitchens and tiny dining quarters can pare down the menu, limiting offerings to just a single entree and a few simple side dishes, so everyone feels comfortable at the table and has ample room to eat. A small menu also gives hosts more time to spend with their loved ones during the festivities.

- **Don't overdo it on drinks, either.** When planning the drinks menu, avoid offering cocktails, which take time to prepare and often require guests to visit the kitchen for refrigerated ingredients. Limit drinks to wine, beer, water, and soft drinks, storing cold beverages in a cooler kept outside on a front or back porch or in an area outside the kitchen so cooks can work without interruption.

- **Move some furniture.** If your main living space is small, consider moving some bulky furniture into a bedroom or office where guests won't be spending time. Then make better use of the open living space by placing folding chairs or other accommodations to ensure there's ample seating for everyone. A single recliner can only be enjoyed by one person, but removing it from a room may create enough space for as many as three folding chairs.

- **Go small on decorations.** If you know you'll be hosting in advance of the holiday season, decorate with guests in mind. That might mean skipping a six-foot Christmas tree in favor of one that takes up less space. Avoid leaving any fragile decorations out, as adults or overexcited kids may knock them over as they try to navigate a cramped space.

Holiday hosting can be fun, even in small spaces. A few simple tricks can make even the smallest spaces accommodating.



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# Wrapping gifts is a very old tradition



**T**he holiday season is rife with tradition. One of the most recognizable traditions involves wrapping gifts. While the wrapping paper many gift givers use today is a relatively recent phenomenon, the tradition of wrapping gifts is centuries old, with some historians even suggesting it dates back to ancient times. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis notes that many ancient cultures celebrated various holidays that included exchanging gifts, adding that it's very likely that, even in ancient times, gifts were wrapped to surprise their eventual recipients. Bojagi is a traditional Korean wrapping cloth that might have begun being used some time during the Three Kingdoms of Korea period, which began in 57 BC and ended in AD 668. The Japanese tradition of furoshiki, which can be traced back to the 17th century and possibly as far back as AD 710, involves using a traditional wrapping cloth to transport certain items, including gifts. As for the gift wrap familiar to today's holiday celebrants, that traces its origins to the early 1900s. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis notes that Eli Hyman and Morris Silverman founded the first gift wrap company in the United States in 1903. Unfortunately for gift givers back then, adhesive tape had not yet been invented in 1903, and wouldn't be for another 27 years.

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# Cooking for a holiday crowd

**D**ecorations and shopping draw much of the attention come the holiday season, and rightfully so. But many people's fondest holiday memories occurred around the dinner table during meals with friends and family.

Holiday foods tend to be rich, flavorful and time-consuming to prepare. However, all the effort is usually worth the satisfied smiles on the faces of loved ones.

Planning holiday meals is challenging, and hosts often doubt if they have enough food for everyone. No one wants guests to leave feeling hungry, nor do they want to have tons of leftovers, much of which will inevitably end up in the trash. Determining how much food to serve involves figuring out a few key items, including the mix of guests (ratio of children, men and women), the length of the occasion, the timing of the event, and the type of meal one plans to serve. For example, if the holiday gathering is an after-dinner cocktail party, hosts can get away with offering very little food. However, hosts of holiday dinners have a lot more food to prepare.

To get started, consider these general guidelines, courtesy of Allrecipes.com and The Spruce, a home living resource.

• **Think about which foods you plan to serve.** Popular foods tend to go more quickly than other items, so serve more than the general portion guidelines



suggest. Shellfish appetizers, roasted or mashed potatoes, wings, and slices of rich meat are examples of popular fare.

• **The more foods you offer, the smaller the portion sizes can be.** But because guests will likely want to try all the offerings, expect the average person to consume more food per individual when several foods are offered.

• **Most people will eat two to three portions each of appetizers or snacks.** In fact, appetizers (for a hungry crowd) may be consumed in greater abundance than subsequent courses.

• **Average portion sizes for each guest include:** 3 ounces of dips; 3 ounces of salad; 6 ounces of meat or main entree; 5 ounces of starch; and 1 1/2 pieces of dessert. These estimates can be used to calculate how much food will be needed.

• **Think about adding "safety" items to the menu that can be pulled out in a pinch and don't require much prep work.** These can include cheese and crackers, extra bread, nuts, olives, or pretzels.

Hosts who are overly concerned that guests may go overboard can tame portion sizes by hiring servers who can oversee buffet lines. Otherwise, serve guests plated meals directly from the kitchen, from which hosts can dole out the right amount of food to ensure everyone gets enough to eat.

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# Keep safety in mind when decorating for the holidays

**D**ecorations help make the holiday season a magical time of year. Stores are awash in color and twinkling lights, and similar imagery is on display in private homes.

Designing holiday displays can be a great way for families to spend time together and kick off the celebration. In fact, according to Electrical Safety Foundation International, around 90 percent of Americans decorate their homes for the holidays.

When trimming the tree and decorating this holiday season, families must keep safety in mind. A little planning and some precautionary measures can ensure displays are enjoyed all season long. Travelers Insurance offers the following holiday decorating safety tips.

- **Do not overload outlets.** Plan displays according to the number and location of available outlets.
- **Never exceed the maximum number of light strands that can be attached together.**
- **Use lights and products that have been tested for safety.** Certification marks like UL, ETL and CSA are from nationally recognized laboratories.
- **LED lights should be used whenever possible.** Such lights consume less energy and run cooler than other bulbs.
- **The ESFI says candles start almost 50 percent of all decoration fires.** Minimize the risk by using candles only when they can be monitored. Artificial candles can be used in place of real candles.

- **Check for freshness in live trees.** A fresh tree will last longer and is less of a fire hazard than an old tree.
  - **Place Christmas trees at least three feet away from all heat sources, including fireplaces and heaters.**
  - **Use decorations that are non-combustible or made from flame-resistant materials.**
  - **Pay attention to the age recommendations of decorations to see if they can be used in homes with young children.** Some items, however common, are choking or strangulation hazards.
  - **Avoid putting small, "mouth-sized" decorations near the ground or on lower limbs of trees, where young children can easily reach them.**
  - **Exercise caution when hanging decorations at high heights.** Make sure the ladder is secured and have a spotter who can hold the ladder and pass items up safely.
  - **Outdoor electric lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs.**
  - **Exercise caution when decorating near power lines that extend to the house.**
  - **Keep hung stockings far away from open flames so they do not catch any errant embers.**
- These are just a few suggestions for decorating a safely for the holiday season.**





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# How to make holiday wreaths the easy way

**T**here are many different ways to decorate homes and businesses for the holidays. Tall evergreen trees are among the most visible symbols of the holiday season. However, wreaths hung on doors, windows or fences also are ubiquitous this time of year.

Wreaths adorn homes primarily during the holidays of Easter and Christmas. Wreaths have also been worn around the head or neck in ceremonial events around the globe for centuries. It is believed the first wreaths date back to ancient Greece and Rome. Members of the Greco-Roman society were known to hand-make ring-shaped items using fresh tree leaves, small fruits, flowers, and twigs. Oftentimes these headdresses symbolized a person's social status. Others suggest wreaths evolved to become a Christian symbol of immortality.

Regardless of how wreaths are viewed, many people like to display wreaths for the holidays. Wreaths can be purchased premade, but making a wreath on your own can make the holidays even more fun.

One of the easiest ways to make a wreath is to design it around a circular floral foam form. Gather supplies to make the wreath. For traditional wreaths, supplies will include sprigs of evergreen (real or artificial), ribbon, floral wire, bows, and artificial berries. Working around the foam form,

arrange the boughs of evergreen, using the floral wire to wrap or pin into the foam itself. Keep the layers coming until you get the desired coverage. Embellish with a ribbon or place a bow.

The blog A Piece of Rainbow says that creating a wreath jig is an easy way to make a wreath. Cut a dollar-store laundry basket bottom from the top ring to make a template, on which you can place wreath-making materials so they keep their circular form. Use floral wire or natural jute string to tie the materials together. Experiment with fresh evergreen, twigs, holly branches, or whatever materials you choose.

Thick card stock also can serve as the wreath template. Attach artificial flowers or leaves, spray snow, ornaments, or other items to the card stock ring with a firm adhesive.

Many craft stores sell wreath forms made of natural vines that have been strung in a ring. These can be decorated in their entirety or left a little sparse to let the natural twine show through.



Wreaths may seem like complicated creations. But a little imagination and the right materials is all it takes to create a homemade wreath.

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# Prepare the fireplace for holiday decorating

A jolly holiday season can be made even more merry with a roaring fire. Homeowners often build holiday tableaux around the fireplace to serve as festive backdrops. The mantle and the fireplace itself also may be a prime spot to dedicate to decorating this time of year.

Even though Christmas tree fires are rare, according to the U.S. Fire Administration, when they do occur they're likely to be serious. That is why trees and other flammable decorations need to be kept clear of gas and wood-burning fireplaces and stoves. In addition, many other guidelines should be heeded to ensure fireplaces and holiday decor safely coexist this season.

Read labels on decorative items carefully before decorating. Be sure to only select items that are flame-resistant or retardant. Cherished collectibles and other items should always be kept far away from open flames and heat.

It pays to have a fireplace inspected and cleaned for use prior to operation, advises Doherty Insurance Agency. Rely on a trained chimney sweep, and have the fireplace and chimney inspected and cleaned at least once per year.

Even though it may be picturesque, do not place wrapped packages or gift boxes near the fireplace, as they tend to be highly combustible. Keep presents and other flammable items at least three feet away from the fireplace.

Do not be tempted to dispose of wrapping paper, boxes or even a Christmas tree in the fireplace. Wrapping paper contains additives that make it burn at high temperatures. A Christmas tree hasn't been properly seasoned and could be a fire hazard and potentially contribute to excessive smoke and creosote.

Keep decorations that kids will be tempted to touch away from the fireplace so kids do not hang out near the heat and open flames.

Fireplaces are often a focal point of holiday decorating and entertaining. Homeowners who want to incorporate their fireplaces into their holiday decor must emphasize safety when doing so.



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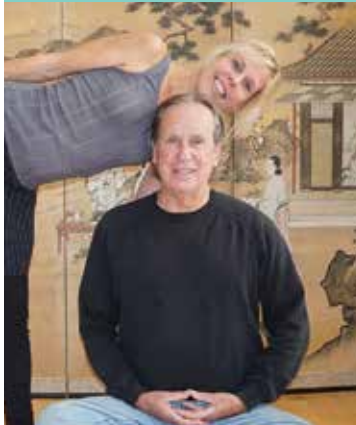


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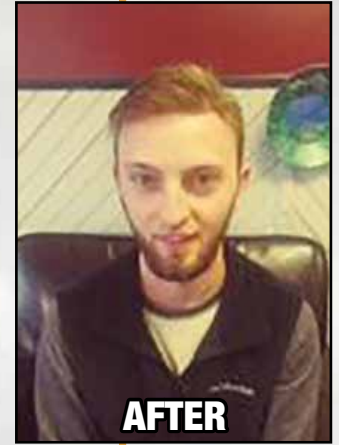
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# Tips for successful office Secret Santa exchanges

The holiday season provides plenty of opportunities to socialize. Holiday celebrations are sometimes akin to family reunions, but friends also tend to celebrate together in December. Such celebrations sometimes include different groups of friends, and that may require hosts to do a little extra to break the ice so everyone relaxes and has a good time.

Secret Santa gift exchanges can make for a great ice breaker, even if guests are buying gifts for people they don't know. If you plan to make Secret Santa part of your holiday party this year, consider these tips to ensure it goes off smoothly.

- **Start planning early.** Hosts likely know everyone coming to their party, so they should take the lead and organize the Secret Santa exchange. Let guests know as early as possible, even including the information in the party invitations, so they have time to shop.
  - **Make it optional.** Forcing people to mingle and exchange gifts is never a good idea. Give guests the option to participate ask them to indicate if they will or won't when they RSVP.
  - **Set a reasonable gift limit.** Figure out a budget that works for everyone. There are plenty of gifts to be had for \$20 and under. Gag gifts or "dollar store" gift themes can ensure no one goes overboard in terms of dollar value.
  - **Consider a wish list.** Asking participants to fill out wish lists ensures that their Secret Santa buddy will have an idea where to start shopping.
  - **Enlist a digital helper.** Technology can make organizing Secret Santa exchanges even easier. Elfster is an online gift exchange app that can help hosts effectively organize their Secret Santa parties.
- Fun is key to Secret Santa exchanges, so make sure to keep things light-hearted when planning the party and exchanging gifts.



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# Eco-friendly gift options

**T**he saying “the more the merrier” certainly applies during the holiday season. But during a season of big gifts, extra food and travel, “more” can exact a heavy toll on the environment.

According to recent study, Americans generate 25 percent more trash between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Eve than during the rest of the year. While no one wants to take anything away from the spirit of holiday season, everyone can take steps to make the holidays more eco-friendly. In fact, there are various eco-friendly gifts that can make great presents and benefit the environment at the same time.

## Purchase experiential gifts

When making holiday shopping lists, think of gifts that offer experiences rather than material goods. Gifts that involve experiences, such as going to a sporting event or attending a play or musical, decrease reliance on wrapping paper. Such gifts also reduce clutter in the recipient’s house and conserve the resources otherwise used to manufacture alternative items that would have been purchased. Experiential gifts that also tap into environmental pursuits, such as touring with an animal rescue group, or accommodations at a carbon-neutral hotel can be an added bonus.

## Opt for locally made gifts

Select gifts made by local artisans or companies that operate domestically. This cuts down on the carbon emissions from having to ship products from long distances or even overseas.

## Give climate-friendly stocking stuffers

Companies like Cool Effect offer gifts for those looking to offset carbon emissions through clever funding. People can buy and offer gifts that correlate to packages like Costa Rican wind power or the “poo package,” which funds biogas digesters for family farms in India that capture methane emissions from cattle dung.

## Get crafty

Gifts from the kitchen or ones made by the giver can be crafted from sustainable materials. They also show how you care by taking the time to customize a gift for the recipient.

## Avoid gag or useless gifts

Select gifts only with utility in mind. Skip purchases that are made only to beef-up the look of presents under the tree or to make it appear that gifting was more generous. Items that a person cannot or will not use will ultimately be relegated to the trash, which is wasteful.

## Wrap in reusable materials

Fancy wrapping paper certainly looks nice, but choose other materials that can be reused. Look for decorative tins, boxes, fancy gift bags, and other items that can be reused for years to come.

Sustainability is possible during a season of excess when gift givers shop and wrap gifts with the environment in mind.

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# Help make your poinsettias last longer

**P**oinsettias are synonymous with the holiday season. These colorful plants brighten up homes with their vibrant hues in variations of red, white and pink, making them a holiday decoration many people cannot live without.

While they're most visible during the often chilly holiday season, poinsettias prefer warm weather. Poinsettias are native to Central America and originally flourished in an area of southern Mexico. The Aztecs used the plant for decorative and medicinal purposes.

The poinsettia may have remained a regional plant if not for the efforts of Joel Roberts Poinsett, who was the first United States Ambassador to Mexico under President James Madison. Poinsett, who would later found the Smithsonian Institution, had a love of botany and became enamored with the brilliant red plants he saw in Mexico. Eventually, Poinsett began growing the plants at home in South Carolina, and friends and others soon coveted them.

Poinsettias are beautiful and the bracts (modified leaves) can be vibrantly colored. That signature vibrancy is why many people would like to preserve their poinsettias to last beyond the New Year, which is possible with the right care. The following are some tips, courtesy of Mother Nature's Network, Habersham Gardens, Oregon Live, and Phoenix Flower Shops, to keep poinsettias thriving past the holiday season.

- **Start with healthy plants that have full leaves, bracts**

**and deep colors.**

- **Poinsettias do best when the temperature is between 65 and 75 F.** Temperatures below that or drafts from cold windows can cause leaves to drop.

- **Position the plant in a room that gets indirect sunlight for at least six hours per day.** If direct sunlight can't be avoided, diffuse the light with a sheer curtain.

- **Poinsettias need well-drained soil.** Overwatering or allowing roots to sit in wet soil can cause the leaves to fall off prematurely. Water thoroughly only when the pot looks dry. In households with temperatures around 70 F, the plant should be watered about once a week.

- **Fertilize the plant after the blooming season with a balanced, all-purpose fertilizer.**

- **Try placing poinsettias in or near a bathroom, as they prefer high humidity.**

It may be possible to get poinsettias to rebloom next season. Allow the poinsettias to dry out a little more in the spring. In May, cut about four inches from each stem to produce a lush, full plant during the winter. The plants can be moved outside in June and during the summer, but keep them away from direct sunlight. Return the poinsettias indoors beginning around October. Make sure the plants get at least 12 hours of darkness per day for around eight weeks in October and November. This will help them develop a deep hue and bloom on time for Christmas.




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