

# *CREATING A STRESS-FREE CHRISTMAS!*

*TIPS & IDEAS ON DECORATING, SHOPPING & MORE*



Brought To You Courtesy Of Martha Darpino  
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## TIPS & IDEAS ON DECORATING, SHOPPING & MORE!

### Surviving Christmas: How to Avoid Holiday Stress

There's nothing like the holidays to bring out the stress in all of us. With all the hustle and bustle of Christmas you may feel you're in an episode of Mission Impossible. While you may be tempted not to accept the mission at all, getting through the holidays with your sanity intact is possible if you follow these strategies.

- **Make a List and Check it Twice**

Old St. Nick has the right idea. To make sure all your holiday tasks get accomplished sit down and make a list of all the things that need to be done. Include sub lists of gifts you need to purchase, special holiday food items you'll need and the names of your Christmas card recipients. The more organized you can keep yourself the lesser the chances that something will get overlooked—which will just compound your stress.

- **Delegate**

Now that you have your lists it's time for some old fashioned delegation. No one is an island and one person in your household shouldn't be expected to carry out all the family's Christmas to-do list either. Even young children can get in on the action helping to bake cookies, sticking stamps on envelopes or helping with simple housecleaning duties. Older members of the family can wrap gifts, help with Christmas decorating or tackle those Christmas cards on their own. Many hands make light work so quit trying to do it all yourself and enlist the help of others.

- **Get A Team**

Another option is to look outside the home for holiday help. Friends or other family members will be going through the same holiday chaos you are so team up with them. Offer to watch any younger children for them while they do their Christmas shopping. While you have the kids get them all involved in a Christmas related task such as helping to bake cookies. Bake enough for your family and the family of your friend or relative. Now switch roles and get your shopping done while the other person takes in your children and helps get some of your baking done. It's a win-win for everyone.

- **Shop Smart**

The purchasing of Christmas gifts can often be a daunting task both financially and mentally. Your first task should be to set a holiday spending budget and stick to it. There's nothing more stressful than going into serious debt due to wild spending habits so make a solid commitment to stick within your means.

While the children of your household will likely have a Christmas wish list as long as your arm there's nothing wrong with limiting the amount of presents under the tree.



Explain to older children that while an idea list is perfectly fine they shouldn't expect every new toy on the market. Kids often don't have a concept of just how much their wish list costs and those asking for presents from Santa will think those toys are free. Explain to them that even Santa has a limit, whether you choose to use space or budget, and that they'll have to keep their expectations realistic.

- **Avoid Playing Family Feud**

Often times dealing with family dynamics is the most stressful holiday task of them all. When getting together with family don't pick those times to bring up or deal with past issues. While some members of your family may drive you crazy take a deep breath and try to let it slide. If there are certain family members that are nearly unbearable it's usually best to limit the time spent with them. This may mean re-evaluating whether or not you really need to spend every Christmas with them or if you can get away with alternating between them and others whose company you really enjoy.

- **Take Time for Yourself**

Getting ready for the holidays can often feel like you're on a mad quest to cater to everyone else's needs. Taking some time for your own needs isn't selfish—it's a survival skill. Don't be afraid to set some time aside just for you. Those who have children can pick an evening and make it a "date night". You can choose to spend this night anyway you wish whether that means getting a babysitter and having a nice night out or putting the kids to bed early and just spending some quiet time together at home. Whatever you do just be sure you don't spend that time catching up on holiday tasks. For one night forget Christmas even exists and spend that time relaxing.

## **Christmas Ornaments: What's Your Style?**

The Christmas ornaments you choose should reflect your decorating taste and personality. They should also fit into the overall theme of your home and holiday theme. Whether you love the classics or want to make a bold statement there's a style of ornaments suited to you.

- **Victorian and Antique Christmas Ornaments**

Those looking to create the image of an old fashioned Christmas can easily do so with Victorian or antique Christmas ornaments. Typically these ornaments are very detailed decorations that often include cherubs, lace or flowers.

More whimsical ornaments might be shaped as Victorian boots or colorful birds. Another wonderful option is to choose ornaments that look like jewelry. Gold and beaded ornaments that resemble large drop earrings look stunning on a tree or used on wreaths and garlands.

- **Traditional Christmas Ornaments**

Everyone recognizes snowflakes and gingerbread men as icons of Christmas. These tried and true Christmas ornaments fit into almost any décor thanks to their popularity and, best of all, they are very easy to find and affordable. Those who are on a budget or are worried small



children may break expensive decorations, can start out with simple Christmas balls, inexpensive garlands and mass produced ornaments. As either your budget or children grow you can ease into higher end ornaments of the same style and begin improving the quality of your ornaments over time.

- **Country and Western Christmas Ornaments**

If you're a little bit country you can have a whole lot of country charm come Christmas with the right ornaments. Typically these types of ornaments are divided into two separate and distinct styles: The western type based on symbols from the old west or the primitive country variety often found at gift shops or craft sales.

For an authentic old west vibe choose Christmas ornaments such as cowboy boots, sheriff's badges in place of stars or miniature horseshoes. Those who would like to stick with the western theme but prefer a dressier look can decorate with turquoise beads or elegant dream catchers.

Primitive country Christmas ornaments usually consist of wood crafts which are decoratively painted. This style can range from wooden signs to hang on your walls or traditional Christmas symbols such as Santa or snowmen that have been painted with bright colors. These ornaments create a very relaxed and cozy atmosphere and are perfect for those that enjoy country living and want their decorations to reflect that.

## **Get Into the Spirit with Christmas Music**

Nothing gets you into the holiday spirit quicker than Christmas music. Whether you're a fan of the classics or love modern twists on Christmas carols putting on a little festive music makes the holiday season merrier.

- **Make Christmas Chores Bearable**

There's never a shortage of tasks to do at Christmas time. Baking, wrapping gifts and decorating become much more enjoyable when you put a few Christmas tunes into the stereo system. This is a great time to put on the classics such as Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra or even some Motown Christmas music.

- **Christmas Gatherings**

Christmas music is a must when you're hosting a holiday get together. For more casual parties try putting some oomph into your carols. Depending on the musical tastes of your guests you can choose from Boney M Christmas tunes, Martina McBride's White Christmas or the Ultimate Christmas 2 CD featuring artists such as Christina Aguilera, Kelly Clarkson and 'NSync.

For a formal gathering or dinner party your Christmas music should be a bit more subdued. Soft background music is best so your guests aren't competing with your tunes. Try Il Divo's The Christmas Collection or Martinis and Mistletoe by various artists. These will set a festive mood for your dinner party but still allow your guests to enjoy a conversation.



- **Christmas Music To Go**

Typically we spend very little time at home. Between work and errands we're on the go constantly and this is even more true during the holidays. To keep the Christmas spirit alive while you're out take some traveler tunes with you.

A Christmas CD in the car will make your commute to work a lot more fun. Try upbeat Christmas carols such as Billboard Greatest Christmas hits. To relieve the stress of the day switch to The Ultimate Relaxation CD.

If your commute doesn't involve a car you can still enjoy great Christmas music by downloading a selection of your favorite holiday singles onto your iPod. This way you can enjoy your festive tunes anywhere you go.

- **Ring In the Holiday Season**

The holidays require a more than an everyday ring tone. Another way to get into the spirit of the season is to change your cell phone ring tone for a Christmas one. There are many to choose from so you can change up that festive ring as often as you wish.

- **Don't Forget the Kids**

While many children still love the classics such as Frosty the Snowman or Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer why not give them Christmas music of their very own? Christmas CDs with songs sung by children are always a great hit with the little ones and they can easily sing along to their favorites.

## **Holiday Décor in a Hurry: Quick & Easy Christmas Decorations for Your Home**

Christmas is coming up fast and before you know it it'll be time to deck your halls with festive Christmas decorations. While nothing looks more inviting than rooms of perfectly adorned holiday items most of us don't have hours to spend creating them.

If you love decorating for the holidays but time is precious here are some Christmas decorating ideas that are quick and easy to create.

- **Plant Power**

Poinsettias have long been a holiday favorite for adding a quick splash of Christmas color. Instead of just displaying one lone plant try using several plants together to make a beautiful floral arrangement. Place several Poinsettias together in the fireplace when it's not in use or line the plants along a window sill for a row of holiday blooms. These plants make cheap and easy Christmas decorations that can be moved and rearranged for a variety of different looks.

- **Unconventional Uses for Traditional Christmas Decorations**

Tradition is a big part of the holiday season and even the most modern decors will likely benefit from tried and true standards. Ribbon and bows are safe favorites that require very little effort on your part but using them in unexpected ways adds a unique twist on these Christmas



decorations. Use bows, either handmade or store bought, and ribbon as festive tie backs for curtains. To quickly dress up your dining table why not turn the back of your chairs into Christmas gifts? Wrap one piece of ribbon horizontally around the back of the chair and another piece vertically. Have the pieces meet and overlap as you would on a boxed gift. Add a large bow where the two pieces meet to finish off the look.

- **Recruit Everyday Items as Decorations**

If non-traditional Christmas decorations are more to your liking try converting everyday items into quick and festive arrangements. Choose a sculpted bowl, glass or porcelain work great, and place it on a gold or silver tray. Fill with like colored fruits of different sizes. Great combinations are pomegranates and cranberries or a mixture of oranges, tangerines and kumquats. Soften the look with sprigs of holly or other festive greenery. Accent the tray with gold Christmas balls and you have a stunning centerpiece in minutes.

- **You Can't Go Wrong with Candles**

When it comes to quick and inexpensive Christmas decorations never underestimate candle power. A grouping of dinner candles placed in gold or silver candle holders of varying lengths on a tray makes a great centerpiece for a dining or coffee table. Add some pinecones, cinnamon sticks or Christmas baubles on the tray for an added holiday touch. Love the look of flames but can't be bothered to light a fire? Place a large arrangement of candles in your fireplace or on your hearth for no-hassle ambience.

- **Turn Christmas Cards into Garland**

Every year we receive tons of Christmas cards and finding space to display them can quickly run out. Instead of simply placing the cards you receive on shelves or tables try turning them into unique garlands. Gather your Christmas cards and long lengths of inexpensive Christmas ribbon. Staple the cards to the ribbon and hang your creation where you would place garland, such as around a fireplace, in doorways or along banisters. The best part of using card as Christmas decorations is that they're free and you are reusing paper products and being environmentally friendly.

As you can see adding festive touches to your home doesn't have to take hours of planning and preparation. By implementing some of these quick and easy techniques you can greatly reduce the time and stress often associated with holiday decorating. The best part is once you start thinking outside the box you'll find a multitude of inexpensive and unique items that can easily double as Christmas decorations and make your holiday décor truly your own.

### **Simple Christmas Gift Giving: Take it Online**

Is all your Christmas shopping done yet? Chances are it isn't and you're already stressing about fighting your way through the crowds in search of those perfect presents. Relax. Buying Christmas gifts doesn't have to resemble an episode of Survivor. Instead grab your gift list, your favorite beverage and head to your computer for the easiest holiday shopping you've ever experienced.



- **It's Better with Baskets**

Gift baskets are a super easy way to whittle down your Christmas list. While you may think that gift baskets are impersonal today's baskets can be found in a multitude of themes that will suit most anyone on your list. Know someone who has a sweet tooth? Gift baskets comprised of gourmet cookies or chocolates are perfect. For anyone who's counting their calories a beautiful fruit basket or spa collection will easily fit the bill.

Gift baskets aren't just for the ladies either. Golf themed Christmas gift baskets or baskets containing micro-brewed beers and tasty snacks should suit someone you know quite well.

For couples try a gourmet cooking basket or wine basket that they can both enjoy for many months to come. The best part of giving these baskets is you don't need to worry about wrapping or shipping—the company will do all that for you. How easy is that?

- **Save the Shipping**

Christmas gifts are expensive enough once you tally them up but add the cost of mailing packages out on top of that and gift giving can get pretty expensive. While the post office isn't likely to have a sale on shipping during the holidays there are many online stores that offer cheap or free shipping with your purchases.

Some stores will offer free shipping if your purchases total a certain amount while others offer to ship your purchases to the nearest physical store at no charge. If you plan on going away for the holidays why not make all your purchases online, get the company to gift wrap them for you and have them all shipped ahead to your holiday destination? Now that's shopping smart.

### **Christmas Gifts That Keep on Giving**

Everyone has someone on their list that's hard to buy for. Instead of stressing yourself out searching for that perfect one time gift try giving them something related to an interest of theirs. Magazine subscriptions to a topic they love work great and since there's a magazine out there for just about any passion or hobby you can think of you're bound to find something suitable.

Enrollment in monthly clubs is also a wonderful option. As an example, there are wine of the month clubs, beer of the month clubs, gourmet foods or even monthly craft clubs for kids. You simply order the subscription online and provide the recipient's address. Then every month thereafter they will receive a new delivery. This is a great way to make your Christmas gift last all year long.

### **Choosing Your Artificial Christmas Tree**

There are many reasons why a person might choose to purchase an artificial Christmas tree over a live one. Perhaps you live in a place that doesn't allow live trees, such as an apartment, or maybe you just don't want the hassle of watering one. Whatever your reasons for choosing an artificial tree there are some factors you'll want to take into consideration before you bring your tree home for the holidays.



- **Size Matters**

When picking out your artificial Christmas tree you're going to want to choose one that's size fits well within the space you plan on displaying it in. Take into account the height of your ceilings in that particular room and how wide of a tree will fit in that space.

As a general rule of thumb you should choose a tree that is, at minimum, six inches shorter than your ceiling height to allow room for your tree topper. If you have cathedral ceilings this could mean accommodating a ten foot or taller tree but before you choose remember that the taller the tree the wider it will be. If space restrictions don't allow for a bushy tree there are slim models of artificial trees that will give you the height you want but with a smaller circumference. While this will save you some space try and keep the tree as proportional as possible—no one likes an anorexic Christmas tree.

Also, when purchasing tall artificial trees you should look for ones that have framed construction as opposed to just the middle pole for added sturdiness.

- **Avoid Weaving a Tangled Web**

If the thought of wrestling with tangled strings of Christmas lights gives you nightmares you might want to look at purchasing a pre-lit artificial Christmas tree. A pre-lit tree is available in clear or multi-colored lighting and saves you the hassle of having to string and remove all those tree lights year after year.

When choosing a pre-lit Christmas tree take the types of tree ornaments you have into consideration for the best overall effect. Darker or vividly colored ornaments are better shown by clear Christmas tree lights while lighter colored ornaments, such as gold or silver, are better suited to the multi-colored variety.

- **Buy a Supportive Tree**

Let's face it—the main purpose of your artificial Christmas tree is as a place to hang your Christmas ornaments. When choosing your tree you'll want to make sure it's going to be sturdy enough to support the weight of all those decorations. If you have a collection of large ornaments look for artificial trees with thicker sturdy branches that can take the weight. By comparison, if you take a minimalist approach to tree decorating you'll want to focus on the quality and realism of the branches as they'll be noticed more on a sparsely adorned tree.

- **Techno Colored Trees**

Long gone are the days where you could choose any colored tree you wanted, as long as it was green. Today's artificial Christmas trees are available in almost every color of the rainbow. You can choose from red, pink, purple, lime green or even black. Before you carry home a hot pink Christmas tree stop and take a moment to assess your overall Christmas décor. If your home and Christmas ornaments are of the traditional variety that techno colored tree is going to stand out like a sore thumb. Stick with the classic green tree if you're in doubt.





On the other hand, if your home is very contemporary and your decorations have a modern twist to them an out of the ordinary tree color may suit your Christmas theme very well. Just be careful that your tree color doesn't clash with the colors in your other decorations. A bold colored tree is best shown off with a simplistic decorating palette so try adorning your purple Christmas tree with a solid color such as all gold or silver ornaments.

## **Deck the Lawns: A Guide to Outdoor Christmas Decorations**

Decorating your lawn for the holidays is a great way to show off your creativity and Christmas spirit. Outdoor Christmas decorations come in a wide range of options from simple strings of outdoor Christmas lights to huge inflatable figurines.

Sometimes, with so many choices available, it can be difficult to decide which outdoor decorations will work best with your home and yard. Here are some practical tips and tricks to making your outdoor space a holiday delight.

- **Plan Your Design**

Before a single light is strung your first step should be to sit down and plan out your design. Draw a rough sketch of your home and yard and draw in where you'd like to place your lawn decorations. Planning the positioning of your outdoor Christmas decorations ahead of time will allow you to put up your decorations more quickly when the time comes and also create a better all over design.

- **Choosing Your Outdoor Christmas Decorations**

You may already have all your outdoor decorations purchased from years past but if you're not happy with the overall design—or your neighbors having been referring to your family as the Griswolds—you may want to take a step back and rethink your outdoor Christmas décor.

Are you trying to fit too many flashy decorations onto a tiny yard? Do your outdoor Christmas decorations match the style of your home? These are questions that you should ask yourself, or others, and be prepared for the truth.

Matching your style of Christmas yard decorations isn't as hard as it might initially sound. For example, a Victorian home requires outdoor decorations suited to its regal nature. Stick with simple white lights along the roof line with some large, elegant bows placed on porch railings. Pre-lit or painted figurines of Christmas carolers would also match well with an older home.

Those with ranch style or modern homes should play up interesting roof lines or columns by accenting them with Christmas lights. While a single color of lights used all over the exterior of your home gives off the most striking effect you can get away with using multi-colored lighting. Just be mindful of how much lighting you use, especially when multiple colors are used as your accent lighting can quickly become garish if you overdo it.

- **Types of Figurines**

Lights and bows are pretty but if you want to add some personality to your outdoor Christmas efforts nothing beats a few well placed figurines. As with all the decorations you choose you'll



want to try and keep your figurines tied into your general theme as much as possible. Brighter and more whimsical outdoor Christmas decorations include giant lit candy canes, Santa faces or gingerbread men. You can even create your own herd of pre-lit reindeer in your front yard.

If a more subdued form of Christmas figurine is your style try adding pre-lit topiaries or wire frame decorations instead. A multitude of shapes are available from angles to sleds and their simple white lighting fits in well with more elegant outdoor Christmas themes.

- **A Word on Inflatable**

Inflatable lawn ornaments are becoming very popular outdoor Christmas decorations due to their fun and festive designs. They are a great way to add a splash of holiday cheer to your yard and they store much easier than traditional large yard decorations. Due to their incredible size—some can reach six feet tall or more—you'll want to use these sparingly. Try keeping your Christmas inflatable decorations to scale with the size of your yard as much as possible. Even a large yard is probably better off with only one. Also be sure to account for these decorations large size by scaling down on the amount of other yard ornaments you use in order to avoid a lawn filled with Christmas themed chaos.

- **Don't Forget the Door**

No outdoor holiday décor is complete without a well dressed front door. Welcome your visitors with a Christmas wreath that ties in with your home's theme. Christmas wreaths are easy to come by in either a traditionally decorated or pre-lit variety and can be personalized with the addition of your own ornaments or bows if you choose.

Another option in door decorating is to turn your front entrance into one huge present. Simply attach two pieces of fabric or extra wide ribbon to your door, placing one horizontally across your door and the other vertically but off-center. Where the two pieces meet place a large bow and your door is instantly transformed into a huge Christmas gift.

Whatever your outdoor decorating style may be with a little planning and attention to detail you'll be able to create a winter wonderland in your own front yard. Most of all remember that outdoor Christmas decorations, like any décor, should be an expression of your family's holiday spirit so have fun and let your creativity be your guide.

## **Go Green with Your Christmas Cards**

Let's face it—Christmas is a time of excess. We eat too much, we spend too much and, unfortunately, we use too many trees in order to send out Christmas cards. Yet the latter doesn't have to be a constant if you implement the use of eco-friendly alternatives to the standard wasteful variety.

- **Christmas Cards That Grow On You**

According to Wikipedia.org some 1.9 billion Christmas cards were mailed out in 2005. That's a lot of dead trees and waste for a one-time-use greeting. When sending out your Christmas cards this year take a minute to evaluate those on your card list. Not everyone necessarily

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