

Have yourself a merry country Christmas!

Christmas decorations can range from grandiose lighting displays to more subtle adornments. Some families may prefer more traditional holiday decor, while others might like the look of modern trimmings.

Holiday decorations can also be used to create an atmosphere reminiscent of a certain type of locale, giving a home a holiday in the city vibe or a more rustic feel. For those who prefer a rustic look reminiscent of a country Christmas, consider the following tips.

- Start with the tree. The Christmas tree is the center of many a home's holiday decor, and those who want to create a country Christmas can start with their tree. Instead of traditional holiday lights, choose lights that look like candles while adorning the tree with wooden ornaments and strands of popcorn.
- Forgo traditional wrapping paper. Instead of flashy, store-bought wrapping paper, wrap presents in brown paper and put presents under the tree as early as possible. Instead of store-bought gift tags, create your own and attach a candy cane or another candy to the gift.
- Think nature with decorations. Items gathered from nature can give a home a rustic appeal during the holidays. Hang a homemade



wreath on the front door and include pine cones and clippings from evergreen trees when adding decorative accents around the house. Tuck a few decorative woven baskets in corners to further emphasize a rustic look.

- Create homemade ornaments. Homemade ornaments can also give a home a more rustic look come the holiday season. Spend an afternoon creating holiday crafts with the kids and use these instead of store-bought ornaments. For those who are especially gifted craftsmen, put your woodworking skills to the test to create decorative wooden stockings that, if not functional, can be replaced with more traditional stockings come Christmas Eve.
- Don't forget the music. Another way to create a country Christmas is to play country Christmas albums instead of classical or more traditional Christmas records. Nearly every country music star of the past and present has recorded a Christmas song or album, so create a master playlist of country Christmas songs on your digital music player and play it throughout the season to set the holiday mood in your household.





Can a hobby be your career in the new year?

The end of the year tends to be a time to reflect on the previous 12 months. Many people are inspired to find a new career at the dawn of a new year. Some might find it possible to turn hobbies and other interests into ventures that can make money or even serve as new jobs.

Earning a living doing something you love is the ultimate goal for many people. However, before a person tries to turn a hobby into a career, he or she first needs to analyze the situation and give such a momentous decision ample consideration. All

hobbies cannot be adapted into lucrative businesses, especially those that are very niche-oriented. The following techniques can help people turn their hobbies into careers.

• Streamline and perfect your skill. Before trying to turn a hobby into a career, obtain further training or education, if necessary. Just because you're qualified to do something as an amateur does not mean



you can do it as a professional. Research if you need more schooling and pursue that schooling if you find you do.

• Appeal to other hobbyists. Hobbyists tend to be quite enthusiastic and passionate about their work. Therefore, your first client base may very well be other hobbyists. Attend street fairs, carnivals and any other gatherings that tend to bring hobbyists together. This can help spread the word about your ventures and

open up your work to an extended network of like-minded individuals.

• Listen to all feedback. Take criticism and other feedback from as many people as you can. This will help you to really fine tune and professionalize your hobby. Try brainstorming with people, remaining open to what others have to say about your potential business.

• Start small and simple. Getting your feet wet in the business world takes an

investment of time and money. It's easy to follow the mentality "go big or go home." But with the goal of turning a hobby into a career, you may want to start slowly - taking the bunny hills before skiing down the expert-level slopes. Start selling items or services in the community. Expand to a website. Keep track of your profit margin before you grow vour business even further. You must be realistic in your ability to make money that can fully support you and your business.

• Write about your interests. You may be able to make

money through your hobby without performing the hobby. Become a freelance writer and share expertise through a blog or by contracting with newspapers and magazines. Sharing your expertise can be a lucrative and less costly way to turn a hobby into a new career.

Turning a hobby into a profession may not result in instant success. But with dedication, the dream may come true.



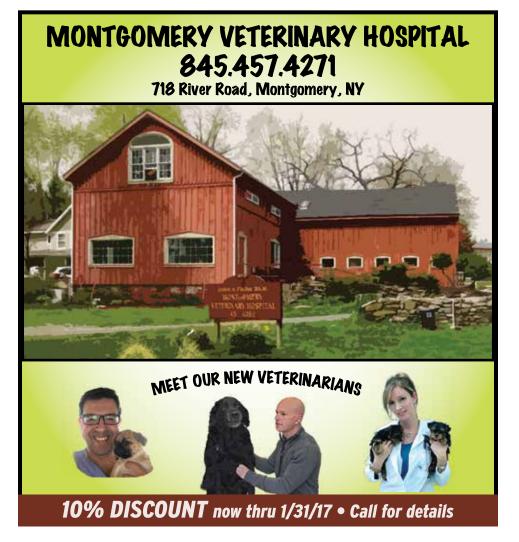
Holiday Greetings from the DiDonato Family

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Reduce stress with these seasonal tips

With so much on our plates between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, the holiday season can be hectic. Fortunately, there are many ways to save time and make the holiday season more manageable.

- If you don't have plastic clips to hang lights around windows and to the eaves of your home, inexpensive clothespins will work just as well. If you're concerned about the color of the wooden clips, paint them holiday hues before stringing the lights.
- Put a bath mat, rug-side down and rubber-side up, beneath your Christmas tree stand. This allows you to spin the tree as you hang lights and ornaments without damaging the floor underneath. It also makes it simple to undress the tree once the season is over. Use a tree skirt to hide the mat.
- Squeeze artificial tree portions into concrete form tubes. First wrap the tree portions in twine and then slip them into the concrete sleeves. Each tube can be stowed in attic or garage rafters, freeing up precious space.
- Use empty squirt bottles to make baking and cooking easier. Pancake and cookie batters can be squirted from the containers for less mess.
- Store one or two strings of lights in a plastic shopping bag to keep the strands from getting tangled. Hang the bags from a hook in a garage or stack them in a storage bin.
- Use plastic zip ties to attach garland and lights to bannisters. They're easy to assemble and will not



damage the bannisters.

- A paper towel holder can be screwed to the wall in a craft room to neatly hold spools of ribbon. Simply pull the length you need from the spool and cut for easy decorating.
- Mount a tree stand to a piece of wood with screws or glue. This prevents spills from reaching the floor while stabilizing the tree.
- Old maps make interesting gift wrap and are a nice change of pace from commercially produced paper or newsprint.
- Wrap duct tape or another type of sticky tape around your hand. Pat over fallen pine needles that accumulate around the tree. In hard-to-reach areas, wrap the tape around a broom or a floor sweeper.

- When traveling for the holidays, use a brightly colored suitcase or flashy tape to make your suitcase stand out from others at the airport.
- Place hardened brown sugar in a baking dish, cover it with a moist paper towel and either microwave it on high for 20-second intervals or place it in a 300 F oven for five minutes. This will soften the sugar, making it easier to use the sugar to prepare your favorite holiday cookie recipes.
- Save plastic bread ties, which can be used to make tags for the wires on certain devices. Such ties also can be used to organize decorating components and to keep your place on a roll of tape.
- Measure the inside of your picture window and construct a wooden frame to its dimensions. Staple holiday lights to the frame and then easily slip the frame in and out of place each year.
- Hang a live wreath or some boughs of evergreen in your home for a fresh pine scent if you have an artificial tree.
- Color-code storage containers so you can easily find holiday decorations in the attic or basement.
- Pack for a holiday excursion using a collapsible clothing storage hanger for closets. Fold clothes on each fabric shelf and then collapse it into your suitcase. When you get to your destination, unfold and hang it in a closet so all of your clothes will be at the ready.





Problems with snow load on the rooftop

The beauty of winter landscapes is not foremost on the minds of homeowners who have roofs full of heavy snow and ice.

Excessive snow loads on a roof can cause the roof to leak or even collapse. The weight, and not the depth, of the snow is what determines if it needs to be removed from the roof. Fluffy snow may not be problematic, as it can take around seven times as much dry snow to equal the weight of wet snow.

After a snowstorm, go outside and lift a few shovelfuls of snow. If it's backbreaking work, then the snow on your roof may be dangerous.

Homes built to code can typically handle the snow and ice load that comes with the winter season. However, homes that have undergone unapproved renovations, or those where load-bearing walls have been removed from the interior may be susceptible to catastrophic roof collapses.

Another problem homeowners face this time of year is ice dams, which occur when snow on the roof melts slightly and then refreezes, forming thick portions of ice usually at the edges of the roof by the gutters. Ice dams can divert melting snow in and under roofing shingles instead of through gutters and downspouts.

A common contributor to ice dams is inadequate ventilation and insulation in attics. Heat from the interior of the home that rises into the attic can cause the roof to warm up enough to melt the snow. This is easily remedied by having ample insulation and ensuring proper ventilation of the attic to maintain temperatures cool enough to prevent underside melting of snow.

If you experience any leaks from the ceiling or notice water coming down walls, a roof leak from excess snow or ice dams may be the culprit. Snow that is too heavy may create cracks in plaster and drywall and cause sagging that affects the framework of interior doorways. If you hear creaking or popping sounds, immediately exit the house, as these are strong indicators of an imminent collapse.

The Better Business Bureau warns against going up on the roof if you cannot safely remove the snow with an ice rake or similar tool. You should not jeopardize your health by trying to remove snow and ice.

Confirm that contractors who remove snow have current liability and worker's compensation insurance before hiring them. Contractors will charge anywhere from \$60 to \$300 per hour to remove snow from the roof. Always inquire in advance as to what a fee covers.

Keep in mind that some snow and

ice removal remedies can invalidate the warranty on recently installed roof shingles. This is something that must be weighed before proceeding with snow removal.

Home insurance policies may or may not cover the cost of snow removal and damage. Call your insurance company to find out what your policy covers. Keep good records for the cost of all repairs to see if you can be reimbursed.







Cinnamon Caramel Cheesecake Squares

Lavish meals are a large part of holiday celebrations, with many people indulging in dinners and desserts throughout the holiday season. This is a time when many families display their best recipes, and these may include certain desserts that can be labor-intensive to make or something more fitting for a special occasion.

Cheesecake is an example of a dessert that, due to the time it takes to create and the richness of the dessert itself, is not something many people eat on a regular basis. However, with a time-saving recipe, cheesecake can become a dessert prepared in little time for holiday festivities. Try "Cinnamon Caramel Cheesecake Squares" from "Pampered Chef Season's Best, Fast, Fun & Fabulous" by Pampered Chef® Test Kitchens.

Cinnamon Caramel Cheesecake Squares

Makes 24 squares
28-ounce packages seamless crescent dough
28-ounce packages cream cheese
1 egg
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
3/4 cup sugar, divided
Flour for dusting
1tablespoon cinnamon
1/2 cup caramel topping

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Unroll one package of crescent



dough into a shallow baking pan. Roll out the dough to edges.

2. Heat the cream cheese in a microwave-safe bowl, uncovered, on high for 30 to 40 seconds, or until softened.

Whisk until almost smooth.

- 3. Add the egg, vanilla and 1/2 cup of the sugar to the bowl. Whisk until smooth. Spread over the crescent dough.
- 4. Lightly sprinkle the flat side of a cutting board with flour. Unroll the second package of crescent dough and roll it into a 13- by 12-inch rectangle.
- 5. Fold the dough in half from the short end; gently lift and place in the pan. Unfold and gently stretch the dough over the cream cheese layer; press the edges to seal. Cut off corners of dough hanging over and discard.
- 6. Bake 22 to 24 minutes, until golden brown.
- 7. Combine the remaining $1/4~{\rm cup}$ sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl. Place the caramel topping in a 1-cup measuring cup.
- 8. Remove the pan from the oven. Immediately pour the caramel topping over the cheesecake and spread to the edges of the crust. Sprinkle with the cinnamon-sugar mixture; let stand for 10 minutes.
- 9. Using a utility knife, cut into 4×6 rows to make 24 squares.



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Gift ideas for senior

their shopping list who they can't find anything for. Some people seem to have it all, while others may be less than forthcoming about items they may need or want.

Many seniors tend to fall into the latter category. Shopping for holiday gifts for seniors can be difficult if you don't know what they want. Following are a handful of gift ideas that might make this holiday season that much more special for seniors.

Books

A 2015 survey from the Pew Research Center found that 69 percent of adults age 65 and over acknowledged reading at least one book in the previous 12 months. That makes books a good bet for shoppers who don't know what to get their 65-and-over loved ones this holiday season. Shoppers might want to opt for traditional print books rather than e-books, as the survey found that only 15 percent of readers age 65 and over had previously read an e-book.

Gym membership

According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, more than 80 percent of adults do not meet the guidelines for aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities. That can be especially troubling for seniors, who are at greater risk for osteoporosis, a medical condition in which age-related tissue loss contributes to

Every holiday shopper has at least one loved one on brittle, fragile bones. Physical activity, including musclestrengthening activities like weight training, can help combat osteoporosis. Family members stuck on what to get should consider gifting a membership to a local gym. Many gyms offer heavily discounted memberships to seniors, and may even offer senior fitness classes at no additional cost.

Travel gifts

Many retirees love to travel, but not every senior has the means. Holiday shoppers can light up seniors' smiles by gifting travel gifts this holiday season. One idea is to transfer airline miles to an elderly loved one so he or she can get a free or discounted flight. If that's not a possibility, some new luggage or a gift card that can be redeemed at 70,000 hotels across the globe, is sure to please.

Hobbies

With retirement and grown children many seniors find they have extra time on their hands. Why not help fill that time with a new hobbie. Art, computer or music classes at a locally owned school can fulfill a lifelong dream or even help start a new career.

Family time

Shoppers who are especially stuck on what to get



seniors for Christmas can just resolve to spend more time with their elderly loved ones. Many seniors genuinely have everything they need, and may only want to spend more time with their children and grandchildren. Make a New Year's resolution to spend more time with the seniors in your life.











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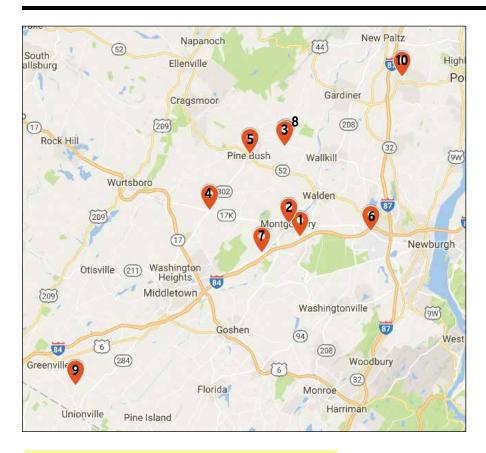


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