

# Back to Basics: Gifts that inspire the imagination

hough it may seem that all of the high-demand gift items this season require batteries and a level of tech savvy only the younger generation can boast, there are actually many great options that let you encourage the kids on your list to get back to basics and get unplugged.

According to research by Common Sense Media, kids under eight spend nearly two hours of every day on screen time — that is, using a tablet, computer or mobile device, watching TV, etc. While some of that usage is dedicated to educational games and content, the prevalence of media use among kids is distracting them from one of childhood's greatest gifts: the freedom to let their imaginations soar.

Kids whose imaginative play is fostered and supported show numerous health and developmental advantages, ranging from increased levels of fitness and coordination to higher self-esteem and an improved ability to apply the information they learn.

This holiday look for gifts that inspire kids:

Books

Good old-fashioned books help expose

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kids to new worlds. Choose-your-ownadventure books, in which the reader helps direct the flow of the story line, are a great choice for engaging kids directly as they imagine their way through the story line. More traditional books introduce concepts, characters and scenarios that provide hours of play as kids act out the new ideas they discover.

#### Blocks

It doesn't get much more basic than building blocks when it comes to setting the imagination free. Small and mid-sized plastic pieces let kids create miniature versions of nearly anything their minds can conjure. On the flip side, jumbo cardboard blocks let children create environments they can physically engage with, such as life-size playhouses.

#### Figurines

There are many figurines and customizable accessories and environments available to tickle kids' imagination. From auto service stations and race tracks to dollhouses and pet boutiques, little ones can explore and create for hours.

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#### Dress up

Whether you assemble a collection of whimsical treasures from thrift shops or rely on the costumes and sets available at retail stores, clothing that allows a child to adopt a new persona is an instant way to encourage the imagination. Costumes depicting familiar characters let kids act out their favorite screentime scenes in real life.

#### Crafting sets

From create-your-own jewelry to color-to-complete playhouses and spaceships,

crafty gifts let kids explore their artistic side and experiment with creating tangible representations of their imagination. Toys and games that encourage pretend play let kids create, explore and imagine in a stress-free environment where they set the rules and boundaries. These gifts, which encourage kids to unplug and embrace a whole new world of wholesome play, are the kind you can feel truly great about giving.

#### Social development

Creating characters and scripting scenes, whether alone or through play with others, teaches a child to consider other perspectives and fosters the growth of empathy and understanding.

#### Language

Being allowed to create their own play environment, versus those delivered on a screen, forces children to rely on their vocabulary and practice using the words they've learned both informally and formally. Solitary play offers the benefit of



Giving gifts that encourage kids to use their imagination helps boost numerous long-term development skills.

allowing a child to practice these skills, while play with peers encourages clear and effective communication with others.

#### Problem solving

It's never too early for a child to begin developing cognitive thinking skills that allow them to effectively trouble-shoot and resolve problems. Even a simple play activity, such as contemplating what items from the dress-up drawer should be packed for an imaginary vacation, lets a little one begin to understand how to identify a challenge and create meaningful solutions.

#### Relationships

Playing with others is a natural way for kids to forge meaningful bonds with other children, and with the adults in their lives. Imaginary play nurtures and lets children practice critical relationship-building skills such as communication. What's more, interacting through pretend play gives kids a shared experience that shapes a bond with their partner in play.

(Family Features)



# You can find some great prices in January

Shopping may be the last thing on the average person's mind once the holiday season has ended. But January may be a great time to go bargain hunting.

Though sinking January temperatures can make winter seem endless, retailers already have spring on their minds when the calender turns, and many use the first month of the year to clear out inventory and make room for spring merchandise. If you're ready to shop, the following items might be available at heavy discounts.

• Winter clothing: January can be a great time to get discounts on winter apparel. Sweaters and coats have been on display since September, and stores are ready to start displaying their spring collections. Use that accumulated Christmas cash to stock up on coats, sweatshirts and even snow boots.

• Exercise equipment: Many people resolve to get in shape come the new year, so it comes as no surprise that fitness gear and equipment is on sale in January. Look for deals on home gym equipment, workout wear and items for winter sports. If you are in the market for a gym membership, health clubs typically offer discounted fees and incentives to join in the first month of the year.

• **Home furnishings:** Several manufacturers release new furniture collections in February, and retailers must clean out their old inventory beforehand. If you are in the market for big-ticket home furnishings, hold



off until after the holidays and your patience may just be rewarded with considerable savings.

• Holiday items: Now is the time to stock up on holiday decor as retailers reorganize for Valentine's Day and spring. Purchase cards, wrapping paper and other holiday items now and pack them away until next year.

• Vehicles: January and February can be ideal times to find discounts on both new and preowned vehicles. Drivers may not to want to drive new vehicles through messy winter conditions, so they will usually wait to buy until spring. Dealerships recognize this and will drop prices on vehicles during the winter to try to entice shoppers to buy. You might find it easier to negotiate a better deal in January and February than you would later in the year when demand is higher.

• **Big-ticket electronics:** January is traditionally one of the best months to buy electronics because this time of year is when the Consumer Electronics Show unveils the newest technology. As people upgrade to new models and systems, last year's merchandise is put on sale. Sports fans also may want to upgrade the size of their televisions now so come February they can watch the Super Bowl in style.

• **Jewelry:** January is slow for jewelry retailers, and that lull can be advantageous to buyers shopping in January. Splurge on jewelry now before prices spike for Valentine's Day.

Bargain hunting consumers may want to brave the winter weather and shop till they drop this January, when retailers may be looking to unload inventory as they prepare for the spring.





Gift Guide, Wednesday, December 17, 2014



# Easy soup and sides to warm up holidays

he best holiday meals have sides that are warm, comforting and satisfying. This year, bring potatoes to the table in three new ways with recipes that can be easily made with little fuss. Invite guests to taste the traditional flavors of the season in a whole new light with these crowd-pleasing recipes:

#### **Festive Loaded Mashed Potatoes**

Prep: 15 minutes, bake time: 25 minutes Servings: 8

- 21/2 cups water
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 1/4 cups milk
- 2 2/3 cups mashed potato flakes
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 6 strips bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 3/4 cup diced red bell pepper
- 1/2 cup sliced green onion

Heat oven to 350°F. Lightly grease or coat with cooking spray 9-inch-by-9-inch or 2-quart baking dish.

Heat water, butter, salt and pepper until simmering in large saucepan. Remove pan from heat.

Stir in milk and potato flakes until blended. Let stand 1 minute. Stir in sour cream.



Spread half potatoes in prepared baking dish. Top with cheddar cheese and bacon. Spread remaining potatoes on top and sprinkle with red pepper and green onion. Cover and bake 25-30 minutes.

#### **Cheesey Spinach-Potato Pie**

Prep: 15 minutes, bake time: 30 minutes Servings: 6

1 cup hashbrown potatoes 3/4 cup mashed potato flakes 3/4 cup milk 2 eggs

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese 1/2 cup cheddar cheese

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1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper 1/4 teaspoon salt

16 ounces frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

2 tablespoons vegetable or olive oil Heat oven to 425°F. Coat 9-inch pie dish with cooking spray.

Combine potato flakes, milk, eggs, cheese, pepper and salt in large bowl. Mix in spinach. Mix hashbrowns and oil.

Spread 3/4 of hashbrowns firmly onto bottom and sides of prepared pie dish. Spoon spinach mixture lightly into dish. Top evenly with remaining hashbrowns, fluffing hashbrowns with fork.

Bake until hashbrowns are well-browned and center is set, 30-35 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before slicing into wedges.

#### **Pumpkin Potato Soup**

Prep: 5 minutes, cook time: 15 minutes Servings: 6-8

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

- 1/2 cup diced onion
- 1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin puree
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) broth
- 1 cup water 1 cup mashed potato flakes
- 1 cup milk
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice



1/4 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 cup sour cream

Heat oil in 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes.

Add pumpkin, broth, water and potato flakes; stir until smooth. Stir in milk, brown sugar, pumpkin pie spice and garlic powder.

Heat over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until soup begins to bubble around edge of saucepan and is thickened. Reduce heat to low.

Stir in sour cream and heat through before serving. Salt and pepper to taste.

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# Celebrate and create: tips for an easy DIY holiday gift

et your creative side shine with thoughtful gifts that are fun to create and add cheer to the lives of those you love.

Turning everyday items from ordinary to extraordinary, Erica Domesek, creator of the lifestyle site "P.S. - I made this," offers these affordable, on-trend projects and tips to elevate your mornings and make your holidays delightfully DIY:

#### Weekender Gift Basket

Will you be traveling and staying with family and friends over the holidays? Never show up empty handed! A basket of coffee accessories is the perfect go-to holiday gift for the host who has everything. Be sure to pack in a favorite premium coffee selection. Fill the basket with elements that complement each other, from coffee mugs to kitchen towels to coasters.

Supplies: Painters tape Basket Newspaper Metallic silver spray paint





#### **Directions:**

1. Tape off handles and inside of basket using painters tape and newspaper

- Spray paint the outside of the basket
  Allow to dry
- 4. Remove painters tape and newspaper

5. Fill with coffee, mugs and goodies

#### Monogram Coaster Set

For a gift that's totally unique, use your loved one's initials to create a beautiful, personalized monogramed coaster set. This practical and charming gift will brighten up any table space. **Supplies:** 

Gold letter rub-on transfers 4-inch-by-4-inch white ceramic tiles Craft stick Gold paint pen Sponge brush Decoupage glue



### Felt bumpers

Directions:

1. Cut out transfer letters and rub one onto each ceramic tile using craft stick

2. Use gold paint pen to paint the sides of

each tile and allow to dry

3. Use sponge brush to apply 2 coats of decoupage glue as a sealer

4. After decoupage glue has dried, add felt bumpers to the bottom corners of each tile.

#### Metallic Patterned Coffee Mugs Make metallic your new neutral. A com-

Make metallic your new neutral. A combination of gold, silver and bronze adds sparkle and shine to ordinary morning mugs. Create a set of four for the family, then relax and celebrate with a cup of coffee.

#### Supplies:

Pencil

White mugs

Metallic gold oil-based paint marker

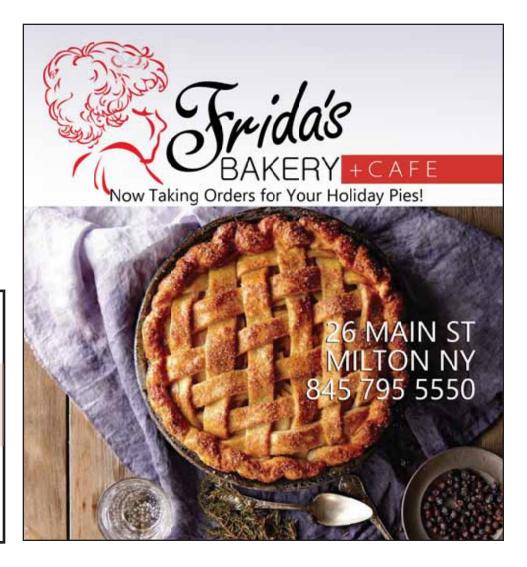
Oven

**Directions:** 

Sketch out design on mug with pencil
 Draw over pencil with metallic marker
 Bake at 350°F for 20 minutes (hand wash only)

For more ideas for the holidays, visit www.Facebook.com/MillstoneCoffee.

(Family Features)



inter is a great time to experiment with new culinary creations that incorporate the bold flavors of wine for delicious results. Nothing pleases the senses quite like a comfort food dish on a chilly evening. If you're planning a menu for just you and your mate, a small group of close friends or a full-blown dinner party, stock up on great wine selections to complete the menu.

#### hints of vanilla and earthy aromas. **Perfect Winter Pairings**

Matanzas Creek Merlot and Beef Bourguignon Bring out the rich and savory flavors of this classic French stew with the notes of dried blueberries and cranberries, bittersweet chocolate and black cardamom in Matanzas Creek Merlot.



Smoky Chili and Murphy-Goode Homefront Red Just as a robust chili calls for a blend of signature ingredients, so does the perfect wine to complement it. The smoky flavors of seasoned steak cubes and dried chili pods will please the palate when united with Murphy-Goode Homefront Red - a blend of syrah, merlot, petite

sirah and zinfandel. This wine is comfort food friendly and fruit forward, chock full of flavors of black cherry and raspberry, vanilla and toast. Plus, for every bottle sold, the winery donates fifty cents to Operation Homefront, a national nonprofit that provides assistance to service members and their families.

#### **Classic Roast Chicken and** La Crema Sonoma Coast Chardonnay

Fresh oregano, fragrant garlic and buttery Castelvetrano olives star in this traditional chicken dish which pairs wonderfully with vibrant La Crema Sonoma Coast Chardonnay. Just as in the Burgundy region of France, these vineyards offer an unusually long, cool growing season, so grapes develop complex flavors. The Sonoma Coast Chardonnay is beautifully aromatic, with an intriguing interplay of lively citrus and subtle toasted oak, laced with just a kiss of butterscotch.

#### **Toasted S'mores and Kendall-Jackson Grand Reserve Pinot Noir**

Take the traditional fireside treat to a new, gooey level with homemade, wine-infused marshmallows served with a glass of Kendall-Jackson Grand Reserve Pinot Noir. Handcrafted from the top seven percent of all the winery's lots, with 70 percent sourced from the same vineyard blocks year-to-year, it ensures greater consistency and enhanced complexity with each vintage. Please your sweet tooth and palate with this pinot noir, with lively berry pie notes defined in wild strawberry and black cherry, with

#### Freemark Abbey Napa Valley **Cabernet and Pot Roast**

Serve up this braised beef favorite alongside Freemark Abbey Napa Valley Cabernet, with its aromas of dark cherry, ripe plum and black currant. **Edmeades Zinfandel** 

and Meatloaf

Each meaty bite tastes even more comforting than the last when paired with the lush texture and notes of toasted oak, vanilla and cherry cola in Edmeades Zinfandel.

#### Chili with Pepato Cheese

Recipe created by Dirk Yeaton on murphygoodewinery.com Servings: 10-12 6 dried chili pods, seeds and stems removed Salt and pepper, to taste 11/2 pounds top round cut into cubes 1 1/2 pounds chuck steak cut into cubes

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 3 small cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 ounces chili powder
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 3 tablespoons cumin
- 2 tablespoons oregano steeped in
- 1 cup of red wine
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar

1/2 teaspoon cocoa powder 2 cups beef broth

- 10 ounces stewed tomatoes
- 1/2 cup grated Pepato cheese

Toast dried chilies over medium heat for about 2 minutes. Add 2 cups of water and simmer for 10 minutes. Strain out chilies to cool, then chop and reserve.

Season meat liberally with salt. Heat oil over high heat in large, heavy bottom pot until it begins to smoke. Carefully place beef into pan and brown on all sides until moisture cooks out and light brown film forms on bottom of pan. Reduce heat to medium. Drain meat of oil and fat.

Add onions and garlic, cooking until soft. Add chili powder, paprika and cumin. Cook until fragrant. Add reserved chopped chilies and rest of ingredients (except for cheese) and stir well with wooden spoon, scraping browned bits off bottom of pot.

Reduce heat to low and simmer for 1 hour, occasionally stirring. To serve, place in bowl and sprinkle with grated cheese.

#### Chicken Thighs with Potato, Lemon & Castelvetrano Olives

Recipe created by Tracey Shepos on lacrema.com

- Servings: 4
- 8 sprigs oregano, leaves picked
- (1/2 cup packed)5 cloves garlic
- 2 lemons, one zested and one cut
- into eight wedges
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 chicken thighs (1 1/2 pounds),
- bone in, skin on
- 2 large Russet potatoes, peeled and
- cut into 1/2-inch circles
- 4 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 cup Castelvetrano olives, pitted

and drained Preheat oven to 350°F.

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In food processor, combine oregano, garlic, lemon zest, cumin and 2 tablespoons oil. Process until chopped. Place mixture in large bowl and toss with chicken thighs.

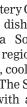
In 10-inch cast iron pan, layer 1 tablespoon oil and

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sprinkle again with 2 teaspoons salt. Scatter lemon wedges in between chicken thighs.

Place pan over medium heat, cook for 5 minutes or until edges start to brown. Immediately place pan on top rack in oven and bake for 10 minutes. Adjust oven temperature to  $400^{\circ}$ F and cook for another 25 minutes or until chicken is browned and internal temperature reaches  $160^{\circ}$ F. Scatter olives on top and serve.

#### Pinot Noir Marshmallows

Recipe created by Molly Yeh on mynameisyeh.com Servings: 16 1/4 cup powdered sugar

1/4 cup cornstarch

1/4 cup Kendall Jackson Grand Reserve Pinot Noir

1/2 cup water2 packets unflavored gelatin powder

3/4 cup sugar

1/2 cup light corn syrup

1 pinch salt

In small bowl, combine powdered sugar and cornstarch. Grease two loaf pans or one 8- or 9-inch square pan and dust bottom and sides with half of powdered sugar mixture. Pour out any excess mixture back into bowl.

In bowl of stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, combine pinot noir and 1/4 cup water. Sprinkle gelatin over liquid. Grease rubber spatula and have standing by mixer, as well as prepared pan(s).

In small saucepan, combine remaining 1/4 cup of water, sugar, corn syrup and salt. Clip on candy thermometer. Heat mixture over medium heat until it reaches  $240^{\circ}$ F.

Resist urge to crank heat level higher, otherwise it could heat up too fast. (If takes a while to heat up to those last few degrees, you can inch heat level up to medium high, keeping a close eye on thermometer.)

Turn mixer on low and drizzle sugar mixture in slow and steady stream down side of bowl. Once entire mixture is in, increase speed to high and let it mix for 10-12 minutes, until lukewarm and fluffy.

Using greased spatula, immediately scrape mixture into pans and spread out evenly as possible. Dust tops with remaining powdered sugar mixture and (if needed) use hands to flatten mixture out completely. Let set for hour, cut into squares and dust edges of squares with remaining powdered sugar mixture.

# Holiday menu planning

First-time holiday hosts can take a number of steps to ensure their menus appeal to all of their guests

Notice holiday hosts often have a lot on their plates. Whether hosting family or friends or a combination of both, first-time hosts typically want to impress their guests while ensuring they get enough to eat and have an enjoyable evening. Since dinner is such a big part of holiday gatherings, hosts often place extra emphasis on what to serve, and that can be tricky when this is the first time they are hosting.

When planning the menu for your holiday soiree, consider the following tips.

• Get a head count. Though other factors will influence what to serve, the size of your guest list may ultimately dictate what to serve. For example, a small gathering of four to five people will likely rule out turkey, as even a small turkey will prove too much effort and produce too much extra food. On the same note, a small dish like lasagna might not be doable for a larger crowd, as it will force you to prepare multiple entrees, which means more time in the kitchen juggling the various cooking duties and less time with your guests. Once you have confirmed just how many guests you will be hosting, you can then choose a main course that suits the size of your guest list.

• Decide which type of party to host. The type of party you want to host also will influence what you serve. A formal gathering should include an appetizer, a main course and a dessert, including both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffees. A less formal gathering gives hosts more leeway. For example, whereas a formal gathering may include soup as an appetizer, hosting a less formal gathering allows hosts to put out some snacks or bread for guests to whet their appetites before everyone sits down for the meal. The more formal the gathering, the more formal the menu. Hosts of less formal gatherings may even want to host a holiday pot luck buffet, inviting guests to bring a favorite dish or side dish while the hosts take care of the main course.

• Ask guests if they have any dietary restrictions. Upon being invited to a holiday dinner, some invitees may let hosts know if they have any food allergies or medical conditions that restrict which foods they can eat. Solicit such information from all of your guests, and do your best to cater to each of your guests' needs. Some guests might be on a gluten-free diet while others may need to limit their sodium intake. You might not be able to meet everyone's demands. Let guests know if they should bring an appropriate snack if you cannot provide one for them.

• Include traditional holiday fare. People

have grown to expect certain things from holiday meals, be it sweet potatoes on Thanksgiving, brisket for Chanukah or holiday cookies or even eggnog at Christmas parties. When planning the menu, be sure to include at least one of these traditional items, even asking guests for suggestions. Such fare will give the party a genuine holiday feel, and guests will appreciate seeing some items on your dinner table they have enjoyed at their own holiday celebrations over the years.

• **Don't overdo it.** First-time hosts want to ensure everyone gets enough to eat, so it's easy to overdo things and prepare too much food. This can be expensive, and guests may feel obligated to overeat so hosts don't have to discard any of



the food they worked so hard to prepare. Though it might once have been a holiday tradition to overeat, many men and women now prefer moderation, and hosts should keep that in mind when preparing their holiday meals.

Hosting a holiday dinner for the first time can be nerve-wracking. But there are a variety of steps first-timers can take when preparing their menus to come off looking like old pros.





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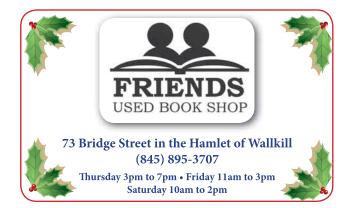


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# Christmas tidbits to put you in the holiday spirit

he holiday season has arrived, and millions of people across the globe will be celebrating Christmas with their families and friends. The following are some interesting tidbits to share with your loved ones this holiday season.

• Each year, more than three billion Christmas cards are sent in the United States alone.

• In 350 AD, Pope Julius I, bishop of Rome, proclaimed December 25 the official celebration date for the birth of Jesus Christ. Many historians and theologians have surmised that Christ really wasn't born this time of year, thanks to imagery and information from the Bible.

• Christmas carols began as an English custom called 'wassailing.' Individuals toasted neighbors to a long and healthy life.

• Despite the common tale that three wise men paid homage to baby Jesus, the Bible never specifically calls out a number. Similarly, there's no specific indication that they visited the infant Jesus. Their visit may have occurred when Jesus was older.

• Santa Claus' modern look was inspired by writings from The Knickerbockers of New York and imagery from Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Moore denied authoring the famous poem for 15 years after it was published anonymously, feeling the poem was beneath his talents.

• Santa has his own official postal code. It's H0 H0 H0.

• The song "Jingle Bells" was originally written for Thanksgiving and not Christmas. People loved it so much that the lyrics were changed to fit Christmas.

• Christmas trees typically grow for 15 years before they're cut and sold. This means the trees sold today were likely planted in 1999.

• Christmas was not declared an official holiday in the United States until June 26, 1870.

• Before turkey, the traditional Christmas meal served in England was a pig's head and mustard.

• Male reindeer tend to shed their antlers in the winter. This means Santa's reindeer are likely female.

• Christ may have been born in a cave rather than a manger. According to the gospel of Luke, the shepherds that helped find shelter for Mary to give birth kept their flock in a cave. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is built over a cave called the Grotto of the Nativity, where Jesus is believed to have been born.

• Many people may be less inclined to stand under mistletoe waiting for a kiss if they knew what "mistletoe" means in the ancient Germanic language. It literally means "dung on a twig," for the bird who eats the berries and then leaves seeds in droppings to propagate new plants.

• Each holiday season, PNC Wealth Management calculates the costs of the gifts in the song, "The 12 Days of Christmas." The price index for the gifts went from \$12,673 in 1984 to more than \$24,000 in 2011. The most expensive gift is the swimming swans.

# Keeping the holidays safe for your pets

n the midst of decorating and socializing, pet owners may overlook the needs of their pets. Hectic schedules and homes full of decor can throw pets off-kilter.

No pet owner wants their pet to suffer, so it's important that owners exercise caution with the following items come the holiday season.

• **Bones:** Is turkey on the menu for the family feast? If so, resist the urge to toss some bones and scraps to dogs or cats. Small bones or bone chips can become lodged in the digestive tracts of pets and cause serious injury. If you want to give your dog a holiday treat, choose raw diced sweet potato or carrots.

• Aromatic oils: The holidays are not the same without the familiar scent of mint, cinnamon or pine. Some synthetic aromas or even natural extracts can be toxic to cats and dogs. Keep them well out of the pet's reach.

• Chocolate and other sweets: An abundance of treats seems to be par for



the course during the holiday season. Dogs should avoid all chocolate, but dark chocolate poses a particularly serious threat. Chocolate can cause agitation, elevated heart rate, diarrhea, vomiting, seizures, and even death. In addition, candy or cookies sweetened with the artificial sweetener xylitol can cause a dangerous drop in blood pressure for dogs.

• **Pine needles and trees:** When ingested, pine needles can puncture the intestines of pets. In search of an easy drink, dogs and cats may be drawn to the fresh water reservoir of live trees, keep trees properly secured, and fallen needles should be promptly discarded.

• **Tinsel and decorations:** Skip the tinsel if you have a cat. Felines are likely to mistake tinsel for a toy. Eating tinsel can cause severe damage to a cat's intestinal tract, as it may get caught in the stomach while the rest of it continues to pass through the intestines. Tinsel also may wrap around the tongue, increas-

ing the cat's risk of choking. Ornaments also are tempting playthings. Cats may pounce on glass ornaments, breaking them and suffering injury. Keep pets in mind when selecting tree ornaments, and opt for unbreakable ornaments when possible.

• **Electrical cords:** The American Animal Hospital Association says holiday lights mean more electrical cords for kittens and puppies to chew. Secure all cords and keep them out of reach of pets.

• **Candles:** The subtle flicker of a lit candle can add ambiance to a space. But all it takes is the swish of a tail or the pat of a paw to knock over a candle and spark a fire. Never leave lit candles unattended. If you have boisterous pets, opt for LED simulated candles instead.

• Alcohol: Spirits are sometimes a part of celebrations, but alcoholic beverages should be kept out of reach of pets. Alcohol suppresses the immune system, and it can result in significant health issues for pets who consume it.

