

Holiday Gift Guide II

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Make it creative this holiday season:

Art blends with food and wine for a unique evening out

A night out on the town during the holidays means different things to many people. Most days fly by and there's hardly time to take in a movie or dining at a favorite restaurant with friends.

But what if there was a way to have a night out that is both social and creatively rewarding. And you might even go home with a great holiday gift for that art collector on your gift list!

Paint-and-sip or paint-and-snack businesses have grown increasingly popular in recent years. The premise is quite simple. Patrons reserve a spot (and canvas) and work their way through a painting, all the while conversing with friends and enjoying a spirited beverage or two along the way. Painting events have helped many men and women tap into their inner artist and make a few new friends along the way. The goal of such events is to have fun and teach adults about painting, and many

men and women find the relaxed atmosphere encourages them to express their individuality and artistry.

Paint-and-sip events come in various styles. One of the more popular scenarios has people working at an established painting studio, such as the Walkill River School of Art in Montgomery, which provides the necessary artistic equipment while guests provide their own drinks and appetizers.

Some bars and restaurants also host social painting evenings. Easels and canvases may be brought into a venue, where participants can paint as they relax with a drink. Food and beverage specials may be part of the package price, or guests may buy items a la carte. Painting events can be organized for private parties, and such parties may take place at private residences or at restaurants or bars.

Painting parties have begun to replace



more traditional party themes. Some find such parties an entertaining alternative to traditional bachelor or bachelorette parties, while others host birthday parties or wedding and baby showers with painting themes. Painting parties also can be a fun way to get friends and family together for a girls' or guys' night out. In addition to a fun night out, participants get to take home their own work of art, which can be gifted or displayed for years to come.

To find a painting party by you, simply inquire about companies in our area with a quick google or facebook search. Prospective Picassos also can inquire with local restaurant or bars if they will be hosting upcoming painting events or even encourage such establishments to do so if no they do not have any events on their schedules.

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Music lessons can be a gift that lasts a lifetime

Time and again research has proven the benefits of music education. Children who study music typically score better on standardized testing and exhibit improved language and reasoning skills, and music education helps students with advanced mathematics lessons by improving their spatial and temporal reasoning. Involvement in music and the arts can improve a student's SAT scores and make the student well-rounded.

Despite these benefits, music and art education is slowly disappearing from the classroom. At many schools across the nation, stages are dark and band and chorus rooms are empty. Budget cuts have been unkind to music education programs. To keep up with the demand for technology in the classroom, certain school programs have to be scaled back, and art and music are generally the first to go. This leaves it up to family to involve kids in music education.

Private lessons have long been a great way for kids to learn music, and many such music coaches are former music teachers. With private lessons, kids get to benefit from working with certified instructors, and parents are happy to make music a part of their youngsters' lives. The following are a handful of ways parents can find private lessons for their kids.

- **Word of mouth:** Begin by asking neighbors or friends in the community if they know of any reli-



able music teachers. Someone is bound to know a person or have a connection to a music teacher. Speak with members of a community music ensemble, such as a church choir, or even amateur or professional musicians you see playing at a restaurant or bar. There's a good chance you can get a referral. You may also have a friend or neighbor who is a talented musician and will agree to offer lessons on the side.

- **Community music programs:** While schools may not have music classes, community centers offer programs for both adults and children. A community arts center may offer instrument training and/or vocal lessons, so look into such organizations in your community. A community YMCA or a similar organization also may have after-school music programs.

- **Nearby colleges:** Music students at local colleges may want to make extra money by offering music lessons. They may be able either to meet at your home or use the music room on campus to conduct lessons.

- **Newspaper classifieds:** Tutors frequently advertise their services in the newspaper. Look in the classified section to see if anyone is offering music lessons. Many newspapers now offer their classifieds both online and in print, so utilize both options to ensure your search is as thorough as possible.

Music education is important, but those seeking instruction may have to look outside of school. Private instructors are available to help foster a love of the arts and mold creative, well-rounded children.

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Make it delicious this holiday season:

Gifts no food fanatic should go without

Food plays a big role come the holiday season, when friends and family tend to gather around the dinner table to share good meals and catch up on the year's happenings. But while food plays an integral role at holiday gatherings, food also makes a great gift for that friend or family member on your holiday list who loves to savor a good meal no matter the time of year.

Thanks in part to celebrity chefs and television shows that teach viewers how to make gourmet meals at home, it's easier than ever before for food lovers to expand their culinary horizons. Food gifts can be fun and may even inspire a love of unique cuisine in holiday shoppers.

• **Cooking kit:** Ingredients and other essential elements of good meals were once taken for granted. But more and more foodies are now creating their own foods from scratch. Bacon fans may fall in love with a kit that helps them cure and smoke their own bacon, while those who love

fresh, homemade bread may appreciate a bread-making kit that includes flour, a pan, some recipes, and other items necessary to make the perfect homemade loaf of bread. Cooking kit options are vast, so find a food your loved one can't go without and purchase the appropriate kit.


• **Gardening tools:** While the holiday season might not seem like the ideal time to buy your favorite foodie some gardening tools, such items make the perfect gift for your loved one who wants to grow his or her own fruits and vegetables. Locally grown produce has become increasingly popular among foodies focused on eco-conscious cooking practices, and it does not get much more local.

• **Cutlery set:** Though it's easy to overlook, cutlery goes a long way toward making home cooks' jobs easier. The right cutlery set, which may include one or two chef's knives, a vegetable knife, a santoku knife, a bread knife, and other knives home cooks will appreciate, can make prepar-

ing a meal easier and more efficient than cooking without a set. High-end cutlery sets can cost several hundred dollars, but shoppers on more limited budgets can still find quality cutlery sets for less money.


• **Food getaway:** Many foodies love to travel so they can experience cuisines popular overseas or in different regions of the country. Men and women whose spouses love food can plan a food-themed getaway weekend to a locale that specializes in a type of food their significant others enjoy or have always wanted to try. For example, men and women who love lobster may enjoy a trip to Maine's annual Lobster Festival, while those who can't get enough barbecue may appreciate a trip to one of the country's more notable barbecue spots, such as Memphis, Kansas City, North Carolina or Texas.

Food-themed gifts make the perfect holiday present, and shoppers have an endless array of options to satisfy their favorite foodies appetites.

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Calzone can be a fun alternative to pizza

Calzones provide a fun and tasty alternative to pizza. Cooks who want to think outside the pizza box can consider the following recipe for Whole-Wheat Spinach Ricotta Calzones.

Whole-Wheat Spinach Ricotta Calzones

Serves 7

For the dough:

- 1 1/2 cups warm water (105 F to 110 F)
- 1 3/4-ounce envelope quick-acting dry yeast
- 2 cups unbleached white whole-wheat flour, plus additional for dusting
- 2 cups unbleached bread flour
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Italian herb seasoning
- Olive oil spray

For the filling:

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 18-ounce package crimini (baby bella) mushrooms, finely chopped
- 4 cups lightly packed baby spinach, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/2 cup soft goat cheese
- 1 cup whole milk ricotta cheese
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup basil leaves, chopped small

- 1/4 cup drained sun-dried tomatoes in oil, chopped
- 1 tablespoon flaxseed meal
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

For serving:

- 1 1/3 cups marinara sauce

To make the dough

Pour the water into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, sprinkle in the yeast, and let it sit for 5 minutes. Add the flours, 3 tablespoons of oil, and salt and seasoning; mix for 10 minutes on medium-low speed until the dough is elastic in consistency. Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap and place it in a warm area until the dough doubles in size, about 90 minutes. If you don't have a warm area in your kitchen, heat the oven to 200 F. Turn off the oven and wait 5 minutes before placing the dough in the oven to proof.

Once the dough has risen, punch down. Coat a large sheet pan (or 2 medium sheets) with olive oil spray, shape the dough into 7 equal balls, cover, and let rest for 15 minutes.

To make the filling

Heat a large frying pan over medium heat and add oil. When the oil begins to shimmer, add mushrooms and saute for 3 minutes; add spinach and garlic and cook until water



releases and evaporates. Remove pan from heat and stir in the goat cheese. Add ricotta, Parmesan cheese, basil, tomatoes, flaxseed meal, salt, and pepper and stir. Transfer to a container and chill.

To assemble a calzone

Preheat oven to 500 F. Dust the counter, rolling pin, and a dough ball with flour. Flatten the dough

into a 5-inch circle, rotating after every few rolls. Place 1/3 cup of filling on the front half of the dough, leaving 1/2 inch around the border. Fold the dough over until the edges meet, forming a half-moon. Fold over 1/2 inch. Press the edges with your fingers to seal and score lightly with a fork. Gently, but quickly, transfer the calzone back to the sheet pan. Repeat this process with the remaining dough and filling. Brush the calzones with 1 tablespoon of oil and using the kitchen shears, cut four 1/2-inch slits into the tops of each. Bake on the middle rack until lightly golden on top and bottom, 15 to 18 minutes.

Complement with warm marinara sauce when serving.



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Make it meaningful this holiday season:

Historical scrapbooks make honorable gifts

There are so many different and creative ways for families to showcase their heritage and honor a grandparent or other family members. Scrapbooks are one such way to share the life of a special person and indirectly tell the tale of your family history.

Very often personal history projects are a part of elementary school curricula, so you may already have the makings of a family tree or a family diary in your home. All it takes is a little more research and some planning to design a scrapbook that can be gifted or kept for generations to enjoy.

Begin by making an outline of what you would like to cover in the scrapbook. Perhaps there is a specific event in a grandparent's life that is worth highlighting, like a military tour of duty or a brief stint in show business. Maybe you would like to present different snapshots in time during his or her life. Either way, planning out the content of the scrapbook will make it easier to gather the necessary elements.

Once you've settled on a theme, begin your research by interviewing the eventual recipient (he or she doesn't have to know the reason behind the inquiry).

During the interview, take note of key dates and try to establish the mood of the era with supporting materials. For example, you may be able to find samples of advertisements from a correlating period in history or newspaper clippings that can be used to fluff up the content of the book.

In the meantime, gather photos that can be used in the scrapbook, which may take some hunting. Prints can be scanned and copied via a desktop scanner at home, or loaded onto a CD or thumb drive and brought to a pharmacy photo kiosk. Some specialty shops can even scan slides or convert stills from film into images. Make sure to make copies of all original prints and be careful not to lose or damage the originals.

Scrapbooks can be made manually with materials purchased anywhere from craft and hobby stores to stationery shops. There are a variety of paper-cutting tools, adhesives, stickers, labels, and stencils that can be used to enhance the look of the scrapbook. There also are computer software programs or online tools through photo-sharing sites that enable you to upload images and text and design photo books entirely online. Then the finished



Scrapbook memorabilia may include old photos or mementos from military days.



product can be printed out in a variety of finishes. This method may actually be preferable for those who plan to save the scrapbook or anticipate it being such a big hit that others will want their own copies.

Create a digital file of all of your information and copies of images. This way if you ever want to add to the scrapbook or reproduce information in the future you will have all of the information at your fingertips. The scrapbook also will serve as a good source material down the line should future generations want to learn about their ancestors.

Scrapbooking is more than just detailing baby's first birthday or a vacation. This popular pastime can help document the life of a special family member or a families historical heritage.

Three great reasons to give homemade gifts

Nearly every holiday shopper has at least one person on their list who seemingly has everything.

While gift cards are a go-to fallback option when shopping for the person who has it all, many gift givers feel such cards are a tad too impersonal. But in lieu of traditional store-bought gifts, shoppers stuck on what to buy should consider the many great reasons to give homemade gifts.

1. Homemade gifts show your loved one how much they mean to you. Gift cards are practical, but they rarely elicit the warm feelings holiday shoppers want their gifts to produce. A homemade gift shows your loved one that you put time and effort into making their holiday special, and that's something they will appreciate when they use or see the gift.



2. Homemade gifts won't break the bank. Holiday shoppers working on tight budgets likely won't have to break the bank to create a homemade gift. The Internet is a great resource for inexpensive homemade gift ideas.

3. You can control quality with homemade gifts. Store-bought items are not always of the highest quality, and no shopper wants to give a gift that falls apart within a few days. By creating the gift yourself, you can ensure it's made with the highest quality materials so it will withstand the test of time.

DIY ornaments add a personal touch

Holiday decorating is a big part of the holiday season. Bins are taken out of the attic or garage, and decorations are once again given their opportunity to shine for several weeks before being packed away again.

Among the many decorations families use to deck the halls are ornaments that were made by hand. This year creating homemade ornaments can be a crafty project that helps families make new holiday memories.

Christmas tree ornaments come in all shapes and sizes and often tell the stories of holiday traditions. There are several different ways to create personalized, do-it-yourself ornaments and leave the cheap, easily broken ornaments from the dollar stores behind.

Photo ornaments

Fun photo ornaments showcase how a family has changed and grown over the years. Experiment with different ways to create these ornaments. You can glue a photo to a ceramic ornament and cover it with decoupage glaze to set it permanently. Try purchasing clear, glass ornaments, then remove the top of the ornament, which is usually spring-loaded, before slipping a photo inside and replacing the top. You also can laminate a photo, punch a



hole in the top and affix a ribbon.

Ceramic ornaments

The popularity of paint-it-yourself pottery has led to an increase in ceramic and crafts shops across the country. During the holiday season such shops offer many holiday items that can be painted. Often the store will then fire the pieces after

they are painted so that they are shiny and hardened for display.

Those who want to do their painting at home can visit their local craft or hobby shop, where typically there are unfinished ceramic ornaments that can be painted with acrylic paints found right in the next aisle. A finishing coat of clear glaze will help protect the ornaments from year to year.

Wood crafts

Many of today's craft centers have expanded to include sections devoted to unfinished wood items. Everything from letters to animal cutouts to boxes and rocking horses can be purchased and finished. Turn keepsake boxes into painted and ribbon-adorned gift boxes. Stain a treasure chest that can be used to store reindeer snacks for Santa's crew. Turn small decorative pieces into ornaments for the tree. Paint and affix wood initials onto stocking holders to identify to whom each stocking belongs. Crafty individuals also can turn plain wood plaques into signs with clever sayings, such as "Park your sleigh here."

Scavenge around the house

Young children can use any medium for making ornaments. Garlands made of macaroni or popcorn are traditional. Fabric scraps can be sewn and stuffed with potpourri for homemade scent satchels. Hand-drawn pictures can be made and laminated and hung on the tree.

The only obstacle with regard to DIY ornaments is a limited imagination. Homemade items can add whimsy and a personal touch to the holiday season.

How to pick and preserve your Christmas tree

As families search for the perfect Christmas tree, two Cornell University experts who work closely with New York Christmas tree producers offer a few tricks for picking and preserving the perfect tree.

Elizabeth Lamb has a Ph.D. in plant breeding and is a senior extension associate with the Cornell Cooperative Extension's New York State Integrated Pest Management program.

Lamb says: "The fresher the tree the

better, which is a good reason to buy local. The branches should be springy and smell good. A few loose needles aren't a problem but you shouldn't get handfuls when you brush the branches.

"Last year's winter was hard on some trees, just like it was hard on us, but growers have been working all summer to produce beautiful Christmas trees for our homes. Have a wonderful time picking out a tree or cutting your own."

Brian Eshenaur is a plant pathologist,

specializing in plant diagnostics and is a senior extension associate with the New York State Integrated Pest Management program.

Eshenaur says: "The best way to preserve the tree's freshness is to keep the water flowing from the cut bottom of the cut trunk to the needles. When you bring it home recut the trunk if you can, especially if you think the tree has spent some time on the tree lot and the cut stump looks dry and dirty. That way you're sure to have open 'pipework' to keep the water flowing which will keep the needles fresh."

Don't be afraid to handle and bend the branches and shoots. Green needles should not come off in your hands. Also, the shoots should be flexible. Avoid a tree if the needles are shed or if the shoots crack or snap with handling.

Look for a tree with a good solid green (or blue green for some species) color. Needle yellowing or a slight brown speckled color could indicate there was a pest problem and could lead to early needle drop.

Have fun looking over all the types of trees. New York growers are producing a wider variety of trees compared with past

years. One can find New York grown firs such as Fraser, Balsam, Douglas and the bluish tinted Concolor fir. Spruces and old-fashioned pines can also be found. Each variety tree offers its own shape, color, fragrance, and branch stiffness for holding needles.

Christmas trees should smell good. If there isn't much fragrance when you flex the needles, it may mean that the tree was cut too long ago.

If possible, make a fresh cut on the bottom so the tree's vascular tissue (pipe work) is not plugged and so the tree can easily take up water. Then, if you're not bringing it into the house right away, get the tree in a bucket of water outside.

Once you move your tree gets inside the house, don't locate it next to a radiator, furnace vent or other heat source. And always remember to keep water in the tree stand topped off, so it never goes below the bottom of the trunk.

County Cooperative Extension offices often have lists of local Christmas tree growers. You can also check the Christmas Tree Farmers Association of New York website at <http://www.christmastreesny.org/SearchFarm.php>.

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Thursday at 7:00pm
Friday at 7:00pm
Saturday at 2:00 & 7:00pm
Sunday at 2:00pm
Snowday - Monday 12/21

Girl Scout Workshops available for each performance. Call for more info.

Admission: \$20 Adults; \$15 Sen/Std
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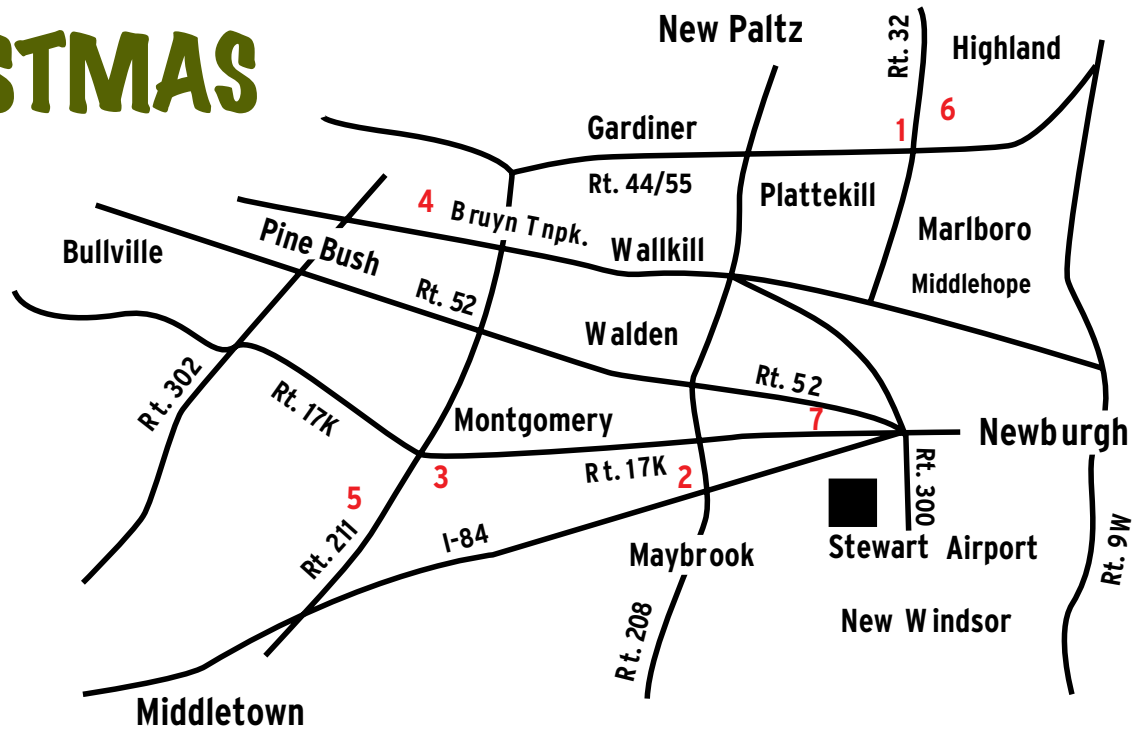
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1

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2

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HOEFFNER FARMS
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3

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CHRISTMAS TREE & WREATH
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4

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Homemade WREATHS
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6

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7

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5

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