



The 2020 holiday season figures to be vastly different than seasons past. COVID-19 has transformed daily life in many ways. We've become accustomed to wearing masks, limiting the people in public venues and keeping distance from friends and loved ones. Many events have been reimagined as virtual celebrations. For those with large families or people more susceptible to illness, sharing the holidays over video conferencing apps may be the safest way to go in 2020.

Pick a bright, festive spot

Set up your tablet, smartphone or computer in a bright area with a festive backdrop. You'll want others in the virtual hangout to see you clearly. A Christmas tree or a decorated fireplace in the background works well.

Choose the right app

Certain programs work better than others depending on your needs. For example, if everyone has the same operating system platform (iOS or Android), you may be able to use an app inherent to that system, which won't require a separate download or login.

Apps also may be chosen depending on how many people are invited, as some set limits. Do your homework and conduct a test run prior to the holidays.

Keep props nearby

If the goal is to open gifts virtually, be sure to have everyone gathered and gifts nearby so no one is scrambling in and out of view.

Position the camera at eye level

Try to set up the camera so you're not looking up or down. Straight ahead is the most flattering angle.

Use mute when not speaking

Muting yourself (and encouraging others to do the same) when you are not speaking will limit the amount of background noise. As the host, serve as the moderator and encourage everyone to speak one at a time. Choose a visual cue to signal when someone has the floor to speak, such as raising a hand or even showing a festive picture.

Tune into virtual worship

Some places of worship have reopened to some capacity, others may

still be offering hybrid services. If your place of worship offers services via YouTube or another video platform, gather around and watch together and participate just as if you were there.. Better yet, share the link with family and friends so they can tune in as well.

Share dinner 'together'

Set up your camera source so it captures the holiday table. All parties gathering virtually can then sit down to the holiday meal as one and enjoy one of the season's more endearing traditions.

Virtual celebrations may continue through the holiday season and even through 2021, keeping connected is good for all of us.

Certain birds can be found all winter long across regions of North America. The Great American Bird Count is a program that is run by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. Its purpose is to seek the help of volunteer birdwatchers across North America to observe and count all the birds seen in a 15-minute interval during a four-day data collection period. This program helps identify birds that are most commonly seen in cold temperatures and study the composition and distribution of the winter bird populations across North America. Birds seen during this time may change from year to year, though certain species are more likely to be around in the winter months.

• **Northern cardinals:** One of the more iconic winter birds, the bright red cardinals are around much of the year but perhaps most noticeable against the snowy, stark landscape of a winter's day. Cardinals use their bright, powerful bills to crack open seeds and cut through sugary fruits to help them survive the winter.

• **Tree sparrows:** Tree sparrows are large-bodied and long-tailed sparrows with gray and reddish-brown streaking along the edges of their feathers. They also wear a bright chestnut



colored cap. Despite their name, tree sparrows spend much of their time on the ground feeding. The bird count has unveiled a greater number of tree swallows in recent years. These birds are insectivorous, so milder winters may be contributing to their increased

presence.

• **Tufted titmice:** Tufted titmice resemble cardinals in body and head shape, albeit on a smaller scale, but they are pale gray in coloring. These are bold birds who defend territory with scolding calls.

• **Blue jays:** These common, vibrant birds are well known to many people. They are large-crested songbirds with broad, round tails. They have white or light gray feathering on the underside of their bodies with various shades of blue, black and white on the top. A favorite food is acorns, and these birds are often found on forest edges. Their calls are loud and carry long distances.

• **Mourning doves:** Many people hear mourning doves before they actually see them, as their soft cooing often comes from roof rafters and tree branches. These birds have plump bodies and long, tapered necks, with a head that looks particularly small in comparison. They tend to be brown to buff color. When the birds take off for flight, their wings make sharp whistling or whinnying sounds.

• **American goldfinches:** These birds are sometimes called the "wild canary" of the Americas. They have distinctive yellow plumage that fades in winter to a palette of buff, brown and gray. They're small seed-eating birds that often travel in flocks.

Birds may need a little help surviving in the winter. Keep fresh, unfrozen water around and supplement food scavenged with peanut butter, suet and nuts. Brush piles, roost boxes or birdhouses can provide needed shelter.

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**Special Guest appearance
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A 2020 holiday party

As popular as holiday office parties may be, few businesses are likely to gather in person this holiday season as the world continues to confront the challenges posed by COVID-19. Social distancing guidelines may put holiday parties on indefinite hold, but there are still ways for employees to gather this holiday season.

Virtual meeting apps like Zoom have helped many businesses stay connected during the pandemic, and there's no reason why the same platform cannot be utilized when hosting virtual office parties this holiday season. While it might not be the same as planning in person holiday office parties, planning

a virtual office get-together can still capture the spirit of the holiday season.

- **Encourage festive backgrounds.** Backgrounds have taken on special meaning as people limit their interactions to video calls. Virtual holiday party organizers can encourage employees to decorate their backgrounds in traditional holiday colors to give the virtual party an authentic holiday feel.

- **Send special care packages to employees.** Various companies have helped make virtual happy hours more unique by offering virtual happy hour kits, and such kits can be created and shipped to employees with a holiday theme in mind. Such kits may include snacks, the ingredients necessary to whip up special beverages like eggnog and even some party favors. Company presidents can then propose a toast during the party and express their appreciation to all the hard work employees have put in during what's proven to be a very challenging year.

- **Take the day off.** Holiday office parties often take place after office hours. Since that might not be doable when everyone is working from home, host the virtual holiday party on a



company-wide off day. Schedule the party for midday and then encourage everyone to hang around on the video call and chat for as long as they'd like. Such calls can be a great time for everyone to catch up and unwind without having to worry about going back to work once the call ends.

- **Cater the party.** Dinner is often served at traditional holiday office parties, and while it may require some logistical maneuvering, employers can still provide employees with meals. If

employees all live in the same general vicinity, arrange for individually prepared meals to be delivered to their homes. If employees are more spread out, employers can offer to reimburse them for meals they eat during the virtual get-together.

Office holiday parties will likely go virtual this year. While that might not be how employees prefer to celebrate, there are many ways to make such gatherings memorable and festive.

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Village of Walden Recreation & Parks Department
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Christmas in the Square

Featuring Santa's Arrival & Tree Lighting

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

Beginning at 6:30 pm, Municipal Square, Village of Walden

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ORDER OF EVENTS

6:30 Foxhill Community Christmas Caroling

6:50 1st viewing of the Live Nativity Freedom Road Bible Church

7:10 New York School of Music Christmas Carols

7:30 SANTA'S ARRIVAL & TREE LIGHTING!

After the event all are welcome to Join us at St. Andrew's Hall for FREE pictures with Santa and refreshments provided by the Walden Women's Club and the Walden Community Council

Please line up on a cone outside the Church. Please remain 6 ft. apart. You will be directed into the church one family at a time.

Unique ways to support small businesses

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the number of active business owners in the United States plummeted by 22 percent in the early stages of the pandemic. Though many businesses managed to hang on as the pandemic continued through spring, summer and fall, such businesses need their communities to continue to help them stay afloat.

Consumers have not been immune to the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment figures skyrocketed across the globe, and in April retail

sales dropped by 14.3 percent from the previous month according to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and Deloitte Insights. But consumer spending gradually increased in various industries over the summer of 2020. As consumers loosen their purse strings and begin spending more, they can embrace some unique ways to help small businesses in their community.



be unaware that they can support small business when shopping via Amazon. Data from the Association of American Publishers indicates that print revenues have grown by more than 1 percent in 2020 as many people in quarantine are choosing to spend that time with a good book. When shopping for books via a site like Amazon, purchase books from independent sellers, who are often small book stores in local communities across the country.

Support struggling industries

Consumers may not typically give much thought to whether an industry is struggling before spending their money, but doing so can help small businesses that have had an especially difficult time during the pandemic. Data from the USCB and Deloitte Services indicates that retail sales in certain industries continued to lag even as other industries recovered over the summer months. Sales in the clothing and accessory and food services and drinking places industries were still down nearly 20 percent in July 2020. Supporting locally owned businesses in these industries can infuse some much-needed cash into their operations.

Purchase gift cards

Pandemic-related restrictions have been lifted in many places, but that doesn't necessarily mean consumers are confident enough to visit their favorite stores and restaurants in person. Gift cards can be a great way to support local businesses even if you're still hesitant to patronize them in person.

Small businesses continue to face an uphill battle as they confront the economic fallout of the pandemic. Consumers can show their support for locally owned businesses in their communities in various ways.

Think twice before you click

Amazon has become such a go-to consumer resource that many shoppers forget they can comparison shop right on Amazon.com. And some consumers may

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BAKE UP SOME FUN & EASY GINGERBREAD CUPCAKES



One of the tastiest and most enjoyable activities you can engage in with family and friends is to team up and create sweet eats in the kitchen. Find more ways to celebrate with sweet eats at milkmeansmore.org.

Gingerbread cupcakes with whipped vanilla buttercream

Recipe courtesy of Megan Gundy of "What Megan's Making" on behalf of Milk Means More

Prep: 10 mins. Cook: 25 mins. Servings: 20

Cupcakes:

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tablespoons ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups unsalted butter, at room temp
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons molasses
- 4 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Whipped Vanilla Buttercream:

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 2-4 tbs. heavy whipping cream
- 1 pinch salt, cinnamon, for topping

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line muffin pan with cupcake liners. Set aside.

Make cupcakes in medium bowl, whisk flour, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and salt.

In large bowl cream butter and sugar until fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add molasses and beat until incorporated. Beat in eggs, one at a time, then beat in vanilla. Add flour mixture and mix on low speed until just combined.

Fill muffin cups, about 3/4 full. Bake 30 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Let cool 10 minutes then move to wire rack.

Make whipped vanilla buttercream in large bowl, beat butter on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla and, with mixer on low, slowly add in powdered sugar, cream and salt, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Once incorporated, whip frosting at least 3 minutes on medium-high or high speed. If frosting is too thick, gradually beat in additional cream. Pipe on top of cooled cupcakes and sprinkle with cinnamon.

(Family Features)





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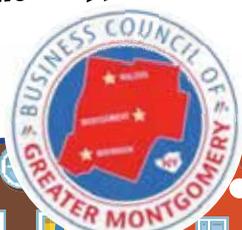
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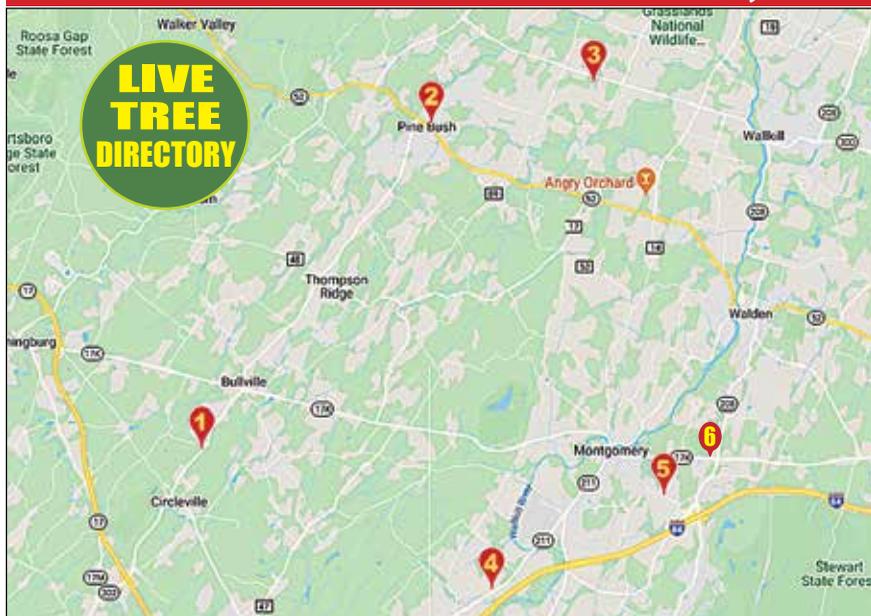
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BECK'S HOME AND GARDEN

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MONTGOMERY FIRE HOUSE

Christmas Tree & Wreath Fundraiser Starts Black Friday, 9am-9pm Nov. 27 - Dec 24 or until sold out. Mon-Fri. 5pm-9pm, Sat. 9am-9pm, Sun. 10am-6pm 136 Ward St., Montgomery, We have Douglas & Fraser fir trees!, Come out and support your local fire house!

A holiday timeline

If you keep holiday photo cards each year, put them in chronological order and hang them from a piece of garland from the mantel or drape on a staircase banister. This can be a fun way to see how your own children or other members of the family have grown.

Mini evergreen displays

Clip your favorite pieces of evergreen and push the stems into floral foam. Display in small vases or other containers and place in groupings to emulate an evergreen forest.

Plan the outside

Exterior lights and other exterior decorations share the holiday spirit with others. It can be overwhelming trying to visualize it all without a plan in place. Take a photo of the house and map out where you want lights and decorations to go. You can even make it a family event. Then with your "map" in hand, you can more readily purchase supplies and start decorating.

A natural color scheme

If you desire an overall holiday feel but aren't interested in Santa figurines or kitschy elements, decorating with color in mind can be key. It's easy to tie things together with some natural elements in your desired palette. For example, white, gold and green may look beautiful. Put boxwood clippings and white amaryllis flowers together. Pine cones, twigs and holly pieces also can add touches to mantels, doorways and table centerpieces.

Ornaments everywhere

Who says ornaments only have to go on a tree? Display antique or favorite ornaments by hanging them from beautiful ribbons throughout the home.

Scent the scene

Hang something aromatic on the tree to mingle with the pine. Fresh cinnamon sticks tied with twine or ribbon can be nestled among the boughs. Another scented idea is candles of pine or cinnamon scents.



Giving outside the box this year

- Organize a thank you gift to essential workers and order it from a local business
- Teachers love gift cards to local businesses
- Share a positive local shout out on social media
- Patronize a local business's on-line ordering, pickup or delivery
 - Organize a gift opening event on zoom
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 - Reschedule instead of canceling
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