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**Parker's Maple Barn Restaurant closing for the season on
December 21 at 4PM. Corn Crib Gift Shop open until
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Online store always available. Also closed Thanksgiving Day!**

Ed Gerhard presents his Christmas Guitar Concert

GRAMMY® Award-winner Ed Gerhard presents his 32nd Annual Christmas Guitar Concert. A Portion of Proceeds to Benefit ACT ONE; Artists' Collaborative Theatre of New England New Hampshire's own GRAMMY® Award-winning guitarist Ed Gerhard will present his popular Annual Christmas Guitar Concert in its 32nd year on Friday, December 19 and Saturday, December 20 at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 292 State Street, Portsmouth, NH.

Showtime is 7:30pm. Doors open 6pm. Tickets are \$26 in advance and \$29 at the door. AVAILABLE AT: Lovell Designs, Portsmouth; Exeter Music, Exeter; Ear Craft Music, Dover or by calling (603) 664-7200 or on the web at www.virtuerecords.com

Join us for this very special evening with one of the country's finest acoustic guitarists. Gerhard will perform soulful arrangements of well-loved carols, as well as his own concert favorites. Fans of guitar music and Christmas alike will want to be a part of this memorable show.

Gerhard celebrates a successful year for his latest CD "There and Gone," a collection of original compositions and covers including a stunning arrangement of "Imagine/Across the Universe," "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"

and a concert favorite on Weissenborn, "Killing the Blues." "...some of the richest steel-string sounds you've ever heard." - Andy Ellis, Premier Guitar Magazine His critically acclaimed holiday recordings, "Christmas" and "On A Cold Winter's Night," continue to garner raves. Boston Globe calls "Christmas," "...the best holiday recording of the year... rivetingly lovely...this is a gem."

His music is featured in the Ken Burns' documentary "Mark Twain" and "The National Parks: America's Best Idea." Gerhard was awarded a GRAMMY® Award for his inclusion on the CD "Henry Mancini; Pink Guitar" a collection of Henry Mancini compositions. Gerhard arranged and performed Moon River.

Gerhard's CD "Luna" was Chosen by Acoustic Guitar Magazine's 20th Anniversary List of 240 Essential Albums. "This soulful album of original compositions rich in melody, chordal complexity and stylistic variety proves why Gerhard is considered to have the most exquisite acoustic guitar tone on the planet." - Acoustic Guitar Magazine In the season of giving we are doing a food drive at the concert.

Bring a non-perishable food item to benefit Seacoast Family Food Pantry and receive a \$1-off coupon for any CD at the CD tables. One donation per CD please.



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Santa's Sleigh stops in Northern NH at Santa's Village

Santa will travel more than 4,000 miles from the North Pole to Jefferson, NH to officially kick-off Christmastime festivities with his elves, reindeer, rides, light shows, and more beginning Saturday, Nov. 22 at Santa's Village in Jefferson, NH. Christmastime at Santa's Village will be open weekends from Nov. 22 through Dec. 21. Santa's Village is a Christmas-themed amusement park geared toward children 13 and under.

Santa's Village is magical at Christmastime when the park glimmers and glows with thousands of colorful lights and festive holiday decorations. Highlights include a special 20-foot colored ribbon tree and a more than 60-foot decorated tree with a spectacular light display. "In honor of our 18th year of the Christ-



mastime event, Santa's Village is opening a brand new tubing hill and, of course, we'll have more Christmas lights than ever throughout the park," said Jim Miller of Santa's Village

In addition to the tubing hill, 17 rides will be operating (weather permitting) for the Christmastime celebration, including the Skyway Sleigh Monorail, the Merry Christmas Ferris Wheel, the Christmas Carousel, and the SS Peppermint Twist. The event also features a 3-D show called "A Tinkerdoodle Christmas" on the antics of L. Fastidious Tinkerdoodle as he prepares Santa for his yearly journey on Christmas Eve.

"Santa's Village is the perfect Christmastime event in northern New Hampshire, drawing

guests from all over the northeast," said Karl Stone, marketing manager at NH Grand. "With a brand new tubing hill, great rides, decorated trees, reindeer, elves and Santa himself, Santa's Village is a unique treasure in the Grand North."

Christmastime at Santa's Village welcomes families with children of all ages. While older children enjoy the rides, younger children and parents can feed the reindeer, warm up with hot chocolate and tasty treats in the heated seating areas and finish holiday shopping while taking in the choreographed lighting shows.

Admission is \$29 per person (children ages 3 and younger are always admitted free) and hours are as follows:

- Saturday, November 22, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Sunday, November 23, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Friday, November 28, and Saturday, November 29, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Sunday, November 30, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- December Saturdays through the 20th, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- December Sundays through the 21st, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For additional holiday events, shopping, and places to stay, visit New Hampshire Grand, the official visitor information source for Coos County, at www.NHGrand.com



Granite Quill Publishers

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5 entertaining ideas to impress at holiday parties

This year, take your holiday party to the next level to truly impress your guests' without breaking the bank. Consider these five entertaining secrets that expert party planners use to throw unforgettable holiday parties for less:

■ **Themes**

From an outdoor autumn harvest to a New Year's masquerade, the sky's the limit. For a fun twist on holiday celebrations, consider having a favorite movie be the theme for the party.

■ **Food**

Enhance your food service by renting everything you need for an impressive presentation. Silver food chafers, flatware, serving trays and more are available from your local ARA rental store.

■ **Entertainment**

Amplify tunes by renting a professional sound system and dance floor to watch guests move and groove. For movie-themed parties, consider renting a projector so guests can view the flick in style!

■ **Decor**

If you're short on time or simply aren't crafty, you can rent table linens, runners and

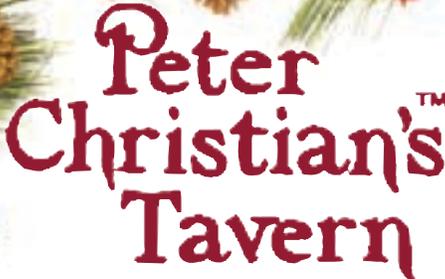


centerpieces. Visit www.RentalHQ.com to learn more about affordable holiday decor rental options.

■ **Extras**

For a truly festive celebration, rent a

bar and set up a drink station with all the barware needed to really impress guests. If you're having a big party, don't pack into your house, rent a tent and heaters if necessary and let the good times roll! (BPT)



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How to simplify holiday shopping this year

■ **Plan early - and firmly**

Even if you love it, last-minute, directionless holiday shopping can create stress. That's why for some American shoppers, the holiday shopping season starts as early as Sept. 30. Start by making a holiday shopping list as early as possible. Your list should include every person you have to shop for, a budget allotment for his or her gift, and at least two good gift ideas. Be sure to include a few generic items that can work as reciprocation for unexpected gifts you receive, or for anyone who may slip your mind until the last minute. Once you have a plan and budget in mind, stick to it.

■ **Timing is everything**

Certain items will be deeply discounted on Black Friday, such as home goods and everyday items like coffee makers and cameras. Other items - like electronics and even cars - are likely to go on sale as the end of the year approaches and sellers strive to clear out lingering 2014 inventory to make room for incoming 2015 products. Research when a particular item you want is likely to go on sale. You might even be able to find a friendly sales clerk who will alert you to an upcoming sale.

While Black Friday will always be a great



deal-finding day for stoic shoppers willing to brave the crowds, Cyber Monday is also a good time to find hassle-free deals. The Monday after the long Thanksgiving weekend traditionally yields great prices on clothing, home goods and electronics for online shoppers.

■ **Pick a payment method that pays off for you**

Consider how you'll pay for your holiday shopping. Many people like the convenience of credit cards, but then you have to keep track of all of them. Meanwhile some shoppers prefer to carry cash to avoid overspending, but lost or stolen cash is gone forever. Another option that's both convenient and trustworthy is PayPal. PayPal is there to help alleviate holiday shopping stress and is accepted in-store, online

and via the mobile app at some of the major national retailers and local merchants. Shoppers can use PayPal to help avoid long lines, receive special offers based on their location, and pay quickly online, in-store and when dining at participating locations.

■ **Be utterly shameless**

Whatever will make holiday shopping easier and more enjoyable for you, do it - shamelessly. If it's easiest to buy gift cards for everyone on your list, have at it; virtually every online and brick-and-mortar retailer now offers gift cards. PayPal offers a select few merchant's digital gift cards, too. With your smartphone, you can now maximize your time and schedule to purchase and send a gift card at a later date or instantly for a last minute gift. You can even buy them from websites that sell gift cards from a variety of merchants, and grocery stores generally have a display dedicated to gift cards. Put them in a pretty package, gift cards remain one of the most-desired holiday gifts. Be shameless about negotiating and taking advantage of shopping incentives like free shipping. While many online retailers already offer free shipping on holiday orders, you have nothing to lose by asking for it if a merchant doesn't offer it. (BPT)

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Give holiday dishes a flavorful twist with gourmet cheese

Winter holidays conjure up cravings for our favorite comfort foods - from the aroma of fresh-baked apple pie to the taste of tender roast turkey. This year, give holiday recipes a delectable new twist by incorporating the flavors of imported gourmet cheeses.

"Creatively crafted cheeses add flavor and pizzazz to traditional holiday dishes," says Chef Michael Symon, co-host of "The Chew," author of numerous best-selling cookbooks and owner of several restaurants. "Whether you love the bold taste of Danish Blue Cheese crumbles, or prefer rich and buttery Aged Havarti, gourmet cheeses give an extra kick to cold-weather favorites."

■ Blue Cheese Stuffed Turkey Breast

It's easy to transform the time-honored turkey into a feast of flavors, according to Symon.

"For a tasty twist on the holiday bird, butterfly-cut a boneless turkey breast and fill it with a mixture of Castello(R) crumbled Danish Blue Cheese, seasoned with kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper and minced shallots. Roll it up in jellyroll fashion, tie with twine and drizzle with olive oil. It's simple to prepare and will be a festive hit."

The key to this recipe's tastiness is Castello Danish Blue Cheese. Its sharp and slightly salty

flavor, referred to as the blue "bite," adds epicurean excitement to turkey, along with a dash of self-indulgence. To bring out the cheese's flavor, serve with accompaniments such as pears, olives, cranberries or rye bread.

■ Apple Pie with Havarti Crust

Apples and cheese have long been friends, so why not marry the two flavors in an amazing pie recipe? Simply add shredded Aged Havarti to the crust. Pulse traditional crust ingredients in a food processor until small crumbs form, then pulse in the shredded cheese. According to Symon, "Castello(R) Aged Havarti's rich, creamy texture and crunchy flecks of salt crystals are the perfect partner for an apple pie crust."

For the filling, Granny Smith apples complement the Aged Havarti flavor and blend beautifully with traditional ingredients like granulated and dark brown sugar, cinnamon and fresh nutmeg. Real butter and heavy cream add even more richness to the recipe.

The result, according to Symon, is a decidedly decadent apple pie with Aged Havarti's buttery flavor: "This pie is the ultimate holiday comfort food - no matter how you slice it," Symon says.

Symon's recipes for Blue Cheese Stuffed

Turkey Breast and Apple Pie with Havarti Crust are at www.castellocheese.com/en-us. (BPT)





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Solutions for getting your house ready for the holidays



The fun chaos of the holidays is right around the corner. Family gatherings to plan, delicious meals to prepare, gifts to find and purchase, and a house to decorate ... the list goes on! With entertaining season approaching at warp speed, it's time to get your home spruced up and looking like new. Your time is precious around the holiday season, so to help make the most of your days - and budget - try these easy solutions to prepare for the holidays while keeping your sanity.

■ **A fresh coat of paint is a quick and easy way to give your home a new look at an affordable price.** Consider starting with the rooms most frequently used, but don't forget the guest bedrooms and bathrooms. To make the most of your effort, use a paint that has the durability and color-lasting qualities you need. Valspar Reserve, available at Lowe's, resists stains and fading and allows you to easily wipe away marks without taking off paint, even if your guests accidentally scuff walls with their suitcases.

■ **A simple way to decorate for the holidays year after year is with an artificial tree.** Lowe's offers four trees pre-lit with color-changing LED lights, meaning you can change the look - and color - of the

tree with just a push of the pedal making your decorating process much easier. For a formal dinner event, glowing white light sets a perfect ambiance. Switch to the multi-color option to delight the kids.

■ **Use holiday decorations in unexpected ways to add festive cheer in every room of your home with minimal effort.**

Try hanging ornaments to decorate live plants, light fixtures, doorway overhangs, stairwells, mirrors and even the mantel. For this project, don't use expensive or family heirloom ornaments - just purchase coordinating ones that work with the color pattern you already have in the room.

■ **Guests in the house mean more foot traffic and chance for a mess, but you don't have to worry about those inevitable spills or stains.** STAINMASTER carpets available at Lowe's are 30 percent more resistant to stains than other brands, and with new carpets on the floor, you'll have a fresh new look in your home that won't cause you stress when everyone arrives for the holiday parties.

■ **Potted evergreen plants decorated with lights bring plenty of festive feelings into a room.** The best news is that ▶

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Great stocking stuffers for book lovers

Have some lit lovers in your life? Want to make stocking stuffers extra special for them this year? Here are a few great ideas:

■ Personalized Bookmarks

Outfit bibliophiles with some cool new reading gear. Encourage them to scrap the scrap paper with a personalized bookmark. Consider cross stitching or engraving a message onto wood or metal.

If you aren't crafty, many artisans make personalized bookmarks, and their wares are available online. Just be sure to place your order ahead of time! Consider a message that includes a favorite literary quote.

■ Postcard Books

Postcard books make perfect gifts. Check out two new titles borne out of Wilhelm Staehle's web comic, "Sihouette Masterpiece Theater." Book lovers may recognize his signature style, as he's illustrated jackets for top authors like Michael Chabon and Michael Crichton.

"Hugs and Misses," is perfect for romantics with a sense of humor, featuring lovelorn ladies, roguish gentleman, renegade Cupids and indecent proposals. "Stars and Swipes," offers a hilarious vision of classic Americana, with farcical frontiersman, prattling presidents and other all-American oddities.

■ Book Lamp

For night owls, a reading lamp can keep the party going. The ideal lamp will have focused, task lighting and a flexible neck to illuminate the page without disturbing bedfellows or roommates. Some book lights even attach directly to the book, making nocturnal reading simple.

■ A Little Humor

Serve up some laughter in book format with comedian Carol Leifer's new collection of essays "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying," which charts her three-decade journey through show business, illuminating her many triumphs and some missteps along the way -- and offering valuable lessons for women and men in any profession. Part memoir, part guide to life, it offers tips and tricks for getting ahead.

■ Some Inspiration

For readers who are also aspiring writers, be a patron of their art. Consider gifting a beautiful journal and fountain pen. Or make an I.O.U. certificate to fund a class at a local or online creative writing school.

Don't fret, when it comes to avid readers, there are plenty of ways to make the holiday season merry. (StatePoint)

when spring arrives, you can plant them outside in your backyard, or donate them to a community project that needs evergreen trees. Using live plants infuses the room with light and good, clean oxygen, and it's the subtle touches your guests will appreciate and remember. With these timely tips, you - and your home - will be ready for a holiday season of celebrations. (BPT)



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Here are just a few suggestions:

The Stokes Essential Pocket Guide to the Birds of North America by Donald and Lillian Stokes - Pocket sized, brilliantly colorful, and easy to use, this book contains everything one needs to identify and enjoy birds in backyards and beyond.

The Education of a Yankee by Judson Hale - The long time editor of Yankee Magazine tells his own family story in this classy reissue updated from the 1987 edition. Perfect for fans of the magazine, it will also entertain anyone with a taste for unusual family histories.

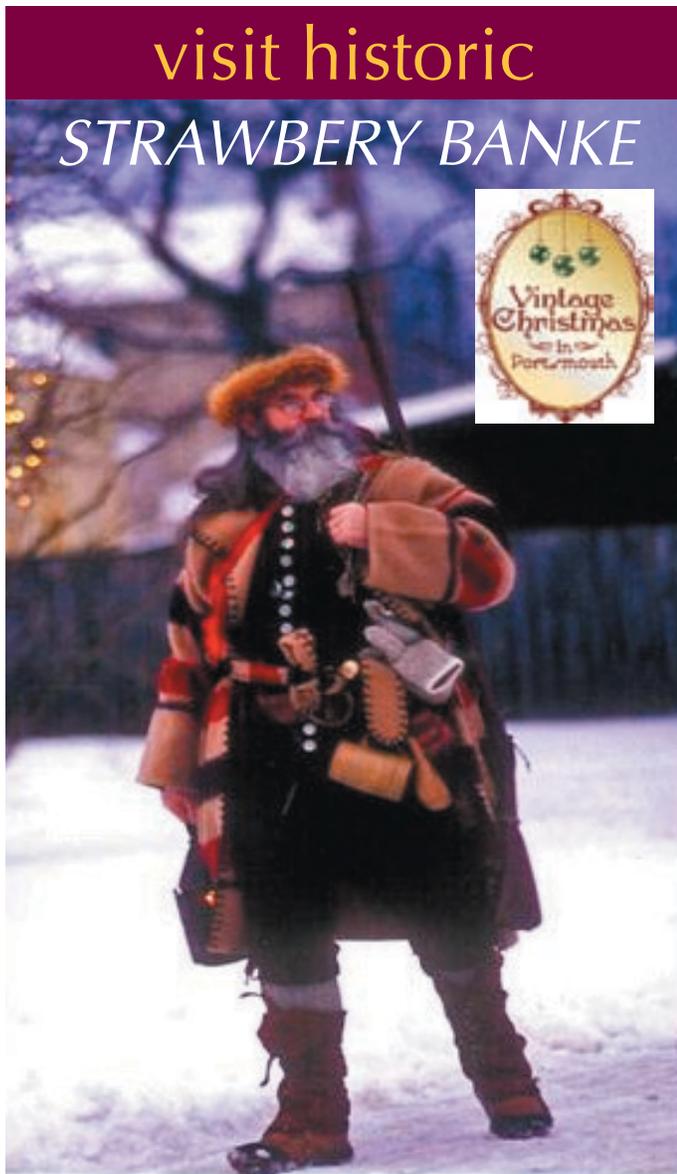
A Child's Christmas in New England: Memories of Seasons Past by Robert Sullivan and Glenn Wolff - Yes it's a spin off of Dylan Thomas's tale, but for New Englanders who grew up in the 1950s and 60s it's a reminder of a time past and a beautiful book to share with a younger generation.

Dogs in Cars by Lara Jo Regan - There's something we love about seeing a dog tasting the passing world from the window of a speeding car. Regan provides a bookfull of photos that any dog lover will enjoy.



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Gift ideas to warm people's hearts and feed their passions

When it comes to finding the perfect gifts for everyone on your list, don't be left out in the cold this holiday season. Ideas abound for warming the hearts and feeding the passions of anyone from friends and relatives to party hosts. Here are some ideas to make everyone think you've been reading their minds.

■ 1. Tacklebox gear for the outdoor enthusiast

Anyone who's passionate about fishing will love to receive a stocking stuffed with Rapala Scatter Rap Series



lures. Introduced in 2013, the one-of-a-kind Scatter Lip gives the baits their celebrated evasive, side-to-side, erratic swimming action. The lures reeled in an IGFA World Record fish right off the bat and, during the five-day Scatter Rap Challenge, caught more than 1,000 fish.

Now, Rapala has expanded the Scatter Rap family with the Scatter Rap Jointed, the Scatter Rap Crank Deep and Crank Shallow and a new smaller-sized Scatter Rap Shad (No. 5), ideal for a finesse presentation. Cast or trolled, the series comes ready to fish right out of the box with an aggressive swimming action that perfectly mimics a spooked baitfish fleeing attack - a presentation trophy fish won't ignore. Scatter Rap lures are available in five popular Rapala body profiles and 18 attractive colors.

To ensure every advantage for your angler, add a pack of Sufix 832 Advanced Superline. It's the strongest most durable small-diameter brand on the market, providing superior strength, roundness and line consistency.

■ 2. Food lover's gift basket

During holiday party season, it's a great personal touch to bring a thoughtful gift for the host.

The perfect host gift doesn't need to be expensive. Below are some tips to build a host gift that will appeal to a variety of tastes.



"Skip the predictable bottle of wine and give a gift the host can enjoy later," says Kelsey Banfield, The Naptime Chef. "My tip in building the perfect host gift is to start with an item you know your host will love and build the rest of the items around it."

"I like to center my gift baskets with a cheese assortment - my favorites to include are Havarti and Gouda. I then like to add mixed nuts, fruit or rich chocolate to pair with it. I love giving Arla Dofino cheeses because they're naturally good, family-friendly cheeses that are free of added hormones, preservatives and additives."

Another host gift idea Kelsey has is to prepare a delicious home cooked meal that is ready to be frozen or reheated, such as a family-favorite like macaroni and cheese with Havarti and Gouda. Bring it in a ►

new serving dish that the host can keep and use for future parties. For this recipe and more, visit ArlaUSA.com.

■ **3. Hot-beverage bottles for people on the go**

As temperatures drop, make sure your loved ones stay warm wherever they are. A Vacuum Insulated Travel Tumbler from Genuine Thermos Brand will keep their beverages hot for up to five hours. Whether they're out and about running errands or taking the sledding hill by storm, the easy-to-use, one-handed DrinkLock sliding lid is ideal for use on the go.



Celebrate the season with the vintage style of Genuine Thermos Brand by gifting the Heritage Plaid Compact Bottle. Your fashion forward friends and family will be pleased with this nostalgic blast from the past. Plus, their beverages will be kept hot for up to 12 hours, making it easy and convenient to transport their favorite peppermint mocha everywhere they go.

■ **4. Moisturizing gel to help anyone look their best**

Cold, unforgiving winter weather, harsh winter sun, and the starchy, sugary food we enjoy during the holidays can leave you looking less than your best. Why? The reason is advanced glycation end-products (AGEs) that cause people to age both on the inside and out. Morinda, the leader in anti-aging beverages, supplements and skin care products, is addressing this issue with its latest innovation - Tru-Age Skin AGE Therapy Gel - a great gift option for friends and family that want to look their best year-round.



The product creates a barrier to AGEs, which are caused by excess sugars combining with proteins in our body, making our skin age quicker than wanted. AGE Therapy Gel helps to reverse the external effects of damage caused by glycation and improves the skin's appearance while boosting its protective layer. This light, moisturizing gel works by disrupting AGE formation, while

soothing and repairing stressed or damaged skin.

It can be used on the face, neck and hands to not only moisturize, but to help block out the aging consequences of dry weather and the holiday diet.

With these thoughtful gift ideas, your friends and family members are sure to get swept up in the holiday spirit this year. (BPT)

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Tips for choosing and preparing a Holiday Turkey

Whether it's your first or fiftieth time, the stress of roasting the holiday bird is enough to ruffle anyone's feathers. Set yourself up for success with two simple rules: stick to the basics and start with great quality meat.

Delicious meat comes from animals raised the way nature intended – no antibiotics or animal by-product in feed. Choose turkeys from farms that have achieved Global Animal Partnership 5-Step Animal Welfare Rating so you know your holiday bird was raised with care.

For the juiciest, most flavorful meat, start with a fresh organic turkey and layer in flavor with a simple brine or herb rub. Try a brine kit, such as one from 365 Everyday Value, and then stuff chopped herbs under the skin before roasting. If you like bronzed, crispy skin, blast your turkey with heat at the beginning or end of cooking, breast side up. Roast until your meat thermometer reads 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Once done, let your turkey rest for 30 minutes before carving so juices redistribute. This locks in moisture and makes for smoother carving. More tips are available at wholefoodsmarket.com/turkey and you can reserve your pick of the flock ahead of time at

foodsmarket.com.
It's all about knowing where your turkey

came from and the best way to lock in its juices and flavor. (StatePoint)

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Food and wine pairing tips for the Holiday Season

One of the most important aspects of holiday entertaining is sometimes overlooked – proper pairing of the food and wine. Even if you have a bottle of top quality wine and an amazing chef-inspired dish, without considering how the food and drink combine, you can ruin the taste of both, say experts. One commonly mismatched wine is Cabernet Sauvignon. “I have a simple goal with food and wine pairings: don’t mess with the taste of the wine,” says Dean Busquaert, a wine educator at Sequoia Grove Winery, a pioneering Cabernet Sauvignon producer in the heart of Rutherford in Napa Valley.

Bold, full-flavored reds like Cabernet Sauvignon will overpower light dishes, but are excellent when served with rich meats like a roast, making them perfect for the holidays. Busquaert, who often shares his pairing wisdom at the Sequoia Grove tasting room, offers some invaluable pairing tips for home cooks planning to serve a Cabernet Sauvignon at their festivities.

■ The number one thing to avoid pairing with Cabernet Sauvignon is sugar, which will throw off the tannin balance of the wine and make it seem astringent and bitter. Sugar con-

tent, whether it comes from fruits like grapes or apples, or honey and chocolate, is simply not a good choice for Cabernet Sauvignon.

■ To make a Cabernet Sauvignon taste more velvety, pair it to dishes high in acidity. For example, adding a splash of lemon to a dish can smooth out a big and structured Cabernet Sauvignon.

■ Don’t be fooled by conventional wisdom. Some rules do not apply across the board.

“Most people think red wine always goes with red meat, only to discover a dish like beef teriyaki, which contains sugar, can make a beautiful Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon seem undrinkable,” says Busquaert.

■ Use salt liberally to bring out the full flavor in foods, without throwing off the flavors of your wine.

■ A great meal deserves a great wine, and the Napa Valley has come to define great Cabernet Sauvignon in America. Look for established and trusted producers, such as Sequoia Grove Winery, with a history of making quality balanced and food-friendly wines.

Visit www.sequoiagrove.com/visitus for more information.

Food pairings are an essential ingredient to



Photo Source: Megan Steffen

a successful holiday party. Don’t overlook this important element when planning your menu. (StatePoint)

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Four ways to celebrate the Holiday Season affordably

The holidays can be an expensive time for decorating, entertaining and shopping. Luckily, there are easy ways to save this holiday season, so you can spend more time celebrating and less time stressing over expenses.

■ **Create**

Typically, one of the largest expenses during the holiday season is gifts for friends and family. Instead of spending a fortune on store-bought presents, consider creating a DIY gift.

For example, you can place dry ingredients inside a canning jar with an easy-to-follow recipe for sugar cookies or holiday pancakes for a creative, inexpensive gift.

Gift cards dressed up with a festive greeting card also makes a great present. Another option is to look for an auto-renewal program that allows you to give a practical gift like diapers, pet food and more to a recipient on a weekly or monthly basis.

■ **Cook**

One of the best parts about the



Photo Source: (c) Micromonkey - Fotolia.com

holidays is baking delicious treats for the whole family to enjoy. A holiday favorite is fruit cake, so bake up something tasty like date nut bread using simple ingredients like flour, milk and eggs that can be bought from a discount retailer like Dollar General.

■ **Clean**

The holidays are often about spending time with family and friends, which means you could be doing a lot more

entertaining than usual at your home. Get your home holiday-ready by making a plan for house-cleaning.

Straighten up before cleaning, so the process is expedited. To save on cleaning supplies, consider buying store brands, rather than name brand products. Be sure to also add the smells of the season with scented candles and electric warmers.

■ **Celebrate**

Adorning your home with holiday decorations can really get your family in the spirit. Deals on dollar ornaments, festive garland, decorative trees and fun wreaths can help you to make your home festive without breaking the bank.

For more tips on holiday savings and DIY gift and decoration ideas, you can visit your local Dollar General or go online to www.dollargeneral.com.

By spending carefully, you can celebrate affordably and in style, without breaking the bank. (StatePoint)

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Think outside the pie tin: surprising way to savor pumpkin this fall

Few flavors say "fall" more clearly and tastily than pumpkin. The squash that's synonymous with autumn is also packed with vitamins, fiber and protein, making it a perfect ingredient for a variety of dishes - not just for everyone's favorite holiday pie. Canned or fresh, pumpkin works in savory and sweet dishes alike.

Americans have been feasting on pumpkins since colonial days, when Native Americans first shared the secrets of this nourishing, easy-to-grow, prolific squash. In fact, along with corn, pumpkin is one of the oldest cultivated crops in the Americas. While early Americans didn't use pumpkins to celebrate Halloween, they did use virtually every part of the squash, from seeds and flowers to the vine and flesh. Today, whether you opt for fresh pumpkin or canned, there are even more ways to enjoy this classic fall food.

Here is a fresh idea to help you think outside the pie tin this fall, so you can work pumpkin into your meals before the season is over.

Pie to pudding, pumpkin often gets relegated to dessert dishes. But it's a great way to add seasonal flavor - and a punch of nutrition - to the first meal of the day. Of course, you can always bake up a batch of pumpkin muffins, but why not try giving some other popular



some pumpkin pie spice and chopped pecans to your morning oatmeal.

If a smoothie gets you going in the morning, it's easy to make a pumpkin smoothie that will deliver flavor, fun and even fiber!

For a quick and healthy pumpkin smoothie, combine with a banana, scoop of yogurt, a spoonful of nut butter, about one-third cup of skim milk, some ice, and cinnamon and honey to taste. For a boost of high-quality protein, throw a raw pasteurized egg in there, too. Try this Pumpkin Smoothie recipe from Davidson's Safest Choice:

Ingredients:

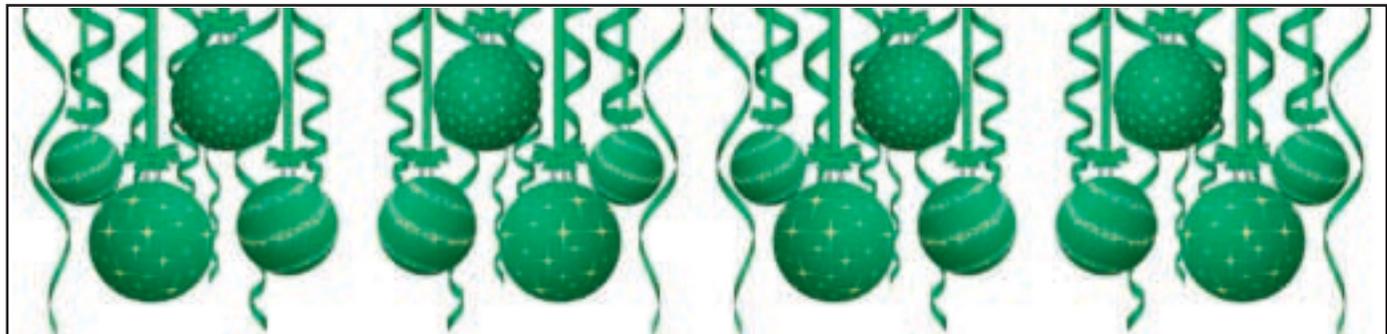
- 1 banana
- 1 Safest Choice Egg (because they're pasteurized in a warm water bath, they're safe for all no-bake and no-cook recipes)
- 1/2 cup low fat yogurt
- 1/4 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- 1/3 cup skim milk
- 1/2 cup ice
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon honey

Directions:

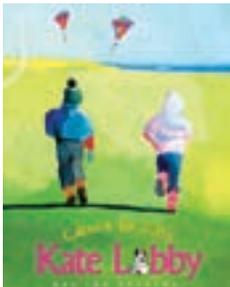
Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. (BPT)

breakfast foods the pumpkin treatment?

Protein bars, granola and scones all benefit from the addition of pumpkin. Incorporating the squash into breakfast can be as simple as adding a few tablespoons of pumpkin puree,



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A cut above the rest: How to make the perfect holiday cookie

(BPT) - Many of our fondest childhood memories consist of spending time with friends and family, baking delicious holiday cookies and eyeing the beautifully wrapped presents under the tree.

Embrace nostalgia and create the perfect holiday cookie that tastes delicious and is easy to decorate. Instead of displaying a gingerbread house, cut sugar cookies using some snowman, tree and star cookie cutters to set up a festive and tasty holiday scene. Scatter some coconut shavings or crinkled strips of paper for snow and place holiday candies behind the cookies, so they stand up all night long.

■ When making holiday cookies, remember to:

* Cream the butter and vanilla together. Doing this beforehand will encapsulate the vanilla and prevent flavor loss.

* Chill the dough in the fridge before shaping it. This will make for a softer, moister cookie that is less likely to spread when baking.

* Remove cookies from the oven a few minutes early, as they will continue to cook on the sheet.

* Let the cookies cool completely before



you begin to ice them.

Try this recipe to make three dozen perfect holiday cookies, using Nielsen-Massey vanilla and peppermint extracts to provide a completely unique flavor your entire family will enjoy.

■ Classic Holiday Sugar Cookies
Ingredients

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup superfine sugar (purchase at store or process granulated sugar for about 20 seconds in a food processor)
- 2 tablespoons heavy whipping cream ▶

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3 1/4 teaspoons Nielsen-Massey Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract

1 teaspoon Nielsen-Massey Pure Peppermint Extract

2 eggs

1/4 cup confectioners' sugar (for dusting work surface)

1/4 cup all-purpose flour (for dusting work surface)

■ Directions

Position oven rack in the center of oven and preheat to 350 F. Line two large, heavy light-colored baking sheets with parchment paper; set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk flour, baking powder and salt until blended; set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, add butter, sugar, cream, vanilla and peppermint extracts; beat with a handheld mixer on medium speed until fluffy, which should take about two minutes. Scrape the sides of the bowl as needed. Reduce speed to medium-low; add eggs one at a time and beat after each addition. Using a rubber spatula, fold in the dry ingredients one half at a time.

Divide dough into two even pieces, then press each piece into a disk shape. Wrap them tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for one hour. Dough should be cool and firm but easy to work with.

In a small bowl, whisk confectioners' sugar and flour until blended; set aside. Working with one piece of dough at a time, place on a clean, dusted surface. Roll dough to about 1/8-inch thickness. Use cookie cutters to cut shapes and transfer with a thin offset metal spatula to prepared cookie sheets. For even baking, do not overcrowd cookies. Gather remaining dough, cover with plastic and chill. Continue with second chilled dough.

For best results, bake one sheet pan at a time until done, which should take about 10 minutes; remove and place cookies on wire racks to cool. Decorate and store in an airtight container.

■ Peppermint Glaze and Peppermint Piping Icing

1 1/4 cups confectioners' sugar

1 tablespoon meringue powder

2 tablespoons water

1/2 teaspoon Nielsen-Massey Pure Peppermint Extract (may substitute with Nielsen-Massey Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract) Variety gel food colors

■ Directions

In a small bowl, whisk together sugar and meringue powder. Add water and peppermint extract, stir until smooth. Glaze cookies in desired colors and set aside to dry before piping. For the piping icing, remake the glaze recipe and add additional confectioners' sugar, one tablespoon at a time until desired consistency is reached. Divide icing into small bowls; add desired gel colors. Select pastry tips, prepare pastry bags and creatively pipe icing onto glazed cookies.



Easy ways to make an impressive cheese plate for holiday entertaining

(StatePoint) Anticipating holiday guests? By keeping a few flavorful, unique items in the pantry and refrigerator, entertaining can both look and be simple and innovative. One easy, yet impressive way to entertain your guests' taste buds is with a cheese plate.

Try starting with such flavorful cheeses as Hennings Cranberry Chipotle Cheddar and Le Maréchal Alpine Cheese to get guests' attention, and then wow them with a cheese like Hervé Mons Camembert stuffed with Porcini Mushrooms or Truffles. If any visitors have special dietary needs restricting them from eating wheat, or simply to add a pop of color, serving Simple & Crisp Blood Orange dried fruit crisps in place of crackers is a beautiful and delicious option. You can find all of these items exclusively at Whole Foods Market for the holiday season.

For added texture and flavor on your cheese plate, don't forget to pick up a variety of nuts -- such as Marcona almonds, candied pecans or fresh walnuts -- to serve alongside dried figs, fruit cake and local honey. Make things even more fun by popping some lightly salted popcorn to add to your cheese board. You can find more tips at wholefoodsmarket.com. Cheers to innovating holiday cheese plate!

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Holiday gift ideas for gardeners of all levels

The holiday season is a great time to shower the gardeners in your life with the tools they need to grow beautiful and delicious things. Whether your recipient already has a green thumb or is just thinking about starting a new hobby, there are some great gift ideas out there for every level of gardening interest and skill.

■ Herb and Vegetable Cookbook

Everyone gets stumped from time-to-time when planning meals or figuring out how best to incorporate a fresh harvest into tonight's dinner.

Consider gifting a little inspiration. Any vegetable gardener will appreciate a great cookbook that focuses on cooking with fresh herbs and vegetables. There are many options – from cookbooks that focus on vegetable side dishes to vegetarian ones where veggie main dishes take center stage.

■ Indoor Gardening

Why only grow tasty vegetables and beautiful flowers part of the year? For the year-round enthusiast, consider an indoor garden. For example, The Miracle-Gro AeroGarden is a soil-free garden that grows herbs, vegetables,



salad greens and flowers five times faster than plants grown in soil. Because it uses advanced hydroponics to create an ideal environment for healthy growth, your gift recipient won't need expertise for a successful garden to thrive.

Plants grown in an AeroGarden receive an ideal balance of water, air and liquid nutrients packed with calcium, iron, magnesium and other key minerals. It also features a control panel to tell you when to add water, eliminat-

ing some of the trickier guesswork.

Foodies and health enthusiasts will also be pleased to know that many of the seeds provided are heirloom varieties, and the company sources organic seeds when possible. More information about indoor soil-free vegetable and flower gardening can be found at www.AeroGarden.com.

■ Bird Feeder

Help your favorite gardener attract pollinators and add a touch of beauty to the garden with a unique bird feeder. The birds attracted by the feeder will do more than bring beauty to the recipient's garden – they can help cross pollinate plants and flowers, as well.

If you're crafty, consider making it yourself, or use an online marketplace to find a unique, hand-crafted or vintage treasure. And if your recipient is crafty, consider giving him or her a do-it-yourself feeder or birdhouse kit.

This holiday season, skip the generic presents and be a bit more thoughtful. For friends and family, there are plenty of ways you can support a new or lifelong, year-round gardening habit. (StatePoint)

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Holiday gift ideas for the health conscious

Americans have a lot on their minds during the holiday season, and the stress of ballooning budgets and crowded calendars can be enough to affect almost anyone's well-being. With that in mind, why not use the holidays as an opportunity to give the most important gift of all?

That gift, of course, is health. Here are a few ways to make your health-conscious friend or family member smile from ear to ear.

■ The Gift of Fitness

Whether buying for a fitness buff or a beginner, options abound. Exercise balls, kettlebells and resistance bands are inexpensive gifts that can help budding fitness gurus build their home gyms. If the DIY option isn't right for the person you have in mind, try a prepaid gym membership, trainer session or package of yoga classes. Losing weight is the most popular New Year's resolution, so spread the health.

■ Healthy Tech

Many health enthusiasts like to monitor their progress and chart their results. These days, there are a number of gadgets that can help keep track of your fitness and dietary goals. From wristbands that log daily activity to wireless heart monitors and interval timers,



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) Andres Rodriguez - Fotolia.com

technology can supercharge any regimen.

■ Culinary Inspiration

Whether you're shopping for a vegetarian, a Paleo enthusiast, or just someone looking to build a healthier kitchen, culinary gifts are always a sure bet. Healthy cookbooks and kitchenware will help them stick to their healthy habits, and you might even get a delicious meal in the bargain.

■ Charitable Donations

Donating to a health-promoting charity on another person's behalf can be a great way to support his or her health-conscious cause. Giving Tuesday is December 2 – a nationwide

event that marks the perfect time for such a gesture.

If you're looking for a unique way to give back, check out Action for Healthy Kids, an organization that works to make schools healthier places for kids to learn. In its online gift catalog, you'll find a host of charitable options, scaled to fit almost any budget. From a physical activity classroom kit to school breakfast for a child for the entire year (students who eat school breakfast score 17.5 percent higher on standardized math tests), Action for Healthy Kids provides

an easy way to make an impact with healthy gifts. "Everyone is looking for the perfect gift for kids this time of year, and it's hard to beat the gift of a healthier life," said Rob Bisceglie CEO of Action for Healthy Kids. "It's estimated that one-third of U.S. kids are overweight or obese. That's a statistic that needs to change."

For more information, visit www.actionforhealthykids.org.

Staying healthy and fit is important year-round, so don't hesitate to give your friends and family holiday gifts that will help enrich their mind, body and soul. While other gifts might be used and discarded, yours will keep on giving. (StatePoint)



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Dinnerware bursts with color for holiday entertaining

The autumn leaves bursting into vibrant reds, lively oranges, and brilliant yellows signal a new season for home entertaining. If you need a little inspiration, look no further than your favorite outdoor spot to update your table setting with the hottest colors for fall 2014.

"Contemporary versions of classic colors are trending in the interior design realm this fall," says John Griffith, visual merchandiser for dinnerware retailer Replacements, Ltd. "Rich deep Pantone colors including Sangria, Aurora Red, Cognac and Misted Yellow reflect the abundance of color you see outdoors. The new Fiesta color, Poppy, is perfect for autumn. Metallic finishes are also wildly popular, such as gold and copper."

Customers frequently ask Griffith and designer Julie Robbins for creative guidance to refresh their family heirloom pattern table settings. Pattern blending is a specialty of Robbins.

"Vintage dinnerware continues to be one of the trendiest design elements in the tabletop industry and those patterns are some of our best sellers," says Rob-



bins. "Why buy a reproduction when the real thing is readily available? Search your mother or grandmother's china cabinet to

find some of the great retro patterns. Add your own point of view when you mix and match contemporary designs ▶

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to create a modern look. It's really simple to add an accent plate, or a stand-out charger in this season's colors to update your table for fall entertaining."

Figural pieces, such as leaf shaped plates and serving pieces are very popular this fall. Many manufacturers are offering colorful accent pieces with favorites including turkey, fall leaves and pumpkin motifs.

"You can use pumpkins as a strong design element through Thanksgiving," Griffith suggests. "Pumpkins made of glass, ceramic and lightweight resin are big sellers in the store as we head into the season. Mix with the real thing to easily create a great centerpiece."

As the season changes, so does the way you're entertaining. Gatherings may be more casual as friends and family get together around the television for the big game or by the fire pit on the patio.

"Appetizer size plates and individual dip bowls are great for finger foods and condiments, says Robbins. "These smaller pieces are both popular and affordable. Plus it's fun to mix shapes, colors or motifs. Mix and match your favorite team colors for the big game or choose individual Thanksgiving themed plates for celebrations tied to turkey day."

Still looking for more fall tabletop ideals? Help is just a click away. This team is now using Facebook to share decorating tips and solutions.

"We love partnering with our customers to solve their design dilemmas," says Robbins. "We're thrilled when people reach out to us and ask questions on Replacements' Facebook page. Our team is having a lot of fun connecting with our customers and we encourage people to visit our page, ask questions, like us and share us with their friends; we get so many great design challenges this way."

Once the team receives a question, they create multiple mix and match options, photograph these table settings then post the images online for the public to see and share. (BPT)



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Spread holiday cheer with the gift of family history

Amidst the gifts, meals and parties of the holiday season, one word takes precedence – family. There's no better time to begin learning about family roots, especially as you're gathered together in celebration. And doing so is easier than ever.

While researching family history or exploring ethnic roots was once a task-heavy chore, filled with hours of library visits, interviews or public records inquiries, now you can conveniently traverse the genealogical landscape thanks to new technology tools, such as mobile apps, social media and even affordable Ancestral DNA tests that enable you to find family stories you may not have known about.

Liven up the holidays and connect with those who mean the most by sitting down and chatting about family history. Here are some pointers to get started:

■ **Start with what you know:** Using a website like Ancestry.com, or the Ancestry app (available on iOS and Android), enter the information you know into your family tree. Upload photos to preserve memories. Don't have all the facts? Don't worry. This is just the start of your quest.

■ **Take a DNA test:** DNA isn't just for TV



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) WavebreakmediaMicro - Fotolia.com

shows and professional detectives. You now can be your own detective. Get your ethnic breakdown by percentage, such as 50 percent Irish and 50 percent Native American, and find out who else may be related to you with tools such as AncestryDNA. On average, folks taking the test have 60 matches to 4th – or closer – cousins in their results.

■ **Chat with relatives at family gatherings:** Over the holidays, dive into your family history with relatives. Consider gifting them family history resources like a DNA test. Record any interviews, particularly with the elderly, and take detailed notes. Ask everyone to bring

photo albums and heirlooms. Any documents you create or collect you can attach to your online family tree for preservation.

■ **Look at the ancestry hints in your family tree:** Ancestry provides hints about possible relatives to populate your family tree. These clues could give valuable insight into your family's legacy and connect you with lost relatives.

■ **Share your findings:** Whether it's at the next family reunion, or as a belated holiday gift wrapped and framed, share your findings with your family for a better understanding of your collective heritage. Plenty of websites offer printing services, so consider the perfect stocking stuffer: a calendar, book, poster or other gift that will bring more meaning to the holidays. Encourage family to try the app and fill in their own family tree.

For more researching tips, or to get started on your own search, visit www.Ancestry.com.

Whether it's confirming a family legend, discovering an old yearbook photo of a grandfather before he left for World War II, or meeting a family you never knew existed, it's never been easier to create memories and family traditions during the holiday season. (StatePoint)

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