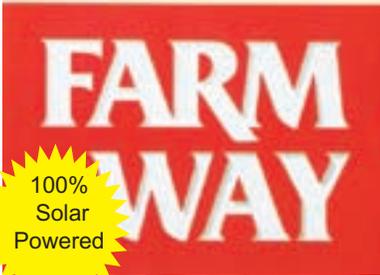




# Christmas Shopping Guide

2017

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# Tips for setting the perfect holiday table

A beautifully set table can elevate your holiday dinner from just great to simply perfect. "Table-setting is an art form anyone can learn to execute beautifully," says Mary Bernardo, director of product development at Princess House. "Simple touches like elegant holiday plates, colorful linens and an eye-catching centerpiece ensure a holiday table looks as inviting as the food smells." Bernardo and the table decor experts at Princess House offer these tips for creating a beautiful holiday dinner table:

▪ **Layers look lovely**

Tablecloths, placemats, table runners and chargers not only help protect your table from spills and scrapes, but they also create a lovely backdrop for dishes, glasses, stemware and - of course - the food. Layering these items adds depth and interest to the tabletop.

Consider starting off with a simple white or red tablecloth, and then add either placemats in seasonal patterns or a festive runner. If chargers take up too much room on the table, you can layer dinner and lunch plates to create the



same effect.

▪ **Keep dishware seasonal and simple**

"It's been said simplicity is the soul of elegance, and that's certainly true when you're setting a holiday dinner table," Bernardo says. Choose dishes with a basic white or cream background accented with a traditional holiday motif. Flatware should also be simple; if your everyday collection is in good condition, feel free to use it for your holiday celebrations. If you don't have enough pieces, supplement with basic flatware that's free of embellishment or heavy designs. Glassware should also be

simple and, whenever possible, multi-functional. For example, stemless wine glasses can be used for soft drinks and water, as well as wine.

▪ **Add seasonal accents**

Even the simplest table setting can feel festive when you add holiday-specific touches, like napkin rings in jewel green or red, a centerpiece filled with evergreen or holly and twinkling candles. For a centerpiece that's festive and practical, consider using your favorite holiday serving bowl, such as a crystal bowl, for the foundation. Then add holiday decor items, like mini Christmas packages, your favorite Christmas tree decorations or a pillar candle in a holiday hue like red, green or snow white. Top with a few sprigs of evergreen, holly or fresh flowers and you have an easy, elegant DIY centerpiece.

"The dinner table is where holiday magic occurs," Bernardo says. "With a few special touches, you can set a holiday table that's perfect for the festive and welcoming spirit of the season." (BPT)

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# Tips for planning memorable holiday travel

The holiday season can be the perfect time to travel. With school and work days off, it's a special way to reconnect with family and friends as you get to bask in that cheerful holiday spirit.

Planning a holiday-themed trip is easier than you think, if you keep a few tips in mind. Follow these five steps and you'll be on your way to making vacation memories that will last a lifetime.

■ **Accessibility**

You're guaranteed to feel like a Scrooge if you're stuck on a long flight or gridlocked roads. When planning a holiday trip, look for a location that's an easy drive or quick flight for everyone. Big cities might be easy to get to, but they are hectic during the holidays. Alternative destinations like Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, are just as convenient to get to and may not have as much travel congestion.

■ **Accommodations**

It will be your home away from home for the holidays, so be smart when



selecting your rental to set your trip up for success. Research accommodations that keep everyone close but comfort-

able, such as a condotel or beach home. Both these options offer plentiful space, including kitchens, so you can whip up ▶

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favorite family foods before relaxing to watch a classic holiday movie together before bed.

■ **Unique events**

One of the best parts of the holidays is access to unique events that don't happen any other time of year. Once you determine a destination, research special

events in the area. For example, grab a cup of cider and walk amid the soft glow of more than 5,500 hand-lit candles at the Nights of a Thousand Candles at Brookgreen Gardens in Myrtle Beach. The breathtaking beauty is enjoyed by couples and families alike.

■ **Fun experiences**

To create a memorable trip, it's important to add a little holiday magic. Bring your favorite holiday book with you to read before bed. Decorate holiday cookies at the local bakery or pick up a gingerbread house kit at a local supermarket. Sign up to meet Santa on the beach and get the perfect holiday photo to send back to family and friends. Ask around and you're sure to find more than a few festive adventures for your travel crew.

■ **Traditional cheer**

Just because you're away from home doesn't mean you can't enjoy traditional holiday fun. Research local celebrations that feature caroling, sleigh rides and tree-lighting ceremonies. If you're in Myrtle Beach, visit Ripley's Aquarium for the Festival of Trees, which includes trees decorated to perfectly represent each of the 50 U.S. states and Puerto Rico. Find your state's tree to see how well it captures the heart of your home!

With these five tips you're sure to have your best holiday yet. Years from now you'll look back and everyone will still be able to talk in detail about their favorite travel experience. (BPT)

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# Gift and stocking stuffers for those with active hobbies

It's the gift-giving season and rather than give generic presents to everyone you love, consider thoughtful items that will make their lives easier and hobbies more fulfilling.

■ **Travelers**

Travel lovers on your holiday shopping list? Frequent fliers will appreciate customized luggage tags that will make spotting bags a cinch. Add comfort to all those redeye flights with a memory foam neck pillow. Newer models even offer features like pockets for smartphones and built-in earbuds.

■ **Runners / Dogwalkers**

Not everyone is exploring the neighborhood in the dark, but runners and dogwalkers often are, especially when days are short. Consider brightening their way to



make adventures safer with a headlight. For bright light of up to 180 lumens, the Energizer Vision HD headlight is an affordable, practical stocking stuffer.

To light the path for both owner and pet on those wintry nights, the headlight features three light modes and pivoting functionality to direct light where one needs it. It's also weather resistant and drop-tested up to 1 meter to stand up to harsh conditions. Running at sunset or at sunrise, an innovative smart-dimming feature provides users with maximum run-time to brighten hands-free activities at any time of the day.

■ **Yogis**

There are many great gift options for those who love yoga. Consider a personalized yoga mat, which you can design through an

online site that lets you upload any image you want to create a meaningful gift. Select a picture of a beloved pet or a rendering of their favorite piece of artwork for a truly unique yoga mat. Or, help them take their practice to the next level with a gift certificate to a studio offering advanced classes, such as hot yoga or aerial yoga.

■ **Outdoor Adventurers**

Give the gift of light to your favorite outdoor adventurer with an Energizer Vision HD performance metal light with Digital Focus. The one-press digital focus easily transitions from a full spotlight to a full flood light to help with fireside cooking or setting up the campsite. For hiking and climbing, the aluminum alloy exterior makes it a durable choice.

Its impressive run-time, paired with powerful light output and a natural daylight color, make this flashlight a must-have gadget for those whose adventures include any kind of outdoor excursion. More information can be found at energizer.com/lighting.

This holiday season, thoughtful gift-giving can add light, comfort and personalized fun to loved ones' busy lifestyles. (StatePoint)



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# Ways to get your home ready for the holidays

Whether you're hosting or just trying to get into the holiday spirit, preparing your home doesn't have to be daunting or expensive. Check out these five tips for getting your home in tip-top holiday shape on any budget from the experts at Dollar General:

▪ **Deck the Dining Table**

Get your dining table holiday-ready by purchasing staple décor pieces that can be rotated throughout the year. Fill glass vases with seasonal items such as ornaments, holly, faux snow or pinecones. Add extra light and warmth to the table with a flameless LED pillar candle. Place tea lights in small vases filled with cranberries, holly and water for an inexpensive and festive way to decorate the table.

▪ **Decorate the Tree**

If you're looking for a fun way to get kids involved in holiday decorating, purchase plain ornaments for them to design with paint or pens. Clear ornaments can be filled with glitter or tinsel to create a unique look for your tree. Decorated ornaments also make great and thoughtful gifts. Embellish your tree by adding red or burlap ribbon from the top of each side and adding a topper. Then, consider coordinating the color scheme of your tree



with gifts, using those that were wrapped early as decor throughout your house.

▪ **Deck the Front Door**

Make a DIY wreath by gluing bows or pinning ornaments to a foam wreath. Designing your own door decor doesn't have to be expensive, and it will allow you to add your own personal touch to your home's entryway. Complete the look with festive outdoor lighting. Affordable options are available at such variety stores as Dollar General.

▪ **Design a Festive Mantle**

Decorate your fireplace mantle for the holidays without spending much time or money. Wrap a garland in mini string lights and hang leftover ornaments to continue

the theme from your tree. Create handmade bows to place at each end of the mantle using your choice of ribbon. If you don't have a mantle, you can create a fireplace-like space with a cluster of string lights or LED candles in a nook of your home. Then, remember to hang the stockings!

▪ **Create a Cleaning Game Plan**

The holidays can be fun, festive and messy. Create a day-by-day cleaning game plan, focusing on one area of your house at a time. This will save you stress and allow you more time to get organized. Be sure you're stocked up on all your holiday prep cleaning supplies, including sponges, microfiber cloths and wet mop refills.

For holiday savings, you can sign up for Dollar General digital coupons, which offers a \$1 off coupon when you sign up. Create an account by visiting [dollargeneral.com/coupons](http://dollargeneral.com/coupons) or through the DG mobile app.

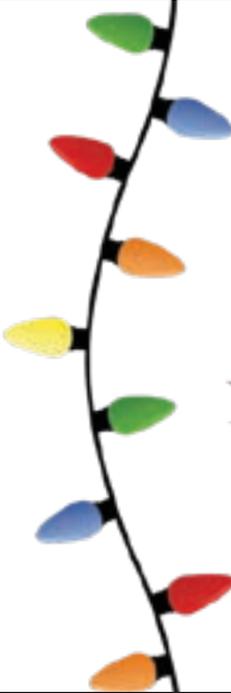
Remember, getting into the holiday spirit doesn't have to break the bank. Save time and money decorating your home, so you can spend more stress-free moments with friends and family. (StatePoint)

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# Happy holiday gift-giving

It's nearly inevitable to go through holiday shopping season without that one person on your gift list who seems impossible to buy for. Rather than spending countless hours meandering through aisle after aisle, try this array of gift options to fit just about anybody on your list.

Find more gift ideas and tips for the holidays at [eLivingToday.com](http://eLivingToday.com).

■ **A New Way of Notetaking**

Save your hand-written notes, ideas and sketches digitally with Bamboo Folio, a smartpad that allows you to write naturally with a pen on any paper. Push the button to save your handwritten notes as digital files. With the Wacom Inkspace app, you can organize, edit and share your notes on your smartphone and tablet. Don't worry if you're not near your mobile devices - you can store up to 100 pages on the smartpad and sync later. Find more information at [bamboo.wacom.com/smartpads](http://bamboo.wacom.com/smartpads).

■ **A Stylish Stocking Stuffer**

When searching for stocking stuffers



or a practical present for a relative, friend or workplace gift exchange, consider a Zebra Pen option. With a wide variety of pen types, styles and ink colors, there's a high-quality pen for nearly everyone on your list. From the Steel Series line perfect for the professionals in your life to Sarasa colored gel pens featuring rapid-drying ink technology that make planning and journaling a breeze. Find more budget-friendly gift ideas at [zebrapen.com](http://zebrapen.com).

■ **A Tasteful Gift**

With the holidays just around the corner,



give your loved ones a gift that keeps giving - the Omaha Steaks Tasteful Gift combo. This assortment of dishes has something for almost everyone, including tender Filet Mignons; juicy Top Sirloins; naturally lean, yet juicy Boneless Pork Chops; Potatoes au Gratin; and home-style Caramel Apple Tartlets. It's a ▶

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■ **The Gift of Gratitude**

This holiday season, spread the gift of gratitude and say "thank you" to the people in your life with merci Chocolates, a thoughtful collection of European chocolates. Each slim,

stylish box contains eight unique, individually wrapped flavors, making it the perfect gift for nearly everyone on your holiday list. Find more information at merci.us.

■ **Serving Up Pancakes for Good**

Make a morning meal that gives back. For every Pampered Chef Pancake Blender Bottle sold, the company will donate 11 meals to Feeding America(r). As a bonus for the home chef, the recipe printed on the side of the container makes 6-12 pancakes or crepes. Simply add the ingredients with the cap that doubles as a measuring spoon and shake for an easy holiday breakfast - no extra dishes required. Find more information at pamperedchef.com/feedingamerica. (Family Features)



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## Tips for being the ultimate holiday host

'Tis the season for holiday gatherings. Decorating and preparing to host a festive party or get-together can be stressful, but with these tips, you can add a seasonal sparkle that makes guests feel welcome and ensure that you - and your home - are ready to look and play the part.

▪ **Brighten up your home.**

Seasonal decor and holiday lights enhance both the interior and exterior of your home to create a welcoming atmosphere for family and guests alike. Further set the mood with a seasonal soundtrack that plays softly in the background throughout your gathering and strategically place holiday-scented diffusers and candles throughout your home. Give careful attention to lighting overall, adding task lighting where needed to keep every room cheery and bright.

▪ **Look your best.**

The holidays are a time when you can't stop smiling as you gather with loved ones, attend holiday parties and seasonal work events, or pose for those annual family photos. It's important you look and feel your best, which starts with your smile, along with choosing the right outfit and accessories that add a festive touch. When brushing twice daily for six weeks, a toothpaste such as Colgate Optic White Platinum High Impact White can deliver four shades visibly whiter teeth, starting in just three days, so your smile is at its whitest for those holiday moments and photos. Keeping your smile white can be convenient and affordable, so go ahead and indulge in your favorite red wine and holiday treat.

▪ **Set a shining table.**

Dress up the dining room table with elegant place settings, including fine china or crystal dishes and glassware. For a more formal gathering, consider placing name cards in stylish holders so guests know where to take their seats. Adding seasonal-colored accents throughout the table can also help set the mood, as can displaying desserts on tiered serving trays. Even if the center of the table will be filled with food, look for creative, subtle ways to infuse the elegance with a pretty centerpiece that brings the whole spread together.

▪ **Give gifts that sparkle.**

Whether gifting for family or assembling gift bags for party guests, look for shimmery wrapping paper or gift bags in vibrant, cheerful colors. Include small seasonal trinkets, such as ornaments that reflect the theme of the party or bejeweled photo frames to capture memories of the celebration for years to come. (Family Features)



## Ways to survive holiday gifting

While the holidays might be the most wonderful time of the year for children, the gifting season can quickly spiral out of control for unprepared shoppers.

These four tips can help you conquer holiday gifting like a pro:

- Get organized.** The secret to conquering the holiday season is having a plan. Take 10-15 minutes to update your calendar with all your holiday parties, family engagements, secret Santa exchanges or any other gifting commitments. Make sure to include dates, locations, times and even specifics, like themes, if they're available. If you have multiple holiday events, you might even color-coordinate your planner for an easy visual reminder. Sync your events across all smart devices for an easy glance at the touch of a button.

- Find your go-to gifts.** As an adult, deciphering what kind of gifts a child wants in this digital age can be tricky. Some classics like brick toys are still a hit with kids of all ages. Studies show that 60 percent of children love playing with brick toys and more than half of parents love that their kids do, according to Mattel Global Consumer Insights. Try product lines like Mega Construx and Mega Bloks, which combine the fun of brick toys with popular franchises to create exciting products for kids. Find more holiday gift ideas at [shop.mattel.com](http://shop.mattel.com).

- Wrap gifts early.** Now that you have your plan in place, save time by purchasing all the gifts you will need for the holidays and wrapping them at one time. Prevent the stress of a last-minute gift wrap run by pre-wrapping gifts and simply labeling them with removable sticky notes.

- Build a gifting closet.** Once you have your gifts wrapped and ready to go, consider using an old crate or storage container and turning it into a "gifting closet." Insert dividers to separate the gifts by age range and set aside your treasure trove in an easy-to-reach storage area. You can even use this closet year-round for birthdays and other gifting events. On the day of the party, simply open your gifting closet, grab a gift for the right age and head out the door.

- Another option to save time and money this holiday season is to enter for the chance to win a gifting closet with \$1,500 worth of MEGA products to help you conquer the gifting season. To enter the sweepstakes, post an original holiday photo to Instagram or Twitter with a short caption that includes why the entrant likes to give or receive construction toys as gifts. For full details, visit [rules.prizelogic.com/MegaSocialSweeps](http://rules.prizelogic.com/MegaSocialSweeps). (Family Features)

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## Thoughtful holiday gifts for babies and toddlers

When planning your holiday gifts for babies and toddlers, why not consider toys and experiences that will encourage them to meet their developmental milestones in the coming years?

"Playtime is not only fun, it's the ideal opportunity for children to pick up new information and skills, from numbers, language and vocabulary to hand-eye coordination," says Dr. Clement Chau, director of learning at VTech, a world leader in age-appropriate and developmental stage-based electronic learning products for children. With a focus on making the most of playtime, consider the following gift ideas.

- Encourage movement and motor skills with the Pop-a-Balls Push & Pop Bulldozer by VTech. Great for ages 12-36 months, this toy features colorful balls that pop up through the smoke stack, into the scoop bucket and back again. Load the balls into the bulldozer, start pushing the handle and watch the bulldozer come to life with popping balls and fun sounds. Kids can also sit and play with the bulldozer by pressing the four colorful number buttons to learn colors, numbers, construction objects and listen to music.

- You can also opt for experiential gifts. Seek out great experiences for babies and young children. From swimming lessons that help a baby get accustomed to the water and feel safe, to classes that expose children to singing and music, in many cases, it's never too early to introduce babies to these skills. Look for local classes offering gift certificates for families that parents can use when they and their baby are ready to get started.

- Help young ones learn about animals with VTech's GearZooz Roll & Roar Animal Train, which lets them mix and match the 15 included



gears, all while strengthening their fine motor skills and problem-solving techniques. Children 1-5 years old can learn about animals when they place the Smart Gear animals on the pegs and press the buttons on the train to explore more.

- Encourage story time at home by starting a young one's little library. Remember, books for babies should be easy to hold, include bright bold colors and illustrations, and introduce children to animals, shapes, letters and more.

- Foster creativity with the Zoo Jamz Stompin' Fun Drums by VTech, which let little rockers tap out beats and create their own sounds. Children will practice counting and develop coordination as they follow along with the melodies and sing-along songs. (StatePoint)

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# Festive tips to set a holiday mood at home

It's the most festive time of the year. Be sure to fill your home with the classic scents, sounds and sights of the holiday season in the following ways.

■ **1. Start a Holiday Cookie Tradition.** Bring the family together by baking cookies. Not only will it fill the home with a scrumptious aroma, it's a fun activity that can involve everyone. Let kids get creative and decorate their own batch. In the spirit of giving, make some extras to share with friends, neighbors, teachers, coworkers and more.

■ **2. Sing carols.** Carol from the comfort of home. To experience a sense of community, organize an at-home holiday sing-along. An elegant, compact digital piano such as Casio's Privia PX-770 is great for this seasonal tradition. Record your performances for pos-



terity using its two-track MIDI recorder.

■ **3. Display greetings.** For a festive feel, creatively decorate your home using your holiday cards with greetings from loved ones. String cards together and hang them in the doorway, decorate the fridge or display them on the mantle.

■ **4. Get into the spirit.** Frosty pine, sugar cookies, cinnamon and more. Fill your

home with the spirit of the holidays using essential oils and candles of classic holiday scents. Or, keep it natural and boil cinnamon sticks with orange and cloves.

■ **5. Enjoy your favorite flicks.** From classic dramas to contemporary comedies, the holiday genre is eclectic. Set up a home theater and enjoy your favorite films with some hot chocolate under a cozy blanket. To get an upgraded movie theater-like experi-

ence at home, check out the projectors from Casio's LampFree line-up, which offer reliable, brilliant images. At your next holiday party, consider projecting movies silently while playing holiday music for an extra boost of cheer. (StatePoint)



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# Yes, Olivia, there is a Santa, and he's calling you

Think there's almost a conspiracy out there to squelch your child's belief in Santa Claus? Technology can help you fight back.

For years the big guy in red has had to contend with aggressive pushback from the PC crowd who apparently wish he'd just pack up his sleigh and stay home in the North Pole. Department stores were pressured to nix their Santa stand-ins. Schools changed their calendars to say "winter holidays" instead of Christmas. And let's not even talk about the damage done to his image by Billy Bob Thornton's "Bad Santa" movies.

Santa, being Santa, could keep right on ho-hoing when lesser immortals would've sicked their elves on them.

But you? Clearly, just quoting pro-Santa experts like Professor Jacqueline Woolley, chair of the Psychology Department at the University of Texas at Austin, wasn't going to cut it. "Believing in impossible beings such as Santa Claus may exercise children's counterfactual reasoning skills," she's written. "The kind of thinking involved in imagining how nine reindeer could fly through the sky carrying a heavy sleigh may well be the same kind of thinking required for imagining a



solution to global warming or a way to cure a disease."

Which is where a website called [www.PackageFromSanta.com](http://www.PackageFromSanta.com) comes in. First started a decade ago as a pure labor of love by the husband-and-wife team of Dale and Carey Gruber operating out of their home in suburban Washington Township, Michigan, the business has grown to the point where it now includes a 21st-century app -- downloadable at the iTunes and Android App Stores -- that lets users worldwide personalize a phone call to their kids from none other than Santa himself.

As in, say, "So! Olivia, I couldn't be

prouder of you for being such a good girl! And I'll see you soon."

And completing the effect for tech-savvy kids: Both their own and Santa's name and photo appear on their smartphone's call screen (with the call shown as originating from the "North Pole Workshop").

"The reason we continue to do this is that it often seems like there's an effort to take the joy out of Christmas," explains Dale Gruber, who's also a graphic artist. "Whereas we think a child's innocent belief in Santa is something worth fostering."

You can watch a video. But know the site offers three different packages at very affordable prices -- all also include a letter from Santa and a personalized Santa video -- and feature items like Christmas cocoa, "genuine reindeer food," and a tin of Mrs. Claus' Famous Sugar Cookies.

In fact, so popular has [PackageFromSanta.com](http://PackageFromSanta.com) become that celebrity fans like Sarah Palin, Bristol Palin, and reality TV star Kim Kolciak Biermann have taken to social media to sing its praises this Christmas season. Think of it as Santa's ultimate ho-ho. (NewsUSA)

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# Great holiday gift ideas for foodies

The holiday season is the perfect opportunity to outfit foodies with all the tools they need to make cooking more efficient and delicious. Not sure where to start? Here are a few smart ideas.

▪ **Promote Precision**

A good kitchen scale will help chefs get more precise when measuring solids and liquids in baking and everyday meal prep. But a great kitchen scale will go beyond that. For example, the IQ Smart Wireless Nutrition Scale, when used with the KitchenIQ Food App, lets users count calories, carbs, fat, fiber, protein, sodium and other nutritional elements. While prepackaged food labeling lays out nutritional data, it can be a lot harder to track these specifics in homecooked meals. Whether your gift recipient is dieting or simply wants to more accurately track the nutrition of the foods he or she cooks and eats, this can be a useful kitchen tool.

▪ **Personalize Accessories**

Cooking is more fun in a kitchen that truly feels like one's own. Help personalize the space of your gift recipient. Monogrammed kitchen utensils and



baking trays make wonderful gifts, as do personalized aprons, oven mitts and kitchen linens. Remember that a personalized order may take more time to reach its destination, so order these items with time to spare. Get inspired on Pinterest and craft your own items, or seek out the handiwork of independent artisans on a site like Etsy.

▪ **Save Space**

No matter what size kitchen you're outfitting, the best items are those that are space-saving because they are multifunctional. Consider gifting an all-in-one kitchen tool, such as the Kitchen IQ 3-in-1 Prep & Measure Tool, which is at once a measuring cup, a citrus reamer and a gravy separator. Its stackable design further saves on storage space.

▪ **Sharpen Up**

When knives and scissors grow dull, simple kitchen tasks can become a big hassle, and in some cases, even dangerous. Help keep tools sharp and highly functional with a knife sharpener designed to sharpen and maintain both straight and serrated knives, as well as scissors. One versatile model that works for both left- and right-handed sharpening is the Diamond Pro 2 Stage Knife and Scissor Sharpener, which features a non-slip bottom for stability in use. This holiday season, give your favorite home chefs great tools that add form and function to their kitchens. (StatePoint)

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exciting events.

The villages will be sporting several holiday themed pop-up shops. The Contoocook Train Depot and St. Andrews Church will both have goods from talented local artisans. On Saturday Contoocook United Methodist Church will feature a cookie walk and a pantry table with homemade food & gift items. Local artisans and crafters will be selling many handcrafted articles at several locations throughout the villages.

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