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Christmas Shopping Guide



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4 Steps to Wrap Christmas Presents Like a Pro

Opening presents on Christmas morning is the highlight of the holidays for many, but getting the gifts ready to put under the tree can be a real chore.

Get those perfect presents ready for the big day with this simple step-by-step wrapping guide:

♥ ***1. Gather Your Materials***

Having everything prepared beforehand can make the wrapping process smoother and more enjoyable. Before you start wrapping, gather wrapping paper, scissors, tape, bows, ribbons and gift tags. If you want to go beyond traditional methods, use fabric instead of paper for a reusable and eco-friendly option. Also be sure to clear a nice, flat surface to work on whether that's the kitchen table or the living room floor.

♥ ***2. Measure and Cut Gift Wrap***

To ensure your gifts look professionally packaged, measure and cut the appropriate amount of wrapping paper for each gift. Place the gift box (or item itself) in the center of the wrapping paper and pull the paper up around the sides to see how much you need. Once you've measured, use scissors to cut neatly for a clean, polished look.

♥ ***3. Fold Crisp Edges and Smooth Surfaces***

Start by folding one side of the wrapping paper over the gift and secure it with tape. Then repeat with the opposite side, ensuring the paper is smooth across the surface of the package. For the edges, fold in the sides and create a triangle at each corner. Fold the triangle up against the side of the gift and secure it with tape. Repeat this process on the other side.

♥ ***4. Add Bows, Ribbons and Tags***

Once your gifts are wrapped, add the finishing touches. Bows, ribbons and tags can add a personal touch and elevate the presentation of gifts. Choose ribbon that complements the wrapping paper and tie it around the gift in a neat bow, or simply attach a premade bow to accent the package. You can also decorate the wrapping paper with stamps, drawings or stickers for a personalized touch. Finally, attach gift tags to ensure each present gets to the proper recipient.

Find more tips and tricks to simplify the holidays at eLivingtoday.com. (Family Features)

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4 Ways to Support Local Shelters During the Christmas Season

The holidays are a time of giving, and there are few better ways to spread joy than by giving back to those in need in your community.

Consider these impactful ways to support local shelters and make a difference this holiday season.

♥ ***Donate Essential Items to Shelters***

One of the most direct ways to support local shelters is donating essential items. Shelters have a constant need for toiletries, warm clothing, blankets and non-perishable food items. By providing these necessities, you help ensure individuals and families in need can stay warm, clean and fed during the cold winter months. Consider organizing a donation drive among your friends, family or coworkers. Collect items such as socks, gloves, scarves and hygiene products to deliver to your local shelter.

♥ ***Volunteer Your Time and Skills***

Shelters often rely on volunteers to help with a variety of tasks, from serving meals and organizing donations to providing administrative support and offering professional services like legal aid or counseling. Consider what skills you can offer and reach out to see how you can assist.

♥ ***Organize a Fundraising Event***

Whether it's a bake sale, charity run or virtual auction, fundraising events can help local shelters provide essential services and support to those in need. Get creative with your fundraising ideas and use social media to promote your event. Engage local businesses and community members to participate and donate.

♥ ***Spread Awareness Through Social Media***

Social media is a powerful tool for spreading awareness and encouraging others to get involved. Use your platforms to share information



about the needs of local shelters, upcoming events and ways people can help. Create posts highlighting the stories of those impacted by shelter services and provide links to donation pages or volunteer sign-ups.

Find more ideas for giving back this holiday season at eLivingtoday.com. (Family Features)

Photo courtesy of Shutterstock

Christmas Gift Ideas for Everyone on Your List

The holiday season arrives differently for everyone. For some, it means busy calendars filled with gatherings, travel and celebrations. For others, it brings opportunities to slow down, focus on wellness or simply spend more time with the people who matter most.

No matter what your journey looks like, one goal remains the same: finding gifts that feel thoughtful, without stretching the budget. That's why many shoppers are focusing on practical gifts that deliver style, comfort and value long after the wrapping paper is gone.

One category leading the holiday wish list this year is boots. As temperatures cool and schedules fill with everything from family photos to festive outings, boots offer versatility that works throughout the season. From fashion-forward tall silhouettes to everyday ankle styles, today's options combine comfort and style in ways that make them easy to wear long after the holidays are over. Seasonal favorites from brands such as Koolaburra by UGG, Timberland, Dr. Martens and Frye help wearers transition easily from everyday activities to special occasions. For the runners, walkers and fitness enthusiasts on your list, athletic footwear remains one of the season's most practical gifts. Whether someone is training for a race, building healthier habits for the new year or simply staying active during a busy season, performance footwear delivers value every time it is worn. Popular running styles from Brooks, adidas and Nike offer the comfort, support and versatility needed to keep pace with both workouts and everyday life.

Of course, not every gift needs to come wrapped in a large box. Some of the most appreciated holiday surprises come in smaller packages. Accessories such as socks, hats, bags, shoe care products and shoe charms make ideal stocking stuffers while adding personality and practicality to everyday routines. They're also an easy way to add a little extra cheer to holiday shopping lists without adding a lot to the total at checkout.



As shoppers navigate gifting season, value continues to play an important role in purchasing decisions. Rather than choosing between quality, style and affordability, consumers are increasingly looking for retailers that offer all three. By focusing on gifts that can be worn and enjoyed well beyond the holiday season, you can feel confident you're giving presents that provide lasting value.

After all, the season is about more than finding the perfect gift. It's about celebrating the moments, milestones and traditions that bring people together. The right pair of shoes, boots or accessories may be just one part of the season, but it can help someone step confidently into everything that lies ahead. To explore holiday-ready styles and gift ideas for every occasion, visit Rack Room Shoes in store or online at https://www.rackroomshoes.com/.

This season, discover gifts that help everyone on your list step into what's next. (StatePoint)

5 Tips to Get Your Home Ready for Hosting Christmas



Whether you're planning a cozy dinner with friends or a full-blown holiday gathering, preparing your home for guests doesn't have to be stressful. With a little organization and a few simple steps, you can create a space that feels warm and welcoming, allowing you to focus on what really matters: spending time together.

♥ ***Declutter and Deep Clean***

Start by refreshing high-traffic areas, including the living room, kitchen and bathrooms. Clear off counters and coffee tables, dust surfaces, vacuum carpet, mop tile or hardwood and wipe down glass or mirrors.

♥ ***Tidy Up the Kitchen***

The kitchen is the heart of many gatherings, meaning it's important to clear both refrigerator and counter space to make room for food, drinks and serving dishes.

Before guests arrive, ensure your oven, microwave, dishwasher, garbage disposal, coffee maker and other appliances are working properly. Don't forget to stock essentials like paper plates, silverware, napkins, ice and paper towels so you're not scrambling later.

♥ ***Refresh Guest Spaces***

If visitors will be staying overnight, prep sleeping areas by changing the sheets, fluffing the pillows and stocking extra blankets. Thoughtful touches like fresh towels, water bottles and a charging station can make guests feel at home.

♥ ***Create a Functional Flow***

Think about how guests will move through your home. Designate areas for food, drinks, games and mingling, arranging furniture to encourage conversation. If you're expecting a large crowd, add extra seating options.

♥ ***Add Seasonal Touches***

For seasonal warmth, swap out throw pillows, add greenery and candles or hang a wreath or other decorations.

Scattering cozy blankets and simmering a pot of cinnamon and citrus on the stove can also help create a warm, inviting atmosphere.

Visit eLivingtoday.com for more tips and guidance to get your home ready to welcome guests. (Family Features)



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Not One Crumb Left; Spiced Apple Crumble

Apple orchards, apple picking and apple desserts all scream fall. Glowing with bright yellows and reds, apples are juicy and more than ready to be used in your favorite fall recipes. If you're looking for something sweet and full of texture that can turn your taste buds upside down, look no further.

This scrumptious Spiced Apple Crumble is not only a family favorite but a holiday must-have.

It's the perfect dish to pack up and deliver to your next gathering of loved ones. Kids and adults love the deliciously sweet apple chunks filling the bottom of the pan along with the crumble topping. Top this killer sweet treat with vanilla ice cream for a sensational, melty, oozing-with-goodness dessert no one can forget.

It's one of those recipes your friends will call you about after the gathering wondering "where did you get that recipe?" The best part: It's perfect for crowds of any size. The bite-size chunks of apple and oats are appetizing for any sweet tooth.

The fall season leading up to the holidays is one of the times of year family and friends traditionally come together most. Nearly everyone loves a satisfying apple, especially when it is baked to perfection, covered with a crumble and topped with creamy, cool vanilla ice cream. Not to mention the splash of lemon added to this mixture brings out a unique tart twist.

Make your next fall festivity or holiday gathering just a little sweeter for all. Spice things up then cool things down. This dessert does it all in just one bite.

Find more recipes for the fall season and holiday fun at Culinary.net.

♥ ***SPICED APPLE CRUMBLE***

Servings: 6-8

♥ ***Filling:***

6	medium Honeycrisp apples, peeled and cubed
1	tablespoon white flour
1/2	cup white sugar
1/2	teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4	teaspoon ground cloves
2	lemons, juice only

♥ ***Topping:***

1	cup quick oats
1	cup white flour
1/2	cup light brown sugar
1/2	cup dark brown sugar
1/2	teaspoon baking powder
1	teaspoon cinnamon powder
1/2	cup unsalted butter, melted
1/8	teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 350 F.

To make filling: In medium bowl, add apples, flour, sugar, cinnamon, cloves and lemon juice. Toss to evenly coat. Spread evenly in 8-by-8-inch baking dish. To make topping: In medium bowl, add oats, flour, brown sugars, baking powder, cinnamon, melted butter and salt. Fork mixture to create crumbles. Pour crumble topping over apple mixture.

Bake 30-40 minutes, or until golden brown. Let stand 10 minutes before serving. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream. (Culinary.net)

How To Choose and Care for a Live Christmas Tree

Though artificial Christmas trees have come a long way, few things compare to the fresh scent and natural beauty of a live tree. Whether your family picks out a real tree as an annual tradition or this is your first time considering a live tree for the holidays, this guidance can help you choose the right one and care for it throughout the season.

♥ ***1. Measure Your Space***

Before you head to your local tree farm, measure the ceiling height where you plan to set up the tree, subtracting the amount of room your star or topper will account for. Similarly, measure the width to ensure the tree doesn't encroach too much on furniture or traffic flow.

♥ ***2. Choose the Right Tree***

While the options can be overwhelming once you're among the field of available trees, consider what shape would fit best in your space: Do you want a fuller or slimmer tree to fit a tighter space? Is a uniform shape without large gaps in the needles important or do you need stronger branches better equipped for handling heavier ornaments? Don't forget to also consider trunk size - and consider bringing your stand with you to ensure your preferred tree fits - as trees with short or crooked trunks may be unstable.

♥ ***3. Inspect for Freshness and Quality***

To ensure a safe, long-lasting, beautiful tree throughout the holidays, look at it from all angles and inspect the needles and branches. Needles should be green, not dry or brittle, and firmly attached to the branches, which should be flexible and not snap easily. If you run your hand through the branches and they break or needles fall off, it may be wise to look at other trees. Remember, if your tree has been cut too early, it may sit too long and dry out before Christmas arrives, so try and buy your tree as close to setup time as possible.

♥ ***4. Set Up with Care***

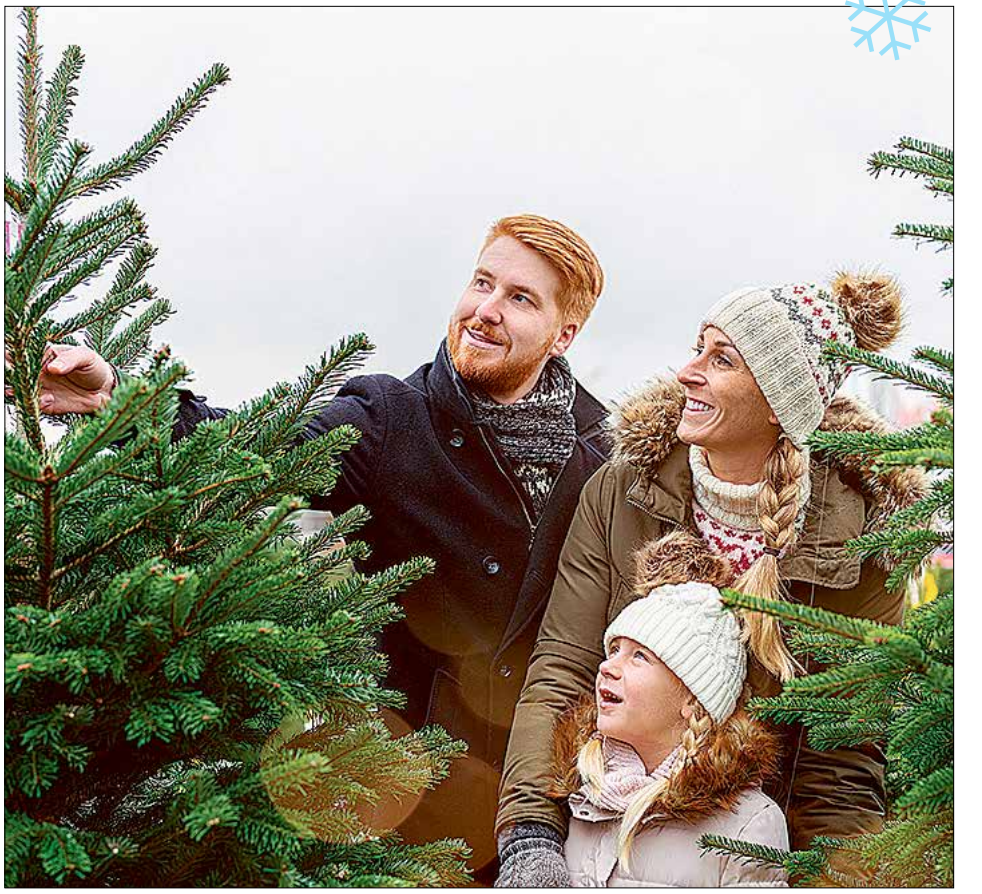
Before placing your tree in the stand, make a fresh cut about 1 inch from the base of the trunk to open the pores for water absorption. Place it away from heat sources - vents, fireplaces, direct sunlight - as they will dry it out faster. Remember to water daily (or at least check it daily), keeping the water level above the base of the trunk.

♥ ***5. Plan for Disposal***

Once your tree has dried out - branches may be brittle and lots of needles may have fallen off - it's time to remove it. Remove all decorations then check to see if your town offers tree recycling or chipping service. Many offer these services for free for a limited time after the holidays but may require you to drop the tree off or cut it into smaller pieces for pick up.

Find more seasonal advice at eLivingtoday.com.

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Turn Up The Flavor This Christmas Season

Holiday meals are a big deal. So why should the grill sit these occasions out? This year, take classic dishes and favorite recipes outdoors, adding a fresh twist and a boost of bold, smoky flavor.

Here to help you add a rich, smoky flavor to all your seasonal spreads is Bear Mountain BBQ, which makes premium, all-natural hardwood products that can help everyone create unforgettable feasts and cherished memories on any grill.

"The holidays are about more than the big meal. They're neighbors dropping by, unexpected dinner guests, and leftovers worth looking forward to. And the grill belongs in all of it, because great flavor has a way of bringing people together," says Levi Strayer of Bear Mountain BBQ.

Along with The Grill Dads, Bear Mountain BBQ is sharing two holiday recipes, both of which call for the brand's Holiday Turkey Blend Pellets – a sweet, smoky, balanced blend of maple, hickory and cherry. First up is Smoked Holiday Turkey, a restaurant-style bird delivering juicy slices, tender dark meat, and a holiday-worthy finish.

♥ *SMOKED HOLIDAY TURKEY*

Servings: 10-12
Prep Time: 30 minutes
Dry Brine: 24-48 hours
Cook Time: Approximately 2-3 hours, depending on the size of each cut

♥ ***Ingredients***

- Bear Mountain Holiday Turkey BBQ Pellets
- 1 whole turkey (12-14 pounds)
- The Grill Dads' Anytime Seasoning, approximately 5.5-7 grams per pound of turkey
- Fresh sage leaves

♥ ***Instructions***

1. Break down the turkey into two leg quarters, the breast, and the wings. Fold the wings into triangles, tucking the tips underneath.

2. Season all sides of the turkey pieces with Anytime Seasoning. Gently slide fresh sage leaves under the skin.

3. Arrange on a wire rack set over a sheet pan and refrigerate uncovered for 24-48 hours to dry-brine and help the skin dry out.

4. Preheat your smoker to 325 degrees using the pellets.

5. Place the turkey pieces on the smoker, leaving space between them for even cooking. Monitor each piece with a meat thermometer and remove the breast when it reaches the appropriate, safe internal temperature. For food safety, turkey breast should reach 165 degrees F; check the thickest part without touching bone.

6. Continue cooking the leg quarters until they reach approximately 175-185 degrees F for tender, well-rendered dark meat. Check the wings for doneness as well, as smaller pieces may finish sooner.



7. Rest the turkey pieces before carving. Arrange on a platter with fresh sage and serve alongside your favorite sides.

Pro tip: Pull the turkey off the grill (or out ▶

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of the oven) when it reaches 155 degrees F. The carryover cooking will bring it to a safe internal temp without drying the meat out.

Up next is Maple Bourbon Smoked Ham, in which sweet maple syrup, rich bourbon and a hint of warm spice come together to make the perfect holiday centerpiece at festive family feasts.

♥ ***MAPLE BOURBON SMOKED HAM***

Servings: 12-16
Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: 2-3 hours

♥ ***Ingredients***

Ham
- Bear Mountain Holiday Turkey BBQ Pellets
- 1 fully cooked bone-in half ham (7-9 pounds)

♥ ***Maple Bourbon Glaze***
- 1 cup pure maple syrup
- 1/2 cup bourbon
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Pinch of cinnamon
- Pinch of cayenne pepper

♥ ***Instructions***

1. In a saucepan, combine the maple syrup, bourbon, brown sugar and Dijon mustard. Simmer for 10-15 minutes, until reduced by about one-third. Remove from the heat and whisk in the butter, cinnamon and cayenne.

2. Score the ham's fat cap in a diamond pattern, being careful not to cut deeply into the meat.

3. Preheat your smoker to 225 degrees F using the pellets.

4. Place the ham on a roasting rack in a pan and smoke until the center reaches 120-130 degrees F, since the ham is already fully cooked.

5. During the final 30-45 minutes, brush the ham with the maple bourbon glaze every 15 minutes, allowing the glaze to set and develop a glossy finish.

6. Remove the ham from the smoker and let it rest briefly before slicing.

7. Serve with extra glaze, whole-grain mustard and your favorite holiday sides.

Bear Mountain BBQ pellets are available online and at retailers nationwide, including The Home Depot, Amazon, Lowes and more. For more holiday recipes, visit https://bearmountainbbq.com, where you can download a complete holiday cookbook for free.

Holiday traditions are great, so don't forgo the classics. Turn things up a notch with a smoky twist on mains, sides and even desserts, making every bite a flavor-packed celebration. (StatePoint)

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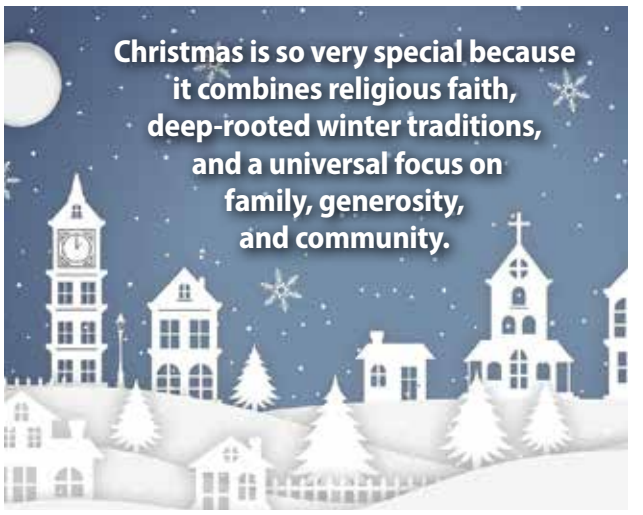
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When Your Home Becomes Your Holiday Entertaining Partner

There's a special pleasure in opening your home for the holidays to share the menu you've imagined, welcome guests to the glow of a room ready for company and enjoy the anticipation of familiar faces at the door. Every detail is an opportunity to make the loved ones you've invited feel especially welcome.

This year, make sure the house itself can lend a hand. From the kitchen to the living room to the guest bathroom, residential technology offers new ways to turn a host's imagination into a memorable experience. The best innovations don't take over the occasion. They help the person bringing everyone together make it extraordinary.

Nor does a home need an elaborate network of connected gadgets. A few well-chosen technologies can make a difference. Explore these ideas from the bathroom design and technology experts at TOTO to level up the different hosting areas of your home as you prepare to gather with family and friends this holiday season.

♥ ***The Kitchen:*** Bringing Something Extraordinary to the Table

The holidays invite a little culinary ambition, and today's kitchens are borrowing a few tricks from professional chefs. Imagine presenting a beef tenderloin cooked to a perfect rosy pink from edge to edge, thanks to the precision of sous vide cooking. Or bringing a platter of roasted root vegetables to the table, their edges beautifully caramelized and their centers tender, prepared in a steam-convection oven. On an induction cooktop, precise, responsive heat helps turn fresh mushrooms into a golden, savory accompaniment.

These technologies put sophisticated techniques within reach of adventurous home cooks, opening the door to new preparations and dishes worthy of special occasions. Experiment with new flavors and rich cuisines that fill your home with enticing aromas and your guests with awe at the first bite.

Nothing says "happy holidays" quite like watching guests discover what you've created for them.

♥ ***The Living Area:*** Setting the Stage for Connection

Holiday gatherings have a rhythm all their own. The first arrivals are greeted with excitement, conversations pick up where they left off months (or years) prior, and before long, the room is filled with laughter and the pleasure of being together.

Today's smart lighting systems allow hosts to create and schedule scenes that shift from the sparkle of a festive welcome to the softer, golden glow of an intimate evening. Multiroom wireless audio systems can bring lively music into the kitchen while keeping it a gentle accompaniment to conversation in the living area. Digital art displays can turn a television screen into a gallery of artwork chosen to complement the celebration, bringing holidays past to life as loved ones mingle in the present.

Successful holiday entertainment engages people



not merely as observers, but participants. A short film could start an inspiring conversation, the right music might get people dancing and atmospheric visual-audio experiences, like a crackling fireplace or soft snowstorm, can create a relaxing seasonal backdrop for shared activities.

With the atmosphere changing quietly in the background, no one needs to interrupt a favorite story to adjust the lights or lower the music. The host can simply enjoy the company they've brought together.

♥ ***The Bathroom:*** The Art of Personal Comfort

The most gracious hosts think beyond the rooms where guests gather. Fresh towels, fragrant soaps and a few unexpected comforts can make the guest bathroom feel every bit as welcoming as the rest of the home. Technology adds a new dimension to that hospitality. Consider a TOTO WASHLET bidet seat, which offers the welcome warmth of a heated seat, the refreshing pleasure of warm-water cleansing and the soothing comfort of warm-air drying. It's an unexpected luxury that makes an everyday experience feel special.

Hosts can choose an option that complements their home's character. The S2 offers inviting simplicity with convenient side-panel controls. The sleek S5 pairs contemporary elegance with a wireless remote. Meanwhile, the S7A adds a touch of theater with a lid that opens automatically, a softly glowing nightlight and personalized cleansing settings.

Even the housekeeping benefits from a little ingenuity through automatic PREMIST and EWATER+: One mists the toilet bowl before use to help keep it cleaner, while the other cleans the cleansing wand and, on select models, the bowl itself with electrolyzed water. It's another way a thoughtful host can anticipate guests' needs and make them feel wonderfully welcome. Long after the last guest has departed, what lingers isn't the sophistication of the house. It's the meal that inspired compliments, the conversations no one wanted to end and the little surprises that made everyone feel at home.

Those are the moments that make holiday entertaining special. Behind each one is a host whose warmth, creativity and attention to detail made it possible, with a little help from the house. Explore more sophisticated bathroom upgrade ideas for the holidays and beyond at TOTOUSA.com. (Feature Impact)
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5 Christmas Shopping Tips to Save Money and Reduce Stress

As the holiday season approaches, savvy gift-givers are already strategizing. Instead of scrambling to shop at the last minute and settling for whatever you can find, you can hunt strategically for gifts to make your loved ones smile.

According to a survey conducted by TopCashback, today's shoppers care more about getting the right gift than saving time or money. In fact, when choosing a holiday shopping superpower, 32% of respondents said they would choose knowing exactly what everyone wants, followed by always finding the perfect gift (30%), finding the best deal instantly (18%), getting unlimited free shipping (15%) and never waiting in checkout lines (6%).

Consider these tips to score better bargains and less stress this season.



♥ ***Make a List***

Among the worst parts of holiday gifting, U.S. adults most frequently cited forgetting to buy someone a gift (31%), followed by having someone dislike the gift they gave (26%). While you don't have to figure out exactly what gifts to buy before you start shopping, it can be helpful to start with a list of the people you want to shop for. Write down family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors and anyone else you'd like to include then check their names off as you go.

♥ ***Set a Budget***

Overspending during the holidays can put your finances in a tough spot for the new year, but you can avoid this pitfall by sticking to a realistic budget. Set spending limits, resist unnecessary impulse purchases and focus more on finding meaningful gifts than expensive ones. By shopping smart and planning ahead, you can make the most of each dollar of your gift budget.

♥ ***Make the Most of Holiday Deals***

U.S. adults most frequently describe their holiday gift-giving persona as "The Bargain Hunter," with 30% agreeing they'll stop at nothing to find the best deal. Women tend to drive a tougher bargain: 30% said the minimum discount they consider a "good" holiday shopping deal is up to 50% off, compared to 19% of men who said the same.

If saving money is a priority, consider combining tactics like shopping on sale days, using coupons and signing up for cash-back platforms like TopCashback, a free-to-join rebates website offering market-leading cash back rates that can be even higher during prime shopping seasons. You can earn cash back on more than 7,000 top brands and redeem your earnings for cash or gift cards to stack the savings - all without paying a membership fee.

♥ ***Shop Early***

Starting your shopping early gives you extra time to discover deals and find gifts you know your recipients will love. In addition to saving you money, this approach can save you from the pressure and rush of last-second panic buying. Younger shoppers are already adopting this mindset, with 37% of Gen Z respondents describing their holiday gift-giving persona as "The Prepper" - meaning they plan and prepare to always find and give the perfect gifts.

♥ ***Treat Yourself***

Holiday shopping season is also self-gifting season, with 77% of surveyed adults reporting they always, often or sometimes purchase items for themselves while holiday shopping. Whether you're taking advantage of a buy-one-get-one deal or see something from your own wish list on sale, it can be an opportunity to give yourself a little extra holiday joy. Learn more about making the most of holiday deals at TopCashback.com. (Feature Impact)

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