

A stack of wrapped gifts. The top gift is wrapped in red paper with a green ribbon. Below it is a gift wrapped in green paper. The bottom gift is wrapped in red paper with white and green circular patterns. A white tag is attached to the top gift, and a green glittery ornament is attached to the bottom gift.

Holiday  
*Gift*  
Guide

December 2015

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# Have yourself a Healthy Holiday

**M**any of us eagerly await this time of year when we can spend quality time with loved ones, relax, reflect on the year and look forward to the new year ahead. This can also be a challenging time to stay healthy, as people tend to remain bundled up indoors and the food seems to pile up on the dinner table.



**Staying active is important to maintaining health through the holidays.**



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Learning how to eat well and stay active ahead of and during the holiday season may mean the difference between staying healthy or packing on a few extra pounds and creating habits that could lead to serious health issues down the road.

“We’re excited to support programs that help make healthy food and exercise programs more affordable and accessible to people nationwide,” said Garth Graham, M.D., MPH, president of the Aetna Foundation, which is working to make nutritious foods and exercise programs readily available for families.

These tips from the Aetna Foundation are designed to help people stay active and healthy during the holiday season:

### 1. Eat well.

When grocery shopping for large (or small) family meals, choose fresh, seasonal, nutritious foods as often as possible. When fresh is not possible, keep in mind that frozen and canned fruits and

vegetables are still healthy alternatives. To guard against nutrient loss, be sure to eat frozen fruits and veggies soon after purchase and steam or microwave them rather than boiling to minimize the loss of water-soluble vitamins.

### 2. Cook together.

As you plan and cook meals for your friends and family over the holidays, inviting your children to cook with you is a great way to teach them about nutrition and better food choices.

### 3. Get off the couch.

It can be tempting to curl up on the couch to stay warm and dry during the cold winter months, but find ways to stay active with your family – such as interactive dancing video games, an indoor game of hide-and-seek or dancing during commercials while you watch your favorite TV show.

*Find more healthy living tips for your family at [aetna-foundation.org](http://aetna-foundation.org).*

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# Holiday cards with an **ARTFUL** EDGE

Shondra Neumayer of Ink Drop Design combines modern vintage typography, folk arty woodland silhouettes and antique style marquee light imagery with rustic barn board backgrounds in her cards, sold on Etsy.



Christmas and seasonal greeting cards have long been an artistic niche that inspires illustrators and designers.

BY KIM COOK  
Associated Press

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Besides today's ubiquitous family photo cards, contemporary designs often take advantage of advances in drafting and production — holography, music embeds, digital photography and laser-cutting among them. Other designs begin life with time-honored tools like the paint pot, pencil box and scissors.

Shondra Neumayer combines modern vintage-style typography, folk-arty woodland silhouettes and antique-style, marquee-light imagery with rustic barn-board backgrounds in cards she sells at her Etsy shop, InkDropDesign. She began designing cards out of frustration with what she saw as a market filled with cheap and cheesy holiday cards.

"Going to the mailbox should be an exciting event," she says. "Each (year) I found myself asking the question, 'Why can't Christmas cards be cool?'"

The Museum of Modern Art in New York has been selling holiday cards since 1954 as a way to foster and encourage young

and emerging artists by exposing their work to a larger audience. The program's early years included work by Alexander Calder, Robert Indiana and Andy Warhol.

MoMA's card art is selected through an open submission process, and the museum receives hundreds of designs annually. Pop-up cards have become particularly popular.

"We started to see an increasing trend toward cards with special features," Chay Costello, the museum's associate director of marketing, says. "Instead of a card with graphic artwork on its front, many artists have begun to think three-dimensionally, with spiraling and fold-out elements and elaborately crafted pop-out constructions that result in a card that's a gift in and of itself."

The crafts site Etsy.com had more than 90,000 Christmas card offerings in a recent search. Other creative cards, pop-up and not, are available at Papyrus, Galison and the Art Institute of Chicago's web shop, among other places.

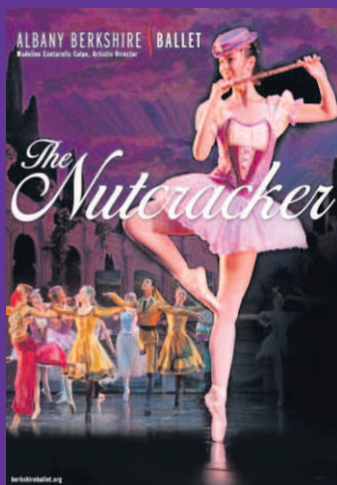
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# Craft a unique holiday tree this Christmas

By MICHELLE LOCKE  
ASSOCIATED PRESS



"The Giving Tree," one of Carrie Brown's creations featured in her book, "The New Christmas Tree."

AP PHOTO/Eric Risberg



## Oh Christmas Tree, oh Christmas Tree — how boring are thy branches?

If you're in a bit of a holiday rut when it comes to seasonal decorating, Carrie Brown's recently released "The New Christmas Tree" (Artisan Books) may be just what you need to get that creative sap flowing.

Brown has been re-inventing trees for years, from the "blue tree" she made one Christmas to reflect her mood (which magically improved the more she got into the project) to the "bonfire ready" trees she came up with one year — manzanita branches studded with plump marshmallows.

Her book presents 24 ideas for rethinking the tree, starting with the basics: picking the tree, what types work best with certain designs and caring for your festive foliage.

Some of the trees are quite simple, like a silver tree that's a skinny branch strung with silver jewelry and other found objects. Some are aimed at keen crafters, like the paperwhite tree decorated with all kinds of ornaments made from different weights of white paper.

A stunner of a tree — and the one that made the cover — is the bees' tree, made of rosemary branches arranged in a vase and decorated with felted bees, beeswax ornaments and tiny vials of wax-dipped honey, among other things.

Beautifully photographed and coffee-table ready, the book is also practical, containing detailed instructions on how to recreate the featured trees along with website references for downloading templates.

Brown would like it to serve as both blueprint and inspiration.

"I decided that it would be a wonderful thing to share, because there's a lot of commercialism for Christmas, a lot of the same-old, same-old," says Brown. "I think young people particularly feel that some of the old commercial ways don't reflect them. I wanted to present something that could give people the opportunity to express themselves."

Personalizing your tree is one of the trends of the season, says Ann Blevins,

senior editor of *Better Homes and Gardens*' "Christmas Ideas," an annual publication on newsstands.

Although many people stick with traditional red and green in their tree décor, a new twist this year is faceted metallic ornaments, which go hand-in-hand with the home-decorating trend of faceted metal lamps, says Blevins.

New takes on lighting include Edison lights, which look like old-fashioned bulbs with a visible "filament," as well as tiny fairy lights designed to be woven deep in the tree and used in abundance.

Getting your tree together can be one of the best parts of the season (unlike, say, pre-party house cleaning) and some of the ideas in Brown's book could be the basis for a trimming party.

A tree decorated with gingerbread cookies and other sweets, Brown's "deconstructed gingerbread house" might be a good choice for a child with a December birthday. Partygoers could help decorate some of the simpler cookie ornaments and go home with treats from the tree.

The Giving Tree, one of Brown's favorites, turns the tables on the typical advent calendar. Ornaments include envelopes holding age-appropriate "good deed" slips. Children get to open an envelope every day in the countdown to Christmas, but instead of getting chocolate, they have a chance to exercise their generosity.

Brown offers lots of ideas for homemade and inventive ornaments, including copper "bonbons" made with copper plumbing floats, available in hardware stores, covered with unraveled copper kitchen scrub pads.

And she suggests taking the decorating theme down to the floor, placing interesting objects beneath the tree and skipping the store-bought tree skirt in favor of an interesting throw or length of material.

Finding an alternative to old-fashioned skirts comes with a hidden bonus, notes Blevins. "We're wrapping the tree in a throw — a fur throw or a sweater throw — which is nice because when Christmas is over and it's January, you have a new afghan, and it's perfect."

# Enjoy the season of giving all year long



Katie Holmes

**F**rom clothing to housewares to toys, your old stuff can go a long way for someone new. As the season of giving approaches, look around your home – you might find there’s more to give than you thought.

Because everyone knows it is what’s inside that counts, The Glad Products Company has teamed up with Katie Holmes to support its Glad to Give program, which was inspired by people using Glad ForceFlex bags for heavy donations. Together, they are on a mission to inspire and enable giving all year and provide an easy way to do so.

“Winter fashion trends may change from year to year, but one thing that never goes out of style is helping others by giving back to your community,” Holmes said.

Holmes also offers these tips to make giving back enjoyable for the whole family:

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## Make It Personal

Getting personally involved in a cause you care about is particularly powerful whether you are donating your time or personal items. Take the time to look through areas of your home, such as closets, kitchen cupboards and the garage, for items that may once have had special meaning to you, but are no longer needed. Donating those items to someone in need is a much better choice than letting them sit unused.

## Be Glad to Give

Whether you're giving to a loved one or a complete stranger, giving provides you with rewards that extend far beyond that moment in time. Holmes recently donated a bag full of her family's winter coats to One Warm Coat – a national nonprofit that works to provide gently worn coats to those in need – and was happy to lighten her load for a good cause. Just fill a bag full of your gently used clothing or household items for donation and go to [GladtoGive.com](http://GladtoGive.com) to

schedule a free pickup with a local charity of your choice.


## Involve Your Family

It's never too early to teach your little ones how to have a giving spirit. Holmes is always looking for fun, little ways to involve her daughter in giving to others – wrapping presents, baking cookies or making cards are easy ways for them to spend time together and make a meaningful contribution to favorite local charities or even a friendly neighbor.

## Enjoy the Benefits of Giving Back

One of the best things you can do with your gently used items is to give them a second life. While 33.6 percent of overall giving happens in the last three months of the year, the benefits are felt year round as people who help others are happier and healthier, according to the Network for Good Digital Giving Index.

*Sign up for your free donation bag and find more ways to give back at [GladtoGive.com](http://GladtoGive.com).*



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# Give the gift of streaming

NEW YORK (AP) — There are plenty of ways to get streaming video onto your big living-room screen. Internet-connected “smart” TVs and gaming consoles such as the Xbox or PlayStation can do the trick. But stand-alone devices tend to offer more features and more video services to choose from.

**TIVO BOLT (starts at \$300, plus \$15 a month for service after the first year)**

The TiVo is first and foremost a digital video recorder, offering many features that cable-company DVRs can’t match.

TiVo recordings have many advantages over streaming services such as Hulu. One tap of the remote skips over the entire commercial break for many prime-time shows. Hulu won’t let you skip commercials at all unless you pay more. TiVo can also play back shows 30 percent faster using its “QuickMode.” Use both, and an hour-long show takes less than 35 minutes.

As a streaming device, though, TiVo is more limited. It offers only four of the 12 leading streaming services we checked — Netflix, Amazon, YouTube and Vudu. Hulu is coming soon. Apps for many specific channels, including HBO and Showtime, are unavailable, nor is baseball’s MLB.TV. TiVo figures you can simply record those channels or use your cable company’s on-demand service, but that doesn’t help if you have only an antenna.

**GOOGLE CHROMECAST (\$35)**

The Chromecast is an odd hybrid — a gateway to relay streaming video from your laptop, phone or tablet to the TV. Choose a video source — say, the Netflix app or website — and make a few taps to “cast” it to the TV. The Chromecast then picks up the video stream directly.

Chromecast doesn’t work with every video app, but has 10 of the 12 services we looked for; iTunes and Amazon are no-shows, at least from mobile devices.

**NVIDIA SHIELD ANDROID TV (\$200)**

The Shield's strength is as a video-game console. It's fast and powerful, and it has a good selection of converted PC games. The device also supports Nvidia's GeForce Now streaming-game subscription. Games run on distant servers, yet feel as though they are directly on the Shield.

The Shield uses Google's Android TV streaming service, which offers eight of our 12 streaming services.

**AMAZON FIRE TV (\$100)**

The Fire TV is a great device for streaming video — especially video from Amazon. Video available as part of Amazon's Prime loyalty program integrates nicely. For other services, you must launch an app first. The Fire TV has nine of the 12 services checked; it's missing iTunes, Google Play and Vudu.

The Fire TV is cheap for a full-fledged streaming device. For an even cheaper option, Amazon's \$40 Fire TV Stick has fewer features but runs the same services.

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