

Sleigh

That List

November 26, 2025
A Special Supplement to **The Iosco County News-Herald & Oscoda Press**

**Spread some *Christmas Magic*
by *Shopping Local*
this holiday season**

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Unique holiday traditions *across the globe*

The holiday season is a special time of year. Regardless of which holiday people celebrate in December, billions of people across the globe embrace chances to be a little more festive and spend additional time with family and friends over the final month of the year.

Tradition contributes to the special feeling felt in many communities each December. Holiday celebrants who can't get enough seasonal magic can take note of some of the many unique traditions across the globe that help make the month of December such a special time of year.

The Yule Lads, Iceland

In a tradition that might call to mind the seven dwarves who welcomed Snow White into their home in the classic fairy tale, the Yule Lads of Iceland are said to leave a small gift for children who leave a shoe on their windowsills before going to bed beginning on the night of December 11. The tradition continues through Christmas Day, with each night featuring a visit from a different Yule Lad.

Hiding Brooms, Norway

Norwegian folklore suggested evil spirits and witches awoke on Christmas Eve, and this unique tradition is rooted in efforts to keep those unwelcome holiday guests grounded and avoid lost brooms. On the night of Julaften (Christmas Eve), Norwegians hide their brooms in closets inside their homes to keep them from being stolen by ill-intentioned witches.

Night of the Radishes, Oaxaca, Mexico

Held annually on December 23, the Night of the Radishes is a local celebration in Oaxaca, Mexico. This unique event celebrates oversized radishes, which certainly merits the celebration's inclusion on any list of unusual holiday season celebrations. The event involves the carving of large radishes into figures, a tradition that began as a way to attract more customers to Oaxaca's Christmas market. A formal radish-carving competition was instituted in the late nineteenth century, and the Night of the Radishes continues to draw visitors today.

Krampus Parades, Austria (various sites)

The holiday season might be a heartwarming time of year in many locales, but the various Krampus parades throughout Austria turn that notion on its head. Krampus is a horned anthropomorphic figure in central and eastern Alpine folklore. Krampus is something akin to Santa Claus's alter ego who's said to punish bad children rather than reward good ones with gifts. Legend says Krampus and his band of less-than-jovial elves roamed an area of the Alps and delighted in causing mayhem. Austrian Krampus parades take place at night and feature revelers dressed in scary costumes, making this a unique if not exactly lighthearted holiday season tradition.

Tradition figures prominently during the holiday season, and some customs stand out for their uniqueness.



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How to use pineapple to elevate your holiday dishes

Does holiday cooking stress you out? If so, you're not alone! According to PWC research, 54% of people admit to feeling uptight any time they think about prepping or cooking food for holiday celebrations. Fortunately, stress-free holiday dishes can be possible with the right ingredients.

Executive chef at Dole, James Bickmore-Hutt has ideas for how to elevate your holiday dishes in preparation for the festivities. "The holiday season is such a busy time of year. It's also a moment when people are expecting to be 'wowed' at mealtime. Selecting high-quality ingredients like Dole® Tropical Gold® Canned Pineapples can reduce prep work and help you deliver crowd-pleasing dishes quickly, so you can focus on enjoying the season with loved ones."

Why are these pineapples Chef James' best-kept secret? Dole Tropical Gold Canned Pineapples are handpicked at peak ripeness and are a naturally sweeter variety of pineapple. Offered in pre-cut chunks or slices with no sugar added, they help home chefs cut down on prep time without sacrificing freshly-packed flavor. Here are Chef James' top tips for incorporating them into your seasonal fare:

- Add extra garnishes of pineapple to any holiday dish for a naturally sweet, tropical taste – no need to add extra sugar!
- Pineapples are very juicy, and you can pre-cook dessert filling on the stovetop to thicken the juices. Simply drain the liquid from the can, pour the fruit in a pan, reduce remaining liquid and then combine it with a thickener of your choice before adding back in.
- Let fruit-filled desserts cool for at least two to four hours after baking to allow the filling to fully set.
- For added oomph and flavor in cocktail or mocktail batches, reserve pineapple juice from the same cans used in your food dishes, like a family-favorite pie.

This holiday season, Chef James' guaranteed crowd-pleaser, Caramelized Pineapple Baked Brie, adds a tropical twist to a traditional spread. Ready in 40 minutes and with just six ingredients, this stress-free appetizer will make your festivities all the more memorable!

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 can (20 ounces) Dole Tropical Gold Pineapple Chunks in 100% Pineapple Juice, drained
- 1/4 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tablespoon honey, divided
- 1 package (13 ounces) round brie cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped roasted salted pistachios

Instructions:

Heat butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add pineapple, rosemary and 1 tablespoon honey, stirring occasionally for 6 minutes or until the pineapple is golden brown.

Line a baking sheet or small baking dish with parchment. Cut the top rind off the brie and discard, placing the remaining portion on the parchment paper.

Spoon pineapple mixture over the brie. Bake at 350 degrees F for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and drizzle with the remaining 1 teaspoon of honey before garnishing with pistachios.

To stress less in the kitchen during this year's holiday festivities, let pre-cut pineapple take center stage for easy preparation of elevated classics. (StatePoint)



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Kitchen and dining tools *no holiday host should be without*

Holiday hosting is a significant undertaking. The holiday season is a beloved time of year filled with merriment and anticipation. When accepting the responsibility of hosting, hosts are taking on the challenge to keep the festive vibes going, and that often involves meeting guests' expectations for a special time of year.

There's no shortage of holiday traditions, but family meals are a notable and cherished custom in many households. Hosts planning family meals this holiday season can look to some particularly useful kitchen tools to make preparing and serving go smoothly.

Carving set

Carving sets may not get too much daily use, but they're a must-have come the holiday entertaining season. Whether hosts are serving a Thanksgiving turkey, a Christmas goose or a holiday ham, a carving set can help make quick work of the main course when it comes time to serve the meal. A carving knife and fork can ensure slices of turkey, goose or ham are as beautiful to see as they are delicious to eat.

Steak knives

Despite their name, steak knives are not reserved for steak. A set of quality steak knives can make it easy to cut through any type of meat. That's particularly important during a time of year like the holiday season when family meals tend to be formal sit-down dinners featuring entrées like holiday roasts or turkey.

Meat thermometer

Ensuring foods are cooked to the correct temperature is necessary for safety and serves to ensure guests will be impressed by the finished product. Meat thermometers let cooks know when meat, including beef and poultry, is cooked, saving them the hassle of cutting into the meat to determine doneness. Cutting into meat like steak can affect its flavor profile, as juices can pour out before they have a chance to be redistributed when the food is removed from the oven.

Prep bowls

Certain must-have holiday hosting tools are easily overlooked, and prep bowls likely fall into that category. Family meals during the holiday season tend to focus as much on side dishes as the main course, so hosts will need some good prep bowls to prepare the potatoes, stuffing, vegetables, and other sides. Collapsible prep bowls can be ideal for hosts with limited cabinet space.

Wine decanter

A wine decanter adds an elegant touch to a holiday dinner table, but this useful dining tool offers more than aesthetic appeal. Red wine may contain some sediment and even small bits of cork, and a decanter can filter and remove such residue. A decanter also can improve the flavor profile of some older wines, which some guests may find bitter. But the primary function of a wine decanter is to aerate the wine and allow it to absorb oxygen, which improves the flavor.

Hosting a family meal during the holiday season is an honor, and it's a responsibility that can be made easier with some essential kitchen and dining tools.



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The many reasons to support Small Business Saturday

Small business is big business across much of North America. According to a 2024 report from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, nearly 98 percent of all businesses in Canada are small businesses, which the Government of Canada defines as firms with one to 99 paid employees. Small businesses boast an equally notable presence in the United States, where the Small Business Administration reports such establishments account for 99 percent of the nation's firms.

With such a profound presence in both Canada and the United States, it's no wonder small businesses are championed at a point in time when shopping takes center stage. Small Business Saturday occurs each year on the Saturday after American Thanksgiving, making it part of a weekend that is often characterized as the start of the holiday shopping season. With small businesses set to take their well-earned turn in the spotlight, consumers can ponder the many reasons to support Small Business Saturday this year.

- **Small businesses are significant employers.** The term "small business" can be misleading, particularly in terms of job creation. While small businesses are generally described as firms with fewer than 500 employees, recent data from the SBA indicated small companies accounted for two-thirds of employment growth across the U.S. over the last quarter century, ultimately generating around 13 million jobs during that time period. Small businesses also are big-time employers in Canada, where the ISEDC notes such firms employed 46.5 percent of the nation's total private labor force in 2023. Those jobs are filled by consumers' family members, friends and neighbors, and supporting these employers ensures those individuals can keep earning.

- **Small businesses help to fund vital local services.** Another notable reason to support small businesses is their role in creating strong local tax bases. The revenue generated by successful, local small businesses strengthens communities because it translates into tax income for local towns, which benefits schools, community organizations and public safety.

- **Small business spending is more likely to stay in the local community.** Another way supporting small businesses benefits communities relates to where consumers' dollars go once they're spent. Data from the American Independent Business Alliance indicates 48 percent of each purchase at a local independent business was recirculated locally. By comparison, just 14 percent of purchases at chain stores was recirculated locally. That means more than three times as much money is staying in communities when consumers buy from locally owned businesses compared to chain retailers.

There's no shortage of reasons to support Small Business Saturday. This year, consumers can do their part and give local small businesses, and the communities they call home, their unwavering support by shopping local on Small Business Saturday.



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Eggnog is a go-to holiday beverage

One of the more notable aspects of the holiday season is the reemergence of foods and beverages that might not be enjoyed at any other point during the year. Eggnog certainly falls into the category. Though it might not be broken out after December, the following recipe for "Eggnog" from Lines+Angles makes a go-to holiday season beverage.

Eggnog

Makes 4 servings
 6 egg yolks
 1/2 cup confectioner's sugar
 1 1/2 cups milk
 3/4 cup light cream
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 1/2 cup whiskey or rum
 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

1. In a medium bowl, whisk egg yolks until light in color. Add confectioners' sugar and whisk together until fluffy. Set aside.
2. In a medium saucepan over low heat, combine milk, cream and vanilla. Stir occasionally and gently heat for 5 minutes. Increase heat to medium and slowly bring mixture to a boil. Remove from heat.
3. Slowly incorporate milk mixture into eggs by adding a little at a time, whisking together constantly to avoid cooking the eggs. Continue to add the hot milk into the eggs and whisking until

thoroughly combined.

4. Pour the combined mixture back into the saucepan and heat over medium heat, stirring constantly, until thick, without bringing to a boil, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat.
5. Allow mixture to cool for about an hour, then add to a jar with a tight-fitting lid. Add whiskey or rum. Refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.
6. When ready to serve, shake jar, add eggnog to serving glasses and top with cinnamon and nutmeg.



CHICK' N DOTS - A specialty children's boutique with clothing, shoes, toys, books, furniture, bedding and more for the children in your life. Laken features a jewelry making kit. It is among the many great gift items available for the kids on your gift list! - Photo by Rebecca Buchanan



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Experiential gifts for everyone on your list

Gift exchanges are a hallmark of the holiday season. Individuals spend weeks making lists and shopping for items they believe recipients will appreciate. However, this holiday season shoppers may want to change up their gift-buying strategy to focus less on material offerings and more on experiences.

A recent survey from Get Your Guide found 92 percent of Americans prefer to receive an experience over a physical gift during the holiday season. In addition, Deloitte's 2024 survey of more than 4,000 consumers in the United States found that spending on experiences during the holidays is expected to rise by 16 percent year-over-year, reaching an average of \$735.

Experiential gifts place value on memories and emotional connections rather than objects. As people increasingly are drawn to these special moments, here's a look at experiential gifts for everyone on a holiday shopping list.

Parents and grandparents

Experiential gifts for older adults are beneficial because they won't add to the clutter or belongings such individuals have already accumulated throughout the years. Useful ideas include memberships to museums, entry to botanical gardens, culinary tastings, travel vouchers, and subscriptions to wellness classes.

Teens and young adults

Teens are big on experiences over material gifts. According to TD Bank's 2024 survey, Gen Z leads the trend in experience-first gifting, with 68 percent preferring experiences. Examples of good experiential gifts for this demographic include escape room experiences, concert tickets, adventure sports like indoor rock climbing, subscription services to streaming music, or movie passes.

Children and families

Families already may be out and about, and parents of young children may appreciate experiences more than additional toys and games that are already filling the house. Annual passes to zoos, museums or aquariums can keep families occupied year-round. Children might like a science or art workshop, while movie night gift cards and tickets to family shows also are viable gift options.

Special partners

Experiences can strengthen relationships and intimacy. Possible gift ideas include spa days, cooking classes for two, a weekend travel getaway, or tickets to a theater performance or concert. The Amex Trendex 2024 survey found that 38 percent of people plan to give an experience to a significant other.

Experiential gifts focus on fun, creating memories and reducing waste. Such gifts also tend to be more economical in the long run. The holidays are often filled with excess, and experiential gifts can put the focus back on joy and spending time together.



CHRISTMAS PARADE & TREE LIGHTING – The East Tawas Business Association will be presenting the Miracle on Newman Street Christmas Parade and Tree Lighting in East Tawas, Saturday, November 29th; Christmas carols starting at 6 p.m. Join us for a fun filled evening which will include cookies and cocoa with Santa!



SHERNI'S CANDIES – Handmade chocolates and candy to satisfy any sweet tooth! Stop in or order your specialty chocolates to send as gifts or to serve at your holiday gatherings. The Hasty family has been in the candy business for 45 years. Father and son, Keith and Brad are holding a ten-pound chocolate bar. - Photo by Penny Essary

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These cookies make a perfect homemade holiday gift

Holiday shopping poses some unique challenges each December. The "perfect gift" can be elusive, particularly when shopping for loved ones who seemingly have it all. When confronted with such conundrums, holiday shoppers are urged to keep a familiar and reliable option in mind to save themselves the frustration of finding the perfect gift.

Food makes a great holiday gift, especially when it's homemade. Baked goods might prove particularly irresistible gifts this holiday season, and those with a knack for baking can gift a batch of these "Oatmeal Cranberry Cookies" courtesy of Lines+Angles.

Oatmeal Cranberry Cookies

Makes approximately 16 to 18 cookies

- 3/4 cup unsalted butter
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 2 small eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 4 cups rolled oats
- 1 cup dried cranberries

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease and line a large cookie sheet with parchment paper.
2. Melt the butter in a small saucepan set over medium heat. Once the butter has melted, pour into a large bowl and add the brown sugar.
3. Mix until well combined. Add the eggs and vanilla, and continue to mix until incorporated.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, baking soda, spices, and oats. Add the dry ingredients to the wet and mix well. Add the cranberries and stir until thoroughly incorporated.
5. Drop scant tablespoons of the batter onto the cookie sheet, spaced apart. Press down slightly in the centers.
6. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes until golden and set. Remove from the oven and let them cool on the cookie sheet for a few minutes before moving to a cooling rack to finish cooling.



TILLY'S CAFE AND TEA HOUSE - Winter wonderland or cozy tea house, we're serving up holiday cheer one cup at a time. - Photo by Jamie Peterman

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Top video games for holiday gifts this year

Gaming remains a wildly popular pastime. According to TechJury, more than 3.3 billion people worldwide played video games in 2025, and gaming is a mainstream hobby across all generations. The Entertainment Software Association's 2025 Facts About the U.S. Video Game Industry report indicates the average player is 26-years-old and female and male gamers are nearly evenly split (47 percent versus 52 percent). Baby Boomers and even older generations also play video games each week and benefit from the mental stimulation and relaxation the hobby offers.

Given the popularity of gaming, gifting video games for the holidays can be a smart tactic. The following are some 2025 releases that can be wrapped up as gifts this year.

- **Donkey Kong Returns HD:** Players will blast out of barrels, ride mine carts, stomp enemies, and more in this popular game newly imagined for the Nintendo Switch. Players join Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong on their wild adventures to retrieve their stolen banana horde.

- **Split Fiction:** In this game, a player and partner become Mio and Zoe, two writers who are trapped in a simulation of their own imaginations after a high-tech attempt to steal their creative ideas goes awry. This unlikely duo will need to work together in order to escape with their memories intact from a world filled with dragons, trolls, cyber ninjas, and robo-parking attendants. The game is available for PlayStation 5.

- **Star Wars Episode 1: Jedi Power Battles:** Video games often tap into nostalgia, which is perhaps why gamers were excited to find out that this popular Star Wars game was being remastered for modern consoles. This enables players to enjoy the original experience with only minor updates that include a simpler control scheme.

- **Citizen Sleeper 2: Starward Vector:** This role-playing game is a sequel to the popular game from 2022. Players control an escaped android with a malfunctioning body, a price on its head and no memory of the past. The goal is to get a ship, find a crew and take on contracts.

- **Doom: The Dark Ages:** This game is a prequel to the popular Doom experience, including Doom and Doom Eternal. It tells an epic story, and players inhabit the boots of the Doom slayer in this medieval and sinister war game.

- **Elden Ring: Nightreign:** This game is a standalone adventure within the Elden Ring universe. It's crafted to offer players a new gaming experience by reimagining the core attributes of play. Players join forces with others to battle the creeping night and become heroes.

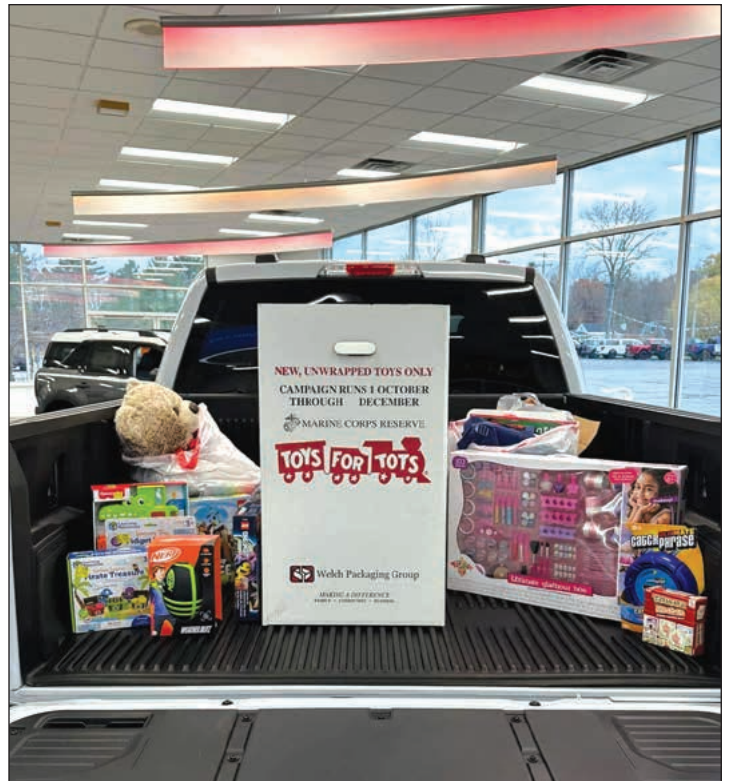
Video games are popular gift ideas, and 2025 doesn't disappoint with its newest crop of exciting releases perfect for gamers of all ages.



VILLAGE CHOCOLATIER – Allen and Jasmine Tubbs are caught in the act with Santa's helpers, Makayla, Amy, Tammy and Mercedes, making their traditional Christmas chocolate wreaths. Come in and order yours now for the Christmas season. – Photo by Julie Carroll



BRANHAM'S JEWELRY – The experienced staff at Branham's Jewelry are available to assist you in selecting an exquisite gift for that special someone on your shopping list. Engagement and wedding rings, fine jewelry, estate jewelry, Swarovski crystals, and watches are just some of the gift options from which to choose. - Courtesy Photo



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Learn to decorate like a holiday pro



The sights and sounds of the holiday season help to make this a special time of year that people look forward to. With its magical moments and opportunities to gather with family and friends, the holiday season is a period to celebrate and, of course, decorate. According to an informal poll from the decorating, culture and travel experts at Veranda, 65 percent of respondents said that the time to decorate for Christmas is right after Thanksgiving or the first week of December.

Many stores now display holiday decorations and other wares concurrently with Halloween and fall items, so people can plan their decorating early if they expect to be adding to their holiday collections. These tips can help with decorating and make anyone deck the halls like a professional.

- **Choose your theme and color palette.** Consider a specific style of decorating, whether it's traditional, minimalist, country, or even winter wonderland. Then select a few coordinating colors to complement the theme and existing items in your home. Pick up these items as they become available in stores, as holiday merchandise often goes quickly.
- **Focus on a few key areas.** While it's tempting to decorate an entire home, pros know to focus on key areas like tables, doorways and mantles to create the most visual interest. This also makes decorating more manageable.
- **Rely on the rule of thirds.** Create balanced and visually pleasing arrangements by dividing the space visually into nine equal parts, symbolically drawing two equally spaced horizontal and two equally spaced vertical lines. Designers often place important elements along these lines or at their intersections to create a more visually balanced and appealing composition. When grouping decorative items together on shelves and tables, threes often look best.
- **Remove clutter.** It's important to declutter a space prior to introducing holiday elements in order to create a clean and organized look. Store additional decorations and knickknacks until after the holiday season.
- **Start with lights.** It's often easier to decorate by beginning with lights first, and then weaving additional decorations into the mix. Build on lights with garlands and accent items.

• **Less is often more.** Keep the decorating simple. A few elements here and there can have a much more effective impact than several things that draw attention away from one another. When taking out holiday decorations this year, use it as an opportunity to assess and cull the collection, which will make things easier next year.



Homeowners can decorate their spaces for the holidays effectively with some guidelines professional designers often use.

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Party pointers for holiday hosts

Entertaining is par for the course from November through the end of December. The holiday season is an especially festive time of year, and there's no shortage of opportunities to celebrate.

Holiday hosts may wonder where to get started in regard to planning their events. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the process, but with some pointers just about anyone can have a holiday gathering worth remembering.

- **Don't be scared off by social media.** When Rebecca Jennings, Vox senior correspondent covering social platforms, was hosting Thanksgiving for the first time last year, she remarked that her social media feed was filled with tutorials that made her feel like everyone was doing it better than she. Although social media can be great for generating ideas, it also might put undue pressure on hosts who feel they need to measure up to the events being executed by professionals, or people with a lot more time on their hands. It's fine if a host can't make everything from scratch or doesn't have a home that looks like something out of a Hallmark Christmas movie. Guests won't be expecting perfection; they just want to have fun and spend time socializing.

- **Plan around the guest experience.** Instead of getting bogged down on details related to decor, holiday hosts should direct most of their attention to the guest experience. They can ask themselves if a guest will even care about something they are considering having at the event. This can certainly save time and stress.

- **Keep everyone full.** Great food often is at the center of a holiday event, and the menu should be designed to be a crowd pleaser. Work with familiar ingredients that may be presented in unique ways. For example, a traditional caprese salad can be transformed into finger foods by alternating cherry tomatoes, chunks of mozzarella and leaves of basil on skewers. Don't forget classics like roasted meats, mashed potatoes, stuffing, rolls and butter, and other hearty items. They will fill guests up and keep them happy.

- **Lighten the hosting load.** Hosts can identify ways to alleviate stress and free up time to engage with guests. This may involve making the event a potluck where everyone is tasked with bringing a dish. Or, if budget allows, hire bartenders, caterers or a cleaning service to handle some jobs and free up time for hosts to mingle.

- **Plan for some entertainment.** Music and entertainment can set the tone of the party. Create a playlist that includes a mix of holiday favorites and other tunes. Hosts who want to go above and beyond may want to hire a DJ or live musicians, or enlist a karaoke company to get guests involved.

Entertaining during the holidays, whether it's a festive party or a formal dinner party, can go more smoothly with some simple planning.



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A brief history of Christmas trees

Towering evergreen trees adorned in lights and other trinkets are a focal point of the holiday season. Christmas trees are placed in prominent locations in homes, typically in front of a large picture window or in the corners of large entryways. These awe-inspiring trees beckon people to inspect all of the ornaments and often are the first thing people envision when thinking of holiday decor. The tradition of the Christmas tree is believed to have begun in Germany in the sixteenth century. However, the National Christmas Tree Association says there may be earlier references to Christmas trees in other parts of the world as well. The first written record of a decorated Christmas tree comes from Riga, Latvia, in 1510. Men of a local merchant's guild decorated the tree with roses and then set fire to it. The rose was considered a symbol of the Virgin Mary. In the sixteenth century in Alsace, France, trees were sold in the marketplace and brought home and set up undecorated. Laws limited the size to "eight shoe lengths" or slightly more than four feet. Early German Christmas trees were

adorned with apples, a holdover from earlier traditions when evergreen boughs hung with apples were used as props in miracle plays. These plays took place in churches on December 24, which was Adam & Eve's Day in the early Christian calendar. Evergreens have long been symbolic of life during the cold months of winter, calling to mind the promise of spring to come. Various cultures, including early Christians, featured trees during winter solstice celebrations. Some historians believe Martin Luther, a Protestant reformer who might have been inspired by stars in the night, was responsible for adding lighted candles to the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree was introduced to the United States by German settlers in the 1800s. Soon after those settlers' arrival, trees began to be sold commercially. President Franklin Pierce is credited with having the first Christmas tree at the White House. Today, Christmas trees are wildly popular, with the American Christmas Tree Association reporting that 94 percent of U.S. consumers plan to display one.




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Tips to make holiday dinners more affordable

“Eat, drink and be merry” is a familiar refrain come the holiday season. Hosting a holiday dinner is a great way to welcome family and friends and encourage them to embrace the festive nature of the season. However, the high cost of foods and other essentials may have certain holiday hosts rethinking their menus and their guest lists this year.

A 2024 Pew Research Poll showed Americans worried about the state of the economy cite the price of food and the cost of housing as their foremost concerns. More than 90 percent of Americans say they are “very” or “somewhat” concerned about the cost of food and consumer goods.

Average annual food-at-home prices were 5 percent higher in 2023 than in 2022, according to the USDA Economic Research Service. Inflation has been a key topic of discussion for much of the last three years. While data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates inflation continues to cool off from all-time highs, consumers are still anxious about how food prices are affecting their bottom lines and their holiday entertaining plans. According to Farmdoc Daily, which offers agriculture-based data analysis, 68 percent of U.S. consumers expected rising food prices to impact their holiday meals in 2024. Similar concerns may prevail in 2025.

Stretching holiday entertaining dollars comes down to being savvy. With that in mind, hosts can consider these meal modification strategies this holiday season.

• **Replace a high-cost protein with a more affordable alternative.**

Sometimes a holiday meal calls for pulling out all of the stops, and that may mean spending more on a special main dish. Rather than a luxury like beef tenderloin or prime rib roast, consider a less expensive dish, such as a pork tenderloin, roasted chicken or even seafood.

• **Add extra side dishes.** Incorporate an inexpensive item like rice, beans or an extra vegetable side dish into the meal so that plates can be filled with the less expensive foods and fewer high-cost items.

• **Shop the sales.** Plan meals around a supermarket circular. While you may have had one holiday dinner idea in mind, once you see what the stores are putting on sale you can stock up on those items and build the dinner around them. If you find a good deal several weeks away from the holidays, buy the items and freeze them until they're needed.

• **Buy generic or store brands.** Chances are no one will notice if you use generic or store brand ingredients, which can be considerably cheaper than their brand-name counterparts. Many are even manufactured in the same facilities that produce the name brand stuff.

• **Make an affordable drink.** Alcohol costs can add up when you try to cater to everyone's tastes and preferences. Make one or two bulk drinks, like a holiday punch or signature cocktail, so you can keep alcohol costs in check.

Instead of a charcuterie board filled with expensive cheeses and meats, opt for dips and raw vegetables or a low-cost cheese ball made with cream cheese and herbs with crackers. Keep snacks to a minimum; otherwise, guests may fill up and then not have room for dinner.

Holiday hosts can embrace various strategies to save money on family meals this season.



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KELLY FRANK - "Looking forward to putting a SOLD sign in your yard!" - Courtesy Photo



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Classic family-friendly holiday traditions

Tradition figures prominently in many households throughout the holiday season. Whether it's decorations like a Chanukah menorah or a Christmas tree, or a family gathering on Christmas Eve, there's no shortage of traditions to make this unique time of year even more special.

Young families or first-time hosts may want to incorporate as many popular traditions into their seasonal celebrations as possible. Doing so can lay a foundation for years of celebrations to come. As families prepare to spend this holiday season at home, they can incorporate some of these classic traditions into their celebrations.

Family baking sessions

What would the holiday season be without baked goods? While it's easy to purchase premade goodies at grocery stores and other retailers, homemade concoctions made in the comforts of one's own kitchen alongside loved ones is a classic and cherished tradition in many households.

Letters to Santa

Santa Claus makes his presence known one night a year, and writing letters to the jolly old elf is a custom with a lengthier history than some may realize. Though it might not be possible to pinpoint precisely when the first letter to Santa was written, historians believe the tradition began in the early nineteenth century. Roughly two centuries later, children's letters to Santa remain a popular tradition in many households and communities, and there's no stopping adults from writing letters to the man who calls the North Pole home.

Advent calendars

Advent calendars are another holiday season tradition with a history that dates back centuries. Historians believe the first Advent calendars were produced in Germany around 1850. Faithful celebrants can now find Advent calendars in many forms, and some retailers even sell craft kits that enable families to create their own calendars at home. Homemade Advent calendars can be a unique way for families to put a relatively new spin on a centuries-old holiday tradition.

Christmas cards

Christmas cards may seem like a relatively recent phenomenon, but that's not the case at all. Prior to 1843, many Christmas celebrants shared handwritten letters with friends during the holiday season. Come 1843, Sir Henry Cole commissioned designer John Colcott Horsley to design a Christmas card that Cole could then send to various friends. Christmas cards remain a popular means to spreading holiday cheer, and families can design cards together and work as a team to get them ready to send.

These are just a handful of the many holiday season traditions families can embrace this December.



RELAX LLC - Merry Christmas from our team to you. Left to right: Lisa Nelkie, Paula Straus, Archie the Frenchie and Kim Burnett. - Courtesy Photo



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