November 2022

Horithe Holidays

A PUBLICATION OF The MONTANA STANDARD



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November 2022

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The Montana Standard

Take steps for greater peace of mind during

Protect your home and valuables during travel season

hether you're visiting your in-laws or taking a tropical vacation over the holidays, you'll likely be leaving your house and the majority of your belongings unattended while you're gone. Recent research suggests that if you're like many Americans, you may not be doing enough to protect your assets when you hit the road.

According to a study conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Selective Insurance, 59% of U.S. homeowners have a home security system or device, yet less than half (49%) use one to protect their unoccupied homes when they are on vacation.

However, most homeowners do take some safety measures before departing for extended periods. For instance, 68% lock all their windows when they leave town. Additional precautions include having someone check their home (61%), setting lights on a timer (39%), shutting off water (21%), and hiring a house sitter (13%).

Nevertheless, risk experts say you're best off with a system that monitors for break-ins and other mishaps, including fire and flooding from storms or leaky pipes.

"Vacations are a great time to create new memories, but they are quickly forgotten if you return to a damaged or burglarized home. Taking sensible home safety preparations before leaving is as important as packing the right items in your suitcase," says Allen Anderson, senior vice president of Personal Lines at Selective Insurance. "Our research shows that home security systems and devices are widely under-used across the country, but they are powerful tools to mitigate against unoccupied home theft, fire and water leaks."

According to Anderson, here are some steps you can take this holiday travel season for greater peace of mind:

Install and use a smart home security system or device. Doing so provides a vital line of defense and could save you money. Many insurers, including Selective Insurance, will provide a homeowners policy discount to policyholders with a professionally monitored security system.

Lock your garage and all of your doors and windows and double-check them.

Install outdoor lights. Use an automatic timer to set your interior and exterior lights and give your home the appearance of occupancy. Stop your mail, package and news deliveries.

Stow away your valuables.

Consider waiting until you return from your trip to share vacation photos to social media, or use privacy settings to control who sees your posts.

Unplug all unnecessary electronics.

Bring all house keys with you, or leave one with a trusted friend to check up on your home while you're gone.

Turn off your water! Some of the most frequent and costly homeowners' claims are due to water damage.

For more home protection tips, visit selective.com.

As you make your holiday travel arrangements, think beyond airline tickets and hotel bookings. Be sure that your plans also include home protection in your absence. – **StatePoint**

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HOST WITH THE NOST

How to prep your home for guests and holiday festivities

PAUL F.P. POGUE Ask Angi

othing says "festive" like creating a warm and welcoming home for guests and visitors during the upcoming busy holiday season. The influx of people and activity provides you with an excellent opportunity to put your home's best face forward. Read on for insights on making a guest-friendly space that will impress friends and family this year.

Rethink your kitchen

The kitchen has become a major

social center of the home, and cooking has become a social event and a time to gather in and of itself. To that end, make your kitchen a focal point of this holiday season.

"The kitchen has become the home's new parlor or living room," says Angi home-interior expert Rachel Zepernick. "Whether you completely redesign it or just move around furniture, think about ways you can make it as guest-friendly as possible."

Island: Adding a permanent kitchen island will cost you about \$4,000, but it can create many new options for entertaining, such as additional seating for people to

gather around during food prep. A rolling island will cost less, \$100 to \$2,500, and serve the same purpose.

Improved lighting: Don't overlook how much lighting can affect mood and ambiance as well as serve a more practical use. A central light, such as a chandelier, can make a striking statement, while task lighting in specific areas will help make measuring ingredients a breeze.

Add extra storage: "One big complaint people have about kitchens is storage, so the more you can add that's both functional and fun, the



better your kitchen is for entertaining purposes," Zepernick says. "Open or pull-out shelves, rolling carts and turntables work wonders for a busy kitchen."

> **Remodel for a new layout:** Giving your kitchen a fresh new look can help you entertain with ease. Redesigning your kitchen will cost between \$4,300 and \$25,000, depending on the scope.

> "The sky is the limit when it comes to rethinking your kitchen," Zepernick says. "A pro can help you consider all your options, based on your vision and budget."

Create a guestfriendly home

Here are some tips on how to quickly prep your home for maximum comfort and give your guests a great experience. Even if you're short on time, fear not; you can accomplish more cleaning than you think in a hurry if you follow some simple tips.

Give all guest linens a good wash, and freshly make the beds:

Bathrooms in particular make a big impression on guests. Wipe down each bathroom thoroughly, paying special attention to the sink, fixtures, floor, shower, tub and toilet.

Hire a professional cleaner: A one-time cleaning costs between \$90 and \$500, depending on home size, and can help make your home guestready in a burry. Keep in

ready in a hurry. Keep in mind that if you don't already have a regular house cleaner, hiring one on short notice during the season could be tricky. **Give your house a walkthrough from a visitor's perspective:** Especially look in guest rooms, bathrooms and common areas. What might seem out of place? What things do you notice first?

Check to ensure supplies are up to date: Get rid of expired medicine, and stock the cabinets with fresh shampoo, conditioner, soap, towels and a hair dryer. Also, consider keeping extras of common items for guests, such as razors, over-the-counter medications, feminine products, toothpaste, toothbrushes and cotton swabs.

Inspect your light bulbs: Look both inside and outdoors. You can easily miss a single burned-out bulb in an area you often walk through.

Pay particular attention to cleaning surfaces that get touched a

lot: This includes light switches, countertops and doorknobs. A two-step process is best to eliminate germs and viruses. First clean with soap and water, then use an alcohol or bleach solution to disinfect.

Your refrigerator and oven tend to get a good workout during the holidays: Scrub your

oven thoroughly to give it a good starting point. Clean and disinfect your fridge's surfaces. Throw away outdated food so you have room for leftovers.

Give your guests space for their stuff: At least one surface should be empty in guest bathrooms to allow room for guests' personal toiletries.



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Decorate your home like a professional stylist

he pages of glossy home magazines are full of photos of wonderful Christmas decor this time of the year.

Wouldn't you just love to find out how the stylist achieved such amazing results? What are his or her secrets? How can you achieve the same look?

Here are the secrets topreparaaccomplishing a gorgeous, anda plan.yet affordable, look for yourFirsthome this Christmas.made o

Plan like a professional

How do you decorate your home for Christmas? Do you get the box with decorations from the attic, buy a Christmas tree at the local lot, and then just hang everything from the box on the tree? Maybe you have some ornaments left over, so you decide to decorate some loose Christmas branches to make a lovely centerpiece for the dinner table. You're done!

If only it was that easy.

No, when a stylist wants to create a wonderful Christmas atmosphere, he or she will make the necessary preparations in the form of a plan.

First of all, a decision is made on a style or theme: elegant baroque, simple family Christmas, or ultra-modern. Then the stylist looks at the surroundings.

What is the main material used in this house? What are the predominant colors? Which style does this house project? How can you use this with your chosen theme? Is there anything that needs hiding?

Then it is time to make a shopping list of things that you need to create your chosen theme and to hide any unsightly elements.

Styling tricks

Styling a home for Christmas is done in exactly the same way as a regular styling job: by using layers.

The stylist starts off with the basic layer, which is the house itself. Color — by using fabric or paint — and shape for example, large backdrops or pieces of furniture — are added to set the tone.

Next is the second layer: the Christmas tree. You can also add other Christmas plants to this layer. For example, you can use two large poinsettias as centerpieces on the dinner table, or pair up small evergreen plants.

The natural green of the plants acts as a base on which to offset the glitter and glamor of the Christmas decoration. This is a much-used styling trick.

Decoration belongs to the third layer: the layer that adds bells and whistles. Decoration is not restricted to the classic Christmas bauble.

Nothing beats candles and tea lights when it comes to creating an atmosphere. Limit the number of different colors – and scents – that you use and place the candles in rhythmic, repetitive arrangements for a stylish touch.



Dried fruit makes an attractive holiday display and it can scent the whole house.

Holiday trends for your home

o you want to transform your holiday decor this year? If so. here are five looks for 2022 that may inspire you.

Nature themed

Natural elements like tree branches and pinecones, and organic materials like wood and hemp are trending choices for Christmas decor.

Retro inspired

A vintage holiday look is currently all the rage. Bring out your old-fashioned ornaments or find new ones that match this theme.

Delovod

Turn used items into decorative pieces or shop for ornaments made from reclaimed materials. You can take this trend a step further by wrap≋ping your gifts in fabric, flyers or newspapers.

Dried fruit

Dried limes, oranges and lemons can be made into garlands and tree ornaments or displayed in glass jars. As a bonus, they smell great!

Shimmer and shine

Shiny decor is sure to put you in a festive mood. Use metallic items in shades like blue and green or silver and gold that can be used year after vear.

For more ideas, and to find everything you need, visit your local stores.



Three places to hang **Christmas stockings**

hristmas stockings are a classic holidav decoration. Here are three places to hang them in your home.

Mantel

To give your living room a festive feel, affix your stockings to a mantel using discreet or ornate holders.

Door

Use metal Christmas

wreath holders and place your stockings at eye level on one or several doors.

Bannister

Attach your stockings to the handrail on your staircase with string or selflocking fasteners.

If Santa is particularly resourceful, you can also hang your children's Christmas stockings in their rooms.

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The perfect

Take your decoration game to new heights

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GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

A holiday tree's crowning achievement is the tree topper, the decoration that can tie all your decorating themes together.

Choosing a tree topper becomes an important purchase, as many toppers get used year after year, and some are even passed down through generations.

Types of tree toppers

Tree toppers are limited only by the imagination. They can speak to your personality as well as tie together decorating themes.

Traditional tree toppers include stars, angels, bows, snowflakes and bouquets. If you're looking for something more whimsical, you might get a tree topper in the shape of a top hat, reindeer, red truck or gnome. You also may prefer character tree toppers, such as King Kong or Yoda. If you have a children's tree, you might top it with ornaments in the shape of Santa, Snoopy, stuffed animals or stars made of candy.

You may also seek out a unique tree topper or one that takes advantage of modern technology. You can order a tree topper in which wire strands spell out your family name. Some tree toppers have LED projectors that project shapes such as stars above the tree. Some tree toppers you can control from your smartphone or a remote control to change the colors of the lights or the order in which they flash, or play music.

Another option is to make your own tree topper. You are likely to find great ideas for how to do that at your local craft store.

Height of the tree topper Another factor to consider is the size of the tree topper. You want to make sure there is enough room between the top of the tree and the ceiling to accommodate the topper. Generally speaking, you want to have at least 6 inches of space between the ceiling and the top of your tree topper.

If you have a standard 9-foot ceiling, follow these guidelines provided by Balsam Hill, a maker of Christmas trees:

• A 4- to 5.5-foot tree can have a tree topper that is 5 inches tall by 6 inches wide.

■ A 6- to 6.5-foot tree can have a tree topper 7 inches tall by 5 inches wide.

A 7- to 7.5-foot tree can have a tree topper 4 inches tall by 4 inches wide.

Tree topper weight

Most tree toppers are made of lightweight fabrics – such as paper, fabric, plastic or fiber composites — so that they balance well on the tree. If your topper is made of something heavier, such as glass, take extra steps to secure it. Zip ties can be useful.

Balsam Hills recommends standing a tree topper on your palm. If it starts to tilt within three seconds, you'll need extra support.

Safety tips

Once you've picked out a topper, it's time to place it on the tree. Start by gathering any tools you will need to secure the topper.

Ask a friend or family member to hold the tree steady while you put the topper in place. Use a stable stepladder to reach the top of the tree.

With a pre-lit tree topper, make sure that all the wires and plugs are working. Inspect the topper for burnt-out or cracked bulbs before plugging it in.

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HOLIDAY PLANNING

SKIRT A TREE WITH CLASS

Cover the base of your pine in a practical and decorative way

GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

he tree skirt is a piece of fabric placed on the floor surrounding the Christmas tree. It covers the tree stand and provides a place for presents. A tree collar wraps tightly around the stand, almost like a scarf, to hide the bottom of the tree and the tree stand.

A bit of history

Back when Germans first began decorating Christmas trees, they used real candles.

They placed a covering under the base of the Christmas tree to protect the floor and collect the wax and needles that fell out of the tree.

Then, around 1879, according to the blog Christmas Tree Source, people started using Christmas tree stands, and the mat underneath became what we now know as the tree skirt.

It became a boon for those who like to decorate, and what was once a simple piece of fabric took on a new life. Families would embroider or quilt tree skirts to match their decorating themes. They became the fancy lawn for holiday villages or nativity scenes.



Tree skirts are a boon for those who like to decorate.

ADOBE STOCK

Materials

From those simple mats to today's decorative masterpieces, tree skirts come in all sorts of different materials and styles. According to House Beautiful, you can now find skirts made of wicker, felt, faux fur and jute. Other sources offer them in velvet, rattan, silk or chunky knits.

Tree collars can be found in rattan, burlap, seagrass and shiny metals. You can make them yourself by quilting, knitting or crocheting. For unique touches, add beading, felt appliques or embroidery.

Measurements

The next decision you'll need to make for a tree skirt is what the diameter will be. Some of that will be dictated by the space you have around your tree.

The company Christmas Lights Etc. offers size guidelines:

■ For larger artificial trees (9 feet and taller), 56 inches is best. Live trees 7 ½ feet and higher can use a 56-inch tree skirt if the tree stand is large, as well.

■ For 7.5-foot Christmas trees, 48 inches works great.

For 4.5- to 6.5-foot trees,
 42 to 48 inches would be ideal.
 Mini tree skirts (20 inches) are for 2- to 3-foot tabletop trees.

Christmas tree collars

Erica Young shared some advice about tree collars with Family Handyman. First, she describes four different kinds: *** Rings:** Solid, round

pieces that can't be adjusted. *** Square:** Usually made

of wood, they fit in with rustic decors.

*** Hinged:** Hinges let you wrap the collar around the tree rather than dropping the tree into the collar.

*** Panels:** Several panels are assembled around the tree and then can be taken apart and laid flat for storage.

She recommends choosing a collar that matches the rest of your decor in style and theme, using plastic and metal collars for live trees and saving more delicate materials for artificial trees. She also suggests deciding what sort of features — price, durability, installation ease — are most important to you and measuring the tree stand before purchasing.

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***** HOLIDAY PLANNING By the chimney with care

How to keep children safe around Christmas and Hanukkah decorations

NICOLE VILLALPANDO

Austin American-Statesman

 t's the most wonderful time of the year! It's also a dangerous time of the year. Sometimes kids and holiday decorations don't mix.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers these tips for families:

Christmas trees

When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. The needles should be hard to pull off and should not break when you bend them. When you tap the tree on the ground, only a few needles should fall off. Cut a few inches off the bottom of the trunk before putting it in the stand, and be sure to keep the stand filled with water.

■ If you have an artificial tree, make sure it's labeled "fire resistant."

When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces, radiators or portable heaters. Place the tree out of the way of traffic, and do not block doorways. Use only noncombustible or flame-re-

sistant materials to trim a tree.

Lights

Check all lights before hanging them on a tree or in your home, even if you have just purchased them. Make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed wires, broken sockets or loose connections.

■ Be cautious about trimmings that may contain lead. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded materials. Light strands may contain lead in the bulb sockets and wire coating, sometimes in high amounts. Make sure your lights are out of reach from young children who might try to put lights in their mouths, and wash your hands after handling them.

■ Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use. To hold lights in place, string them through hooks or insulated staples, not nails or tacks. Never pull or tug lights to remove them. Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground-fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.

When lighting candles, remove flammable materials from the area, and place the candles where they will not be knocked over. Never leave a burning candle unattended.

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Do not use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. For more fire-safety tips, listen to "Holiday Fire Safety" at HealthyChildren.org.

Decorations

■ In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable. Keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to prevent them from swallowing or inhaling small pieces. Avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a young child to eat them.

■ Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun-glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Remove all wrapping papers, bags, paper, ribbons and bows from tree and fireplace areas after gifts are opened. These items can pose suffocation and choking hazards to a small child or can cause a fire if near flame.

• Keep potentially poisonous holiday plant decorations, including mistletoe berries, Jerusalem cherry and holly berry, away from children.

We would add a safety note about Hanukkah:

■ Supervise all candle lighting with the children. For young children, light the candles for them, or explore an electric menorah that they can light with the push of a button.

■ For early elementary-age children, place your hand over their hand and light the candles together. That way, your hand will get the wax, not theirs. Use a long electric lighter rather than a match.

■ Watch the candles until they burn out. Make sure you light them in a place where they are not going to be knocked over, or light them on a tray, and then move the tray to a safe spot. We love the kitchen sink or the stove.

Choose large oversized dreidels for your youngest dreidel players.

■ Take the foil off of the gelt for young children, and dispose of it so they don't swallow the foil.



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