

Holiday Gift Guide

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Find the time to shop for holiday gifts



The holiday season is a busy time of year. So many activities are packed into a relatively short period of time, and it is easy to become a tad overwhelmed by it all. Once Black Friday arrives on November 27 (or Thanksgiving evening for those who can't wait until Friday), holiday shoppers have less than a month to get all of their shopping done.

Planning, decorating, entertaining, and socializing takes time away from shopping. To find the time to get everything done — especially shopping — consider these time management tips and tricks.

- Shop during off-peak hours. The busiest times of the day for holiday shopping will be lunch hour during a business day and right before or after supper time. Wading through crowds can be time-consuming. Try to shop when the stores are more sparsely populated so you can get in and out faster.

- Shop local. Think about patronizing small, independent retailers. Not only will you enjoy customized, exemplary customer service, but the stores probably will not be able to fit as many customers as large chains. That means you can browse more readily and shop faster and more safely.

- Schedule online shopping blocks. Pepper your calendar with blocks of time devoted to online shopping. This way you can handle it without distraction and easily check people off of your list.

- Delegate some tasks. Pool your resources with friends or family members and divide up your shopping lists. Each person can be in charge of a different category of shopping. For example, if you are in charge of gaming gifts, buy all of these and then distribute them to whoever needed them. Delegating saves time and lets shoppers avoid rushing from store to store.

- Take a day off. While it may not be ideal to use vacation time for holiday shopping, sometimes it can be an effective way to check off a good portion of your list. Start in the early morning when the children are at school and visit as many stores as possible. Stow away those gifts until you have the opportunity to wrap them. Make the day off a little more special by treating yourself to a solo lunch or a midday meal with a friend.

The holiday season is one of the busiest times of the year. Finding the time to finish shopping and complete other tasks is challenging, but possible.

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5 ways to support small businesses this holiday season



Small businesses long have been the heart and soul of local communities. There is something to be said about being on a first-name basis with a local restaurateur or another small business owner, as such familiarity often translates into exemplary service.

According to the U.S.

Small Business Administration, small businesses account for 99.9 percent of companies in the country, due in large part to the broad definition of small businesses (those with fewer than 500 employees). However, the vast majority of businesses in the United States have a staff that's

smaller than 20 workers, according to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. These firms employ nearly 60 million workers, says the SBA.

Despite the prevalence of small businesses, fewer than 80 percent of entrepreneurial small business ventures make it beyond their

first year, and only around half make it beyond five years.

Consumers who want to help their favorite small businesses survive can use the holiday season and beyond to set the course for success. Consumers can make a concerted effort to fuel this important cog

in their local economic engines.

- Shop local. The concept is simple but effective. Opting to shop in local stores over larger conglomerates and franchises can help small businesses take root. Before making holiday shopping lists, visit local stores and base gift ideas on items they have in stock. Chances are those gifts will be one-of-a-kind.

- Purchase gift cards/certificates. All businesses have slow periods, and post-holidays is often a time when sales stagnate. Gift cards may bring new customers into local businesses who might otherwise not have patronized them, potentially creating new repeat customers.

- Cater holiday meals and gatherings. The holiday season is chock-full of entertainment opportunities. Individuals can rely on nearby restaurants and other food and beverage businesses to cater holiday parties. Some

businesses also may be willing to discount or donate food for nonprofit group activities, such as church holiday bazaars, school holiday concerts or fundraising fairs.

- Mention small businesses on social media. The holiday season breeds

excitement. Therefore, when shoppers are in local stores, they can snap pictures of products and overflowing shopping bags and post them online while praising local businesses.

- Think about subscription gifts. Enrollment in a health club or a massage therapy service are gifts that keep on giving for the recipient, but also help ensure consistent incoming cash for the business providing the service.

When shopping this holiday season, consumers can look to the small, local businesses in their communities that help make towns and cities unique.



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A guide to picking the perfect fresh Christmas tree



Come the holiday season, perhaps no tradition evokes the warm and fuzzy “feels” more than a family outing to pick a Christmas tree. Whether it’s a trek to a live Christmas tree farm or a short drive to the nearest pre-cut tree lot, the process of selecting a tree that will serve as the crown jewel of the entire season is a great way to make lasting memories.

Selecting a tree is a yearly ritual and each person has his or her set of criteria for what makes the ideal Christmas tree. These tips can help families find the right tree.

CHOOSE YOUR SPECIES

Do some homework on the type of tree you want prior to buying the tree. Balsam fir and Fraser fir are popular Christmas tree varieties, but there are many others, such as noble fir and Norway spruce. Balsams are known for having the most fragrant smell, but Frasers tend to keep their needles the longest. For those who prefer a Douglas fir, keep in mind that they sometimes drop their needles prematurely due to foliar diseases like needle-cast fungus.

SPACE FOR ORNAMENTS

In addition to aroma and needle longevity, look for trees that have

a desirable shape and allow for adequate space between branches, advises the home and garden resource The Spruce. Trees groomed to be lush and full will look beautiful unadorned, but once ornaments are added, full branches may cause those ornaments to hang low or even fall off. Trees with sparse branches allow for ornaments to hang straight.

MEASURE YOUR SPACE

Trees in the field or in a lot may look much smaller than they do when brought into the living room. Don’t make the mistake of selecting a tree that is too large for your home. The agricultural firm Ragan

& Masey says to measure the room from floor to ceiling and subtract the height of the tree stand and tree topper. It’s equally important to measure the width of the area where the tree will stand and allow for ample space for foot traffic around the tree.

PERFORM A NEEDLE CHECK

Every tree will drop some needles, and most evergreens hold their foliage. Modest needle loss is not an indicator of a poor tree. However, Decker’s Nursery in Greenlawn, NY says if 50 percent of the needles are lost when you swipe your hand down three to five different branches around the tree,

the tree likely is not a good choice. In addition, avoid a tree that has glaring defects in the trunk as it can impede water flow through the tree.

HEAVIER IS BETTER

A heavy pre-cut tree means it is full of water and has been cut more recently. A healthy, fresh tree is going to require an effort to lift. Older, dried out trees will not be heavy.

Upon arriving home, make a fresh cut off the tree trunk and get it in water as soon as possible — even if that’s a bucket until the tree stand can be set up.

Holiday gifts for four-legged family members



Holiday shoppers who are busy making lists and checking them twice should make sure they don't overlook the family pet. Christmas has gone to the cats and dogs, as a greater number of people include their companion animals when selecting gifts each year.

A study by OnePoll conducted by Rover.com, the nation's largest network of dog sitters and walkers, found that 95 percent of pet owners have bought holiday gifts for their pets. Gifts can range from everyday needs, like food and treats, to more lavish extravagances like spa treatments.

Pet owners who plan to get their pets gifts this year may want to consider some of the emerging pet trends as they browse wares and services. The Balance, a business, career and industry information site, says pet industry trends point toward these segments seeing growth.

NATURAL PET PRODUCTS

Just as people are interested in protecting the health of the planet and their own personal health, so, too, are they extending this concern to companion animals. Natural pet products, which can include natural flea and tick remedies, holistic foods, organic items, and all-natural grooming products, can make great gifts.

Specialty pet services

The American Pet Products Association says the demand for high-end pet grooming and other services is substantial. In addition, personalized training, behavioral consulting, portrait photography, dog sitting, and upscale spa treatments like pet Reiki and massage are booming.

MOBILE PET GROOMING

Mobile pet grooming has become the norm in many areas. Mobile pet grooming can reduce the poten-

tial stress on animals, and tends to be very convenient for customers, particularly seniors and others who have mobility issues.

Beyond these growing trends, pet owners have a bevy of other ideas from which to choose. Here are just a few different suggestions:

- tests to detect pets' DNA and trace breed and ancestry,
- interactive puzzles to keep pets engaged and banish boredom,
- stylish storage baskets for pet toys,
- hidden cat litter or dog crate items that camouflage commonly used pet items,
- heated pet bed for cozy nights and mornings, and
- signature vests, coats and sweaters to look good and remain comfortable.

Pet gifts are popular this time of year, ensuring all members of the family have a treat to open.

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10 gift ideas for people who love to cook



Many people know someone who loves spending lots of time in the kitchen. Certain home cooks may enjoy whipping up favorite recipes, while others might get excited about experimenting with new flavors and ingredients.

A love of cooking paves the way for many different gifting opportunities. Food-related gifts also come in a

wide variety of price points, making it easy for shoppers to spend as little or as much as they want. Check out these 10 gift ideas for the foodie on your holiday shopping list.

1. Sheet pans: They may not seem like the most sexy or high-tech tools of the kitchen, but sheet pans are among the most versatile. They can be used for cook-

ies, sheet pan cakes, oven-frying cutlets or fries, or even serving as the perfect bases for candy brittles.

2. Air fryer tool set: By now many people have hopped on the air fryer bandwagon, but they may not have all of the accessories to take air frying to the next level. From spatulas to tongs to silicone brushes, an air fryer tool set can

make meals even more delicious.

3. Dutch oven: You'd be hard-pressed to find a more hard-working tool in the kitchen than a Dutch oven. These heavy, often enameled cast iron vessels come in various quart sizes. They can be used to cook stews, breads, cakes, and much more.

4. Kitchen compost bin:

Home cooks who want to cut down on waste will appreciate a countertop compost bin to gather food scraps.

5. Serving board: The rise in cheese and charcuterie boards means cooks will need something attractive to serve their spreads. Wooden and stone boards are attractive when serving sliced cheeses, crackers,

chutneys, and other appetizer.

6. Electric wine opener: Wine is the perfect complement to many dishes, and what easier way to open bottles than with an electric wine opener? Many are compatible with almost any bottleneck and can open several bottles on a single charge.

7. Spiralizer: The trend for pasta alternatives continues, and having a spiralizer that can turn vegetables like zucchini into spiraled "noodles" will be handy in most kitchens.

8. Apron and accessories: Home cooks need to protect their clothing in the kitchen. A fashionable apron and matching oven mitts can make a statement and keep clothes clean.

9. Meat delivery: The number of direct-to-home meat shipping providers continues to grow. Have quality cuts of meat delivered right to a home cook's house so that he or she can cut back on trips to the store.

10. New blender: Today's blenders can crush ice, process foods, puree, and chop foods. These versatile appliances make a welcome addition to any kitchen.

Stock up on food-related gifts now for those people on your holiday shopping list who love to cook.

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Keep safety in mind when gifting toys



Few people garner as much delight from opening holiday gifts as young children. The holiday season is a wonder to behold, culminating with brightly wrapped presents just waiting to be revealed.

For parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends, nothing is more memorable than watching the pure joy on a child's face when he or she opens a holiday gift. As a result, well-meaning gift-givers sometimes forget to consider safety when seeking out toys and games for kids.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission says there were more than 250,000 toy-related injuries treated in American hospital emergency departments in 2017. Most of these injuries were attributed to nonmotorized scooters, toy balls and toy vehicles. However, any toy that is not age-appropriate has the potential to cause harm. That is why the organization Prevent Blindness America, which spearheaded the campaign to make December Safe Toys and Gifts Month, advises caution when gifting youngsters.

The following are some guidelines when gifting young kids, courtesy of PBA, the CPSC and Kids Health® by Nemours.

- Always read labels to see if the toy is right for a child's age. Don't buy a toy that is too mature for a child even if you think it would be a big hit.

- Consider a gift recipient's temperament and behavior before purchasing a toy. While one child may

be mature enough to handle a toy, another of the same age may not be ready for it.

- Recognize choking hazards in toys, which may include marbles, small balls and uninflated balloons. Button batteries, which come in many electronics, can be a choking hazard and cause damage to intestines if swallowed.

- Toys with strings and straps can strangle young children and should be avoided.

- Inspect all toys for sharp edges or points. Even stuffed animals with internal wires can stab, cut or shock.

- Avoid toys that have parts that fly off, as they can injure the eyes or other parts of the body.

- Look for nontoxic labels on toys, including crayons, markers and other art supplies.

- Toys made of fabric should be labeled as flame-resistant or flame-retardant.

- Painted toys must use lead-free paint.

- Look for the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) label, which signifies that the toy has passed the group's safety inspection standards.

- Monitor toy usage during play, and frequently examine toys to see if wear and tear has made them into hazards.

The holiday season is an exciting time for children eager to play with new toys and games. Ensuring those gifts are safe can make for a healthy giving season.

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Great gifts for avid snowbirds



Every winter, millions of people — largely seniors and retirees — pack their bags, load up their RVs or book their flights with warm destinations in mind. Soon after they start sharing photos of themselves sipping tropical drinks on sandy shores while the rest of their family members are likely shiver-

ing in icy drifts back home.

This seasonal migration has become the norm for a distinct demographic who prefer to ride out the winter in locales that are free from snow, ice and frigid temperatures. The term “snowbird” was first used in the 1920s to describe seasonal workers who moved south for the

winter months, and in 1979 it was used in reference to tourists who headed south each winter. According to Vacations Made Easy, around 10 percent of the snowbirds who head to the southern United States each winter are Canadian. Florida is one of the most popular destinations for snowbirds.

A significant percentage of snowbirds eventually will make their southern residences permanent. In the meantime, shoppers who want to give a fitting gift for the snowbirds who are still traveling each year can consider the following ideas this holiday season.

- Golf course guide: Retirees often spend time out on the golf course. Offer a guide to various courses in southern states, and they can plan their trips by making road trips as they visit each course.
- GPS device: While many snow-

birds have cars already equipped with built-in navigation, those driving older vehicles may benefit from a GPS device they can mount to the dashboard, which will provide directions if they have to divert from their normal routes or when they want to go off the beaten path on their way to sunny skies.

- Decorative stationery: Make it easy for snowbirds to communicate with friends and family back home in a traditional way. Decorative note cards, post cards or other stationery can be a nice gift, and these notes can serve as mementos for recipients, particularly grandchildren.
- Customized T-shirts: Have T-shirts monogrammed or customized with messages that play to snowbirds’ love of travel and/or sense of humor.
- Beach essentials: Put together

a gift that makes spending time on the beach more enjoyable. A beach caddy stocked with sunscreen, towels, an umbrella, and flip flops will give beachgoers a head start on gathering seaside essentials.

- Food and wine carrier: Keeping items cool is critical in hot climates. A well-insulated food and beverage carrier can make picnics or snacks by the shore comfortable and safe.
- Lounges: Whether you offer a zero-gravity lounge to set up on the lanai or a floating beach lounge for relaxing in the waves, a gift that brings relaxation to the next level will be appreciated.

Snowbirds travel many miles to reach warm destinations and ride out winter in comfort. Gifts geared around this annual tradition are guaranteed to make snowbirds smile.

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Gift-wrapping tips and tricks



Much of the focus of each holiday season is on gift-giving, but all those gifts will eventually need to be wrapped. Stacks of presents just waiting to be covered with paper and ribbon can overwhelm gift givers, prompting them to put off wrapping gifts until the last minute. Hesitant wrappers with a pile of gifts to wrap can use these tricks to make the process go smoothly.

FIND INSPIRATION

Instead of looking at wrapping as yet another chore, try to envision how the recipient will feel peeling open the paper and finding the gift inside. Wrapping can be the prelude to the gift itself, and intensify the anticipation. The wrapping paper or style also may draw on aspects of the gift itself. For example, a knit scarf can be placed in

a crocheted stocking.

HANDLE ODDLY-SHAPED ITEMS

Wrapping rectangular boxes can be a snap, but what about something that's round or full of angles? Think about placing oddly-shaped items inside another item to make the shape more uniform. Shoe boxes, coffee cans and even paper towel rolls can hold items. Then place

the wrapping on these containers.

COVER PRICES

To enable easy exchanges or returns, do not cut off the price tags of gifts. Instead, place a festive sticker over the dollar amount, but leave the scan bar visible. This way the gift recipient can return the gift with ease if necessary.

KEEP SUPPLIES AT THE READY

Devote a bin or bins to wrapping supplies and tools. Having scissors, paper, tape, ribbon, and more in a designated spot will cut down on having to hunt and peck when it comes time to wrap. Martha Stewart suggests getting a rotary cutter to cut long straight or decorative edges on wrapping paper. Rotary cutters may be easier to use than scissors, especially when paired with a ruler.

WRAP ON A FIRM SURFACE

Devote a table or counter to wrapping gifts. This will keep the paper taut and neat and make it easier to cut and position. You risk tearing the paper or puncturing it when working on carpeting or bedding.

COLOR- OR PATTERN-CODE GIFTS

It's easy to visualize who gets what gift when each recipient has his or her own special wrapping paper. This is also a handy idea when wrapping gifts from Santa, as it will differentiate the Santa gifts from the ones being given by Mom and Dad.

With a few helpful pointers, wrapping gifts can be easy. And for those who prefer to skip the wrapping themselves, many malls and retailers offer complimentary wrapping for a small donation to charity.

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Sticking to your budget



The mounds of advertisements for Black Friday savings can easily entice someone to stray from their budget and take advantage of plastic payments. However, depending on the cost of an item, it's possible to find yourself paying for the same purchase when the season rolls around next year.

Credit cards are great companions for emergencies or when offering points toward travel, fuel or cash-back rewards. But when you begin relying on them for luxury items, spending habits can quickly become harmful.

When you're Black Friday shopping this year, stick to buying items with cash instead of leaning on credit.

CREDIT CARD DEBT STATISTICS

According to the United States Federal Reserve, America is fac-

ing a total of \$420.22 billion of revolving credit card debt. This epidemic in the country can be managed by spending responsibly and paying down current balances. Here are some other sobering facts about the state of credit debt in the country from the organization.

The average household will pay an average of \$1,141 in interest annually; overall, Americans with revolving debt face outstanding balances of \$6,929; and both revolving and outstanding credit card debt account to \$944 billion in America.

SAVE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Learning to save throughout the year can lessen the urge you feel to rack up credit card debt for the holidays. One efficient way to ensure funds are intact for Black Fri-

day is by opening a holiday-savings account. Speak to a lender about finding a plan that offers high-interest returns.

You should also get a better understanding on your spending habits to find areas where you can improve. Take advantage of applications that track where your money is going to visualize a better strategy for savings.

WHEN CREDIT CARDS MAKE SENSE

If you plan to purchase high-cost items this holiday season, using a credit card that offers rewards can be great way to build points — if you can pay off the balance before interest is charged.

Search offers from lenders for perks like travel, fuel and cash-back opportunities.

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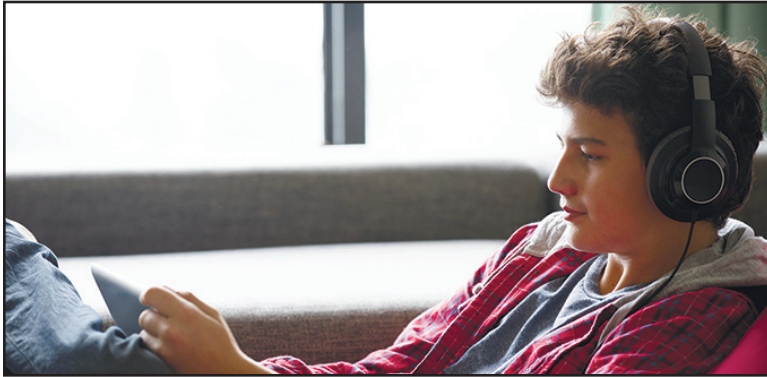
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5 great gifts for tweens and teens this holiday



Children often marvel at the world around them. They're delighted to receive just about any toy, and play with items that others may not see as fun — including everything from mixing bowls to cardboard boxes. Slowly that cherubic toddler turns into a school-aged wonder, and later into a young adult trying to find his or

her place in the world. With each passing year, the task of finding gifts for tweens and teenagers becomes that much more challenging. While most parents and other relatives may never seem “cool” in the eyes of their teens, they can gift the tweens and teens they love with presents that will earn them a few extra brownie points. The fol-

lowing are five gift ideas that are tailor-made for tweens and teens.

1. LED STRIP LIGHTS

Both girls and boys may enjoy customizing their rooms as they see fit. Teens can utilize LED strip lights to create a unique ambiance that reflects their style. These often self-sticking ribbons of lights adhere right to walls. They come in a variety of lengths so they can be used to frame the perimeter of the room, if desired. Complete with multicolored options and a remote control, teens can set their room colors as their mood dictates.

2. GIFT CARDS

Teens try to keep up with the latest styles. A gift card or clothing gift from one of their favorite retailers can help them build their ensembles that much quicker. Aeropostale, Abercrombie & Fitch,

Hollister, Forever 21, Zumiez, American Eagle, and Tilly's are just some of the stores popular among today's tweens and teens.

3. WIRELESS EARBUDS OR HEADPHONES

Wireless headphones are used on a daily basis by tweens and teens. They rely on them for listening to music, watching movies on their devices and even during remote learning sessions. There are many brands to choose from, and Beats by Dre and Apple AirPods are among the most popular.

4. SNEAKERS AND SHOES

Sneakers have long been popular gifts for teenagers, but they tend to be costly, especially for trending styles and brands. Vans Slip-On™ Core Classics, Converse Chuck Taylor All Star High Top Sneakers, Reebok Club C 85 Vintage, Nike Air

Force One, and Adidas Sobakov are popular among today's tweens and teens. In addition, thanks to the resurgence of 1990s style, Dr. Martens boots are once again in demand.

5. VIDEO GAME CONSOLES

Each gamer has his or her preferred platform for gaming. From the Nintendo Switch to the Xbox Series X to the Sony PlayStation 5, these systems are in high demand. Due to that demand, these products may be harder to find the closer you get to Christmas Day. Grab them while you can and soak in the smile on your favorite tween's or teen's face.

Teens and tweens are notoriously challenging to shop for. However, with some knowledge, loved ones can find gifts tweens and teens are more likely to use and enjoy.

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Great homemade food gifts



Gifts from the heart are among the most coveted and appreciated come the holiday season. Hobbyists from all walks of life can turn their passions into handmade gifts, but few gifts may be as wel-

comed as those that can be eaten.

Cooking and baking ramps up during the holiday season. People can turn extra time in the kitchen into opportunities to create festive treats that are ideal for gifting.

But which items are the best of the best? Even though tastes are singular, these items will appeal to most foodies and others on your gift list.

- Jams and preserves: Fruit jams and preserves are versatile foods. They are as at home on toast and biscuits as they are as fillings in cookies and tarts. Jams and preserves can be made with relatively few ingredients and work well with seasonal fruits.

- Cinnamon rolls: Warm, sticky and full of aromatic spice, cinnamon rolls are the perfect comfort foods. These rolls do not typically have a long shelf life, so be sure to present them promptly before they get stale.

- Pancakes (or cookies) in a jar: If you have a fantastic recipe that you can't resist sharing, try turning it into a gift. Measure and package

the ingredients into mason jars, tie with ribbons and include directions for preparation and cooking.

- Mini bundt cakes: Fruit cakes may be a holiday standard, but bundt cakes make for great and traditional offerings as well. Miniature bundts filled with chocolate chips, dried fruits or even those soaked in a favorite boozy-butter glaze can be moist and delicious.

- Chocolate barks or fudges: Seasonal flavors can come to life in chocolate treats. White chocolate filled with peppermint pieces or dark chocolate and cherry chunks are tasty pairings. Break apart portions of the bark or cut the fudge with cookie cutters and gift inside cello bags tied with ribbons or in cardboard candy boxes.

- Cocktail syrups: Create spicy or sweet syrups that are tailor-

made for enhancing cocktails. Anyone on your gift list can then become a master mixologist.

- Shortbread cookie ornaments: Circular shortbread cookies can be decorated with royal icing to look like Christmas ornaments. They can be eaten or even placed on trees to complete holiday decor.

- Festive cookie pops: Cookie pops can be made by mixing homemade or prepurchased crumbled cake with frosting or softened cream cheese and formed into balls. Insert a lollipop stick and dip the balls into melted chocolate or candy melts. Sprinkles, nonpareils or luster dust can be used to enhance the covered pops.

Food gifts are perfect for the holiday season. Handmade treats from the heart show loved ones how just much you care.

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