



How to keep gifts secret and hidden

Surprising loved ones and friends with gifts is part of the excitement of the holiday season. It can be just as exhilarating for gift-givers to witness the gifts being opened as for the recipients who are tearing into the paper to reveal their gifts. But in order for presents to be the ultimate surprises, it is essential for items purchased to remain a secret.

Whether shopping online or in-store, gift buyers can do their best to hide gifts from others.

Online shopping

The popularity of online shopping has now made it possible for just about anything to be purchased from the comfort of home or while on-the-go. This same convenience

has created a new obstacle pertaining to keeping gifts a secret, especially from a spouse or children living in the same house.

Gift-givers have to essentially be package ninjas, intercepting parcels from delivery people and burying the digital trail leading back to the purchase. Here are some tips for success:

- Clear your web search history and computer cache frequently on shared devices. This way you avoid loved ones stumbling across past searches for gifts as well as seeing all of those advertisements that seemingly pop up magically in accordance with your search history.
- Use your work email for receipts and purchase correspondence. This helps when



spouses share one email account.

- Investigate if online retailers have private shopping modes, which may mask purchases from others.
- Create a family account to

relieve the stress of wondering if the kids saw your long history list of past purchases.

- Turn off push notifications of purchases or when the items will ship. This is key for those who share digital devices and accounts. You'll avoid the message of "Name item has just shipped" from being shared with others.
- Opt to have items shipped to the store for in-store pick-up, or arrange for an alternate delivery address.

mask orders. Retailers like Amazon enable you to set up family sharing. This way each family member can have a unique log in, which will then separate order history logs among relatives. This helps

you have shopped. Retailers love to emblazon their shopping bags with names and logos, and that can cue savvy kids and adults as to where you shopped.

- Pay in cash as much as possible. Reduce the paper trail of purchases by purchasing the more secretive gifts with cash.
- Tuck receipts into a well-hidden place that others will not think to look.
- Consider shopping on lunch hour at work and hiding gifts in the office until they can be brought to the house when others are not home.

Regardless of how gifts are purchased, make sure to promptly wrap and hide presents so they are not discovered before the big day.

Relate to the house when others are not home.

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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Live theater can be a memorable gift experience



The experience of live theater is unlike any other. Watching actors perform live on stage can be a wonder to behold, and many people even vividly recall the first play or musical they attended.

According to a survey conducted by Nielsen Scarborough in spring of 2016, more than 47 million Americans had attended a live theatre event within the past month. No matter if one is a lover of the arts or simply enjoys a night out on the town, live theater can make for the perfect holiday gift. Here's how to make the gift of live theater happen this season.

- **Enroll in a discount ticket program.** Explore the pos-

sibilities of discounted tickets through employers, schools or professional organizations. Groups offer perks like enrollment in entertainment plans that are affiliated with theaters across the country. Participation in these clubs can offset the cost of tickets.

- **Tap into a person's interests.** Theater shows run the gamut from serious dramas to lighthearted musicals. Find a show that you think fits the recipient. Many new musicals are based on pop culture and can entertain just about anyone. For example, "The Cher Show," "Jersey Boys," "Beautiful," and "Rock of Ages" have tapped into popular music as the crux of the

storyline and can appeal to anyone who grew up listening to certain performers.

- **Look close to home.** While London's West End and Broadway in New York City are the most renowned places for live theater, you don't have to stray far from home to find quality performances. Many shows go on tours and visit various big cities. If you live close to a college campus or regional theater company, you can probably find great, budget-friendly performances nearby.
- **Make it a road trip.** If your mantra is "go big or go home," then you can purchase tickets for a show having a run on Broadway. Just be sure

to include the travel arrangements and accommodations into the gift to make it worry-free for the recipient. Many Broadway tickets get discounted post-Christmas as a way to boost tourism during winter months. Consider this as a cost-saving measure.

- **Throw in a bonus.** Ensure lasting memories of live theater by including an original cast recording soundtrack, script, book on which the show was based, posters, or another memento of the show.

Live theater is a holiday gift that keeps on giving long after the curtain has come down.

Great gifts for hunters

Millions of people across the globe have a passion for hunting. When the time comes to find gifts for the avid hunters in your life, indulging their passion for the great outdoors can make for the perfect present.

Hunters come in all shapes and sizes and from all walks of life. When shopping for gifts for hunters, it can be advantageous, particularly for consumers who don't hunt, to think of the ages and experience levels of their loved ones and then go from there.

Young and/or inexperienced hunters

Many areas have minimum age requirements for hunters, and nearly every region requires hunters to take courses on hunting safety before they can apply for hunting licenses. Financing such educations can be an ideal gift for young hunters, ensuring they will have a strong foun-

dation in firearm safety and other important aspects of hunting before they come of age and go on their first hunting trip.

A two-way radio makes another great gift for young hunters, especially who don't yet have their own phones. Even those that who have phones may find it more fun to speak with their fellow hunters over their special radios than on the phones they use every day.

Gear, which can include everything from attire to knives to compound bows and more, also can make for a great gift for young hunters or those just learning the ropes. However, consumers buying for youngsters who aren't their own children should first consult the child's parents to determine their readiness for certain gear.

Established hunters

Established hunters who

have strong passions for the sport may already have everything they need. And even those that don't may prefer certain manufacturers. It can be difficult to learn of such preferences without speaking directly to a loved one, which can spoil the surprise. In such instances, consider gifting a hunting experience. Finance a trip to a hunting ground a loved one wants to visit but never has. Go along for the trip and you might just develop your own passion for hunting.

Some additional gifts that can be great for established hunters include a rifle case; ammo cans; a bore guide, which hunters use to clean their rifles; camping gear; headlamps; and other items hunters routinely use that could be in need of an upgrade.

Of course, one of the best reasons to choose a hunting-related gift for the family out-



doorsman is it might compel them to share their bounty when they return home from a successful trip. A cookbook

that offers tips on butchering in addition to recipes can make for the perfect gift, and one that the whole family will

ultimately enjoy at the dinner table.

Top-selling gifts from years past

Many children who grew up in the 1980s hoped to find a wrapped Cabbage Patch Doll under the tree on Christmas morning, and many parents went to great lengths to procure such dolls for their children.

Cabbage Patch Dolls are just one example of a toy creating a shopping frenzy. Over the years, many toys have become the must-have presents of their times. The following is a history of some of the more popular gifts from bygone years.

1984: Transformers were a must-have present in 1984. Originally produced by a Japanese toy company, Transformers were eventually produced by Hasbro and became so popular they were a toy that spawned an animated series (not the series leading to the toy) and later blockbuster live-action movies.

1985: Just about every child, and maybe even adult, wanted a Nintendo Entertainment System for Christmas in the 1980s. The system ushered in a new era of gaming, and

helped make Super Mario Bros. a household name. NES continued its success for several years, selling seven million systems during the 1988 holiday season.

1986: Introduced the previous year, Teddy Ruxpin was an animatronic bear that would tell stories from a cassette tape inserted in his back.

1990: Were you a fan of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Donatello, or Raphael? Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were named after Renaissance artists, but they were just

pizza-eating teenage heroes at the start of the 1990s. Kids obsessed over these action figures and the animated series that featured them.

1992: Barbie has always been a popular holiday gift, but her reinvented Barbie Dream House was something girls were clamoring for in the early 1990s. Barbie's trend-setting home featured a ringing telephone, a working doorbell and a fireplace that lit up.

1993: The Talkboy was a portable audio cassette player and recorder made popular by

the movie "Home Alone 2: Lost in New York."

1995: Beanie Babies were a popular line of collectibles that enjoyed their heyday in 1995. Rare Beanie Babies would later be worth hundreds of dollars.

1997: Tamagotchi made its appearance and became a premiere virtual "pet." Industry insiders estimate that, at the height of its popularity, 15 Tamagotchis sold every minute across North America.

1998: Building on the Tamagotchi success, Furbies were

poised to become a hit as well. And they did, as 27 million Furbies were sold in 1998 alone.

Pokémon cards, Razor Scooters, Nintendo DS, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and many other gifts have reigned supreme during the holiday shopping season. Last year L.O.L. Surprise Dolls were the sleeper hit, and who is to say which gift will capture the hearts of kids this year?



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Did you know?

The holiday season is rife with tradition. Some holiday traditions, such as holiday lighting displays, are impossible to miss, while others are more subtle and possibly even unknown to many celebrants. One tradition that falls into the latter category involves the placing of oranges into Christmas stockings. The origins of Christmas stockings are rooted in legend, and one of the more popular tales involves a widowed father of

three beautiful girls. According to Smithsonian.com, this father was struggling to make ends meet and was concerned that his financial struggles would affect his daughters' ability to find a spouse. As the legend goes, St. Nicholas was wandering through the man's town and heard of his concerns. Recognizing that the man was unlikely to accept charity, St. Nicholas slid down the chimney of his house and placed three gold balls in

the girls' recently laundered stockings, which were hanging by the fire to dry. The value of the gold balls, which were discovered the following morning, was enough to ensure the girls could eventually wed. So what does that have to do with oranges? Those who wanted to replicate the tale could not so easily come upon gold balls to place in stockings, so they chose something similar in appearance: oranges.



Are poinsettias poisonous?

Christmas trees, Santa Claus, menorahs, and glittering lighting displays are just a few of the many prominent symbols of the holiday season. And while mistletoe might garner more attention and inspire more displays of affection, poinsettias are another prominent sign that the holiday season has arrived. Thanks to its bright red and green colors, the poinsettia is perhaps the ideal holiday plant. But as much as it suits holiday decor and seems tailor-made for that special time of year between Thanksgiving and the first of January, the poinsettia has a reputation that few plants would want. First discovered in Mexico and brought to the United States by Dr. Joel Poinsett, the poinsettia has long been rumored to be poisonous. However, the National Capital

Poison Center notes that poinsettias are not deadly. In fact, the NCPC notes that the rumor that poinsettias are deadly may have been around for more than a century, tracing its origins all the way back to a child who was found dead lying next to a poinsettia plant. The plant was blamed for the child's death, and even though that blame was misplaced, the stigma stuck. WebMD notes that others trace the false rumors surrounding poinsettias to 1919, when parents blamed the death of their daughter, who they thought had eaten poinsettia leaves, on this ubiquitous holiday plant. Even today, when researchers have long since proven that poinsettias are not deadly, many people still believe they can be fatal if consumed. The NCPC notes that, in

most cases, exposure to any part of a poinsettia plant in children or pets has little, if any, effect. However, if the plant is swallowed, some people and pets may experience symptoms including nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Some who touch the plant may develop a rash after contact. While poinsettias are not deadly, the NCPC still advises those who plant to include the plant in their holiday decor to take every measure necessary to prevent children and pets from swallowing it. Placing poinsettias beyond the reach of kids and pets is one simple way to accomplish just that. Poinsettias are seemingly everywhere come the holiday season. And because they're not fatal, celebrants can continue to display these beautiful plants that call to mind the colors of the holiday season.



Keep safety in mind when gifting toy

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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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 informa-

tion 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 treat-

ments 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 potential 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
- 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.



How to uncork bubbly safely



Special occasions like birthdays, holidays, and of course, New Year's Eve, are often enhanced by the inclusion of sparkling beverages. Sipping a chilled glass of bubbly can make everything feel more festive and indulgent. However, those bottles of champagne, cava or prosecco can pack quite a punch — and not just because of their alcohol content.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology says each year hundreds of people suffer serious, potentially blinding eye injuries from sparkling wine corks. Town and Country magazine reports that the pressure behind a cork is around 90 psi, which is three times the pressure of most car tires. The AAO says champagne corks can fly out of the bottle at speeds upwards of 50 miles per hour (80.5 km/h). Sometimes that rocket-

powered launch can elicit laughs, while other times it can be downright dangerous.

It is important to emphasize safety when uncorking favorite vintages. Expert sommeliers advise following some key techniques so that guests are not ducking for cover the next time a bottle of bubbly is uncorked.

- **Ensure the bottle is chilled.** Sparkling wine should be properly chilled to around 45 F. Should the beverage not be cold enough, the pressure inside the bottle will cause the cork to be released fast and can cause an overly foamy, geyser-like situation.
- **Remove the wrapping.** Champagne and other sparkling products are sealed with foil and a wire cage to keep the cork seated. Remove these first, being careful to hold the cork down in case it spontaneously pops.

- **Have a towel handy.** Drape a dish towel or cloth napkin over the top of the bottle. This muffles the pop and can absorb any spillage.
- **Twist the bottle.** Hold the bottle at a 45-degree angle facing away from yourself and anyone in the vicinity. Keep pressure around the cork while twisting the bottle. If you twist the cork, it could break inside the bottle. Continue to twist until the bottle starts to loosen from the cork and spins freely. Then you can slowly pull the cork away from the bottle.
- **Keep downward pressure.** If you can feel the pressure starting to force the cork out, push against the cork to control its release. By managing the release, you can avoid a sharp "pop" and instead have only a mild hiss of pressure as the carbonation escapes.
- **Double-pour the bubbly.** Only half-fill the glasses to allow the foam to subside. Then fill to desired level.

Note: Leftover sparkling wine can be saved without losing its fizz. If you don't have a special device for this purpose, you can use a regular metal spoon. Simply insert the stem of the spoon into the bottle top so the bowl of the spoon faces upwards. Pop the bottle into the refrigerator and the champagne will likely maintain its fizz for a few days. Some suggest chilling and then revitalizing bubbles with some raisins. Give it a try to see what works best.



How to create a durable gingerbread house

Gingerbread cookies and houses are one of the many symbols of the holiday season, alongside Christmas trees and twinkling lights. In fact, few confections symbolize the holidays more so than gingerbread.

Many a child (or a child at heart) has spent hours carefully trying to create decorative gingerbread houses. Although gingerbread recipes span various cultures, gingerbread houses originated in 16th century Germany. The fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" helped solidify the popularity of gingerbread, which became part of Christmas traditions.

Even though gingerbread houses can be fun to make, there's no denying it can be exacting work — especially for those who strive for perfection. Prepackaged kits attempt to take some of the guesswork out of the equation, but those who are crafting from scratch can employ these tips as they build their gingerbread houses.

- **Go for form and not flavor.** Few gingerbread houses ever get eaten, so focus on finding a dough that will bake up rock hard as opposed to one that tastes good.
- **Get the right icing texture.** Pastry artist Catherine Beddall says royal icing is the preferred "glue" to adhere gingerbread pieces. Beddall says icing should be thick like peanut butter and not runny.
- **Mind the dough.** Do not roll out the gingerbread dough too thin or it may become brittle after being cooked. Always cut out shapes before the gingerbread is baked. Let the baked pieces sit overnight to cool completely before using them to build.
- **Patience is key.** Allow the icing to dry for at least a couple of hours after adhering each piece and before moving and handling the house, says Beddall. Work in stages so that individual items can be decorated and allowed to dry. Then the walls can be put together, followed by the roof pieces.
- **Kids likely will need help.** Children may not have the patience or steadiness to handle complete gingerbread construction. They can decorate the separate pieces of the house while the components are laying flat, which is easier for kids. Adults can do the main assembly later on.

Happy Holidays

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The origins of Christmas caroling



The festive nature of the holiday season makes it an ideal time to sing, especially in groups. Perhaps it's no surprise then that caroling, a tradition that dates back many centuries, ultimately collided with Christmas.

Caroling and Christmas caroling are two different things. According to History.org, the origins of modern Christmas caroling can be traced to wassailing, a term that has evolved for more than a millennium. What started as a simple greeting gradually became part of a toast made during ritualized drinking. Time magazine notes that the word "wassail," which appeared in English literature as early as the eighth century, eventually came to mean the

wishing of good fortune on one's neighbors, though no one can say for certain when this particular development occurred.

During medieval times, farmers in certain parts of Britain would drink a beverage to toast the health of their crops and encourage the fertility of their animals. By 1600, farmers in some parts of Britain were still engaging in this ritual, and some were by now taking a wassail bowl filled with a toasting beverage around the streets. These wassailers would stop by neighboring homes and offer a warm drink, all the while wishing good fortune on their neighbors.

During this period, wassailing had nothing to do with

Christmas, but that began to change in Victorian England, when Christmas became more commercialized and popular. It was during this time when publishers began circulating carols, forever linking the tradition of wassailing with Christmas.

Christmas caroling as Victorian Englanders knew it might have fallen by the wayside. But while carolers may no longer go door-to-door singing Christmas songs and wishing their neighbors good fortune, those intent on seeing the modern manifestation of this tradition that dates back more than a millennium may be able to find some carolers at their local mall or church.

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Cabaret Cafe

LOST IN BOSTON

WITH RANA ROMAN, RYAN CAPPLEMAN & JOEL KOPISCHKE

7 p.m. Friday & Saturday, Jan 3 & 4, 2020

Dinner begins serving at 6:15 p.m.

TICKETS Show Only:

\$36 Regular, Seniors & College Students
\$18 HS Students & Younger & Military Personnel (with ID)

Dinner & Show:

\$49 Regular, Seniors & College Students
\$31 HS Students & Younger & Military Personnel (with ID)

Main Stage

John Mueller's Winter Dance Party

"The number one and official show for Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper!"

7 p.m. Saturday January 11, 2020

TICKETS:

\$36 Regular \$32 Seniors (60+) & College Students
\$18 HS Students & Younger & Military Personnel (with ID)

641 E FOREST ST, OCONOMOWOC

WWW.THEOAC.NET **262.560.3172**