



Celebrate the Season

November 2021

The bright side of small holiday celebrations

To say the novel coronavirus COVID-19 changed life would be an understatement. Due to COVID-19, the way people interact with one another has changed dramatically over the last several months. Despite this, the public has proven very resilient and adaptive, often finding a silver lining while confronting challenges that might once have seemed insurmountable.

The holidays are one aspect of life that have been modified as people continue to navigate the new normal. It's easy to lament the fact that extended family may not be able to travel or celebrate the holidays together. However, there is something to be said for small celebrations. The following are some of the positive aspects of scaling back holiday festivities.

- **More personal:** Certainly it can be great to see distant cousins or old college roommates for the holidays. But the more people who you see each holiday season, the less personal interaction you get. When the holidays are scaled back, dinner becomes more intimate and everyone can exchange gifts and see their loved ones' reactions.

- **Reduced expenses:** Putting out an extensive



holiday spread and entertaining 10 or more people can be expensive. Small gatherings are less expensive because there's fewer mouths to feed.

- **Ability to splurge:** On the other side of the financial coin, having fewer people for the holidays means one can indulge on items that may not be possible when hosting a crowd. Therefore, if chicken was normally on the menu, it could be possible to upgrade to a roast or something indulgent like lobster and other seafood. In addition, a small holiday celebration may free up the budget to spend more on gifts.

- **Special touch:** When there are only a few people celebrating, hosts can go the extra mile to give celebrations a special touch. Create a special holiday dessert even if the recipe is time-consuming. In addition, immediate family can pile into the car to tour the neighborhood decorations, something that may not be as manageable with a motorcade of relatives.

While holiday celebrations may need to be scaled back this year, small gatherings can produce some pleasant, unanticipated benefits.



Make-ahead meals for tasty holiday dinners

Individuals may be presented with plenty of opportunities to cook for a crowd over the course of a typical year. But no time of year is more synonymous with large sit-down meals than the holiday season.

Certain foods, such as pasta dishes and casseroles, are ideal dishes to cook for crowds. However, for those home cooks who want to prepare in advance and then enjoy themselves on the actual holiday, it may be best to choose foods that taste better the day after the dish has been cooked. Many recipes develop deeper flavor profiles after they have been left to rest and are then reheated. Holiday hosts can explore these ideas for meals that can be cooked in advance and taste even better when reheated after a day in the refrigerator.

meat loaf continue to release their flavors, and letting the loaf sit can improve the texture and the ability to slice it without it falling apart. Consider pan-frying individual slices of meatloaf until they're browned so they'll be crisp on the outside and tender in the middle.

Lasagna

Lasagna is a layered pasta dish featuring flat noodle sheets, cheese, sauce, and sometimes meat like ground beef or sausage. Lasagnas that are served right out of the oven can be runny even if they taste scrumptious. Baking it and letting it sit overnight allows all of the layers to gel together, making for a much more cohesive and fortified dish the following day.

Curries

Curries are typically made with many spices that help to make the dish flavorful. A curry that is freshly made may feature intense flavor because each of its components can be tasted individually. After a night of resting in the refrigerator, those flavors meld and mellow. Furthermore, if potatoes are used in the recipe, a night in the fridge gives the potatoes an opportunity to absorb the spices, making for an even tastier meal.

Many meals can be made ahead of time for holiday dinners and will taste even better when they are served the following day.

Stew

A stew that's been simmering on the stove or in the slow cooker all day will have a winning flavor. But stew can be even more delicious the next day. The starch in the potatoes will enable the sauce of the stew — whether it's tomato-based or comprised of a mix of brown gravy and meat drippings — to thicken. The meat may continue to cook and tenderize while reheating. As a one-pot meal, stew is simple to prepare in advance and then serve in an attractive crock for the holidays.

Meatloaf

The herbs and spices in a

Home holiday decorating ideas

The holidays often involve purchasing gifts for close friends and loved ones as well as making a delicious meal the entire family will love. But nothing sets the holiday scene and overall mood more so than beautiful decorations and other seasonal accoutrements.

Many people leave no room untouched for the holidays, meaning color schemes or trinkets may carry through from top to bottom. Decking the halls this season can be made even easier with some of these handy ideas.

Holiday timeline

If you keep holiday photo cards each year, put them in chronological order and hang them from a piece of garland from the mantel or drape on a staircase banister. This can be a fun way to see how your own children or other members of the family have grown.

Make mini evergreen displays

Clip your favorite pieces of evergreen and push the stems into floral foam. Display in small vases or other containers and place in groupings to emulate an evergreen forest.

Plan the outside

Exterior illumination and other exterior decorations share the holiday spirit with others. It can be overwhelming trying to visualize it all without a plan in place. Take a photo of the house and map out where you want lights and decorations to go. Then with your "map" in hand, you can more readily purchase supplies and start decorating.



palette. For example, white, gold and green may look beautiful. Put boxwood clip-pings and white amaryllis flowers together. Pine cones, twigs and holly pieces also can add touches to mantels, doorways and table centerpieces.

Go for a specific natural color scheme

If you desire an overall holiday feel but aren't interested in Santa figurines or kitschy elements, decorating with color in mind can be key. It's easy to tie things together with some natural elements in your desired

Ornaments elsewhere

Who says ornaments only have to go on a tree? Display antique or favorite ornaments by hanging them from beautiful ribbons throughout the home.

Scent the scene

Hang something aromatic

on the tree to mingle with the pine. Fresh cinnamon sticks tied with twine or ribbon can be nestled among the boughs. Another scented idea is to make pine cone candles and use pine or cinnamon scents to make them smell just like the season.

Holiday decorating gets a hand from some creative ideas. Always follow safety precautions, especially when using candles, hanging lights and plugging in multiple items to electric sockets. With ingenuity and safety in mind, holiday decorations can be extra special.

Keep safety in mind when decorating for the holidays

Decorations help make the holiday season a magical time of year. Stores are awash in color and twinkling lights, and similar imagery is on display in private homes.

Designing holiday displays can be a great way for families to spend time together and kick off the celebration. In fact, according to Electrical Safety Foundation International, around 90 percent of Americans decorate their homes for the holidays.

When trimming the tree and decorating this holiday season, families must keep safety in mind. A little planning and some precautionary measures can ensure displays are enjoyed all season long. Travelers Insurance offers the following holiday decorating safety tips.

- Do not overload outlets. Plan displays according to the number and location of available outlets.
- Never exceed the maximum number of light



strands that can be attached together.

- Use lights and products that have been tested for safety. Certification marks like UL, ETL and CSA are from nationally recognized laboratories.
- LED lights should be

used whenever possible. Such lights consume less energy and run cooler than other bulbs.

- The ESFI says candles start almost 50 percent of all decoration fires. Minimize the risk by using candles only when they can be mon-

itored. Artificial candles can be used in place of real candles.

- Check for freshness in live trees. A fresh tree will last longer and is less of a fire hazard than an old tree.
- Place Christmas trees at least three feet away from

all heat sources, including fireplaces and heaters.

- Use decorations that are non-combustible or made from flame-resistant materials.

- Pay attention to the age recommendations of decorations to see if they can be

used in homes with young children. Some items, however common, are choking or strangulation hazards.

- Avoid putting small, "mouth-sized" decorations near the ground or on lower limbs of trees, where young children can easily reach them.

- Exercise caution when hanging decorations at high heights. Make sure the ladder is secured and have a spotter who can hold the ladder and pass items up safely.

- Outdoor electric lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters, or GFCIs.

- Exercise caution when decorating near power lines that extend to the house.

- Keep hung stockings far away from open flames so they do not catch any errant embers.

These are just a few suggestions for decorating safely for the holiday season.

Deck the halls with DIY decor

Decorating is one of the joys of the holiday season. Families often decorate together, and such traditions may include dressing the Christmas tree and hanging holiday lights around the house.

A day spent making homemade ornaments is another great way to decorate and spend quality time together as a family during the holiday season. Though families can let their imaginations run wild when making ornaments at home, the following are some great starting points that can serve as springboards for holiday crafting sessions.

• **Snowmen:** The holiday season simply wouldn't be the same without snowmen. Homemade snowmen can be made out of ping pong balls, which are the ideal size when making ornaments for the Christmas tree. Those who want

to go a little bigger can glue wiffle balls or large polystyrene balls together or create their own papier mâché snowmen to display on mantles or on console tables in a foyer or hallway.

• **Santa Claus:** Another staple of holiday decor, Santa Claus has inspired many a DIY holiday ornament over the years. A paper plate Santa Claus with a cotton ball beard glued on can make for a fun Christmas craft, especially for young children who can't wait for the big guy to appear on Christmas Eve.

• **Penguins:** Though they might not have a direct link to the holiday season, penguins evoke feelings of cold weather, making them an ideal addition to holiday decor schemes. Make your own penguin family using polystyrene craft balls in assorted sizes and then hang them on the tree or

place them around the house.

• **Reindeer:** Santa would not be able to get the job done each Christmas Eve without his trustworthy team of reindeer. Popsicle stick reindeer projects can be fun for kids of all ages and a great way for youngsters to recognize the efforts of Dasher, Dancer, Comet, Cupid, and, of course, Rudolph, among others.

• **Cookie cutters:** Family baking sessions are a holiday tradition for millions of people. Though that often leads to batches upon batches of tasty cookies, it also means families tend to have a surplus of holiday cookie cutters around the house. Surplus cookie cutters tend to be discarded or relegated to the miscellaneous items drawer in kitchens, but a more awe-inspiring fate can await them. A coat of paint, some glitter and a little bit



of string or twine is all families need to transform their extra cookie cutters into colorful tree ornaments. Holiday decorating sessions can be made even more fun when families take time to craft some DIY decorations together.

Tips for baking better Christmas cookies

Cookies and other baked treats are everywhere come the holiday season. It's not uncommon to give cookies as gifts or arrive at holiday gatherings with cakes and other decadent desserts.

Cookies are a classic holiday treat, and some families even build entire traditions around baking Christmas cookies.

Novice bakers making cookies for the first time may be a little overwhelmed when perusing recipes. Baking is a science, and sometimes it takes practice to get the results just right. However, there are some tips that can help yield better, buttery bounties.

Handle butter with care

Butter can make or break a cookie recipe, as butter is often the glue that holds the cookie together. Therefore, it is key to follow the directions carefully regarding how to handle butter. Smithsonian.com says to leave butter at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes to properly soften it. This takes patience, but fiddling with butter too much can damage its delectable integrity. While purists may say butter is best, margarine may be acceptable if it has a high fat content; otherwise, cookies may spread out and flatten.

When it comes time to cream the butter with sugar, be sure to do so thoroughly to incorporate air into the butter and remove the grainy texture of the sugar.

Measure flour properly

Measuring flour the right way can ensure cookies come out right. The Cooking Channel says to spoon the flour lightly into a dry measuring cup, then level it off with a knife. Do not dip the measuring cup into the flour or tap the knife against the cup. This will pack too much flour into the measuring cup and result in dry, tough cookies.

Slow down the eggs

Add eggs one at a time to make sure each will emulsify properly with the fat in the butter. Adding eggs en masse may cause the emulsification to fail.

Chill out

Follow recipes that call for chilling cookie dough carefully. This process is important for making sliced and shaped cookies. By chilling, the dough becomes more malleable for rolling and even slicing.

Use a bottom rack

Too much heat may compromise cookie integrity. The food experts at Delish say to try moving cookies onto a lower rack in the oven if they aren't retaining their shape when baked. Put an empty cookie sheet on the top rack. That will block the cookies from the most intense heat that rises to the top of the oven.

Mastering cookies takes a little patience and some trial and error. Once bakers get their feet wet, Christmas-cookie-baking becomes even more special.



Steps for hanging holiday lights outdoors

It begins to look a lot like Christmas when twinkling lights brighten up homes inside and out. Few things liven up the season more than holiday decorations, particularly clear and colored lights.

Prior to taking out the lights, ladder and thermos of coffee to get you through the job, it's important to note that there are right and wrong ways to hang holiday lights.

• **Sketch out your plan.** Start by taking a few photos of your home from various vantage points. Print out the photos on regular paper so that you can draw your lighting arrangement and decoration placement right on the photos to see how things will look.

• **Measure the area.** Use a measuring tape to roughly measure the width and height of eaves or other areas of the home where you plan to hang light strands. Calculate how much overall footage you will need so you can purchase all of the lights in one shopping trip.

• **Test the lights first.** Plug in the lights to be sure all strands are operational.

• **Begin where the lights will be plugged in.** Start where the lights will be plugged in and then work your way around the house.

• **Add to shrubs and trees.** Lights also can adorn shrubs and trees. Lowes

Home Improvement says a good rule of thumb is 100 lights for every 1.5-feet of tree or shrub to cover. A 6-foot evergreen needs at least 400 lights for a basic level of lighting.

• **Exercise extreme caution.** Accidents can happen when stringing lights. While many professionals use harnesses, homeowners are not always so cautious. Utilize a spotter to hold the ladder and make sure things are safe. Never set foot on a wet or icy roof. Do not attempt to string lights in inclement weather.

• **Know the wattage.** Each outlet can generally hold about 17 amps or 1,870 watts if the lights are not sharing a circuit with another outlet, says Parrish. Plan accordingly to ensure you have enough power to handle your lights.

• **Use plastic clips.** Plastic light clips hang strands along eaves and gables. They're specially designed for hanging lights over the gutters. Some slip under the edges of roof shingles. Lights can be hung without staples or nails, which can damage exterior surfaces. Plastic zip-ties or deck clips also can attach lights along a handrail.

• **Use only outdoor extension cords.** Be sure the extension cords you use are designed specifically for outdoor use.

• **Use a timer.** Timers



can make sure the lights turn on and off even if homeowners forget.

Once lights have been safely strung, sit back and enjoy the splendor of a well-decorated house.

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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 select-

ing 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.

5 ways to enjoy the holidays without breaking your budget

(BPT) – A new survey reveals that Americans say the holidays will give them something positive to look forward to, after many people had to curtail last year’s holiday celebrations due to the pandemic. In the new 2021 Coinstar Holiday Survey, respondents said that while gift buying may go down this year (one-third plan to buy fewer gifts), people overall are looking for more activities that bring them holiday joy - as they still manage their budgets.

Here are tips to help boost your holiday spirit, without breaking the bank.

1. Embrace regifting: If you’ve ever thought about regifting a present to someone who might actually enjoy it, you’re not alone. According to the survey, more than one-fourth (28%) said they’re likely to regift something this holiday season.

There’s nothing wrong with regifting, and here’s why:

- It saves you money
- Reusing is good for the environment
- Your closet gets a little less cluttered
- You may be giving the absolute perfect gift to someone else

Be sure to regift with care, and not give the gift back to the same person who gave it to you!

2. Use spare change



to stretch your budget: When finances are tight, you may be surprised to learn that you have more spare change lying around than you think! Check your purse, couch cushions, car or change jar for loose change. Survey respondents estimate they have approximately \$123 in spare change at home, and over half (52%) said they are likely to

cash in or use their spare change this holiday season. This newfound cash can be used for buying gifts, decorations or donating to others.

3. Deck the halls with holiday spirit: Nothing brings back your childhood sense of holiday wonder and magic better than beautiful colored lights and holiday decorations, whether at

your own home or around your neighborhood. Over 90% of the people surveyed plan to decorate their homes this season, and three out of four say they will start or increase their tradition of driving around to enjoy decorations and lights nearby - a fun and no-cost activity to delight your whole family.

4. Bake a little joy for

the holidays: Baking is one of the most fun and inexpensive ways to spend time with your family, as well as being a great way to create giftable treats. In the survey, 80% of Americans said they will start or increase their home baking this holiday season. Find festive tins, jars or holiday-themed plates to load up with goodies, wrap in foil, then stick

on a colorful ribbon and voila! A tasty gift anyone would love to receive.

Baking not your strong suit? No worries. You can find pre-made refrigerated or frozen cookie dough in most stores, so you can still have the fun - and delicious aroma - of homemade cookies without all the fuss and muss.

5. Bring joy to others by giving: Giving to others can bring unexpected holiday joy. After more than a year of challenges, nearly two-thirds of Americans (61%) say they’ll start or increase their donations of money or volunteering time to charity this holiday season.

Another way to feel the warm glow of giving to others is by tipping service providers who help you throughout the year, from your childcare provider to your mail carrier. Well over half (57%) of Americans say they tip service providers during the holidays.

It doesn’t take a lot of cash to make the season bright. Revisit the traditions you have with friends and family and perhaps create a few new ones to make this year memorable. Approaching the holiday with an attitude of creativity and gratitude will go a long way toward capturing the joy of the holiday season.

Cooking for a holiday crowd

Decorations and shopping draw much of the attention come the holiday season, and rightfully so. But many people’s fondest holiday memories occurred around the dinner table during meals with friends and family.

Holiday foods tend to be rich, flavorful and time-consuming to prepare. However, all the effort is usually worth the satisfied smiles on the faces of loved ones.

Planning holiday meals is challenging, and hosts often doubt if they have enough food for everyone. No one wants guests to leave feeling hungry, nor do they want to have tons of leftovers, much of which will inevitably end up in the trash. Determining how much food to serve involves figuring out a few key items, including the mix of guests (ratio of children, men and women), the length of the occasion, the timing of the event, and the type of meal one plans to serve. For example, if the holiday gathering is an after-dinner cocktail party, hosts can get away with offering very little food. However, hosts of holiday dinners have a lot more food to prepare.

To get started, consider these general guidelines, courtesy of Allrecipes.com and The Spruce, a home living resource.

• Think about which foods you plan to serve. Popular foods tend to go more quickly than other items, so serve more than the general portion guidelines suggest. Shellfish appetizers, roasted or mash-

ed potatoes, wings, and slices of rich meat are examples of popular fare.

• The more foods you offer, the smaller the portion sizes can be. But because guests will likely want to try all the offerings, expect the average person to consume more food per individual when several foods are offered.

• Most people will eat two to three portions each of appetizers or snacks. In fact, appetizers (for a hungry

crowd) may be consumed in greater abundance than subsequent courses.

• Average portion sizes for each guest include: 3 ounces of dips; 3 ounces of salad; 6 ounces of meat or main entrée; 5 ounces of starch; and 1 1/2 pieces of dessert. These estimates can be used to calculate how much food will be needed.

• Think about adding “safety” items to the menu that can be pulled out in a pinch and don’t require

much prep work. These can include cheese and crackers, extra bread, nuts, olives, or pretzels.

Hosts who are overly concerned that guests may go overboard can tame portion sizes by hiring servers who can oversee buffet lines. Otherwise, serve guests plated meals directly from the kitchen, from which hosts can dole out the right amount of food to ensure everyone gets enough to eat.





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4 home upgrades to help you get ready for holiday guests

(BPT) – Many people are happy to welcome back friends and family in their homes again. In anticipation of the holiday season, you might consider updating your house now, so entertaining is a joy in the many months of celebration to come.

Home improvements that add function and support when entertaining are key. Whether you'll be hosting a grand holiday party with out-of-town guests or an intimate affair with local loved ones, these top improvements will prepare your home for holiday merriment.

1) Refresh the fireplace: The quintessential holiday gathering always seems to be set around a warm and welcoming fireplace. If you have one in your home, consider getting maintenance done now before the holiday rush. A tune-up, chimney cleaning and glass-door cleaning will ensure your fireplace is ready to inspire guests to cozy up and create memories.

Beyond proper functioning, you can also update your fireplace to create a new aesthetic. If the surrounding brick, rock or tile

is dated, consider special masonry or tile paint that can help you refresh the materials with a contemporary neutral color such as gray, beige or white. You can also paint the mantle to accent your new fireplace surround for a cohesive look that will serve as a backdrop for holiday photographs for years to come.

2) Research functional additions: Adding a guest bathroom or wet bar is sure to impress visitors and add to your home's value. But this may seem impossible in spaces without below-floor drainage for plumbing - like a basement or garage.

A simple, affordable solution is above-floor plumbing systems from Saniflo that avoid the hassle and expense of busting through concrete to create conventional drainage or installing a sewage ejector system.

For example, the Saniaccess 2 from Saniflo is ideal for creating an additional half bathroom virtually anywhere, thanks to a 1/2-horsepower macerator pump system. Above-floor systems like this can process waste from sinks and toilets before pumping it to the nearest drain line



that connects to the home's septic tank or a sewer system.

3) Create a contemporary kitchen: The kitchen may be the heart of the home, but it's also the hub of the holiday season. From roasting that golden turkey to baking and decorating favorite holiday treats, the kitchen is a functional gathering place for your family and guests. Simple updates can make a big difference in style and functionality, such as enhancing organization and adding seating options.

If you want bigger changes without the expense of a complete remodel, consider thoughtful updates that revive your kitchen with notable style. Painting the existing cabinets and adding new hardware provide a visual facelift that revives the

room. New countertops are nice, but sometimes just adding a new backsplash transforms the space, plus makes for easy cleanup during sometimes messy holiday cooking.

You might also consider adding an island with running water and a sink. An above-floor plumbing solution, like the Sanivite from Saniflo, can create that functionality where no

below-floor drain currently exists.

4) Define dining areas: Whether you have an open concept home or the layout features a formal dining room, it's important to update eating spaces. After all, enjoying food together is one of the crowning events of holiday get-togethers. Painting the space in a modern hue provides a big visual impact without much cost or effort. An area rug can also redefine the dining room and pull elements together. New linens add a holiday vibe.

More casual eating spaces can benefit from a refresh as well. Tidy up breakfast nooks and buffet tables so they are ready to use. Stools for countertop spaces create an ideal place for cooking, casual noshing and conversation. If you're hosting children, you may want to set up tables and other areas for them to eat and play games.

The holiday season brings family and friends together. Now that in-person celebrations are being planned again, there's no better time to focus on home improvements that guests will appreciate and you will love.

Great gifts for holiday hosts

Hosting family and friends during the holiday season is a big responsibility, especially for those men and women welcoming overnight guests into their homes. Hosts anticipate opening their homes to loved ones during the holiday season and would never ask for anything in return. But guests who want to show their appreciation to their gracious hosts can consider these gift ideas this holiday season.

- **Decorative vase:** The holiday season is colorful, and many people deck their halls with poinsettias or other plants and flowers during this time of year. A decorative holiday vase is a thoughtful gift that can be part of hosts' holiday decor for years to come.
- **Wine rack:** Wine makes a perfect complement to holiday meals, and

hosts might appreciate a place to store their collections. Guests unfamiliar with the layout of their hosts' homes may want to choose a countertop wine rack, which won't take up much space and can be a convenient place to store a bottle or two before dinner. Guests who want to go the extra mile can bring along a few bottles of wine so the wine rack is presented fully stocked.

- **A night out:** While it might not be a gift in the traditional sense, paying for a night out is a great way to show hosts you recognize and appreciate all of their hard work. Call your host in advance of your visit and insist on taking everyone out to dinner one night during your stay, even splitting the tab with other guests if a lot of people will be staying overnight.

- **Holiday photo frame or album:** Men and women like to host family during the holidays because it's a great chance to make lasting memories and reconnect with loved ones. Help hosts commemorate those memories by giving them a photo frame in which they can place a picture of the whole family, or an album where they can place various photos of the family from this holiday season.
- **Spa day:** Of course, gifts for holiday hosts need not tie in to hosting. A certificate for a day at a local spa can be just what exhausted hosts need to refresh once all of their guests have come and gone. If a day at the spa is beyond your budget, put together a home spa package with bubble bath, scented candles and a bottle of wine.

Holiday hosts deserve a



little extra for inviting family and friends into their homes during this joyous time of year.

How holiday hosts can safeguard guests with food allergies

Hosting for the holidays is a fun way to bring loved ones together during a special time of year. As enjoyable as hosting can be, it's no small task, especially when guests have food allergies.

According to Food Allergy Research & Education, an organization dedicated to improving the quality of life and the health of individuals with food allergies, a food allergy is a medical condition in which exposure to a certain food triggers a harmful immune system response. FARE® notes that more than 170 foods have been reported to cause allergic reactions, and roughly one in 13 children in the United States has a food allergy. And food allergies are not just a danger in the U.S., as data published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology in 2015 revealed that 6.9 percent of Canadian children under the age of 18 self-report having at least one food allergy.

Food allergies are cause for concern, as FARE® notes that every three minutes a food allergy reaction sends someone to the emergency room. Before planning holiday menus, hosts should ask guests if they or their chil-



dren have any food allergies and then plan the menu accordingly.

When hosting large gatherings, it may be impossible to avoid foods that trigger guests' allergies. In such instances, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America offers the following food safety tips to hosts.

- Wash hands before and after eating or handling food.
- Prevent cross-contamination in preparation and serving by preparing dishes in separate areas and washing all prep materials, such as cutting boards, before reusing. Keep unsafe foods away from safe foods at all times.
- Read all food labels.
- Prepare and cook safe meals first before sealing them and setting them aside. Then make unsafe foods.
- Use separate serving utensils for each dish. Be careful not to mix them up.
- Wash all prep areas and eating areas with a paper towel and commercial cleaner. Avoid using sponges and rags, which can

be a source of allergens.

- Keep food isolated to one area of the home and clean up thoroughly after the meal.
- Make a plate for each child with food allergies before the meal is served to avoid cross contamination. Keep unsafe foods out of reach of young children with allergies.
- Request that children with food allergies sit close to their parents during the meal. Ensure that those eating nearby will be careful not to accidentally spill or share unsafe foods.
- Place packages of wipes near food and encourage everyone to wipe their hands after eating, though encouraging them to use soap and water is best. Walk around periodically to dispose of any uneaten food or dirty plates and napkins.

When planning holiday menus, host should always keep food allergies in mind. Taking steps to safeguard adults and children with food allergies can ensure everyone has a happy, healthy holiday.

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