

HOLIDAY HACKS & SURVIVAL GUIDE

We are grateful for the many responses we received and are so excited to share them!

We promise you there are some valuable nuggets to glean, some to adopt immediately, others to consider for next year and the rest...who knows?

Enjoy! And we hope you find some that are great additions to a more delicious, soulful, fun, efficient, and festive season!

Our warmest wishes, Barbara & Nancy

Holiday Activity or Tradition

Making Gingerbread Houses. I started this tradition when my children were about 10 years old. After buying a DIY kit, I found a beautiful mold and now start the process after Thanksgiving with baking the house, constructing the house, and decorating the house. At first would have my adult children help decorate but now I have a 4- and 2-year-old to have that fun. It's messy and takes a long time (probably over a week because the decorating is a multi-day event with such young children) but it is delightful and we get to look at the house - and eat off it! - all month.

Shared by – Janet Hanley, Founder and President, Mission Accounting, Inc.

Charitable Donation as Gift: My tradition is to ask for my family to donate to a charity of their choice instead of giving me a gift. I received a heartfelt letter from an animal rescue in Kentucky saying that my brother walked in and gave a very generous donation. He also shared the story of why he was making the donation. They were so grateful.

Shared by – Christine Noone, Chief Talent Officer, Thresholds

PJs All Day: I give my kids pajamas on Christmas Eve. They know this is coming every year, and they look forward to it. Sometimes I do practical stuff and sometimes I go really silly....whatever strikes me. Then they are required to wear them all day on Christmas, through dinner (fancy dinner in dining room but we are all still in PJs). My kids are now older, but I still do this and they still seem to get a kick out of it!

Shared by – Nancie McDonnell Ruder, Founder and CEO Noetic Consultants

Theater: A favorite tradition of our family has been to see A Christmas Carol at the Goodman Theatre every year. It has always been a great way to kick off the holiday season.

Shared by – Susan Pope, Senior Facilities Manager, CBRE

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Advent Calendars. I have given my girls advent calendars every year since they were 1 year old. Now that there are calendars that you can open up and put something inside, I have created in each of the 24 open boxes a card that states either a well-known quote, a request for the kids of that family to do their homework, ask of the entire family to be kind to everyone that day, etc. If they all agree the family member(s) did what was asked or utilized the quote for that day, they get to go to "Santa's Bag" – which I have pre-filled with all kinds of gifts and goodies. (On a recent trip to Germany, I bought handmade ornaments and chocolates, and also put some in Santa's bag.). On Christmas Eve, they get to pick the final gift, which is one that is larger, but only if they "have been good" according to Santa's rules. It keeps everyone in the family engaged and helps to support the true meaning of the holiday season – regardless of religious beliefs.

Shared by – Jean Wallace, Transformational Business Strategist and Senior Career Advisor

Holiday Theme: Our family always picks a theme which includes the menu and gift. This year is the Alps so the menu will be fondue, mulled wines, potatoes, fowl, and sausages. We have a cousin and family gift exchange that (usually) fit the theme. Going on our 20th year. Best part is the nieces and nephews are getting into it and picking the theme. And I also use my Christmas dishes the whole month of December.

Shared by – Liz Summy, Regional Executive, American Hospital Association

Holiday Cards: I have made handmade Christmas cards (about 200 of them) every year except one, for over 20 years. Think handmade papers (I buy these), a sepia or monochrome photo of my kiddos, clever bindings, etc. I love this way of "caring for" our friends, neighbors, family, colleagues, and others in our life to help share a message to "cap" each year.

Shared by – Ana Garcia Doyle, ED and Founder, One Earth Collective. Speaker, Digital Marketer, Sustainability Programs & Events Lead

Holiday Budgeting

Managing Travel: I've enjoyed booking Christmas day flights for the past 5 years. Cheaper and less traffic

Shared by – Rose Kaz, Owner, Rose Kaz Creative, Founder of LBI Backstage Pass, Digital Consultant and Producer

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Gift Buying, Wrapping, Meaningful Giving or Exchange Strategies

Gifts for Hosts: Do you need another candle or ornament? Donate to a charity instead. After 20 years, we included a message on our annual holiday open house invite "Please no gifts – but we are collecting food and goods for The People's Resource Center." It became a holiday tradition with a full car or more of donations. During Covid, we ended up having a collection event in our garage - even without the party.

Shared by – Sue Golden, Founder and Certified Coach, Golden Leadership, LLC

Gift Exchange: No idea what to get niece, nephews, cousins...? Tired of just buying and giving gift cards? Make it a game. Wrap gift cards for those family members – maybe even include a gag gift. Turn it into a game, roll the dice and they can choose the gift they want. When all gifts have been chosen, even the numbers out and allow a few rounds of "stealing" from each other. It's a great way to get all ages involved and a lot of fun.

Shared by – Sue Golden, Founder and Certified Coach, Golden Leadership, LLC

- **Note from Barbara Best:** I do a similar gift exchange with my book club for our December meeting. Some books are new, but all are encouraged to wrap and bring books we have already read, too! Always fun!

Generating Gift Ideas: We travel to a warm weather destination over Thanksgiving week. Then, on the trip, while on the beach or poolside, we all create Christmas wish lists. There's some nice reflection time to make sure everyone identifies what they'd really like. With teenagers, this greatly helps parents and grandparents with gift ideas. And 10 days later, our Christmas shopping is now mostly done.

Shared by – Amy Riley, International Speaker, Author, Consultant, Coach. The Courage of a Leader. Owner, Shoop Consulting Group.

Homemade Gifts – I love to give homemade granola, homemade bread, or DIY liquors like amaretto in a beautiful upcycled jar. I also have dried herbs/teas from my garden and gifted them as various mixes (e.g. chamomile, lemon balm, mint, lemongrass, fennel) in upcycled containers.

Shared by – Ana Garcia Doyle, ED and Founder, One Earth Collective. Speaker, Digital Marketer, Sustainability Programs & Events Lead

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Purposeful Purchasing: I try to shop for gifts that give more – beyond the gift itself:

Buy from:

- Locally owned shops in your community and at Farmers' Markets
- Women owned businesses, such as on [The WMarketplace.com/](https://www.thewmarketplace.com/) and [The Little Market.com/](https://www.thelittlemarket.com/)
- BIPOC-owned businesses, such as found on [We Buy Black](https://www.webuyblack.com/), [B Yellowtail](https://www.byellowtail.com/), B Yellow Tail

Some of my Favorites:

- [Prosperity Candles](#) (supporting refugees),
- [Feed Projects](#) (feeding the hungry), and
- [Raw Spirit](#) fragrance and candles (supporting indigenous communities)

Shared by Diane Osgood, Founder, Osgood Consulting, Partner, NOW Partner

Other Favorites

- [21 Pineapples "Be A Good Human t-shirt"](#) (mission is to change the way others perceive people with Down Syndrome & other special abilities).
- Diamond Dazzle Stik jewelry cleaner - I attach it to the bow of gifts that I exchange with friends who I know where rings.

Shared by Laura Bellis, Sr. Relationship Manager, LaSalle Network

Gift Tracking & Wrapping: I have a room in my house that becomes my Santa workshop. Every time I buy a gift, I store it in there. In November and December, I go in to assemble, arrange, take stock of what I have/what I need, wrap and eventually ship or place under the tree. This way it is all in one place and becomes my cozy planning space. I play music while I arrange and organize and wrap.

Shared by – Nancie McDonnell Ruder, Founder and CEO, Noetic Consultants

Gift Wrapping: Using gift wrap bags that come in all sizes and holiday prints. You can buy them in bulk, and they fit any odd-shaped gift and your gift is literally wrapped in three seconds.

Shared by – Lorraine Martin, President and CEO, National Safety Council



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Mindfulness Strategy or Ritual

The first strategy is not to give up your important morning rituals because you are just too busy during the holidays. That so easily happens. We need them!

Prioritize sleep not perfection! A long list of harmful impacts, big ones are lowers you immune system, creates stress, mind is less sharp so are less productive...need we say more?

Morning Reflection: Spend as many early mornings as possible during the holiday season in front of the Christmas tree or fireplace. I recommend lighting a candle, playing soothing instrumental music (e.g. Windham Hill holiday selections), and reading something heartwarming or inspirational while sipping coffee or tea. It is a wonderful time to reflect and give gratitude while savoring the beauty of the season.

Shared by – Mary Lynn Fayoumi, President and CEO, HR Source

Daily Exercise...first thing in the AM help me stay in my body and get out of my head: regular routine of running, yoga, and rowing. Especially keeps me "fit" more internally than externally, for holiday madness, when things start to rev up and time always seems short!

Shared by – Ana Garcia Doyle, ED and Founder, One Earth Collective. Speaker, Digital Marketer, Sustainability Programs & Events Lead

I say "No" to anything I don't want to do!

Shared by – Amy Riley, Author, Speaker, Author, Consultant, Coach, Courage of a Leader. Consultant, Shoop Consulting Group

Prioritizing My "Yes's": In years past, I've purposefully backed off attending gatherings because it felt "too much". This year, I have a renewed sense of wanting to connect and I'm doing so in groups that bring me joy and in groups where my value is recognized for bringing value not because I must give more, but because who I am is already valued and therefore is reciprocally life giving to the attendees. It makes the energy expenditure of handling the attendance logistics (e.g., accepting the invite and then getting it onto the right calendar, making babysitter arrangements, getting the hostess gifts, etc.) not only worth it, but a great time investment.

Shared by – April Oury, Founder, Entrepreneur, Angel Investor

Blocking Time: I am trying not to take any meetings on Fridays, so I can think and steep in my work, in holiday preparations, etc. and not get whisked away in the frenetic pace of the season.

Shared by – Ana Garcia Doyle, ED and Founder, One Earth Collective. Speaker, Digital Marketer, Sustainability Programs & Events Lead

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Shared by – Dr. Morgan Levy,
Clinical Psychologist.

Learn more at
www.drmorganlevy.com

Note from Barbara Best:

This highly effective technique was first introduced to the Women's Forum in Nov. 2020 during Robin Ross' presentation – recap and video here:

[Building Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty](#)

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Healthy Choices | Fitness, Movement and Other Strategies

Fitness Challenge: I join a 30-day fitness challenge with my trainer. The goal is to schedule a minimum of 30 minutes each day between Thanksgiving and New Year's where we do exercise. The exercise spans a broad range of ideas - a Pilates class, a scheduled walk, tennis, running, biking, Peloton, yoga... The important thing is that it is not - I went shopping and walked around for 30 minutes. I know I will get this "break" each day and look forward to it!

Shared by: Janet Hanley, Founder and President, Mission Accounting, Inc.

Increase Vitamin-C and decrease caffeine intake!

Shared by Deborah (Dee) Baker, Commissioner at Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission

Good Morning Lemon Elixir. At the 2020 Holiday Soiree, Health coach Monique Costello shared this recipe. Ginger and turmeric both fight inflammation while lemon tones the liver and cleanses our cells. I make it on Sunday nights and it lasts for my work week.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole organic lemon – washed and quartered
- 1 1/2 " knob fresh ginger
- 1 1/2 " knob of fresh turmeric root – or 1/2 tsp turmeric powder
- 2 TBLS olive oil – "organic unfiltered, unrefined" preferred
- 2 TBLS apple cider vinegar
- 16 oz filtered water
- 1 tsp Himalayan pink salt

Directions

- Wash the lemon, cut off the ends and quarter.
- Place all the ingredients in the blender, process on high for at least 1-minute. Strain if desired (but don't – all that goodness and fiber is the bomb!)
- Pour into a glass jar and store in the refrigerator.
- Start every morning with 2-4 ounces as a shot or sip. Or dilute if you prefer.

Shared by Barbara Best, CAP STRAT

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Decorating and/or Entertaining Strategy

Ornaments: If you are purchasing holiday ornaments, collect them from your travels all year or get great deals (up to 90% off) after the holidays. To increase your inventory, allow guests to purchase or make as a hostess gift. If you have the same guests year to year, they will be delighted to see their ornament adorning your tree.

Meal Preparation: I smoke my turkey beginning at 3:00 a.m. and allow it to cook unattended for five hours without using internal oven space and I can sleep while it is cooking and wake up refreshed so that I can complete all other dishes.

Goal: Spend time out of the kitchen and enjoy your guest conversations and activities.

- Do as much slicing and dicing, as well as sauce preparation in advance, so that you can quickly access when needed.
- Prepare a signature dessert and ask your guests to bring a favorite to share.
- Stage dish preparation/warming right before the meal, so that all food is hot simultaneously.

Both shared by – Cheryl Hamilton Hill, CEO, Lincoln Park Community Services

I love to cook, especially for others, and holiday time is a perfect time for hosting. I love a "bar" so folks can have it their way: soup bar, avocado toast bar, pasta bar, taco bar, oatmeal bar, bowl bar, smoothie bowl bar -- all with appropriate fixins, of course.

I also love to cook a homemade Filipino meal, since a lot of folks have never had one; and I love to do hearty, plant-based soups.

Shared by – Ana Garcia Doyle, ED and CO-Founder, One Earth Collective, etal. and Soulful Chef

Festive Holiday Candle

Supplies: Mason jar, greens (fake or real), cranberries, water, votive and ribbon. Lined up on a table for centerpiece.

Shared by – Nancy Rizzuto, CAP STRAT



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Recipes – Holiday Appetizer or Yummy Treat

Favorite Family Appetizer: Bruschetta

I assemble the night before, and 15-min before guests arrive, put in pre-heated oven at 350 degrees for 15 minutes. Serve warm. They go fast. I am not allowed to attend a party without them.

Ingredients

- 1 loaf Panera Asiago Cheese bread thinly sliced, available at Jewel Foods (not at Panera), sliced thin
- 1 cup Annie's Shitake Sesame Dressing (available at Whole Foods)
- 1 10-12 oz. package cherry tomatoes (medley of yellow, red is best), sliced in halves or thirds, depending on size
- 1 cup parmesan cheese shredded

Directions

- Cover a cookie sheet with aluminum foil and spray with cooking oil spray.
- Mix sliced tomatoes with dressing and ½ cup shredded parmesan.
- Spread a tablespoon of marinated tomatoes on each bread slice.
- Pour ½ teaspoon of leftover marinade on each slice and sprinkle remaining parmesan on top of each slice.
- Bake at 350° for 15 minutes, until toasts are brown on bottom.
- Can decorate with a single piece of fresh basil before serving.



Shared by – Michele Weldon, Author, Journalist, Editor, and Keynote Speaker

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Edible Herb Butter

Butter gets used often around the holidays. Rather than skip it, add nutrients and flavor to get more out of it when you do indulge!

Ingredients & Directions

- Let a pound of pasture-raised butter soften on the countertop.
- Mix in minced shallots and every herb you have.
- Form it into a log, or a snowman or a tree.
- Adorn with veggies, edible flowers and even celery or fennel fronds.
- Use on warm buns, roasted sweet potatoes or roasted veggies.



Shared by – Monique Costello, Health Educator, Speaker, Holistic Functional Medicine Coach, Wellness Chef, Founder @ Happy Eats Healthy

Easy Appetizer Recipe

Ingredients:

- 1 package bacon
- horseradish mustard
- peeled and uncooked shrimp

Directions:

- Slice bacon strips crosswise into halves and partially cook them.
- Spread horseradish mustard on one side of the bacon strips.
- Place a shrimp on a bacon slice, roll it and secure the wrapped bacon with a toothpick.
- Broil until the shrimp is fully cooked. (5-10 minutes, shrimp should be pink not translucent)
- Place on paper towels to manage grease and then serve (if there are any left!)

Shared by – Dina Tantra, Co-Founder, Co-CEO, Global Rhino. Member of Corporate Boards

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Rosemary Walnuts

Great recipes for anytime, but especially for winter/holiday cocktail parties or hostess gifts.

Ingredients:

- 2½ Tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons dried rosemary (crumbled)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 cups walnuts

Directions:

- Preheat the oven to 350° F.
- In a small pan on the stovetop (or in the microwave), melt the butter with rosemary, salt, and cayenne.
- Pour the mixture over walnuts, tossing to coat.
- Bake the nuts on a cookie sheet for 10 minutes.
- If giving as a gift, use repurposed or mason jars OR clear plastic bag tied with ribbon.

Spiced Pecans

Ingredients:

- 1 egg white
- 1 tsp cold water
- 1 lb pecan halves
- 1/2 c sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt
- Spices (*see Alternative 1&2*)

Alternative #1:

- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp cloves

Alternative #2

- 1 tsp grated lime rinds
- 1-2 T chili powder (*heat preference*)
- 1/2 t cumin
- 1/4 t cayenne

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 225 ° F degrees
- Beat egg white and water until frothy but not stiff. Add pecans. Mix well until all nuts are coated with egg white mixture.
- Combine sugar and spices in a large bowl. Add pecans and coat thoroughly. Place in a well buttered baking dish. Bake for 60 minutes, stir every 15 minutes.

Shared by – Barbara Best, CAP STRAT

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Dessert - Santa Brownie Hats (Chef Katie Lee, appeared in Parade Magazine 12/7/2018)

Ingredients

- 1½ cups canned vanilla or cream cheese frosting
- 24 store-bought round brownie bites
- 24 whole strawberries, stem removed and cut to create a flat surface
- 24 white chocolate chips



Directions

- Arrange brownies on a baking sheet.
- Spoon frosting into a pastry bag or heavy-duty plastic bag; snip tip.
- Pipe frosting around the perimeter on top of the brownie and place the flat part of the strawberry on top.
- Pipe each with a small dot of frosting and top with a white chocolate chip (you might cut the tip of the strawberry to create a more stable small flat surface for the chip).
- Refrigerate 30 minutes to set.

Shared by – Gail Ludwig, President, TotalWorks

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Raspberry Walnut Cookies

Ingredients:

- 2 sticks unsalted butter, at cool room temperature
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups plus 2 TBSP all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon fine salt
- 2 large egg whites, beaten
- 1 cup walnuts, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup raspberry preserves or jam



Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F
2. Line large baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats and set aside.
3. In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat the butter, sugar, and vanilla extract on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 to 3 minutes.
4. Add the flour and salt and beat until just combined.
5. Use a tablespoon to shape the dough into balls. Dip each ball in beaten egg whites, then roll in the chopped walnuts. Press the nuts to adhere to the dough. Place on prepared baking sheets, spacing about 2 inches apart.
6. Bake until cookies are puffy, about 12 minutes.
7. Remove cookies from the oven. Make an indentation in the centers with the blunt round end of a wooden spatula or spoon. Spoon about 1/2 tsp. of preserves into each indentation. Bake for another 2 to 3 minutes or until the edges are golden brown.
8. Let cookies cool on baking sheets for 5 minutes before transferring them to wire racks to cool completely before serving.
9. Cookies can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 3 days or in the fridge for one week.

Shared by – Kathy Steele, CEO & Founder, Red Caffeine