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Holiday music countdown

Some stores start stocking Christmas decorations and wrapping paper as early as October, and some families begin decking their halls in holiday finery in late November. But for many people, the holiday season has not truly begun until the music synonymous with this festive time of year has hit the airwaves.

Few things can make a person feel as festive as the holiday songs they know and love. Many families have favorite music they consider synonymous with their holiday celebrations. While families have their own unique holiday traditions, over time certain holiday songs have emerged as favorites. These are the tunes you're likely to hear played over and over on the radio. Billboard, which tracks the music industry's most popular songs, compiled its own list of the most popular Christmas songs. The list measures the volume of people who have been exposed to the song on the radio, and is based on ranking rather than exact figures of listeners, and

the following are the 10 most popular songs based on those parameters.

10. "Happy Xmas (War is Over)," by John Lennon: This song debuted in 1971 and was written by Lennon and his wife, Yoko Ono. Performed with the Harlem Community Choir, the song was originally a protest song about the Vietnam War before it eventually became a Christmas standard.

9. "Christmas Eve (Sarajevo 12/24)," by Trans-Siberian Orchestra: According to Nielsen, this instrumental mash-up of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and "Carol of the Bells" is one of the best-selling Christmas digital singles in SoundScan history. A combination of full, classical orchestra and rock, "Christmas Eve" is a memorable and powerful piece of music.

8. "White Christmas," by Bing Crosby: Crosby crooned this tune in 1942 in the movie of the same name, and Irving



Berlin's song soon became one of the most popular holiday tunes of all time. It has been covered innumerable times and has become a holiday season standard.

7. "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year," by Andy Williams: This popular Christmas song was written by Edward Pola and George Wyle in 1963. The song celebrates the traditions and feelings of the Christmas season.

6. "Feliz Navidad," by Jose Feliciano: This Spanish-English pop song is recognized by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers as one of the 25 most-played and recorded Christmas songs around the world. Puerto-Rican born Feliciano has said that the song has always been a bridge to the cultures that are so dear to him.

5. "A Holly Jolly Christmas," by Burl Ives: This song was written by Johnny Marks, an American songwriter. Ironically, Marks was Jewish, but he specialized in Christmas songs and wrote many of the holiday standards people love, including this upbeat tune and "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree."

4. "The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)," by Nat King Cole: Believe it or not, this song was actually

written in the summer when composers Bob Wells and Mel Tormé were trying to cool off with winter imagery. Snow-covered images and phrases eventually turned into lyrics for this popular song that was most memorably recorded by Nat King Cole.

3. "Jingle Bell Rock," by Bobby Helms: This song has been performed by many, but Helms' version of the is perhaps the best known. The song highlights the crossover style known as "rockabilly" and merges the classic "Jingle Bells" with rock n' roll references of the 1950s.

2. "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," by Brenda Lee: Brenda Lee was a chart-topping female vocalist of the 1960s who owes much of her success to this beloved holiday classic. Despite the mature sound of her voice, Lee recorded this version when she was only 13 years old.

1. "All I Want for Christmas is You," by Mariah Carey: This up-tempo love song has become a Christmas classic and one of Carey's most popular hits. She cowrote and coproduced the song with Walter Afansieff. It is one of the few, modern, original Christmas songs to stand the test of time and become an official Christmas standard.

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Shopping on your smartphone

Holiday shopping is an annual tradition for many people. But while it may be customary to exchange gifts with loved ones during the holiday season, how those gifts are purchased has changed dramatically over the last decade and a half.

Thanks to advancements in technology, many holiday shoppers get their shopping done without ever setting foot in malls or shopping centers. And data indicates more and more shoppers are using their smartphones to do their holiday shopping. According to Nielsen Mobile Measurement, the number of mobile shoppers in December 2014 rose to 138.1 million users, an increase of nearly 14 million users from the same period just a year earlier. And mobile shoppers averaged nearly a full hour more shopping on the Web from their mobile phones in 2014 than in 2013.

Convenience often drives shoppers decisions to use their mobile phones during the holiday season. But it's important that shoppers not sacrifice security for the sake of convenience. Those who want the best of both worlds this holiday season can take several steps to protect their personal information while shopping on their

smartphones.

- **Only use shopping apps with which you're comfortable.** Downloading an app only takes a few seconds, and some shoppers are so used to downloading apps they may not realize just what they're downloading. Before installing an app on your phone, familiarize yourself with the app and what it requests of its user. Some apps ask users for a considerable amount of personal information, even though there is no legitimate reason for them to have that information. If you're uncomfortable with apps that require you to allow access to your location and other potentially sensitive information, don't download the app.

- **Sign out when you stop using an app.** It may be convenient to stay signed in to an app at all times, but that can leave you vulnerable to hackers and/or thieves. Many apps store users credit card numbers so shoppers don't have to enter such information each time they make a purchase. If you stay signed in to an app at all times, hackers who access your smartphone can then access your credit card information, as can thieves should your phone be stolen. Signing out when you finish using an app provides an extra measure

of protection.

- **Turn off automatic connections.** Many smartphones enable users to automatically connect to nearby Wi-Fi networks so they can seamlessly access the Internet regardless of where they are. However, some Wi-Fi networks are fraudulent, and you may unknowingly be transmitting sensitive data through such networks when you automatically log on. Disable automatic connections, only logging on to secure Wi-Fi networks when out in public.

- **Browse but don't buy.** Shoppers who are especially concerned about smartphone security may want to use apps and their smartphone's Internet connections to browse rather than buy. Avoid logging into apps or websites when using your smartphone, instead browsing deals and jotting them down on the phone's notes app. You can then make purchases once you gain access to a secure network, such as the one at your home or office.

Holiday shoppers are increasingly turning to their smartphones to do their holiday shopping. While the convenience of such devices may be unrivaled, consumers must prioritize security over expediency.

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A holly, jolly recipe for merry mornings

This holiday season, make your mornings merry and savor time with loved ones visiting from near and far with festive recipes like Christmas Tree Waffles and Overnight Cinnamon Roll Casserole.

“You don’t have to get up early to impress guests with a holiday breakfast,” said Chef Kevan Vetter of the McCormick Kitchens. “Take waffles, simply add green food color to the batter then dust with powdered sugar ‘snow’ to resemble Christmas trees. Or prepare a cinnamon roll casserole the night before. Soak cut-up challah bread in milk and cinnamon overnight, bake until golden in the morning. Finish off with a drizzle of cream cheese frosting.”

For more Christmas tips and recipes, find McCormick on Pinterest and Facebook, and visit McCormick.com.

Overnight Cinnamon Roll Casserole

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

Servings: 12

12 eggs

1 1/2 cups plus 3 tbs milk, divided

2 tablespoons ground cinnamon, divided

5 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided

1/4 teaspoon baking powder

1 loaf challah or brioche bread, cubed



1/4 cup butter, melted
1/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
1/2 cup whipped cream cheese
3 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

Mix eggs, 1 1/2 cups of milk, 1 tablespoon of cinnamon, 3 teaspoons of vanilla and baking powder in large bowl with wire whisk until well blended. Add bread cubes; toss to coat well. Pour into 13x9-inch baking dish sprayed with no stick cooking spray. Cover. Refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Remove casserole from refrigerator. Mix melted butter, brown sugar and remaining 1 tablespoon cinnamon in small bowl until well blended. Drizzle over casserole. Let stand 10 to 15 minutes.

Bake 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

Meanwhile, mix cream cheese, confectioners' sugar and remaining 2 teaspoons vanilla in small bowl until smooth. Slowly stir in remaining 3 tablespoons milk. Drizzle over casserole before serving.

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Behind the scenes of two beloved holiday films

Holiday movies have a way of making audiences laugh and cry while inspiring those warm and fuzzy feelings that perfectly complement the season of family and giving. Depending on the individual, favorite movies may include old classics or new releases.

A lot of work goes into making movies, and holiday films are no exception. Fans may be surprised by some of the events that went on behind the scenes of their favorite holiday films, as well as background information about the actors and settings of the movies.

Get into the festive spirit by learning about the following beloved holiday films.

It a Wonderful Life

Anyone who has ever wondered what life would be like if they took a different path or made different decisions can relate to this classic Christmas film. It's

difficult to make it through the holiday season without seeing It's a Wonderful Life, and many people make it a point of to view it every year. The following are some interesting tidbits about George Bailey and the film that put savings-and-loan managers on the map.

- The movie began as a short story titled "The Greatest Gift." Writer Philip Van Dornen Stern was unsuccessful at shopping the story and turned it into a Christmas card for 200 friends and family. A producer at RKO pictures got a copy and purchased the movie rights for \$10,000.

- Many now agree that Jimmy Stewart was the perfect choice to play lead character George Bailey, but studio heads originally had Carey Grant in mind for the lead. The role went to Stewart when Frank Capra signed on to the film and named Stewart his leading man.

- Although Donna Reed was a seasoned actress prior to the movie, 'It's a Wonderful Life' marked her first starring role.

- Bedford Falls, the fictional town in the movie, is reportedly based on upstate New York towns Bedford Hills and Seneca Falls. Nearby cities like Rochester and Buffalo are referenced in the movie. However, the movie was not filmed on location. It was filmed in the summertime

on a back lot in the San Fernando Valley section of Los Angeles.

- The movie received a technical Academy Award for the snow effects, which were created by using a 'snow' mixture of water, soap and a fire-fighting chemical called Foamite.

- The movie was not well received upon its release in 1946. The film received mixed reviews, which might surprise those who consider it a cinematic classic.

A Christmas Story

An equally beloved holiday film and a cult favorite, A Christmas Story follows a 1940s Indiana family anchored by Ralphie, the cynical but lovable schoolboy played by actor Peter Billingsley. The movie was based on autobiographical tales penned by author and radio personality Jean Shepherd, who narrates the film.

- The movie was a low-budget film that used virtually no special effects. It also used tracking shots instead of Steadicam.

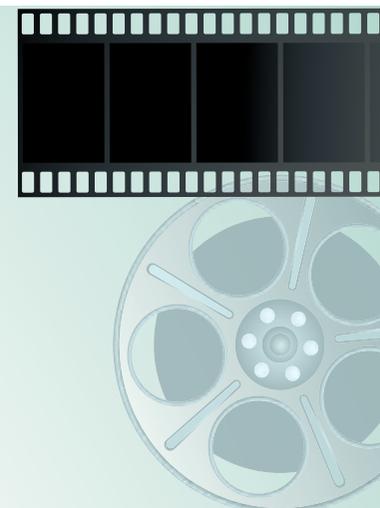
- The setting for the movie is based on Shepherd's hometown of Hammond, Indiana. Shepherd grew up on Cleveland Street and went to Warren G. Harding Elementary School. However, the movie was filmed in Cleveland, Ohio, and Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The house

from the movie still stands in Cleveland. Part of the decision to film in Cleveland stems from the willingness of Higbee's department store to allow crews to film inside the store.

- Darren McGavin played Ralphie's father, a role he won over Jack Nicholson. McGavin might have won the role because of Nicholson's typically large salary demands.

- For the scene in which Flick's tongue sticks to the flagpole, a hidden suction tube was used to safely create the illusion that his tongue had frozen to the metal.

- Three leg lamps were made for the movie, and all three broke during filming.



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New Year's celebrations around the world

Much of the world rings in the new year in grand fashion. Celebrations include fireworks, concerts and, of course, champagne. But while there might be common elements to New Year's celebrations regardless of geography, the parties can vary greatly depending on where celebrants happen to be. The following are some of the more raucous places in the world to ring in the new year.

New York, NY

Times Square is in the heart of midtown Manhattan and is a sight to behold any time of year. But the New Year's celebration in Times Square is a truly unique event that many people insist they must experience at least once in their lifetimes. Each year, roughly one million revelers gather at the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, so anyone planning to attend the celebration should aim to get there long before midnight if they want to see the famed ball drop.

Paris, France

Fireworks dominate the Parisians' celebration of the dawn of a new year. The world renowned Champs-Elysees is lined with revelers who can't wait to catch a glimpse of the fireworks that explode from the Eiffel Tower at the stroke of midnight.

Sydney, Australia

Fireworks fanatics who can't make it to the City of Light might want to book a trip down under to Sydney. Each year, revelers in Sydney gather to witness awe-inspiring fireworks displays that explode from the Sydney Harbour Bridge and some surrounding buildings. The Sydney waterfront adds to the celebratory ambiance.



London, England

New Year's waterfront celebrations are explosive as London hosts celebratory fireworks displays along the River Thames. When fireworks are finished exploding around Big Ben, one of the world's most recognizable tourist attractions, the magic continues at another of London's famous landmarks, the London Eye. Fireworks explode from the ferris wheel as Londoners ring in the new year.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

New Year's revelers who want something slightly different might want to try Rio, where residents take to the beaches to celebrate the dawn of a new year. Flowers are thrown into the waves at the stroke of midnight before the city erupts into parties loaded with dancing and music.

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Champagne vs sparkling wine

True champagne

Authentic champagne is named after Champagne, France, the region where the grapes used to make it are grown, fermented and bottled. According to European law, the only labels that are allowed to include the name "Champagne" must be bottled within 100 miles of this region.

The taste of champagne is unique thanks to the soil the grapes are grown in. It's the mineral-rich soil that flavors the beverage. Champagne is made from a unique base of grapes that include Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay grapes. Experts with Wine Country also say that roughly 90 percent of all blended champagnes use a ratio of 2/3 red and 1/3 Chardonnay mixes.

Another component that sets champagne apart is the process by which it is made. It is strictly controlled by the Appellation d'Origine Controlée. This certification dictates how a producer may grow the grapes and how the grapes can be harvested and processed. Champagne is produced by méthode champenoise, a process that is said to have been invented by a monk named Dom Perignon. This procedure involves double fermentation

in bottles and creates an earthy, yeasty flavor.

Sparkling wine

Champagne is sparkling wine, but not all sparkling wines are champagne. Other notable types of sparkling wine include Italian Prosecco and Spanish Cava. Sparkling wine is produced in regions of France as well as in the United States and Canada. But sparkling wine can be made just about anywhere grapes are grown. Sparkling wines are often double-fermented in steel containers instead of bottles.

People are drawn to other sparkling wines besides champagne for various reasons. For some, cost is a heavy consideration, as authentic champagne can be considerably more expensive than sparkling wine. In addition, some people find less expensive champagnes are not as palate-pleasing as sparkling wines.

Few things are more universally associated with celebrations than a bottle of bubbly. Subtle differences set sparkling wines apart from champagne, but personal preference is oftentimes the deciding factor when choosing which beverage to choose for a special occasion.



Millions of people travel to visit family and friends each holiday season. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, during the Christmas and New Year's holiday period, the number of trips to and from a destination 50 miles or more away rises by 23 percent compared to the average number for the rest of the year.

Holiday travelers who are flexible with regard to their travel dates may be able to avoid traffic or long lines at the airport. The BTS notes that people traveling between 50 and 99 miles away from home are most likely to travel on Thursday and return on Saturday. So those making short trips who want to avoid traffic may actually benefit by driving home on Sunday after leaving home on Friday rather than traveling on Thursday and Saturday. The BTS notes that travel days are spread out almost equally among people who travel 100 miles away from home or more, so the day travelers choose may not matter as much as the time of day they choose to travel. Flights during off-peak hours, for example, may help travelers avoid long check-in and security lines at airports.

Air travelers who are flexible with regard to their departing and arriving airports may be able to save time and money. Small airports might not boast the amenities of large airports, but they have less flights

and, as a result, less flight delays, saving travelers time. Small airports also may not charge as much for overnight parking as large airports. When considering flights from various airports, factor in the cost of parking and transportation to and from each airport. A flight that takes off at your ideal travel time but costs more than the alternative might save you money if you can save on transportation and parking.

Early flights may be less likely to be delayed than flights in the afternoon and evening. The later into the day your flight departs, the more likely that departure might be affected by delays or inclement weather at other airports and in other cities. Waking up early might not be ideal for everyone, but check-in and security lines tend to be short in the early morning hours as well. Those lines get longer as morning becomes afternoon and afternoon becomes evening.

You'll save money with package deals. Holiday travel is expensive, as airlines and hotels recognize the holiday season is peak travel season. Package deals from sites such as Orbitz combine flight and hotels into one price, and such deals may even include rental cars. Travel bundles can save travelers considerable amounts of money. Compare the prices when booking each individually to the price of a package deal, and choose the one that's best.

Let the Festivus begin

Each December 23, legions of "Seinfeld" fans pay homage to "A Festivus for the Rest of Us." This contrived, alternative holiday was a plot line developed for the beloved Costanza family on the series and was billed as Frank Costanza's creation. Festivus debuted on December 18, 1997, on the episode, "The Strike." Instead of a tree, candles or carols, Festivus celebrations involve a metal pole, the airing of grievances and feats of strength. Many believe Festivus was simply a television creation, but the holiday is loosely rooted in fact. Daniel O'Keefe, a former writer for "Seinfeld," reluctantly admitted that his father, Dan, actually invented Festivus in 1966. O'Keefe told CNN that his little brother let the

Festivus traditions slip out, and other writers for the show, including Jerry Seinfeld, felt it would make for a great episode, particularly because the holiday wasn't beholden to anything political or religious. That was the reason O'Keefe's father developed it in the first place. The real Festivus had few similarities to the TV version. While there was an airing of grievances, the pole and feats of strength were absent. O'Keefe has written that his father would also nail a bag containing a clock to the wall each year, but he doesn't know why his father did this. Since 1997, the holiday has become a worldwide celebration, with people gathering around their own metal poles in late December every year



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Charity

WHEN MONEY IS TIGHT

Charity is not exclusive to donating dollars, and those who want to give back but can't fit donations into their budgets can explore various ways to make an impact without writing a check.

Volunteering

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, roughly 63 million people volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2014 and September 2015. Up north, the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating from Statistics Canada found that more than four in 10 Canadians ages 15 and older volunteered to some degree in 2013.

Volunteering is a rewarding way to give back to one's community. Nonprofits and charitable organizations may fall short of meeting their missions if not for the valuable services provided by volunteers, so pitching in can be just as valuable as writing a check. Discuss your personal and professional experience with an organization to find a volunteering

opportunity that suits you and your skill set. In addition schools, hospitals, libraries, and religious institutions have volunteering opportunities for those who want to give back.

Item donations

Donating time and money may be among the most popular ways to give back, but those are not the only ways to donate to organizations and people in need. Go through your closet and donate clothes you no longer wear. Instead of selling furniture you plan to replace, contact local charitable organizations to see if they would like your furniture, or donate pieces that they can then sell to finance their operations. Some donated items, such as vehicles, may earn donors tax deductions.

Medical donations

Donating money or dropping off canned goods at food banks may be the first things many people think of when mulling charitable donations, but medical donations also present a great way to give back. The American Red Cross notes that



blood donations help millions of people and a single blood donation can end up helping more than one person. The Red Cross also notes that roughly 36,000 units of red blood cells are needed in the United States alone each day, while nearly 7,000 units of platelets and 10,000 units of plasma are needed daily. Donating blood, plasma or platelets can help save lives, and making such donations does not require substantial commitments of time.

Organ donations also present a great way to give back. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services notes that an average of 22 people die each day waiting for transplants that cannot take place because of the shortage of organ donors. Many lives might be saved if more people signed up to be organ donors, an act that can be as simple as checking a box on the back of your driver's license.

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Explore the most charitable nations in the world

Philanthropic efforts are meant to help the less fortunate, but the benefits of being charitable also extend to those doing the giving. The National Institutes of Health found research participants who chose to donate a portion of the \$100 they were provided enjoyed activated pleasure centers in the brain. Being charitable also can motivate others to give, including children who realize the benefits of philanthropy.

Another benefit of being generous is that it can recharge a person's life for the better. Donating time or money can create opportunities to meet new people who support the same causes. This may be the driving force behind countries around the world that have established themselves as the most giving per capita.

The CAF World Giving Index routinely ranks the most charitable nations. The rankings are based on data from Gallup and Charities Aid Foundation. Individuals may find it interesting that philanthropy is not directly related to material wealth.

Only five of the countries in the index are members of the G20, a forum of the world's largest economies. In fact, many less affluent places hold top positions in the rankings. The WGI ranks the nations on their propensity to help a stranger, donate money and volunteer time. These percentages are factored together to provide a WGI score and ranking. Here's how the nations measured up for the most recent year of reporting.

The United States falls to second place this year thanks to a 5 percent decrease in financial donations (the United States is 12th in the world for charitable donations). However, a very high proportion of the American population (76 percent) helps strangers. For the third year in a row, Myanmar topped the WGI. Most people in the country are devout Theravada Buddhists, and charitable giving is integral to their religion. While donations tend to be small, many give daily, with 92 percent of the population making charitable donations in 2014.

People around the world engage in charitable giving
Below is the top 20 countdown:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 20. Germany | 10. Malaysia |
| 19. Thailand | 9. Ireland |
| 18. Kyrgyzstan | 8. Sri Lanka |
| 17. Bhutan | 7. Netherlands |
| 16. Guatemala | 6. United Kingdom |
| 15. Norway | 5. Australia |
| 14. United Arab Emirates | 4. Canada |
| 13. Bahrain | 3. New Zealand |
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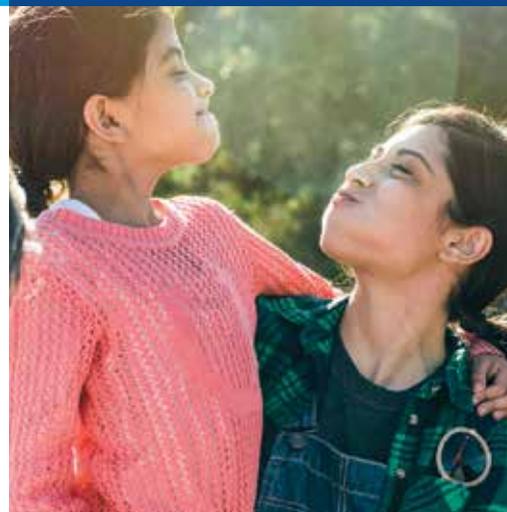
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the handyman *Gift* GUIDE

For those people who don't know a box cutter from a box saw, shopping for men and women who like to get their hands dirty around the house can be a difficult task. Home improvement projects are complex undertakings that often involve the use of complex tools, and novices may be lost in the proverbial woods as they look for gifts for their loved ones who can't wait to swing hammers around the house.

Though there's always an element of risk when shopping for gifts for loved ones, the following hints might help shoppers with no knowledge of home improvement projects find gifts that will please their favorite handyman.

- **Take inventory of his or her**

existing tools. When shopping for the DIY enthusiast in your family, try to take inventory of his or her tool chest before beginning your search. Make note of any tools that look new, checking those off your shopping list, and any that look like they need replacing. Use your phone to photograph any unfamiliar tools that you might want to replace so you know what to look for when visiting the hardware store.

- **Think of what your relative likes to do most.** The family handyman may have a particular area of home improvement expertise or something he or she is especially passionate about. Does your loved one prefer to work in the garden? Is he into woodworking and making decorative items for the house? Think of what he



or she likes to do most and then look for something that will make that hobby more enjoyable. While multipurpose tools might make for welcome gifts, something more specific to his or her particular passion may make an even better gift.

- **Think outside the (tool) box.** While new tools might make a handyman's day, they are not the only items that make

great DIY gifts. Consider enrolling your loved one in an advanced class so he or she can learn more about a favorite hobby. Or gift a magazine subscription so he or she can stay abreast of the latest DIY trends and topics. Such gifts are great options for shoppers hesitant to purchase potentially costly tools that may or may not be hits with their relatives.

- **Speak with a professional.** If you can't access your loved one's workshop or simply don't know what he or she might want, ask a local contractor for gift recommendations. For example, a carpenter might know just what will elicit a smile from woodworking enthusiasts, while landscapers might be able to suggest items for gardening or lawn care enthusiasts. Advancements are always being made in the home improvement industry, and those people who make their living in that industry might be great resources as you try to find the go-to gift for your loved one.

Finding a gift for the family handyman might be difficult for shoppers with no DIY experience of their own. But a little forethought and perhaps some professional assistance can be just what shoppers need to find gifts their loved ones will cherish for years to come.

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