

Creative gift ideas for kids



Few things compare to the joy and excitement on the faces of children on Christmas morning as they rush to the tree in search of packages bearing their names.

Though it may seem many of the items on your child's list require tech savvy, getting back to basics with crafty gifts can allow your kids to explore their artistic sides and foster imaginative play. From options like coloring books and jewelry-making kits to glitter activity sets and color and wash collectibles, there are a variety of present ideas out there meant to get those creative juices flowing.

Whether searching for a gift for the

animal lover, aspiring scientist or DIYer, you can find gifts to spark your child's imagination and leave him or her with a colorful, memorable surprise at Crayola. com.

Rethink arts and crafts time

While many children love to play with glitter, traditional glitter and glue can be messy. This holiday season, opt for a lessmess solution like Crayola Glitter Dots, which are recommended for children 5 or older and available in 13 sparkly colors and three color palettes: classic, tropical and bold. Each innovative dot

features a special coating so all the glitter is contained inside and a unique adhesive that sticks to multiple surfaces including paper, wood, felt, papier-mache, fabrics, plastic foam and more. They are available in single packs or as part of larger activity kits that can be used to conceive custom creations as well as keychains, stickers, mosaics, sparkly signs and more.

Customizable creativity

In a matter of minutes, kids can be transported to an imaginative safari where they can create, nurture and collect colorable and washable figures with the Crayola Scribble Scrubbie Safari, intended for ages 3 and older. Using the included kid-powered Oasis Tub with a slide attachment, kids can wash off their pets, customize their appearance using six different Scribble Scrubbie Ultra Clean Washable Markers and create brand new designs again and again. In addition to the four safari pets included - monkey, elephant, giraffe and lion - additional expansion packs are available that can bring your child's collection to a total of 12 adorable animals.

(Family Features)







Delishiously easy entertaining with simple ingredients

Hosting a crowd can be exciting and rewarding, but it can also come with plenty of challenges. One of the simplest ways to make mealtime stress-free when entertaining is to focus on ingredients that can be incorporated into a variety of different dishes.

From quick appetizers to grab-and-go snacks, you can crowd-please with ease by using your favorite flavor sausage and deli meats. Whether you're celebrating an occasion, hosting a family gathering or watching a game, using a convenient option like deli meat means all you have to do is add it to your favorite recipes for an extra boost of flavor. This season, whip up some delicious Quiche Cups in Muffin Tins for a combo of deli ham, eggs and other simple ingredients for a speedy dish that can ward off your group's hunger and allow for more quality time together.

Quiche Cups in Muffin Tins

- 5 eggs
- 1 cup skim milk
- 1 1/2 cups shredded Swiss cheese

- 1/4 cup chopped green onion
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- nonstick cooking spray
- 18 thin slices deli ham

Heat oven to 350 F.

In bowl, whisk eggs. Add milk, cheese, onion, thyme, salt and pepper; stir to combine.

Spray muffin pan with nonstick cooking spray. Place one slice ham in each chamber.

Spoon about 3 tablespoons egg mixture into each chamber so each is three-fourths full.

Bake about 25 minutes, or until toothpick inserted into center comes out clean and tops begin to brown.

Remove from oven and cool about 10 minutes. Find more recipes for entertaining with ease at Eckrich.com. (Family Features)









3 holiday activities to engage with loved ones

Any time can be the right time to enjoy memorable moments with family members, but the holidays present a special opportunity to meaningful conversations and interactions with loved ones.

One of the best ways to spark creativity and generate memories is through activities that get conversations started, whether it's remembering favorite moments from the past, sharing notes of appreciation, or simply making new memories. The natural bonding moments that stem from activities like these can last a lifetime.

Time Capsule

Making a holiday-inspired time capsule can help strengthen family bonds while preserving treasured memories and creating opportunities for future holidays when it's time to reopen the contents.

Use a sealed container or plastic bag to protect items from moisture and mold then place the container in a box that can be decorated and stored in a safe place with related holiday decorations. Mark on the container the date it was created for future reference, and pack it with items like family-favorite recipes; notes about significant events from that year like births, weddings, graduations and more; copies of newspapers detailing high-profile happenings; and pictures, drawings and notes from the year.

If you're patient enough to wait, try leaving the contents undisturbed at least five years to give the memories even more meaning when the time comes to relive those special moments.



Memories Tablecloth

To help keep important family footnotes front and center during future celebrations, a memorial tablecloth provides each person an opportunity to personalize a piece of popular decor. As you gather around the table for holiday meals, ask each family member to jot down a favorite memory or something he or she is thankful for along with a signature and date.

You can make it an annual event by using the same tablecloth each year and, before long, it will be filled with personal memories as a way to cherish relationships as time goes on. Just use an appropriately sized, inexpensive white canvas drop cloth. Place fabric markers in the center of the table before inviting guests to participate, and to help distinguish each year, try using different colored markers.

Gratitude Tree

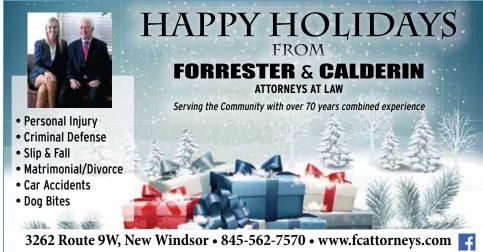
Start a new tradition by creating a gratitude tree, a simple decoration you can look forward to using each year as a reminder of what you and your family are thankful

To make a gratitude tree, collect twigs or branches, dry them out and cut them to the desired lengths. Put the branches in a vase or decorative container. Punch holes at the tops of fall-colored paper to be used as tags then instruct guests to write what they're grateful for on each tag.

Take turns reading the tags and tie them to the branches then keep the handwritten tags in a safe place until they can be read again each holiday season. Over the years, as the tree fills up, you'll have a lifetime of memories to share.

Find more ways to celebrate the holidays with your loved ones at talkofalifetime.org. (Family Features)





Shop Ho-Ho-Local

he 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 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.



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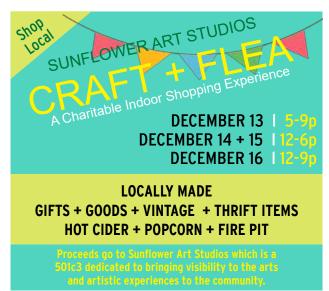












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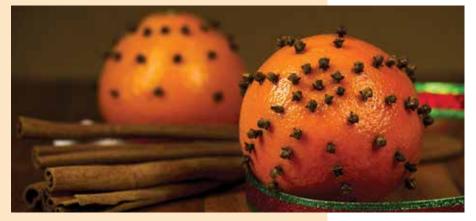
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Fill your home with the scents of holiday spirit

- · Create a seasonal scented simmer. Take to the stove to make a homemade air infusion from ingredients in and around the house. Simmer pine branches, citrus peels, vanilla, nutmeg, cinnamon, and whatever else can be placed in a pot or slow cooker with water. The scents will permeate the house for hours if enough water is added to the mixture.
- · Make holiday sachets. Some of the same ingredients for the holiday simmer can be dried and sewn into sachets. Add ribbon and hang on real or artificial trees. Or tuck the pouches into various areas around the house.
- · Make beeswax ornaments. Add scented oils to melted beeswax and pour into molds. Hang these creations as ornaments on trees or in other areas of the home.
- Craft some "gingerbread" ornaments. A mixture of cinnamon, applesauce and glue can be used to make ornaments or gift tags that resemble gingerbread cookies, and these ornaments have more staying power than actual cookies.
- **Design a pretty pomander.** Stud an orange with cloves. Cut off the top of the orange and hollow out a



place for a small tea light. The warmth of the flame will produce more scent.

- Experiment with scented candles. Scented candles can be found at various stores during the holiday season. Select among popular holiday aromas like pine, cinnamon, apples, and Christmas cookie varieties.
- **Utilize essential oils.** Natural food stores and other retailers may sell essential oils, which can be diluted and sprayed on surfaces or into the air. Exercise caution around upholstery, or test for staining before use.
- Spend time in the kitchen. Add delicious scents to the home by way of freshly baked goods or holiday meals. Nothing beats the smell of cookies right out of the oven, and the scents can linger for hours.



Shop Pine Bush













5 easy ways to give back during the season of giving

Over the holiday season, it's natural to look for ways to give back to those in need, whether in your own community or beyond. With everyone's schedules being full to the brim over the season, and with so many other demands on your energy and your funds, it's sometimes hard to know the best method to donate. Fortunately, there are many ways that you can make a big difference in the lives of others, even while going about your holiday errands and outings.

1. Participate in a toy drive

The needs of children whose families may not have many resources are always on our minds this season. Organizations large and small throughout the country run toy drives over the holidays, so it's easy to share the magic of the season with children in your community. Just pick up an extra couple of toys while you're doing your own shopping, then find a drop-off location near you. Most charities require that donated toys be new and unwrapped.



2. Give your airline miles

While you're arranging your holiday travel, check to see if you've accumulated extra airline miles. Most airlines allow donation of miles for a wide variety of good causes, so if you have some miles

that are close to expiring or you just don't think you'll need them, ask the airline what charities they are connected to and how you can donate your miles. Chances are, you won't even miss them - and they can make a meaningful impact on others.

3. Book a room, make a difference

If you or your relatives are traveling over the holidays, consider booking rooms at a Red Roof property, as their "Room In Your Heart" campaign will donate 15% to one of four meaningful charities, up to \$25,000, as well as provide a 15% discount on the room rate. The four charities benefiting from the campaign are:

Flying Horse Farms offers magical, transformative camp experiences for children with serious illnesses and families, free of charge.

Canine Companions for Independence provides highly trained assistance dogs for children, adults and veterans with disabilities, free of charge.

The Freedom Alliance supports American troops and families with care

packages, grants, scholarships and other programs.

The Sunshine Kids Foundation organizes positive group activities for children with cancer

All travelers need to do is book a stay now through Dec. 31 using the promo code "Room" at any Red Roof Inn, Red Roof PLUS+, The Red Collection or HomeTowne Studios by Red Roof to take advantage of the discount and to make a huge difference to children, support animals and military members.

To learn more about the Room In Your Heart campaign, visit RedRoof.com/deals/national-deals/room-in-vour-heart.

4. Donate blood

Often forgotten over the holidays is the continual need for blood and platelets. Disaster relief organizations and hospitals continue to rely on donated blood throughout the winter months, but many would-be donors are over-scheduled and may not be thinking about this crucial need, which never takes a holiday. Stores of blood are often depleted this time of year. It's easy to do an online search for a blood drive location near you, and it only takes a little over an hour of your time.

5. Give while you walk

Several charities are connected to apps that allow you to donate simply by just walking throughout your day. You connect with your phone, which tracks your miles, and you can choose what charity you want to donate to. It's a great way to stay active while also contributing to a good cause.

Weather you give close to home or far away these opportunities to give back will make the season even more magical - for you and for others.







Gift ideas for small business owners, partners, students or yourself

For a small business owner, the holiday season is often the most profitable - and busiest - time of the year. With a third of all retailers making 50 percent of their profits during the holidays1, keeping up with the customer demand alone can be a challenge. Now add that to going to holiday parties, finding gifts for family, friends, clients and colleagues and taking time off to actually relax and enjoy the seasonal festivities - "the most wonderful time of the year" quickly becomes "the most stressful time of the year."

So, what's the solution when looking to take advantage of the busy shopping season AND trying to enjoy some time with friends and family? The answer is to combine small business and personal holiday tasks as much as you can.

Here are a few tips to help you enjoy this time of year with less stress.

1. Do as much one-stop shopping as you can

Time is valuable. Find places to shop that carry a variety of items that not only make great gifts for family and friends, but also for clients, bosses and co-workers.

One example is the TUL® Wireless



Charging Notebook. A perfect gift for a student, business pro or busy mom on-thego, this professional-looking leather-discbound notebook now has a built-in wireless charging spot on the cover that is compatible with any Qi-certified Android or Apple smart phone. This notebook can also be tailored to meet your unique

style and functionality needs. Punch in business cards and photos or accessorize with a variety of add-ons like a task pad or ruler - you can make it yours. Complete the gift with the TUL® Fine Writing Solid Metal Barrel Ballpoint Pens, which are precision engineered and beautifully crafted, with a professional and luxurious look.

2. Tap into the latest technology

With a hectic holiday season and new year ahead, invest in some new tech for your business. Buy products that are multi-functional and long-lasting to keep you and your business efficient at all times.

The HP Pavilion Convertible 2-In-1 Laptop is a great example. You can take both work and play to the next level with this 2-in-1 laptop, which allows you to touch, tap and glide through its intuitive interface while enjoying versatile typing and viewing positions thanks to the 360-degree hinge. You can surf the Internet with ease with this laptop, and its superior solid-state drive holds plenty of songs, photos, documents and other files. The HP Wide Vision HD webcam allows you to video conference with crisp,

clear audio performance, and the dual speakers with HP Audio Boost help bring music and video to life.

3. Get practical

Give the gift of an improved, ergonomic work station. If you're like most people, you've tried everything to make your daily work position more comfortable. The VARIDESK (TM) ProPlus Manual Standing Desk Converter does just that. The sturdy base sits on top of an existing desk, and the upper deck acts as the display surface for monitors. The easily adjustable design offers 11 different height settings, so you can experiment with different levels to find optimal comfort, and to vary your posture while working.

Your friends, family, business partners and colleagues - especially fellow small business owners - will all appreciate the practical gift solutions. Don't let the holidays stress you out this year. By shopping smart, small business owners can take advantage of a profitable holiday season and conquer their to-do lists so that this holiday season can be the best one yet. - (BPT)



Chocolate Bundt Cake with Peppermint Glaze

What are the benefits of baking from scratch? Mostly, it's fun, and your whole family can join in. On top of that, nothing tastes as good as fresh baked treats right out of the oven. Another bonus, it makes the whole house smell great. But perhaps the most important reason to bake from scratch is that you'll know exactly what's going in everything you make.

Choosing ingredients carefully makes all the difference. If you want to reduce vour family's consumption of artificial ingredients, skip the refined white sugar and substitute the same amount of Sugar In The Raw, made exclusively from natural sugarcane grown in the tropics. The hearty, golden crystals are made from the first pressing of sugarcane and never bleached, so they keep the rich flavor and color of natural molasses. The product is Non-GMO Project Verified, Certified Vegan, naturally gluten free and Kosher certified.

Chocolate Bundt Cake with Peppermint Glaze

Prep: 20 minutes Cook: 65 minutes Servings: 16

Ingredients

Cake:

Softened butter for greasing pan

2 cups Sugar In The Raw, plus more for sprinkling in cake pan

2 cups all-purpose flour

3/4 cup Dutch process cocoa powder

1 teaspoon fine sea salt



3/4 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1 cup strong brewed coffee

3/4 cup sour cream

3/4 cup vegetable oil

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

Glaze:

1/4 cup heavy cream

1 cup white chocolate chips or 6 ounces white chocolate, chopped

1 teaspoon peppermint extract

Crushed peppermint candies (optional)

cool completely.

- 6. In small saucepan bring cream to a boil. Take off heat, add white chocolate, cover and let sit 5 minutes.
- 7. Stir until smooth, then stir in peppermint extract. Let cool 15 minutes.
- 8. Pour glaze over cake, letting it drip down sides. If desired, sprinkle cake with peppermint candies.

Use natural food coloring

For recipes needing colored icing or colored batter, you can now find natural food coloring on the market that uses 100% natural vegetable juices, rather than relying on artificial additives.

Try butter alternatives

While regular dairy butter provides a unique texture that other products can't always duplicate, you can substitute at least part of the standard butter in many recipes with vegetable oils, cultured organic butter, grass-fed butter, clarified butter (or ghee), or even coconut oil as more healthful alternatives. Experiment with a favorite recipe first to see what ingredients work best.

Bake with fresh produce

When you're baking pies or making other dessert recipes that contain fruit, opt for the best quality fresh produce you can find in your area. You, your family and guests will all notice the difference.

Directions

- 1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Liberally butter a 10" Bundt pan. Place some sugar inside pan and rotate to coat evenly. Shake out
- 2. In large bowl, whisk to combine sugar, flour, cocoa powder, salt, baking powder and baking soda.
- 3. Add coffee, sour cream, oil, eggs and vanilla. Whisk to combine.
- 4. Scrape batter into prepared pan and bake until toothpick inserted in cake comes out clean or with moist crumbs attached, 50-60 minutes.
- 5. Let cake cool in pan 15 minutes, then invert onto rack, removing pan. Let cake













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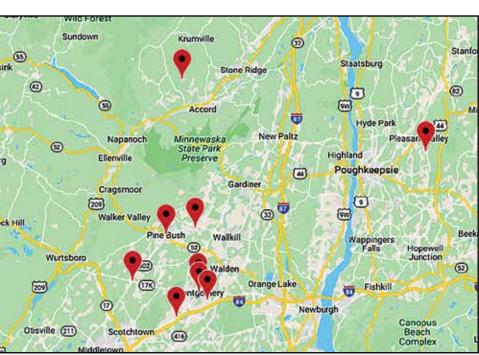


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