

# ***HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE III***



# Make life easier with these holiday entertaining tips

## Meal Prep

Getting ahead on meal prep can mean more time spent with friends and family. If you're tasked with serving a big holiday meal, prep the main dishes a day or two ahead of time so you can just pop them into the oven the day of your holiday feast. You can also brine and season turkey, prepare your glaze and score the ham, chop veggies and pre-mix salad dressings the night before. Festive beverages can be batched in advance so guests can easily serve themselves, helping you stay calm and collected during your party. And of course, don't feel shy about asking friends and family to contribute a dish.

## Have Dessert Ready

Whether you're throwing a holiday bash or expecting overnight guests, you'll be the host with the most if you have delicious desserts on hand. Fortunately, serving baked goods made with care and quality ingredients is easier than you think! Stick with the classics like Entenmann's – a 125-year-old



brand with many delicious options to choose from. Powdered Pop'ettes will satisfy your guests' sweet cravings, Pop'ems Glazed Donut Holes are great for bite-sized snacking, and Baker's Delights Mini Crumb Cake has a rich and delicious homemade taste. Convenient choices such as these can keep you prepared for the night ahead should the doorbell

surprise you with carolers or other visitors. They can also round out a buffet spread, help you end a multi-course feast on a sweet note or simplify breakfast for overnight guests. All you'll need to do is put the coffee on!

## Plan a Game Night

If your overnight guests will be spending more than a night or two at your home, you can keep them happy and entertained with some activities that require very little planning but are a lot of fun. For example, you can organize a game night, which is a nice way to maximize your time together. Pick a few games that are well-suited for the size of the crowd and the age of the players. Remember, the best choices for a party are games that inspire conversations, teamwork and creativity. Or plan a movie marathon, picking some holiday themed crowd favorites in advance. You can simplify feeding your guests during these low-key activities by putting out some finger foods like crudité, popcorn, pretzels and donut holes.

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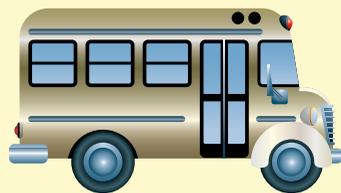
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## AN EASY STUFFED TOMATO APPETIZER

Whether you need a quick appetizer or something to snack on, these Stuffed Cherry Tomatoes make for a yummy bite.

Find more snack recipes at [Culinary.net](http://Culinary.net)

### Stuffed Cherry Tomatoes

- 24-48 cherry tomatoes**
- 1 pkg. (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened**
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise**
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled and diced**
- 3 green onion stalks, diced**
- 2 teaspoons minced dill**
- fresh dill, for garnish**

Cut a thin slice off top of each tomato. Scoop out pulp. Invert tomatoes on paper towel to drain.

In medium bowl, combine cream cheese and mayonnaise until smooth. Stir in cucumber, green onion and dill. Spoon mixture into tomatoes. Top with fresh dill.

Refrigerate until ready to serve.  
(Culinary.net)



# 4 ways to send holiday greetings on a budget

With a little twist on the classic tradition, you can save time and money while creating unique holiday greetings.

In a AmericanGreetings.com survey, 60% of Americans sent cards last year and 90% of people said they bring them joy. Here are a few tips to make this year's family greeting more special than ever before, even on a budget and time crunch.

## Write a Personal Message

71% of people surveyed said personalization, such as adding a custom note, is their favorite part of cards. Make it unique by sharing memories from throughout the year that showcase favorite moments with specific family and friends.

## Go Digital

Holiday cards can be a time-consuming task—but it doesn't have

to be. Go the digital route with Pics & Wishes, a line of multimedia greetings from AmericanGreetings.com, where you can send specially designed ecards to loved ones. The app makes creating and sending heartfelt greetings extremely easy, personalized and affordable.

With Pics & Wishes, people of all ages and skill levels can unleash their creativity. American Greetings' easy-to-use card-builder lets you select from seasonal templates featuring a variety of animated graphics. Since your phone is likely already full of photos and videos, Pics & Wishes offers an easy, inexpensive way to personalize greetings straight from your mobile



to your whole mailing list at once.

## Create a Family Newsletter

Outdo last year's traditional greetings while keeping loved ones up to date by creating a family newsletter. With Pics & Wishes, you have the option to write a simple, personalized note or take

your card-sending game to a whole new level. One way is by sharing the latest and greatest in your family members' lives in a fun, entertaining year-in-review letter. Plus, the easy-to-use app offers special accents for recipients to enjoy, such as decorative letterhead and cheerful holiday music.

device. You'll never need to worry about your long list of recipients or how it will add up in cost. Since the app is subscription-based, the unlimited number of sends makes it incredibly convenient to send ecards

## Don't Forget Pets

People love their pets and often treat them like family. In fact, nearly half of Americans say they have signed their pet's name in a card. The annual holiday card is the perfect opportunity to include your furry friend in photos as an honored part of the family. Plus, recipients will also enjoy their inclusion, as 58% of Americans surveyed said they gravitate toward greeting cards that feature animals. Whether it's a cute, posed photo of your puppy or a candid of your cat, it's sure to bring a smile to your loved ones' faces. (StatePoint)



# Happy Holidays

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# It's not too late to decorate!

## Local Christmas Decor decorating specialist says simplicity and focusing on features are key to holiday decor success

There is still time to deck out your home or business for the holidays, says Patrick Carr of Christmas Decor of the Hudson Valley, a franchise member of the Christmas Decor network. The key, according to Carr, is to keep things simple and focus on your property's best features.

1. Identify your home's most attractive feature, like a porch, window, door or tree. Then, draw focus to that feature with holiday lights and garlands.

2. Inventory your existing holiday supplies for additional lights and three-dimensional decor items like stars or figures that will compliment your focal point decor.

3. Avoid using multiple themes and

colors that draw attention away from your focal point. Think simple, clean, and classic. Less is best, in terms of both appearance and cost.

"Above all," says Carr, "don't panic. The holidays are a time to enjoy the company of friends and family. Use what you have on hand. Even the simplest decor of evergreen boughs, holly sprigs or pinecones can create a warm holiday welcome at your front door."

Christmas Decor of the Hudson Valley, based in Pine Bush, is a member of the Christmas Decor Franchise Network, the premier holiday lighting and decorating company in North America. Their trained holiday outdoor decorating specialists create glowing



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displays using exclusive professional-grade lighting and decor options not available to the everyday consumer. Their full-service approach includes maintenance and repair of light installations and displays throughout the holidays and removal and storage of the lights and decor when the holidays are over. Owners Patrick and Deborah Carr also operate a pest removal service in the warmer weather.

"When even the simplest of holiday decorating chores seem more stressful than joyful, services like ours can be a holiday game-changer," says

Carr. "There's still time to work with a professional outdoor holiday decorating specialist, but slots are filling up rapidly; it's important to act quickly before calendars are full."

For more information on having Christmas Decor decorate your home or business, or to schedule an appointment for a consultation or installation, please contact Patrick Carr of Christmas Decor of the Hudson Valley at (845) 669-0090 or [info@christmasdecorhv.com](mailto:info@christmasdecorhv.com). You can also learn more at [www.christmasdecor.net](http://www.christmasdecor.net).

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# Treat a nature lover to a special gift

The natural world is a wonder to behold, with awe-inspiring vistas and wildlife. Spending time in nature has been studied and reported on by a number of medical professionals. The general takeaway is that enjoying time in the great outdoors has been linked to everything from improved mood to reduced risk of disease. Just a little bit of time in fresh air and sunlight can improve well-being by a significant margin, which is perhaps why nature has inspired so many devotees.

If there is a nature lover in your family, use that interest as inspiration when holiday shopping this year. Here are some nature-related gift ideas.

- **Binoculars:** Bird watchers or other animal observers understand that wild animals can become skittish around people. It's best to view them from afar, and a good set of binoculars makes it easier to do so.

- **Mounted camera:** When the GoPro camera came on the scene many years ago, it revolutionized the way amateur filmmakers could document their adventures. The GoPro and its model evolutions continue to enable people to capture photos and videos both on land and underwater. With a head-



mounting strap and some additional accessories, adventurers will be unencumbered by the camera. Similar mounting devices may be available for Android- and Apple-based phones and cameras as well.

- **Waterproof hiking boots/shoes:** Taking the road less traveled often means going on foot. Trailblazing is made easier with durable, waterproof footwear that can go from the trail to the mountainside more readily.

- **Motion-capture trail camera:** Another way to watch wildlife is to do so from a motion-capture trail camera that can be set up by a nesting area or along a path frequented by local wildlife.

- **First aid kit:** It's always important to keep safety in mind when enjoying nature. A well-stocked first aid kit is a great way to give the gift of good health and safety.

- **Camping gear:** When sleeping out under the stars or at a campsite, a tent, ground cover, sleeping bag, backpack, camp stove and other gear can make the experience all the better.

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# Holiday gift ideas for the artist in your life

Creative individuals and resident artists are continually honing their crafts. This holiday season could be the perfect opportunity to tune into these artistic pursuits and give something that lets artists take their creativity to the next level.

## Supplies gift basket

Each artistic pursuit requires its own array of materials and tools to perfect the craft. For example, painters will rely on canvases, oils and paintbrushes to create masterpieces, while those who engage in ceramics may need bisques, clays and firing tools. A mix of supplies can fuel upcoming projects.

## Museum or exhibition visit

Purchase tickets to a museum that has always been a favorite for the gift recipient. Entry to a local art installation or exhibition also figures to be a hit.



## Lessons

Classes with an artistic master can help artists hone their craft. Masterclass.com offers annual subscriptions or monthly sessions with the best instructors in their respective fields. Local artists also

may be willing to serve as mentors or instructors, and sessions with these people also can make perfect gifts.

## Shopping experience

Many artists also are entrepreneurs who sell their wares to others. You

can help promote that passion by funding an online shopping website or paying for table or booth fees at area craft festivals and other vendor events around town.

## Display their art

If an artist you know has a particularly beloved piece of art, arrange for a professional framing or purchase a high-end display case. This way the artwork will remain pristine for others to enjoy in the years ahead.

## Gift cards

Though gift cards may seem impersonal, they can be the means by which an artist is able to purchase supplies or travel to art shows to sell their offerings. Don't discount the utility of gift cards come the holiday season.

Artists can benefit from gifts that help to propel their creative pursuits.





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# The classic holiday party playlist

The late Aretha Franklin said, "Music does a lot of things for a lot of people. It's transporting, for sure. It can take you right back, years back, to the very moment certain things happened in your life. It's uplifting, it's encouraging, it's strengthening."

The power of music is strong and a playlist to complement the holiday festivities is a must have.

"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas (1943): This is a song written for Judy Garland for the MGM musical "Meet Me in St. Louis." Many artists have covered it, including Frank Sinatra and Sam Smith.

"Run Rudolph Run" (1958): Written by Chuck Berry, and first performed by him, the song is a 12-bar blues. It's similar in style to Berry's popular "Johnny B. Goode."

"It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" (1963): Recorded by Andy Williams for his first Christmas album, this song is a celebration of holiday gatherings with friends and family.

"What Christmas Means to Me" (1967): Stevie Wonder's recognizable tenor shines through on this

song that shares all the traditions that help make Christmas merry and bright.

"Happy Christmas (War is Over)" (1971): John Lennon and Yoko Ono released this song in 1971. Though it's a protest song against the Vietnam War, it has since become a Christmas standard.

"Santa Claus is Coming to Town" (1975): Bruce Springsteen's rocking version of this song is one no holiday playlist should be without.

"Do They Know It's Christmas?" (1984): Written by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure, this song was recorded to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia. It features Band Aid, a supergroup made up of popular Irish and British musical artists.

"All I Want for Christmas Is You" (1994): Love it or loathe it, Mariah Carey's song is one of the few modern Christmas songs to enter the esteemed Christmas music canon. It also helped pave the way for Carey to be forever tied to Christmas.

"It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas" (2011): Several artists have recorded this song, which

was written in 1951. Jazz standards artist Michael Bublé made it his own in 2011.

Curating a holiday party playlist can start with the above songs, and the list can then be customized with more tunes that help make the season magical.

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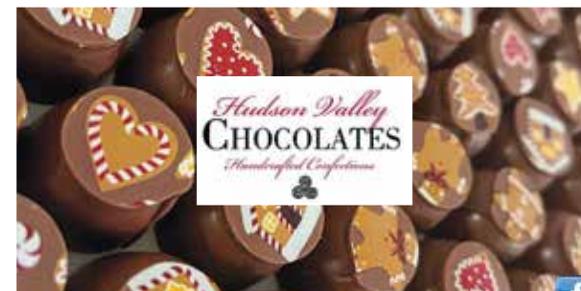


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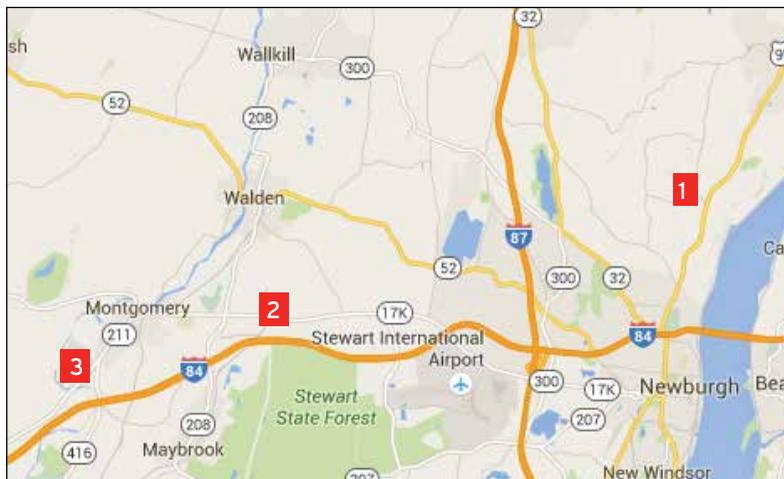
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## Consider these tips as you look for the perfect Christmas tree

- Measure the area where the tree will be placed. There should be enough room around the tree for families and their guests to sit around it. The home interior experts at Better Homes & Gardens recommend leaving a minimum of six inches between the top of the tree and the ceiling. If a tree topper will be added, make sure the top of the tree is at least 12 inches from the ceiling. Measure the area before leaving to buy a tree so it can fit nicely into the room.

- Try the shake test. Anyone who has purchased a fresh-cut Christmas tree is undoubtedly familiar with the shake test, an effective way to measure the dryness of the tree. A slight shake will produce some fallen needles. If the needles are brown and few and far between, then the tree likely is not overly dry. However, a lot of falling green needles indicates the tree is already drying out, which means it could shed quite a bit and lose its looks before Christmas Day.

- Pick a tree with a symmetrical look. Trees are living things, so it's unlikely that buyers will find a perfectly symmetrical tree. However, a tree that's misshapen or already has some sagging branches won't make for an awe-inspiring addition to a home decor scheme.

- Find the trunk (if you can). A trunk that's visible through the branches indicates the tree does not have dense branches, which will be necessary if homeowners want to dress the tree with ornaments. If it's hard to find the trunk because of all the thick branches and green needles, then the tree is likely pretty healthy.

- Test the needles. The home improvement experts at Lowes note that needles should be flexible but still snap when bent sharply. Avoid trees with needles that are already losing their color and can easily be pulled off.

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