

10 Ways to Get Ahead of Holiday Preparations

By Jan Hoadley

The holiday season is hectic. Start early, do and buy a little at a time and spend more time enjoying the season!.

1. Gather up leftover wrapping paper, ribbon, and other supplies in one area. Take an inventory and make a list of what you need - tape, ribbon, cards, stamps, etc. and get those supplies now. Having them on hand means you can save last minute trips to the store - and if it's for a roll of tape seldom do you get out of the store with just the tape. As you get gifts you can wrap them, tag them and they're done!

2. Get an inexpensive notebook (the 5/\$1 pocket ones are fine). Outline the candy and baked goods you plan to make and the ingredients you need. What you can get now - DO! If you know every year you make 4 pecan pies, get pecans early, when they're on sale. Don't overlook farmers markets. This gives you the luxury of stocking up a little at a time and of buying when you find things on sale. Waiting until late November usually means paying premium prices - and if you bake quite a bit that can mean a \$200+ grocery bill just for baking supplies. Splitting that into several months and buying smarter can mean saving quite a bit of money.

3. Make a list of craft projects the same way. Recently I saw short strings of lights - 25 lights - for \$1 on an early sale. These can be used for wonderful easy to make handmade gifts. Get a wide mouthed jar/vase, layer the lights (with the cord end out) with potpourri (also easy to find on sale if you buy at your convenience!) and cover with a bright cloth and ribbon. Plugged into an outlet the light warms the potpourri and is an attractive counter or desk item.

4. Set up small daily chores to save on housework. Get other family members involved - leave the sink clean a night. Cleaning the sink, wiping down the counter and table and sweep the floor takes just a few minutes. Wipe down the bathroom counters and mirror takes a couple more minutes. Get pretty containers on sale to help store things. Think of it this way - three people doing 15 minutes is 45 minutes of cleaning a day. Even children can do small tasks. Something for 15 minutes isn't as bad as an all day cleaning marathon.

5. Address envelopes. If you do a holiday letter you might wait until November but do the rest - then you just need to insert the letter, seal and mail.

6. Go through decorations - make notes of bulbs that need replaced and get extras when you go on the errand trip. Weed out broken ones. If you have grown children and want to cut back on the ornaments gift special ones to each child - an easy way to continue the traditions of home in their new home. Once you get everything checked over consider hanging the lights if you do so on the house. You don't have to turn them on until the holiday season, but hanging them now can save time. When you're up there cleaning the gutters and attending to winter maintenance you can hang the lights at the same time. This saves dragging everything out in a month and means you can put them up when it's clear rather than when there's snow and ice on the way or on the ground.

7. Begin your gifts! If you give baked goods consider baking a couple dozen per week and freezing them. While you're at it bake a few extra to send to a soldier and brighten their time away from home. Did you can things from the garden or other items that can be gifted? Look at creative gift baskets - which can be much cheaper and more personalized than storebought. Make photograph enlargements or other items that can be used for gifts now, before the rush is on. They can be matted, framed and/or wrapped, a gift card put on it and that's *done*! If you do like many do and pick up small items, stocking stuffers, get out the stockings and begin stuffing! There are many things you can find with the luxury of time. The great sale on shirts that are just \$4 each - get a couple and wrap them. Only you know that you got them much cheaper than the \$20-30 price tag they normally go for!

8. Consider making a journal/memory album - several years ago I found a little journal with prompts in it - and gave it to my mom. She filled it out with things I'd never known and never thought to ask - and the following year gave it back to me. With her health failing right now that is a priceless gift that no money can buy. Never underestimate what these things can mean.

9. Look through online catalogs and order items for gift giving. For the gardener, for example, there's some great half off (or more) sales at garden sites right now - you get a better gift than you might otherwise be able to afford, and it's ordered in plenty of time to get there. Watch shipping charges and "handling charges" - those can add up some places to make things not such a great bargain.

10. Look at the out of the ordinary outside-the-box thinking for gifts. A bird lover may be delighted to get a few homemade nest boxes for their feathered visitors. Add a \$1 bird calender and a packet of sunflower or other seeds (deeply discounted this time of year!) and it's a gift for immediate and all year. Again - thinking ahead can save a lot of money. It can make that \$200 budget stretch to give gifts of double or triple that - gifts that everyone will love. Make calendars (personalized - many programs online), Tshirt transfers and other things for one of a kind gifts without the high dollar price tag - and before the rush it's easier to get an hour or so to devote to doing such projects!

The holidays should be a time to reflect, enjoy friends, revel in the season and appreciate what we have. Appreciation is hard to come by when there's a mountain of expenses and tasks that need done! Start now - make it a great holiday season.

Takeaways

Start early for planning the holidays.

Get gifts and supplies a little at a time, taking advantage of sales/specials.

Enjoy the season.