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Holiday Gift Guide 2022

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Table of Contents

3 Great gifts for school-aged children

Shop for the younger generation on your list.

4 Christmas Eve

How to make Christmas Eve special for kids.

4 Buying gifts for children

Safety first when buying toys for children.

5 Make it safe for your pets

Pet proof your home when decking the halls.

10 Involve kids in Holiday decorating

Simple ways to involve young ones in Holiday decorating.

10 Recycle

Recycle and reduce waste for the Holidays.

11 The popularity of Christmas lights

When did Christmas lights become so popular?

11 Do-it-yourselfer on your list?

Gift ideas for someone who is into DIY.

14 Compare prices like a pro

Tips to master comparison shopping.

15 Gift ideas for the busy professional

Four gift ideas for the busy professional on your list.

Great gifts for school-aged children

Successful shopping for adults on a holiday list often involves identifying a loved one's favorite hobby and then finding something that makes that hobby even more enjoyable. For example, a new e-reader can be just what the family bookworm needs to make reading even more immersive.

School-aged children may not be so simple to shop for, as their interests are always evolving and they tend to outgrow toys as quickly as their growing bodies outgrow their clothes. No two kids are the same, but these gift ideas can appeal to school-aged youngsters at a time in their lives when their curiosity is always piqued.

- **STEM gifts:** Parents know that the term "STEM" is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. These academic disciplines have gained heightened importance over the last couple of decades, and many toy manufacturers now make products that reinforce STEM lessons kids learn in the classroom in a fun way. STEM-based toys are available for kids of all ages, including children who are still in diapers.

- **Nature-based gifts:** Many parents do everything they can to reduce the amount of time their kids spend looking at screens, which is a tall order in the digital era. But various manufacturers produce toys designed to help kids be more physically active in the great outdoors. From age-appropriate binoculars that encourage kids to explore natural settings to birdhouses and fairy gardens kids can build and paint in their favorite colors, shoppers can choose from a host of nature-based gifts that encourage kids to get away from their screens and enjoy the great outdoors.

- **Board games:** Board games remain a wonderful way for kids to learn and have fun doing it. Board games are made for kids of all ages, and they're not just fun, but also beneficial to early childhood development. For example, clinical psychologist Beatrice Tauber Prior, Psy.D. noted to the children's book publisher and distributor Scholastic that board games requiring strategy help the frontal lobes of the brain develop. Those lobes are responsible for planning, organizing and deci-



sion-making. Board games also provide opportunities for families to spend quality time together free from distractions.

- **Cookbooks:** Cookbooks are another great gift for school-aged youngsters, who can learn a lot from pitching in at dinnertime. Children who cook with their parents can learn valuable lessons about nutrition and measuring ingredients can reinforce lessons learned in the

classroom. Shoppers can choose from any number of cookbooks designed for kids, and even children as young as two can pitch in when baking cookies or preparing family meals.

Shopping for school-aged children during the holiday season can be made easier with some suggestions that can reinforce classroom lessons while keeping the focus on fun.

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How to make Christmas Eve special for kids

Christmas Eve is viewed differently by different people, even those who live under the same Santa-ready roof. Adults may see Christmas Eve as crunch time when they must prepare food for the next day or set up presents for their children to open in the morning. Children, on the other hand, are focused on Santa's visit and little else.

Parents naturally want to make Christmastime as special as possible for their children, and that may involve ensuring that Christmas Eve is just as memorable as Christmas Day. The following are some ways to impart more magic into Christmas Eve celebrations.

Attend Mass at midnight

Practicing Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas. On Christmas Eve, churches often hold celebrations that may include late-evening or midnight masses that celebrate the birth of Christ when the calendar switches over to December 25. While it does make for a late night, it can be thought-provoking for kids and a unique experience unlike any other.

Bake fresh cookies

Children like to leave out a plate of cookies and a glass of milk for Santa. That makes Christmas Eve a perfect time to whip up a fresh batch of cookies. Explore different recipes to come up with a unique offering each year.

Read a Christmas story

Watching television or looking at a tablet or mobile phone before bed can be too stimulating when it's time for children to wind down for bed. Choose a holiday tale or tales that can

be read as a Christmas Eve bedtime story. Reciting the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas ('Twas the Night Before Christmas)" is a great way to set the Christmas Eve mood.

Make a batch of 'reindeer dust'

Why should Santa's reindeer be left out when it comes to receiving treats? Reindeer dust, made from a combination of oatmeal, rice cereal, dried fruits, and glitter (if desired), is purported to attract Santa's reindeer and provide them a nibble at the same time. Plus, it's generally safe for other animals in the yard to eat.

Go caroling

Caroling may not be the norm, but some families may want to revive it. Close-knit communities can organize family-centric caroling opportunities and roam the cul-de-sacs and other pedestrian-friendly areas singing popular songs.

Christmas Eve is a great time to embrace various traditions that help to make the season even more special.



Safety first when buying toys for children this holiday season

December is a special time of year for children, millions of whom await the arrival of Santa Claus and the bounty of toys he delivers each year. When buying holiday gifts for youngsters, adults must consider safety. According to the Alliance for Children and Families, approximately 217,000

children are treated at hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries each year. Holiday shoppers are urged to stick to age-related recommendations on product packaging and avoid toys that do not contain the ATSM (American Society for Testing and Materials) label.



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How to pet proof your home when decking the halls

The holiday season is a special time of year. Many factors combine to make the holiday season so unique and festive, and that includes all the effort people put into decorating their homes.

Much thought is given to holiday lighting arrangements and which tree to buy, but it's equally important to consider pets when decorating. Many common household pets are naturally curious, and that curiosity can make it difficult to decorate safely come the holiday season. But various pet-proofing strategies can ensure holiday decorations and displays aren't compromised by four-legged friends this season.

- Secure the Christmas tree. Much like other residents of the home, pets may be mesmerized by a glowing Christmas tree. Pets may sniff around the tree or investigate it closely, which can increase the chances that it tips over. That poses a significant safety hazard and underscores the importance of using a sturdy stand. Fastening the tree to a wall, much like one might do

with a television that isn't mounted, adds a further layer of protection from tip-overs.

- Block off the base of a live tree. Live trees need water to stay green and keep their needles throughout the season. That water could prove enticing to thirsty pets. Drinking water from a tree stand could increase the risk of the tree tipping over and the water could upset the stomach of pets if the tree was treated with pesticides prior to being brought home. When decorating with a live tree, make sure the base of the tree where the water will be is blocked off. A small fence around the tree could keep curious pets away. The room where the tree is located should be locked or inaccessible when pets are home alone.

- Inspect and conceal light wires. Wires can become frayed over time, and that could pique pets' curiosity. Lighting wires should always be inspected prior to decorating and frayed or damaged wires should be thrown away, even if it means replacing lights. If wires are still sturdy, conceal them along the base of

the wall using a cable concealer, which prevents pets from chewing on them.

- Avoid lighting candles. Candles should not be lit in homes with pets. Even candles on shelves that are seemingly beyond pets' reach can be hazardous, as pets, especially cats, have a way of accessing spaces they seemingly shouldn't be able to reach. Use electric candles in lieu of traditional ones.

- Speak to a vet about seasonal plants and flowers before bringing them into the home. Pet owners can speak with their veterinarians before bringing poinsettias, holly and other seasonal plants and flowers into their homes. Some pets could suffer allergic reactions if they eat certain seasonal plants, so it's best to err on the side of caution and speak to a vet before including live plants and flowers in decorative displays.

Decorating is part of the holiday season. Pet owners must exercise an extra bit of caution to keep their pets and homes safe when decorating during this special time of year.





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Simple ways to involve kids in holiday decorating

Millions of people across the globe feel that the holiday season is a magical time of year. Though those people come from all walks of life, it's likely that no group is as taken by the unique spirit of the holiday season as much as children.

Whether they're looking forward to Santa's arrival or preparing for a school holiday pageant, kids have much to be excited about come December. Parents can channel that enthusiasm by involving kids when decorating around the house this holiday season.

- Make homemade ornaments. The options are limitless when making holiday ornaments with children. From simple ornaments made from pine cones picked up outside to more complex projects designed for children nearing adolescence, parents can look to the internet to find design ideas and directions for hundreds of ornaments.

- Let kids lead the way when decorating the tree. Families that celebrate Christmas can let kids lead the way when decorating their Christmas tree.

Kids are likely to spend the weeks leading up to Santa's arrival gazing in awe at the tree, and knowing they decided where to place the various ornaments on it might make the season even more special for youngsters.

- Take kids along when choosing lawn ornaments. It's not safe to involve children when installing lighting displays, but kids will get a kick out of choosing inflatable lawn decorations and other items to place around the yard. Take kids along when buying new items and then seek their input when placing Frosty, Santa and his reindeer friends around the yard.

- Include kids in culinary decor. Many celebrants cannot imagine a holiday season without gingerbread houses and cookies. These traditions provide another great opportunity to involve children in holiday decorating. Set aside some time to make homemade gingerbread houses, which can be used as decorations before they're ultimately eaten. Cookies may not have the shelf



life of a typical gingerbread house, but kids can pitch in and decorate cookies prior to a holiday party or family meal.

The spirit of the holiday season can be seen on the faces of children each

December. Inviting kids to pitch in when decorating for the holidays can make the season even more special for its youngest celebrants.

Recycle and reduce waste for the holidays



The holiday season is a special time of year. Individuals often spend a little more on gifts, indulge a little more on rich foods and treats and make a concerted effort to enjoy more time with their loved ones during the holidays.

The tendency to overdo things during the holiday season can create a lot of waste. In fact, Americans produce 25 percent more garbage from Thanksgiving through the end of the year, according to Waste Advantage magazine, a publication of the waste and recycling industry. That uptick equates to one million tons of extra trash per week

throughout the holidays.

Extra food, plastic and paper waste is generated this time of year, but people can be mindful of the potential to go overboard and take some steps to be more waste-conscious as they entertain.

- Reuse a small portion of wrapping paper or look for other wrapping items. Sunday comics, newsprint, colorful magazine pages, and even pieces of fabric can be used to wrap gifts in lieu of purchasing new wrapping paper. Other

See **RECYCLE** Page 11



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When did Christmas lights become so popular?

Holiday lights are now everywhere come the holiday season. Private homeowners tend to hang the holiday lights outside their homes around Thanksgiving weekend and keep them up through New Year's Day. Though it might seem like a tradition without a deep history, decorating a Christmas tree with electric lights can be traced all the way back to the nineteenth century. In 1882, Edward Johnson, who was a friend and colleague of the man who invented light bulbs, Thomas Edison, replaced candles, which had traditionally been used to briefly light Christmas trees, with light bulbs. But at the time of Johnson's innovation, the high cost and relative infancy of light bulbs ensured the idea did not catch on. And though United States President Grover Cleveland used electric

lights to illuminate a Christmas tree in the White House in 1895, it would be another eight years before General Electric would begin selling Christmas light kits. Those kits cost \$12 in 1903, which equates to several hundred dollars today. The first outdoor Christmas light shows started to become popular in the 1920s, and this is the same time when commercial sales of Christmas lights picked up. In the 1960s, GE's decision to begin manufacturing Christmas lights overseas helped reduce the price of outdoor lights even further, thus paving the way for the tradition of decorating home exteriors with string lights during the holiday season to take a firm hold. And that tradition remains wildly popular today.

RECYCLE

Continued from Page 10

erwise, collect used wrapping paper and reuse it next year, doing the same with boxes and bows. According to researchers at Stanford University, if every American family wrapped just three presents in reused materials, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields.

- Skip disposable party items. It's certainly easy to use disposable plates, napkins and cups when hosting holiday parties, but that is very wasteful. Opt for durable, reusable products that can be packed away and used each year during holiday events.

- Buy durable and reusable items as gifts. Avoid fad gifts and focus on items that will have staying power. Homemade gifts, such as foods, knitted scarves, artwork, and more, are generally eco-friendly.

- Set up marked trash and recycling

receptacles. Remind party guests to recycle the appropriate materials by clearly marking a pail designed for collecting recyclables, such as cans, plastic beverage bottles and glass wine bottles. Most hard plastics can be recycled.

- Remove your name from catalog lists. Call companies and ask to be taken off promotional mailing lists to reduce paper waste.

- Send a photo. Mail holiday card recipients photos of the kids or the entire family in lieu of cards. They're apt to save the photos and display them, helping to keep even more paper trash out of landfills.

- Research new recipes for leftovers. With an abundance of food remaining after entertaining, turn leftovers into new meals by exploring recipes from friends or by doing a little research online.

Waste can get out of control during the holidays, but there are ways to tame the excess.

Gift ideas for the family do-it-yourselfer

Home improvement projects enable homeowners to transform their homes into their ideal living spaces. According to iProperty Management, most homeowners in the United States spent between \$5,000 and \$10,000 improving their homes in 2018. And it doesn't stop there, as home improvement sales are projected to reach \$465 billion in 2022.

Various renovation projects are best left to the professionals. However, many homeowners are eager to get their own hands dirty with various projects, large and small. Having the right tools and gear on hand can make projects go all the more smoothly. Holiday shoppers can consider these ideas as they seek to ensure DIYers have all they need to get the job done.

- Painting time-savers: Painting requires some basic essentials, from paint trays to rollers to brushes. Projects can be made more efficient with innovative products that help save time and reduce mess. One such

item is a paint brush cover, which snaps over wet paintbrushes between coats so they won't dry out or require rinsing. Brushes that cut in easily and others with flexible handles for getting in tight places also make painting projects that much easier.

- Cordless drill: A mechanical drill makes easy work of assembly projects and general renovations that require screws as fasteners. A cordless rechargeable drill will be easy to maneuver when handling projects away from outlets. Going cord-free also reduces the risk of trips and falls on errant cords.

- Lawn care subscription service: Home improvements extend to the exterior. In addition to mowers, trimmers and garden shears, DIYers may benefit from subscription products that improve on property care. These formulations are customized to the specific needs of homeowners' lawn or landscaping greenery and

See **DIY** Page 14



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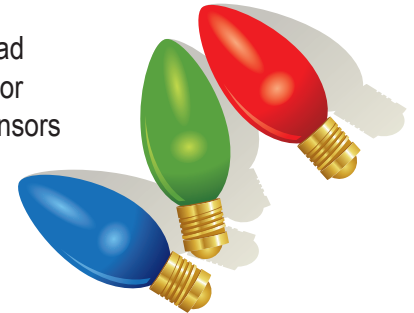
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Tips to master comparison shopping



Savvy shoppers recognize the value of comparison shopping. By comparing prices of the same or similar products at various retailers, consumers can save considerable amounts of money. That's especially true during

the holiday season, when shoppers are looking for items for everyone on their shopping list and hoping to find them without breaking the bank.

Though comparison shopping may fall short of being a science, skilled

shoppers know that some proven methods can greatly increase the chances of finding gifts that will make loved ones' eyes light up this holiday season.

- **Track prices over time.** Successful comparison shopping takes time and patience, as savvy shoppers recognize that prices on an array of items fluctuate over time. Holiday shoppers should not wait until the unofficial beginning of the holiday season to start tracking prices, as that leaves little time for prices to change. The earlier you start, the better a feel you'll develop for how much an item might cost and how much the item might come down in price before it's time to pounce.

- **Establish a price you're comfortable paying.** It's beneficial to determine a price you're comfortable paying for each item when comparison shopping during the holiday season. This reduces the chances that you'll delay buying an item until it's too late to find a bargain. If you set prices you're comfortable paying and items hit that mark, then purchase them

right away and shift your attention to gifts for others on your list.

- **Utilize alerts.** Various comparison shopping sites allow users to set up email alerts that can inform them when items are being sold for a certain price determined by the shopper. Utilizing these alerts essentially lets the comparison tool do the work for you. Once you receive an alert, all you need to do is purchase the item.

- **Ask around.** Technology has made it simpler than ever to comparison shop, but it's important that holiday shoppers do not discount the value of word-of-mouth shopping. When speaking to neighbors or loved ones, ask if there are any local businesses that offer great deals or websites that they rely on to find budget-friendly items. Word-of-mouth shopping was once the norm, and it can still pay dividends when looking for holiday gifts.

Comparison shopping is a must for budget-conscious holiday shoppers. Various strategies can help shoppers score great deals without feeling as though an item could have been found for less at a different retailer.

DIY

Continued from Page 11

are shipped right to their door.

- **Rotary tool kit:** This is one of the most versatile tools homeowners can have on hand. A rotary tool can engrave, grind, sharpen, polish, cut, carve, and more depending on the accessory attachment.

- **Multi-use ladder:** A ladder is a necessity for various projects inside and outside the home. One that can transform into an A-frame, scaffold system, staircase ladder and other configura-

tions helps ensure maximum safe reach for the job at hand.

- **Composter:** Whether you use an indoor kitchen composter or one designed for outdoor use, being able to generate one's own compost is great for avid gardeners. Compost, often called "black gold," is made from kitchen scraps, leaves and other items that break down into a rich fertilizer.

- **Tool box/tool organizer:** Tool storage is a market all its own. It runs the gamut from rolling metal storage containers to plastic or metal boxes to canvas bags to plastic molded curated

kits. Tool organizer kits also come at various price points, so it's easy for shoppers to choose one that fits their budgets.

- **Organizing units:** Organizing units are available in prefabricated kits that are easily assembled when needed, as well as custom-made products that are installed by a professional. They may be an option for a handy person looking to organize tools and other items for home repairs.

Do-it-yourselfers can be even more handy with tools geared toward their interests and repair needs.



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GREETINGS OF
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4 gifts for the busy professional on your holiday list

The life of a successful professional can be hectic. Demands at work force many professionals to work long hours, and those days could be even longer for remote workers. In fact, a 2020 study of 2,800 workers by the staffing firm Robert Half found that 70 percent of workers who transitioned to remote work due to the pandemic now work on the weekends. The survey also found that 45 percent of workers indicate they now routinely work more hours during the week than they did prior to the pandemic.

With so much on their plates, busy professionals may not have time to shop for products that can make their lives a little easier. That makes the holiday season a perfect time for people to consider what to get the hardworking professional on their shopping list. These four gifts can each make it easier for busy professionals to handle long days at the office.

1. Portable phone charger

Modern professionals rely on their smartphones to check and send work emails, keep track of their busy schedules and answer calls from colleagues,

among other things. But those phones are only useful when their batteries are charged. Portable phone chargers are lightweight and easy to use, making them ideal for on-the-go professionals who need to keep their phones charged all day long. Professionals who spend lots of time in their vehicles may love a solar-powered portable charger, which ensures their phone batteries stay charged even when they forget USB cables at home.

2. Wireless headphones

Though some models can cost of hundreds of dollars, a reliable set of wireless headphones can be found for as little as \$50. These headphones can be especially useful for professionals who work from home, as many are designed to cancel out ambient noise, making it easier to participate in Zoom calls or other meetings even if the kids are being rowdy right outside a home office door.

3. Cleaning service

Few chores are less appealing after a long day at the office than cleaning a house. Many cleaning services offer weekly or monthly packages, and pro-



professionals would undoubtedly appreciate someone taking this time-consuming task off their to-do list. Ask a relative or two to pitch in and help pay for the service if it's beyond your budget.

4. Slow cooker

Slow cookers allow users to put everything in a pot in the morning and then arrive at night to a ready-to-eat,

homecooked meal. These can be especially valuable to professionals who work long hours and don't have the time to prepare a meal from scratch at the end of a workday.

Whether it's portable tech, some help keeping their homes clean or a device designed to simplify homecooking, various gift ideas can help make busy professionals' lives a little less hectic.



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