



Illuminate the Season

... wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on
Earth, good will toward men.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

When gearing up for the new year, consider starting some new holiday traditions or some exciting activities to celebrate this special season:

- Consider taking a family vacation to visit relatives. Share each other's holiday traditions and experience new activities and climates. Engaging in a fresh alternative to your holiday season can be fun and rewarding for the entire family.
- Call a charitable organization and see how you and your family can get involved. As a family, go through your closets and the rest of your house to see what you no longer need. Check with local charities to find the most appropriate one for the various items you would like to donate. Many dry cleaners will clean coats, free of charge, to give to those in need.
- This is an important time of the year. Our hectic lives often keep us too busy to focus on those things that are the most valuable. Make the commitment to enjoy all this season has to offer and approach it with a positive attitude. It is important to remember what we value the most, and it's the perfect time to create memories that will last a lifetime.

Plan to Make This Holiday Rich, Memorable and Stress-free.

A study by Wirthlin Worldwide revealed that approximately 52 percent of women and 40 percent of men ages 35 to 54 said their stress levels go up during the holidays. The American Psychological Association reports that Americans list lack of money (61%), the pressures of gift giving (42%), lack of time (34%) and credit card debt (23%) as the top causes of holiday stress.

It is possible to find peace and enjoy the holidays, both this year and next. It's simply a matter of prioritizing, parsing out tasks and planning ahead.

MAKE A LIST.

Divide a piece of paper into two columns. List the things you must do for the holidays in the first column (gift shopping, planning for travel, etc.) and the things you would like to do in the second column (such as special holiday baking or helping those in need). If the items in the first column outnumber the items in the second, then it's time to re-prioritize. Start eliminating some of the tasks you feel are least important to make room for the ones that will be more enjoyable for you and your family.

A great way to manage a big crowd is to set up food in a buffet. Also, consider serving roasts or casseroles, which can be left alone freeing up more of your time.

EASE YOUR HOLIDAY LOAD.

Whoever said you had to wrap all your holiday gifts personally? Consider a gift-wrapping party. If it's the cleaning and cooking that's stressing you out, consider hiring a cleaning service or a caterer.



Favorite Dessert Recipes

Old Fashioned Double Chocolate Fudge

Recipe by: Emeril Lagasse, 2005

3 tablespoons + 1 teaspoon butter
1 ½ cups sugar
½ cup light brown sugar
¾ cup half-and-half
2 ounces milk chocolate, chopped
2 ounces dark chocolate, chopped
1 teaspoon light corn syrup
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup chopped walnuts, toasted



Line an 8 x 8 x 2-inch square pan with aluminum foil. Butter the pan with 1 tablespoon of the butter. Butter the bottom and sides of a 2-quart heavy saucepan with 1 teaspoon of the butter. Combine the sugars, half-and-half, chocolates and corn syrup in the saucepan. Place over medium heat and cook until the mixture reaches a boil, stirring constantly. Carefully clip a candy thermometer to the side of the pan. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture reaches the soft ball stage (234°F), which takes about 10 minutes.

Remove from the heat and add the remaining butter and vanilla. Let the mixture stand, without stirring, for about 1 hour or until the mixture reaches 110°F. Remove the candy thermometer. Using a wooden spoon, beat the mixture continuously until it thickens. Add the nuts and continue to beat the mixture for about 10 minutes or until it's very thick and loses shine. Spread the mixture in the pan. Let the mixture set completely, preferably overnight. Carefully lift the foil from the pan and cut the fudge into individual squares.

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/emiril-lagasse/old-fashioned-double-chocolate-fudge-recipe/index.html>



Pumpkin Pie

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/paula-deen/pumpkin-pie-recipe/index.html>



Gingerbread Cookies

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/saras-secrets/gingerbread-cookies-recipe/index.html>



Sugar Cookies

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchens/3-in-1-sugar-cookies-recipe/index.html>

Making a Difference This Holiday Season.

The latest data shows that 37 million Americans are living in poverty. Families continue to remain displaced in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Military families are still waiting for loved ones to return home. In fact, a greater portion of families and their children live in poverty in America today than three decades ago. The season is a time for giving, and giving to those less fortunate is rewarding for you and a great way to show your children the true meaning of this special season.

Resources for Holiday Donations

Make-A-Wish Foundation, www.wish.org—This program's goal is to provide children who have life-threatening medical conditions the opportunity to realize their greatest wish, whether it is meeting an admired athlete, riding a horse or visiting a theme park.

Be An Elf, www.beanelf.org—Each year, millions of children send Christmas lists to Santa Claus and his elves via the U.S. Postal Service. The Be An Elf program helps volunteers obtain a real letter written by a child in need and fulfill his or her dreams.

Toys For Tots, www.toysfortots.org—Established by the Marine Corps, Toys For Tots allows participants to donate unwrapped toys at a number of drop sites located throughout the country. Cash and vehicle donations are also accepted.