Smart Shopping Tips for the Holidays

The holidays are just around the corner. Here are some ways to save time and money:

- How much can you really afford to spend on gifts? Make a list and stick to it. Could you use the money to buy the materials and make the gift? Would the recipient like a gift of homemade food?
- Consider writing your own gift certificates for your time and expertise. Maybe you can baby sit, hang wallpaper or clean the garage. Make “coupon” books that can be redeemed throughout the year.
- How much time do you have? Decide what you can realistically accomplish. Do you really have time to make twenty kinds of cookies? You might want to have a discussion with your family to decide what’s important to them.
- Delegate! Ask for help! Women have been making Christmas special for their families by shopping, decorating and cooking fabulous foods for years. Aunt Mary would love to bring her tuna sweet potato casserole for dinner and the children can help decorate the tree. You don’t have to do it all.
- Decorations and food are often forgotten budget items. If you plan ahead, you can stockpile groceries on sale. Pinecones are free for the finding and children enjoy the hunt. They can be made into wreaths, piled into baskets and made into ornaments. What grandparent wouldn’t love a glittered pinecone ornament made by a favorite child?
- Expect to be stressed but don’t forget to take some time to enjoy the season. Make a paper chain with a child. Invite a friend for a cup of hot chocolate after a walk to look at the lights. It can be a magical time if you let it be.

Make Your Food Dollars Count

If you need a dish to take or for Sunday night supper, try these quick and easy recipe ideas:

Mushroom Cheeseburger Pizza
1/2 pound ground beef or turkey
1 cup prepared pizza sauce
1 can mushrooms, drained
1 recipe pizza dough, refrigerated or homemade (about 1 pound)
8 ounces (2 cups) shredded cheddar cheese

Heat oven to 425°F. Pat dough into lightly oiled 13 X 9-inch pan or cookie sheet. Starting at center, press out with hands. Bake at 425°F for 10 to 15 minutes or until golden brown.

Brown ground beef or turkey in medium skillet; drain. Stir in pizza sauce and mushrooms. Spoon hamburger mixture over partially baked crust; sprinkle with cheese. Bake at 425°F for 10 to 15 minutes or until deep golden brown.

Hot Broccoli Dip
1/2 cup celery, finely chopped
1/2 cup onion
2 teaspoons water
1 pound “Velveeta”, cubed
1-10 ounce package chopped broccoli, thawed and drained

In microwave, sauté celery and onion in water. Add cheese and broccoli until melted.

Dippers: raw vegetables and rye bread cubes.

Baked Ham & Cheese Hero
1-8 ounce loaf Italian bread (uncut)
4 ounces sliced provolone
2 ounces sliced deli style ham
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese, optional
1 ripe tomato, thinly sliced
1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning, crushed
1/2 onion, thinly sliced, separated into rings
Italian salad dressing

Preheat oven to 350°. Slice bread lengthwise in half. On bottom half, layer provolone, ham, cheddar cheese, tomato and onion. Sprinkle with Italian seasoning. Sprinkle inside of top of loaf with Italian dressing. Cover sandwich with top half of loaf.

Place loaf in center of 12” length of aluminum foil. Bring sides of foil around loaf, leaving a half inch strip along the top of the bread uncovered to crisp crust. Bake until hot and cheese is melted, about 25 minutes. Cut into slices and serve hot.
**Food Safety Reminder**

**Raw Egg Recipes Not Safe**

Eggs must be cooked thoroughly in order to kill any bacteria — such as salmonella — that may be present. If your eggnog-recipe calls for raw eggs, it’s not safe. Likewise, neither is Hollandaise sauce or mousse. Don’t worry about cakes, cookies and candies though. Eggs used in baking get thoroughly cooked, and candy (such as divinity) containing eggs, reaches temperatures far above that needed to kill bacteria. However, raw cookie dough isn’t safe to eat!

**Kids Holiday Post Cards**

Start with a blank index card. These are available in a variety of sizes. Stamp (post card rates are 21¢) and address one side and decorate the other with anything you and your children decide on! For example:

- A holiday seal and a scribble - Nothing beats the charm of a child’s drawing. If it’s drawn in red and green it will look festive - throw in a few gold stars or sprinkles!
- Stickers - kids favorite. Buy them by the bag in simple geometric shapes to create funny or elegant designs.

**Stocking Up**

Be sure to take advantage of post-holiday sales. While you're picking up deeply discounted wrapping paper and other items, look for red candles and paper goods that will work for Valentine’s Day, green items to help celebrate St. Patrick’s Day and red, white and blue things for Memorial Day and July 4th.

**Need Help With Holiday Baking?**

**Butterball Turkey Talk-Line:**

1-800-288-8372; www.butterball.com

**Land O'Lakes Bakeline:**

1-800-782-9606; www.landolakes.com

**USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline:**

1-800-535-4555; www.fsis.usda.gov

**Price Chopper’s Cooks Line:**

1-800-666-7667; www.pricechopper.com

**Yeast Dough Questions:**

Fleischmann’s Yeast:

1-800-777-4959 ext. 1

Red Star Yeast:

1-800-445-4746 ext 2

**Holiday Book Tree**

Cornell Cooperative Extension is collecting books for children ages 0-3 for their holiday book tree. All books collected will be donated to the Even Start Program, a family literacy program. To donate a new or “gently used” book, please stop by the office 8:30 - 4:30 p.m. weekdays or call 866-7920 to arrange another time.

**Free Nutrition Education Programs**

Nutrition Teaching Assistants are available to help limited income individuals and families throughout Herkimer County stretch their food dollars to feed themselves and their families better.

Lessons can take place in participants homes or worksites as well as at community centers. Newsletters and other resources are also available by mail.

**Topics include:**

- Budgeting and stretching food dollars.
- Basic nutrition and menu planning.
- Preparing low cost, easy recipes and menus.
- Preserving, storing and preparing food safely.

**Contact:**

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