



## ‘Tis the Season to be Jolly

Did you spend Thanksgiving Day looking through the many post-Thanksgiving sale ads in preparation for some holiday shopping? If so, you're not alone. While eating turkey and watching football are an important part of Thanksgiving Day, many of us also spend time making our holiday shopping lists in preparation for one of the year's biggest shopping days.

Retailers know the day after Thanksgiving as Black Friday—and not because of over-congested shopping malls and late hours. The day after Thanksgiving is the beginning of the nation's retailers' highest-revenue season. Almost 25% of the year's retail sales take place in November and December. It's how retailers end the year in the black, instead of in the red—hence the name Black Friday.



# Happy Holidays

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## Feel the Peace of the Season

It's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season and lose focus on such mundane things as a spending budget. We often tell ourselves, "After all, Christmas only comes along once a year," and before we know it, we are so far overspent it will take most of next year to make up for our purchases. While creating a gift-giving budget may sound Scrooge-like, the exact opposite is actually true. Really giving some thought to how you can celebrate the season with meaningful gift-giving that won't cause you financial stress can make the season more, not less, enjoyable.

Not everyone has the creative skills of Martha Stewart, and handmade gifts may not work for everyone on your list, but with a little thought you can create great gifts without hurting your wallet.

1. Arrange a nice selection of inexpensive items in a basket and add a bow (you can often find baskets for very little money at thrift stores). Give the items a theme—hair care goods, kitchen items, socks, car care, etc. Shop at bulk goods outlets and split your items into several gifts.
2. Combine homemade goods like chocolate chip cookies with a purchased item such as a holiday platter. You can create a very appealing gift for a reasonable price. Make sure your baked-goods ingredients don't become too expensive. Again, a batch of cookies can make several gifts if you divide them into gifts of 6, 8, or 12 cookies.

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# ARTICLES

## 'Tis the Season

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Black Friday can turn truly dismal for consumers, however, if they don't keep their budgets in mind. With all the jollity of the season, it's easy to get carried away by the feelings of goodwill and go a little overboard. Many surveys show that the average consumer will spend between \$700 and \$800 during the holidays, while some surveys show spending at more than \$1,000. That's just the average, remember, some people will spend much higher amounts.

The National Retail Federation has found the typical breakdown to be:

- Gifts for family: \$407
- Gifts for friends: \$71
- Gifts for coworkers: \$22
- Other gifts (teachers, neighbors, etc): \$41

And that's just the gifts. Another significant portion of that \$700 to \$800 goes for things like cards, stamps, wrapping paper, party food, and so forth. Don't forget to add these items to your holiday budget or you'll find yourself in trouble.

The typical breakdown is:

- Party food and candies: \$84
- Holiday decorations: \$36
- Greeting cards and postage: \$25
- Poinsettias and other holiday flowers: \$16

We also find the sales too good to pass up and buy a little something for ourselves. Surveys shows—more than 50% of us spend at least \$90 on ourselves while we're doing all that shopping for others.

No one wants to take away from the spirit of the season and all the opportunities it brings for sharing and showing those you love a little extra special attention. There are many great ideas for economical gifts and ways to avoid financial groans over the holidays. We've collected some of our favorites and placed them throughout this newsletter to help you keep the season enjoyable by staying within the realms of reality for your finances and avoiding unnecessary financial distress when the season is over.

Most of all, all of us at Family Financial Education Foundation want all of you to have a wonderful holiday season with the prospects of a great New Year. ■

## Gift Tips

### 1. Gift Exchange

If you are one of those lucky people who has a small home business (or even a big one!) selling books, make-up, jewelry, cookware, Tupperware, etc., consider a gift exchange. Arrange a get-together with other likeminded people and swap items still in your inventory so you can each have a variety of gifts to give. If you provide some kind of service such as editing, writing, sewing, graphic design, photography, etc., swap your service for products. It's a WIN-WIN situation.

### 2. Gift Tags

Use last year's greeting cards to make gift tags instead of buying them. Cut out snowmen, snowflakes, sleighs—any pretty holiday picture—and use them to make gift tags.

### 3. Candy Bag

Put hot chocolate, jelly beans, or other candies in the bag and tie with a ribbon. These make great gifts for children, grandpas and grandmas, neighbors, or school teachers.

### 4. Gift Bags

Children, teenagers, or adults can decorate sturdy brown paper bags and use them as gift bags. Get creative and use letters cut from wrapping paper, make handmade characters, or cut potato stamps to decorate the bags

### 5. Chocolate Mint Spoon

Dip plastic spoons in melted chocolate and crushed candy canes. Tie a thin gold ribbon on the spoon handle. The spoon can be used to stir any hot drink. It's a great idea for children to make for teachers or neighbors.

Attach this poem

Try Chocolate-Mint hot chocolate

It's tasty as can be

And while you drink it

You can think of me.

3. Some elderly family members or friends or those with young children may appreciate your time more than an expensive gift. Take elderly loved ones out for a walk or picnic dinner/lunch or help run errands. Any mom or dad with young children will welcome a few hours of free time. Offer to baby-sit and make the gift extra special by letting the parents return to a clean home.
4. Avoid going overboard when giving young children holiday gifts. The short attention spans of young children means individual gifts receive only fleeting attention. Children are often the most happy with a homemade gift. A lovingly crafted stuffed toy, wooden pull-along, room decoration, or article of clothing can become a treasured memory.

5. Plan ahead to determine the needs of those on your list and start shopping in June instead of trying to complete your shopping all at once.

**If you are one of those lucky enough to have a gathering of family or friends on the big day:**

- If possible, share a ride to the family gathering with a relative.
- If you're having the guests at your home, prepare the food yourself instead of buying items already made, or ask your guests to share in bringing the food.
- If you're preparing the meal, save time and money by cooking similar items together.
- Make your own wreaths and decorations. ■

## Don't Let the Grinch Find You: Holiday Scams

More than 140 billion American dollars are given annually to charities, and more than 40% of them are given during the holiday season. Fundraisers are particularly aggressive about appealing to those who are wrapped up in the season's spirit of giving. During the holiday season, most Americans are likely to receive more than five charitable solicitations a week.

Online giving can be a quick and convenient way to make year-end donations to your favorite charities. However, as online giving grows in popularity, so do online donation scams. Donation scams not only steal your money, but they also stop it from reaching those in need of your financial support.

These scams typically show up as spam e-mail messages and postings in online forums that ask for donations in the name of well-known legitimate charities. A fast-growing type of fraud called "phishing" often arrives as an e-mail with links to apparently charitable websites, but these websites are actually clever fakes that are designed purely to take your money.

### Things to watch out for:

1. Beware of charities with names similar to reputable ones. Navigate to the charity's website on your own if you receive an e-mail request from a charity that you'd like to support, instead of clicking on the links in the e-mail to see if the website is legitimate or not.
2. If you receive an unsolicited e-mail from a charitable organization asking for money, don't be quick to click links or enter any personal information.
3. Instead of responding to solicitations, contact well-known and established charity agencies yourself, and stick with ones that you or people you trust have used before.
4. Be wary of e-mails from strangers or unknown sources, especially those claiming to have attached photos, which can come infected with computer viruses.
5. Improve your computer's security and use current technology to help block spam. ■



### Home for the Holidays— Keep Your Home Safe

According to the National Fire Protection Association's data of all residential fires, Christmas Trees, both real and fake, are ignited in less than 1/10 of one percent (0.1%) of all home fires. So what does cause those fires we're always hearing about at holiday time?

- Unattended cooking is the number 1 cause of home fires in the U.S. When cooking for holiday visitors, remember to keep an eye on the range.
- Provide plenty of large, deep ashtrays for guests who smoke and check them frequently. Cigarette butts can smolder in the trash and cause a fire, so completely douse cigarette butts with water before discarding. After a party, always check on, between, and under upholstery and cushions and inside trashcans for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, out of sight and reach of children (preferably in a locked cabinet). When smokers visit your home, ask that they keep smoking materials with them.
- Only use only indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors. Check your lights every year for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Replace any damaged light sets.
- Don't use more than three light sets on a single extension cord.
- Turn off all the lights on trees and decorations when you go to bed or whenever you leave the house.

December is the peak month for candle fires, with the number of incidents nearly doubling over the rest of the year. Forty-four percent of reported candle fires in the home start in the bedroom.

- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire, especially flammable liquids. Yes—people forget this!

- Don't place lit candles in windows, where blinds and curtains can close over them.
- Use candleholders that are sturdy and won't tip over easily, and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Place candleholders on a sturdy, uncluttered surface where they can't be knocked over by children or pets.
- Keep candlewicks trimmed to one-quarter inch and extinguish taper and pillar candles when they get to within two inches of the holder or decorative material. Votives and containers should be extinguished before the last half-inch of wax starts to melt. ■



### Plan Now for Next Year

Once the holidays are over, it can seem a little irreverent to already be thinking of next year's holidays. But if you do, the money you will save by being prepared when next year rolls around will give you such a warm feeling that you'll get over the irreverence very quickly.

The after-holiday sales are even better than the after-Thanksgiving sales and with a little careful budget planning, you can store up a few necessities now. The most obvious items to look for are wrapping paper and greeting cards. Boxed fancy soaps and candles in holiday shapes are usually sold off quite cheap, and household items like tablecloths, trays, candy dishes, etc., can be a real steal. Buy them up, store them away, and take them out next year. By having them ready, you can give them early enough next year that the lucky recipient can use them all through the season. ■

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