

HOME FOR THE
HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE II

Get Christmas crafty with homemade ornaments

Handmade gifts, trinkets and treats help make the holiday season special. Although cookies and other baked goods are some of the most popular homemade creations this time of year, gift-givers young and old can put their talents to use with various craft projects. Ornaments and decorations are one such idea. Here are some clever and, not-too-time-consuming craft projects to try this holiday season.

- **Mini sleighs:** Create miniature replicas of Santa's famous sleigh. Paint several popsicle sticks to form the main body of the sleigh and glue them together. Put one at the top perpendicular to the others to serve as the steering rudder. Two silver-painted popsicle sticks placed on their thin sides act as the blades of a sled.

- **Popcorn garland:** Garland made of popcorn is a classic handmade holiday project. For a new twist, toss the popcorn with food coloring and allow it to dry before stringing for some bright color on the tree.

- **Photo ornaments:** Print out several different photos that you love. Purchase round or square thin wood pieces from a craft store and attach the photos with Mod Podge®. When dry, drill a hole through the top and thread with twine.

- **Advent calendar:** Make an Advent calendar to count down to Christmas by covering a foam board with fabric. Use paper tags or small ornaments and write a number on each for each day of the month. Hang these all from the board. As each day passes, move the tag or ornament to the tree.

- **Wooden snowflakes:** Have children collect small



twigs from outdoors, as well as holly leaves and some sprigs of evergreen. Arrange similarly sized twigs in the shape of snowflakes and glue together, or tie with twine. Embellish with stickers, glitter, dried berries, and more.

- **Dough ornaments:** Anyone can have fun molding their own ornaments, letting them dry and then painting them. Use cookie cutters to get perfect holiday shapes. Craft stores sell various types of modeling clays and lightweight modeling materials. Or, make your own salt dough.

- **Reindeer bottle topper:** Put to use any wine corks you have lying around. Attach googly eyes and a small fuzzy nose to the front of a cork. Insert twisted, brown pipe cleaners to make the antlers up top. Add ribbons, small snippets of faux fur or any other extras you desire.

- **Sweet sentiments:** Use old Scrabble® letter tiles to form a favorite holiday phrase, like "Joy to the World." Glue the tiles together and hang from the tree on a piece of ribbon.



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30 ways and 30 days to celebrate a merry month

The holiday season begins in late November and runs through New Year's Day. It is marked by gatherings of friends and family, decadent foods, cocktails, traveling and gift giving. The National Retail Federation says consumers will spend an average of \$967 during the holiday season. However, the joy of the holidays also is about all of the memorable experiences that tend to make the season so beloved.

1. Visit with an elderly or housebound neighbor and share conversation.
2. Donate gently used toys to a children's hospital.
3. Research the history of the holiday and share it with people you care about.
4. Make handmade Christmas tree ornaments.
5. Donate money to a charity or other good cause.
6. Encourage "pay it forward" movements in your community. Start simple like buying a coffee for a complete stranger.
7. Feed birds facing the cold, winter weather.
8. Take a ride or walk around the neighborhood to look at decorated houses.
9. Make a fire in a fire pit in the yard and toast marshmallows while sipping hot chocolate.
10. Binge watch holiday movies.
11. Attend the concert of a children's choir.
12. Help a friend decorate his or her home.
13. Host a tree-trimming party.
14. Schedule a day for baking cookies.
15. Sing Christmas carols at a nursing home.
16. Put together care packages of items and send them to troops overseas.
17. Share the holidays with a military family whose spouse is in service and can't make it home.
18. Offer to shop for someone who is homebound due to age, a chronic illness or injury.
19. Visit a large city to look at Christmas window displays.
20. Buy and hang real mistletoe and use it!
21. Make a new friend and invite him or her to a holiday party for the first time.
22. Babysit a newborn so his or her parents can get errands done or just catch up on rest.
23. Volunteer at a soup kitchen.
24. Share the religious traditions of your holiday with someone of a different faith.
25. If weather permits, go sledding, build a snowman or have a snowball fight.
26. Share favorite memories at family holiday dinners.
27. Remember a deceased loved one with a special tribute.
28. Construct a gingerbread house.
29. Teach someone how to make a cherished family recipe.
30. Surprise a distant relative with an impromptu visit.





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Poinsettias: misunderstood beauty

Christmas trees, Santa Claus, menorahs, and glittering lighting displays are just a few of the many prominent symbols of the holiday season. And while mistletoe might garner more attention and inspire more displays of affection, poinsettias are another prominent sign that the holiday season has arrived.

Thanks to its bright red and green colors, the poinsettia is perhaps the ideal holiday plant. But as much as it suits holiday decor and seems tailor-made for that special time of year between Thanksgiving and the first of January, the poinsettia has a reputation that few plants would want.

First discovered in Mexico and brought to the United States by Dr. Joel Poinsett, the poinsettia has long been rumored to be poisonous. However, the National Capital Poison Center notes that poinsettias are not deadly. In fact, the NCPC notes that the rumor that poinsettias are deadly may have been around for more than a century, tracing its origins all the way back to a child who was found dead lying next to a poinsettia plant. The plant was blamed for the child's death, and



even though that blame was misplaced, the stigma stuck. WebMD notes that oth-

ers trace the false rumors surrounding poinsettias to 1919, when parents blamed

the death of their daughter, who they thought had eaten poinsettia leaves, on this ubiquitous holiday plant.

Even today, when researchers have long since proven that poinsettias are not deadly, many people still believe they can be fatal if consumed.

The NCPC notes that, in most cases, exposure to any part of a poinsettia plant in children or pets has little, if any, effect. However, if the plant is swallowed, some people and pets may experience symptoms including nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. As well touching the plant may cause a rash for some after contact.

While poinsettias are not deadly, the NCPC still advises those who plan to include the plant in their holiday decor to take every measure necessary to prevent children and pets from swallowing it. Placing poinsettias beyond the reach of kids and pets is one simple way to accomplish just that.

Poinsettias are seemingly everywhere come the holiday season. And because they're not fatal, celebrants can continue to display these beautiful plants that call to mind the colors of the holiday season.



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Snowy Christmas Crafts



By LISA IANNUCCI
CTW Features

If you're dreaming of a white Christmas, but Jack Frost isn't cooperating, don't worry. There are creative ways you can bring the feeling of winter and the fluffy white stuff indoors to enjoy for the rest of the holiday season.

Mason Jar Snow Globes

"Create your own snowy scenes that last

all year long," says Amy Shey Jacobs of Chandelier Events in New York. "All you will need is a mason jar with lid, super glue or a hot glue gun, glitter and water – and something cute like a figurine, snowman or Christmas tree scene to put inside."

Jacobs suggests using a waterproof glue, such as Gorilla Glue Super G, to adhere items to the metal lid. "While the glue dries, fill the mason jar with water and glitter or fake snow," she says. "When you're done, fasten the lid tightly and give it a whirl."

Sweater Wine Sleeves

Nothing says winter like snow and an ugly holiday sweater, so why not wrap up your bottles of wine in one too! "You can buy these online inexpensively or recycle old sweaters," Jacobs says. "It's as simple as cutting off the sleeve of the sweater, and sewing up the open hole. Pop the bottle of wine or cider into the sleeve so that the bottle's neck sticks out of the wrist of the sweater sleeve. Tie it with a ribbon."

Frozen Hot Cocoa Snow Cones

Jacobs brings "snow" into the kitchen, too, with this frozen treat. "Create a batch

of hot cocoa (you can use premade mixes) and freeze in a freezer-friendly container," she says. "When almost frozen, blend the hot cocoa in a blender or food processor to make a nice icy mix. Don't over blend or it becomes a slushy. If you're over 21, you can spike your cone with a favorite liqueur."

Once blended into a shaved ice, put in a paper cone and decorate with candies and

sugar crystals.

"Works well with eggnog, too," she says.

Looking for crafts for young ones? They can cut out paper snowflakes, create a snowflake journal, create outdoor snow paintings and more. For more snowy ideas, check out other websites as well, including Hands On As We Grow (handsonaswegrow.com).

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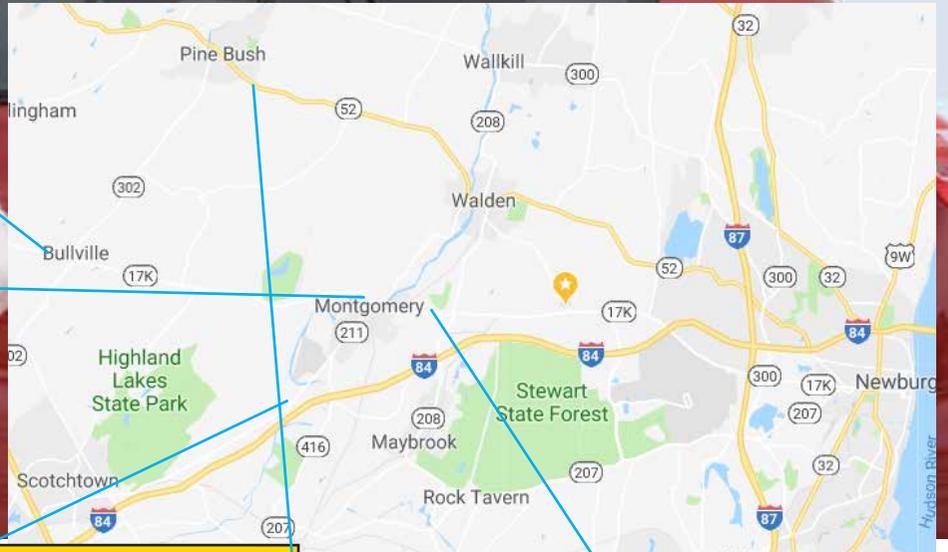
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