



Holiday Decorating



Going Griswold

Decorating for the holidays is a long held and respected tradition. No matter where you live, you can find a neighborhood that is transformed by lights and full of holiday spirit.

These neighborhoods often become infamous to locals and become tourist attractions in their own right. For some towns, the pressure is really on. When Christmas is in your name, you have to do it up right. Here's the rundown on three towns that pull out all the stops. (You also can visit www.christmaslightfinder.com to find displays in your area.)

NORTH POLE, ALASKA

Living in “the North Pole,” how can you not feel the responsibility to show off your Christmas cheer? The town hosts what its citizens call “Christmas in Ice.” This is a six-week winter ice park, featuring ice art competitions, ice slides, a maze and ice sculpture demonstrations.

It also has a highly touted kids' park. The festival hosts many other activities, including cookie decorating. The festival concludes with Santa playing in the ice park on Christmas Eve before leaving to make his annual deliveries.

CHRISTMAS COVE, MAINE

Christmas Cove is an actual cove, which means it is pretty empty at Christmas. (Winter in Maine is not a time to be on a boat.) However, just North is Wilton, and Wilton Lights has been a Maine holiday tradition for many years.

The Christmas display at a private residence is set to timers and animated by music,



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which can be heard by tuning in to a local radio station when you are nearby. Think twice before you travel this year, however. The family that dis-

plays the lights at its home is moving across town and has decided to postpone the light show this year.

SANTA CLAUS, INDIANA

If you are ever in Santa Claus, check out its Land of Light — the largest campground holiday light show in

North America. The light show tells a story in lights and storyboards, with more than 300 light display pieces stretching more than a mile.

Holidays by the Numbers



Our love of the holiday season can be measured in numbers — how we spend our money and how much we spend decorating our living spaces.

Here are 10 interesting details about how we celebrate the holiday season.

- Christmas is the most observed federal holiday, with 94 percent of Americans celebrating.
- The United States imported approximately \$1 billion worth of Christmas ornaments from China in 2014, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- The average person spent \$805 during December in 2015, according to the National Retail Federation. This is up from \$681 in 2009 — the low experienced directly after the Great Recession.
- According to the National Retail Federation, almost 50 percent of holiday shopping will happen online.
- Consumers try to keep their costs low by taking advantage of free shipping. According to the National Retail Federation, 93 percent of online shoppers take advantage of free shipping on online orders, while 47 percent of consumers stated that the offer of free shipping directly dictated where they would spend their dollars.
- Saving on shipping is a must when gift shopping. According to the National Retail Federation, spending on gifts surpasses food spending six times over.
- While people travel more for Thanksgiving, they are willing to travel further for Christmas. The average person travels 275 miles for Christmas.
- According to the National Christmas Tree Association, approximately 26 million live Christmas trees were purchased in 2015. Of these, 76 percent were pre-cut, while 24 percent were retrieved from people who prefer to cut their own.
- We all know retailers increase their staffs during the holiday season, but none more so than toy and game stores. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, toy and game retailers increase their staffs by 38 percent during the holidays. This is more than double the increase of other retailers.
- Seventy-seven percent of consumers also treated themselves in 2015 while completing their holiday gift shopping.



The Nutcracker

It is not uncommon during the holidays to see little wooden soldiers in various shapes and sizes lining the mantles of fireplaces or quietly guarding rooms from other perches.

These regal little soldiers are nutcrackers, and they've become an iconic symbol of the Christmas season.

GERMAN FOLKLORE

According to German folklore, nutcrackers were given as keepsakes to bring good luck to families and protect the home. The carving of nutcrackers developed as a cottage industry in rural Germany. They most famous ones come from Sonneberg, Germany — which is also a center of doll-making — and the Ore Mountains.

Nutcrackers were carved in the shapes of soldiers, kings, and knights — along with other professions that have existed since the 15th century.

THE TALE THAT MADE THEM FAMOUS

The wooden figures got a major publicity boost when the story of The Nutcracker was set to music by Tchaikovsky in 1891, and premiered the week before Christmas in 1892.

The Nutcracker Ballet has become an iconic Christmas tradition. A ballet in two acts, the story centers on a family's Christmas Eve celebration. The production is now performed by hundreds of ballet companies across the globe each year.

AN AMERICAN FASCINATION

While nutcrackers are wildly popular now in Christmas decor, this was not always the case. They only became popular in the United States approximately 50 years ago. During World War II, American soldiers brought the figurines home from Germany as gifts and souvenirs.

Their popularity exploded, and mass reproductions followed. With the increased availability of pre-shelled nuts, their design changed. While original nutcrackers were designed with mouths large (and sturdy) enough to crack open a nut, modern designs are purely ornamental.



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Salt Dough Ornaments

Homemade decorations give your home that heartfelt touch. Stringing popcorn and cranberries is low-maintenance, but don't shy away from salt dough.

Salt dough is an easy craft the whole family can enjoy. It offers a blank holiday canvas just waiting for you and your family to mold into shapes and add color and detail.

Salt dough is a forgiving material and allows you to make your designs as

intricate or simple as you desire. Turn it into a tradition by pairing it with hot cocoa and Christmas carols and you are sure to repeat this activity for years to come.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup water

Note: Never use a self-rising flour, as this will cause the ornaments to bubble and crack during baking.

SUPPLIES

- Medium mixing bowl
- Cookie sheet

- Rolling pin
- Cookie cutters
- Drinking straw

STEPS

Preheat the oven to 250 degrees Fahrenheit. In a mixing bowl, add the flour and salt and stir together before adding the water. Mix thoroughly.

Sprinkle flour onto either parchment paper or directly onto the countertop and knead the dough until it is soft and pliable (think pie crust). Add more flour if the dough is too sticky or water if it is too dry to stick together.

Lightly flour the rolling pin and roll out the dough to about a 1/4-inch thickness.

Time for the cookie cutters. Fun Christmas shapes are always wonderful, but if you lack

cookie cutters, use biscuit cutters or the open side of a drinking glass. These round shapes are perfect for decorating later to look like glass ornaments or snow globes.

Place shapes on an ungreased cookie sheet and use the straw to poke holes in the "tops" of the ornaments. You will use these holes later to string ribbon through for hanging.

Place the cookie sheet in the oven and let bake for two to three hours. You want the ornaments to be completely dry. Flip once about half way through. Allow to cool to room temperature before decorating.

A Note on Decorating: If you want the ornaments to last through the years, apply two to three coats of a non-toxic acrylic varnish over them. This prevents moisture from seeping in.



Decorate with Ornaments

Waste not, want not — particularly during the holidays. After decorating the large focal areas of your home, such as the tree, it is not uncommon to have decor items left over each year.

This is especially true for ornaments. But before you toss the unused ornaments back into their storage containers, consider other ways you can use them in your decor, other than on the tree.

CREATE A STRIKING CENTERPIECE

Putting various-sized bulbs in a bowl or glass vase is a quick and festive table centerpiece that is sure to catch guests' attention.

For smaller ornaments, consider putting decorative branches in a pretty vase and hanging mini ornaments from its arms.

DECORATE A WREATH

Attach unused bulbs to a wreath for a pop of color. If you have many ornaments that have been retired from their place on your tree, consider making a wreath entirely out of ornaments.

You just need a green foam wreath base (found at any local craft store for minimal cost) and a little glue.

GIVE LIGHT FIXTURES A HOLIDAY FACE LIFT

String ornaments of compli-

mentary colors from your dining room chandelier with dark green satin ribbon.

Using the fixture over your table, you are free to hang them from varying heights since you won't have to worry about people hitting their heads on them.

STRING THEM TOGETHER FOR GARLAND

This is a great project if you are overflowing with leftover ornaments. While glass ball ornaments work best for this project, most ornaments will work as long as they are not heavy.

Just loop a piece of wired ribbon through the tops of ornaments and pull them tightly together. You will be left with a length of full, colorful garland to drape over a window or mantle.

INCORPORATE THEM INTO GIFT-WRAPPING

If you have a lot of mini ornaments, consider using them as gift charms. Attach them to ribbon and wrap around the gift just before it is tied into a bow.

This adds a special and finishing touch to your gift-wrapping.

Simple Holiday Decorations

Holiday cheer can be used carefully and sparingly and still create a big impact. Whether you are trying to embrace a minimalist lifestyle or you don't have a lot of time to dedicate to decorating, these ideas will bring holiday cheer into your home in no time at all.



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UTILIZE YOUR WALLS

Wall space is an often-overlooked part of our home for holiday decor. Because it is vertical space, we can decorate it easily without feeling the intrusion of another item into the living space of a room.

Consider hanging stockings from a branch instead of from a mantle, or set them on a piece of furniture. Hang festive wreaths along a line of windows. These options will

instantly inject holiday cheer into a room.

GO SIMPLE WITH GIFT-WRAPPING

Forgo flashy Christmas paper in favor of something simple yet striking. Consider brown butcher's paper on which you (or your kids) can draw Christmas scenes.

You also can keep it natural by securing your gifts with a piece of red-and-white-striped

baker's twine and a sprig of pine.

REPLACE INSTEAD OF ADD

It is routine for people to add their holiday decor to their existing home decor. Instead of adding more things to a room, consider replacing items.

Remove a vase or other knick-knacks from a side table and replace them with reindeer figurines or a nativity scene.

Take photos or pictures off the wall and replace them with a Christmas scene.

SIMPLIFY BY GOING BIG

When choosing holiday decor, sometimes the best way to approach trimmings is to first think about how you will clean around them. Would you rather dust a cluster of small decorations or pick up around one larger piece?

Large decorations can create

a big impact, reducing the need for many decorations in order to feel as if you've decorated.

REMEMBER THE GOOD IDEAS

The best decor arrangements are inspired spontaneously. If you enjoy how a room or arrangement turned out, don't forget to take a photo. This will help you recreate it in following years, and help you incorporate new items later.

Window Dressing

Dressing up the windows for the holidays can be the perfect finishing touch to any room.

Window decor also is an avenue through which you can keep your decorating fresh every year, and it can be a great outlet to exercise creativity.

Consider decorating the rest of your home and then sprucing up the windows with remnant decorations that did not get used elsewhere. (We all have leftovers.) Here are just a few ideas to get the creative juices flowing.

SNOWFLAKES

Create your own winter wonderland by attaching homemade snowflakes to your windows. Cut them from delicate, thin parchment for a subtle effect.

You don't have to be an artist for parchment snowflakes to look fabulous, as their thin yet sturdy material is great at hiding imperfections.

WREATHS

You can't go wrong with this classic choice. Hanging wreaths in a row over multiple windows can have a striking effect that is enjoyed from both inside and outside the home.

GARLAND

Drape greenery over your curtain rods to add a pop of color and fresh scent. If you



prefer more color, consider wrapping curtain rods with thick, lush ribbons and letting the ends curl down to the floor, trimming your curtains. Also don't overlook beaded garland.

ORNAMENTS

Ornaments are not just for the tree. Hang glass ornaments at varying heights from a curtain rod using coloring ribbons.

This will allow light to hit

them and splash color throughout the room. However, remember if you are attaching them to the curtain rod, it will be difficult to close the drapes. This option is best on a rear-facing window, or consider attaching a secondary tension rod behind your current one.

PINE CONES

Simplistic and stunning,

hanging pine cones bring a bit of nature inside to enjoy. The effect is more rustic and down-to-earth and will complement pine or fir swags, wreaths or garland.

ADVENT

Hang your Advent calendar along a line of windows. Don't have one? This is the perfect time to make one. String clotheslines across your win-

dows and attach your advent items to it with clothespins.

This can be anything from mini stockings to colored dish-towels with numbers ironed onto them.

You can even print the numbers of the month onto Kraft paper lunch bags, and put a sweet treat in each one for children or grandchildren to enjoy when they check it each day.