

Holiday TRADITIONS





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A History of Caroling

You may not have gone a-wassailing, but you've almost certainly heard some sleigh bells jing-jing-jingling, either in real life or sang ad nauseum (almost) during the holiday season.

As it turns out, carols have been around almost as long as Christmas itself.

A HYMNAL HISTORY

The first recorded carol dates to

around the year 100 with the "Angels Hymn." It was around then, ClassicFM says, that Christian hymns started to take over for traditional pagan songs sung at the winter solstice. Over time, more Nativity-themed songs emerged, and the Middle Ages brought us "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and other songs. Many of the songs we know today and the practice of singing them in public places comes from the 19th century.

CAROLS WE HAVE HEARD FOREVER, OR AT LEAST SINCE THE 1800S

The 19th century is when Christmas started to look — and sound — more

familiar to modern eyes and ears. Mendelssohn wrote "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" in 1840, not too long after Frank Xavier Gruber and Joseph Mohr composed "Silent Night."

During this time, a group of carolers was called a wait, and the singers would perform in public spaces for passers-by, who would reward them with food and drink for a job well done. This tradition, eventually known as wassailing (now know where that came from), evolved into the groups going door to door to sing carols. As the groups would go around, they would demand free drink and food from residents, and eventually, the caroling would devolve into sort of a

drunken shouting match.

BUT WHY DO THEY ALL SOUND KIND OF THE SAME?

It's not your imagination. Christmas carols are almost universally recognizable as Christmas carols, no matter what subject they tackle or what language they are sung in. That's because many of our carols are based on medieval chord patterns that give them a unique sound, J.W. Pepper says.

Minor chords or diminished chords are sprinkled throughout most Christmas songs in a way that give them a distinct feel and immediately identifies them as Christmassy, music experts say.

Making Ornaments

Some of the best holiday memories are hands-on holiday memories. Baking cookies and cakes, wrapping presents, and, this year, making your own ornaments.

Keep reading to find out how to start this fun holiday tradition for your own family.

MINI WALNUT REINDEER

Make your own fleet of tiny reindeer. Start with a walnut, in the shell, and drill a small hole through the top. Glue on googly eyes, a red pompom nose, and felt ears to finish it off. Run a piece of twine through the hole in the walnut and you've got your own Rudolph.

Use your imagination and make more reindeer with bows, sparkly noses and more. The only limit is your local craft store's inventory.

DECOUPAGED TISSUE ORNAMENTS

Use clear glass or plastic balls and tiny bits of ripped up tissue paper. Affix the tissue to the ornament using glossy Mod Podge, then tie a ribbon through the cap. Use different colors and layers for texture, or go all out and make a whole scene. See who can make the most creative ornaments this year.

SALT DOUGH ORNAMENTS

These are a Christmas classic. Mix up a batch of salt dough — 4 cups flour, 1 cup salt, ½ cups warm water — then roll it out and get to cutting. Use Christmas themed cookie cutters and don't forget

to find some way to get those little thumbprints in there for the best memories. Use a straw to poke a hole through the top for hanging, then bake at 300 degrees for about an hour. Cool before handling.

Wooden Bead Snowmen
These won't melt away, but

you might from the sweetness. Paint three wooden craft beads (any size will do, it depends on how big you want your snowmen) with white craft paint and allow to dry. Thread a piece of twine through the beads and knot it to hold them together. Attach

black gem mini gems or beads for the buttons and eyes, then snip orange felt and attach it for a carrot nose. Attach two twigs for arms and, if you'd like, a felt hat. Feel free to personalize your snowmen and date each ornament.



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Pour Up Tasty Hot Drinks

Nothing's better on a freezing day than a nice, warm mug of something sweet. And even better if it has a kick.

Here are a few toasty recipes guaranteed to bring the holiday cheer to your party.

HOT TODDY WITH CHARRED ORANGES

- 1 1/2 cup bourbon
- 3/4 cup honey
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice
- 3 thyme sprigs
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 3 star anise
- 4 small oranges, cut in half

Directions

1. Combine the bourbon, honey, lemon juice, spices and two cups of water in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat until just warm, 10-15 minutes.

2. Grill or broil orange halves until charred, 1-2 minutes. Serve the drinks and top with charred oranges.

MULLED WINE

- 750 milliliters merlot
- 2 cups pomegranate juice
- 2 cups apple cider
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 3 star anise
- 2 slices of orange
- 10-12 whole cloves

Directions

1. In a large saucepan, pour in wine, juice, apple cider and orange juice. Add the cinnamon sticks and



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star anise.

2. Pull whole cloves through the slices of orange and add to the pot. Bring to a boil and simmer for 45 minutes. Serve warm.

SALTED CARAMEL HOT CHOCOLATE

- 2 cups milk chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup caramels, unwrapped
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt

Directions

1. Add all the ingredients except the sea salt to a slow cooker. Cook on low for two hours. Stir until the ingredients melt completely. Add the sea salt and stir, then serve.

BOOZY CHAI LATTE

- 2 cups water
- 4 spiced chai black tea bags
- 2 strips orange peel

- 10 whole cloves
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 10 whole black peppercorns
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon cardamom pods, smashed
- 3 tablespoons light brown sugar, packed
- 2 cups milk
- 4 ounces spiced rum
- 1 1/2 ounces Cointreau

Directions

1. Combine the water, tea bags, orange peel, spices and brown sugar in a saucepan. Bring to a rolling boil and turn off the heat. Allow the mixture to steep for 10 minutes.

2. Strain the mixture through a sieve, pressing on the tea bags. Discard the solids.

3. Add the milk and warm until simmering. Add the rum and Cointreau and froth with an immersion blender. Serve warm.

Giving Back

The holiday season is a great time to be thankful for what we have.

One way to put into sharp focus all we have to be grateful for is to schedule some time to give back to others. Remember you may not just be able to walk in and volunteer; giving back may take some planning. Some places require training before you can work your first volunteer shift, so take that into account.

Here are some ways to work volunteering into your family's holiday traditions.

HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES

These are great places to volunteer all year round, but especially during the holidays, when people may be stranded in hospitals or nursing homes on their own. Ask the hospitals if you can visit with patients that haven't gotten any visitors lately. Bring a deck of cards or other games and keep them chatting while you're there.

HOMELESS SHELTERS

Some things you may be able to do are cook and serve meals, pack up toiletries, toys and clothes to hand out, or help entertain children during their stay at the shelter. Consider rounding up your friends and family to bring donations in, too. Look at your area's domestic violence shelters, too. Incidents of abuse tend to spike along with holiday stress,



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and these organizations can quickly become overwhelmed with some of a community's most vulnerable residents.

DELIVERING MEALS

Find local organizations that deliver meals and groceries to

the home bound, and offer to make deliveries or do the shopping for these organizations. You can also help wrap gifts that these groups sometimes give out at Christmas or collect and distribute non perishable foods.

ANIMAL SHELTERS

Don't forget the four-legged friends, too. Collect donations for your local animal shelter, then volunteer to walk or play with the pets spending the holidays there to take the strain off of shelter staff. Your

input could also help a lonely pet find their home for the holidays.

If your family is staying around the house, you could also consider being a foster family and letting a shelter pet rest and relax in your home.

Choosing a Christmas Tree

Putting up the tree is a great memory for many families.

Now, there are lots to choose from, well beyond live tree or faux. But fear not, we're here to help you find the perfect tannenbaum for your family's holiday celebrations.

LIVE

Nothing smells quite like a live Christmas tree. If you choose to go the live route, know that your local Christmas tree vendor may have several varieties from which to choose. Get a tree suited to your family. If you have little hands (or paws) around, pick a tree with softer needles.

Look for a tree that's not so full that you can't festoon it with decorations; it should have a few empty spaces to show off your cherished baubles.

Find one with a straight trunk to avoid complications getting it in the tree stand and it should be fresh. Check for freshness by breaking a needle in half with your fingers. A fresh fir will snap; fresh pines should bend without breaking.

REUSABLE TREES

If bringing a live tree indoors isn't your thing, the fake trees are getting more fancy every year. The needles look more real and, just like everything else, even Christmas trees are more tech savvy. There are trees you can



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control with your digital assistant, that will sync their lights to music and that are controlled by remotes. Take that, disco tinsel tree.

When you're done with your tree for the year, take it

down and store it according to the manufacturer's directions. If your tree is technologically advanced, this may mean considering storing it in a climate controlled closet or other space to avoid damage.

RECYCLING YOUR TREES

Once the season's over, it's time to responsibly recycle your live trees. Many cities and towns will offer a service to mulch your tree for you, or sometimes there's a drive to

create fish and wetlands habitat using old Christmas trees. Look into the recycling programs offered in your area and choose the one that works best for you. Whatever you do, don't just put it into the trash.

Roasts for the Holidays

The holidays are time to show up and show out on the dining table.

From Thanksgiving through the New Year (and that inevitable resolution to eat better and work out more), it's time to chow down. It's the perfect season, as Cindy Lou Who knows, for roast beast.

ROASTED TURKEY

We start off, much like the holiday season, with roasted turkey. Turkeys are a New World food and were eaten by ancient peoples in the Americas for centuries before European conquerors brought turkeys back home with them. Turkey was eaten in England as early as the 16th century and, during the 17th century, turkey became a common Christmastide food in Britain. In the U.S., turkey was a common Thanksgiving dish as early as the 1800s.

HAM

The word ham comes from the Old English ham or hom, meaning the bend of the knee, fitting since it refers to a leg of pork. People have been eating ham almost as long as there have been people and pigs; even the ancient Romans had a recipe. Hams can be dry cured in salt, wet cured in a brine or smoked. Usually, in the U.S., hams for holiday consumption are baked in a sweet outer coating, some-



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times of honey or brown sugar.

PRIME RIB

This is a cut of beef from the primal rib containing anywhere from two to seven ribs. Ribeye steaks are also cut from the standing ribs. Prime rib is a

traditional Christmas roast among the Irish, as beef was dear and it was a holiday treat. Prime rib is made by slow-roasting the meat on the primal rib and then portioning it after cooking, whereas ribeye steaks are what you get when you cut it before cooking.

ROASTED GOOSE

In Germany, roasted geese often sit on the Christmas table, and the birds are also popular in England. They are usually seasoned with apples, sweet chestnuts, prunes and onions, along with mugwort or marjoram. They can be

served alongside potatoes and other root vegetables roasted in the goose fat, which has a high smoking point and thus makes these veggies nice and crisp.

Goose itself is a dark meat with an intense flavor that's not akin to turkey or chicken.

Gift Giving

Gift giving is now an integral part of how we celebrate the holidays in the U.S.

There are different strategies for different families. Some people exchange names and everyone gets one present. Some people only give to children. Still other families encourage the giving of small gifts and necessary items, while others blow it out with extravagant giving.

No matter how your family gifts, there's always a new way to enjoy this holiday tradition. Here are some ways you and yours can up your gifting game.

DONATIONS

For families who love to give back and for recipients who have everything, consider a monthly or yearly donation. Does your person love sloths? Sponsor a sloth and get them regular updates on how their creature is doing. Look for organizations that support causes near and dear to your recipient's heart and do your homework. Make sure the charity you're considering spends their money wisely by using websites such as Charity Navigator.

SERVICES

Everyone appreciates the gift of time. By giving prepaid services, such as car detailing or lawn care, you're giving your loved ones that time back. You may also be treat-



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ing them to a luxury they wouldn't normally pay for themselves.

Other services to consider: Spa treatments, pet care and boarding, meal delivery and grocery delivery. And don't forget to add in the customary tip for your area for these service providers.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

Sure, there's the bacon-of-the-month club, but subscription services and boxes have gotten a lot more sophisticated. Now you can find a customizable subscription for just about anyone and anything under the sun. Look for

boxes for pet lovers, fashionistas, beauty products and even spices. You can also consider paying for a whole year of their favorite streaming media service.

AN EXPERIENCE

One thing that came out of the COVID-19 pandemic is a

tendency to value experiences over things. Consider giving your loved ones the gift of an unforgettable experience. It doesn't have to be a trip out of the country, either. If you have an animal love to buy for this year, look at getting them a backstage trip to a local zoo or aquarium.