

Holiday Checklist - Plan ahead to have fun and stay sane.



Some of us love the holiday season, but hate the crowds, the commercialism, and the mania. With a little planning, the following checklist can help organize your life during the holiday season and reduce the craziness.

September

- Plan holiday travel itinerary if you intend to visit out-of-town relatives or enjoy end-of-the-year vacations. Research hotels and transportation.
- Schedule trips and accommodations as early as possible. (Some places require reservations a year in advance!)

October – December

- Set budget.
- Make list of gift recipients.
- Shop for gifts. (The closer you are to the holiday, the better the sales but larger the crowds. Pick your poison.)
- Clip ideas for entertainment, recipes, and decorations from magazines.
- If you know what you need, order online early. Often shipping is low, especially if you hit a minimum dollar amount for some vendors. Even if it isn't, the cost of shipping can be negligible compared with time wasted driving all over the place looking for an elusive tablecloth or candelabra.
- Schedule a couple of weekends to do deep cleaning projects.

November

- Shop for clothing and accessories, if needed for specific events. Do *not* try shopping the day before.
- Buy tickets to seasonal entertainments.
- Mail gifts to friends living abroad no later than Thanksgiving. (The sooner the better.)
- Check dishes and glassware for holiday entertaining.
- Make a shopping list for entertaining and decorating.
- Decide menus for the month of December.
- Inventory pantry, then make comprehensive shopping list of necessities through January 1st. (You can save a lot of wear, tear, and cash by limiting shopping to just fresh dairy, fruits, vegetables, and sale items. Shop early or late in the day and avoid weekends.)
- De-clutter house for seasonal decorating. Store, give away, or discard belongings to make room for decorating and entertaining. (File receipts for charities with current year taxes.)
- Get out ornaments and decorations.
- Decorate house with lights the weekend after Thanksgiving, if possible. (Most practical time to do this.)
- Create a master schedule of all events and activities for the season. Don't forget to include birthdays, anniversaries, and other non-holiday events. Post the schedule where family members can add more if needed.
- Schedule down time. Very important for maintaining sanity. Also, including a generous buffer means you can respond to spontaneous activities and that's a lot of the fun.
- If planning to videotape events, check camera and make sure you have plenty of spare tapes or memory cards.
- For large gatherings, schedule hired help as far in advance as possible. (Good services tend to book their time early.)

December

- Assemble clothing for specific events, if needed. Check to make sure everything is clean, mended, and ready to go.
- Complete major shopping by the first week of December if at all possible.
- Mail season's greeting cards.
- Decorate house.
- Buy and put up Christmas tree.
- Two weeks before Christmas—mail packages for all domestic recipients.
- Order party trays and specialty foods at least two weeks in advance.
- Prepare as much in advance as you can, then freeze.
- Do baking and traditional family cooking.

For Each Event

- Create a mini-checklist of tasks, menus, and entertainments.
- If traveling, check car and make sure there's plenty of gas.
- Set out clothes.
- Tidy house. (Delegate tasks to family members.)
- Set tables, buffet, etc.
- Prepare food and drinks.
- Dress for occasion, if necessary.
- Aim to finish a full half hour before you expect guests to arrive. Take a deep breath, make a cup of tea, and relax.

After Christmas

- Shop for greeting cards, wrapping paper, ribbons, ornaments, and other decorations to be used for next year.
- Review what worked and what didn't. Make notes or write a journal.
- Take down tree and recycle, if fresh.
- Throw out broken or damaged ornaments. Sort decorations and keep only what you love for next year. Give the rest away.
- Store ALL holiday decorations, wrapping supplies, dinner and glassware together in the same location so you can find it next year.
- While the memory is fresh, start your holiday plan for next year!