



*Have Yourself a
Thrifty Little
Christmas*

And a Debt-Free New Year

*by
Daisy Luther & Rachel Lauren*

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How to Have Yourself a Thrifty Little Christmas

Of all the holidays, Christmas is the one that is the most magical for children...and often the most stressful for adults. It seems like every year, the wish lists get longer and more expensive, the food prices go up, and the traditions get more extravagant.

Meanwhile, even when it's not holiday time, our paychecks must stretch further. Some of us have suffered job losses, unexpected expenses, and a higher cost of living.

The holiday season shouldn't feel like a burden, but for many families, it brings almost as much anxiety as it does joy. The average family spends \$806 per person, according to a report by the National Retail Federation.

Ouch.

That's just not in the budget for our family. In fact, we're determined to have the most frugal Christmas ever this year.

So, join me in jumping off the holiday treadmill and making this a Thrifty Little Christmas. We'll still deck the halls, eat a feast, bake some cookies, give presents, celebrate with traditions, and lend others a helping hand.

Let your holiday be filled with the peace of knowing that you won't be meeting the New Year buried in post-Christmas debt.

Why You Should Make the Switch to Simpler Holidays

It might seem like dialing back Christmas is kind of mean, but providing your kids with a realistic view of the world is far better than any gift they'll ever find under the tree. When they are making their own money, they'll understand that they don't have to figure out how to make each Christmas bigger and better than the last.

When every day is a trip to Disneyworld, how are you going to be satisfied with climbing a tree and finding animals in the clouds that float overhead?

I came across an article about the Christmas wish lists in 1913 versus the 2013 wish lists, and I believe that the list says it all. The differences illustrated in these two lists define our society, then and now.

In 1913, the yearned-for items were mostly simple ones. Many of them could be homemade by a loved one who cared enough to take the time to do so. The toys on the lists were "imagination toys" that required kids to playact scenarios in their minds.

1. Candy
2. Nuts
3. Rocking horse
4. Doll
5. Mittens/gloves
6. Toy train
7. Oranges
8. Books
9. Handkerchiefs
10. Skates

Fast forward to 2013. The most popular toys on the list were electronic stuffed animals that dispense affection and companionship on command. Personally, the only items on this list I would have ever gotten my kids were the dollhouse, the Nerf Gun, the Ninja Turtle figures, and the Lego.

1. Furby Boom
2. Teksta Robotic Puppy
3. LeapPad Ultra
4. Flying Fairy
5. Big Hugs Elmo
6. Barbie Dream House
7. Giggly Monkey
8. Nerf Gun

9. Ninja Turtles

10. Lego

When you are forever seeking a greater "wow" factor in your belongings and your experiences, you're doomed to be completely unsatisfied and always seeking the next exciting thing, which becomes harder and harder to find. If you are always looking for some type of excitement and stimulation that tops the last episode, then you will never be content with simplicity. If you look to your electronic devices for companionship and entertainment, you can't fully develop a love and empathy for your fellow man.

There are a lot of reasons that sensible people want to step off the materialistic rocket ride that is the standard North American Christmas.

- They may be tired of spending the entire following year working overtime because they are deeply in debt for having produced a spectacular Christmas morning that was the stuff of storybooks.
- They don't want to create children who are never satisfied and always want more, who always yearn for that next edition of the iGadget of the year.
- Perhaps they have suffered a personal economic crisis and just can't afford it this year.
- They might just want that sense of peace and contentment you can't buy from a store.

Whatever your reason, this year, set your sights on having a "Thrifty Little Christmas." Many of the ideas in this book don't cost a penny, and others are so low-cost that they will let you face the new year without being mired in debt.

The Holiday Budget

First of all, you have to create a budget. It's easy if you have been putting aside money and saving up for the big event. Otherwise, see what amount you can spare, and then stick to it. Never, never, never put Christmas gifts on a credit card! I can think of no more horrible way to start a new year than opening astronomical bills that are incurring 28% interest.

Here are a few tips to help you stick to the budget:

1. Figure out what you can truly afford.

Many of us don't have the means for a financial free-for-all with the justification that "Christmas only comes once a year!" Christmas might just come once, but those credit card bills will keep on coming, every single month until they're paid off, accumulating interest long after the gift has lost its charm. Make sure you pay your bills first, put aside a little money for an unexpected emergency, and have a stocked pantry of food before you go and spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars to fuel a 15-minute paper-tearing frenzy on Christmas morning.

2. Use the envelope method.

To do this, write the names of your gift recipients on envelopes. You can also include envelopes for groceries, decorations, and charitable giving. Into each envelope, place the designated amount of cash you intend to spend on each person or item. When you purchase something, place the receipt and the change into the envelope from whence the money came. The most important thing: When the money is gone, it's gone! You don't get to top it up or buy one more thing. *This is your limit.*

3. Let the kids know what to expect.

Ever since my kids were old enough to understand it, I've told them what the Christmas gift budget was for that particular year. If it is \$50 each or \$200 each, they have known in advance and have made their lists accordingly.

I've been told that this is "mean" and it "takes the magic out of Christmas." Honestly, I think it is kinder to let them know what to expect, particularly if it's a tight year than to allow them to expect a room full of expensive presents that just magically appeared. The girls nearly always get what they want for Christmas because they keep their wishes within a budget. They don't ask for iPads and Xboxes because those are purchases that exceed the amount we are spending. Because they know what to expect, they've never

been disappointed on Christmas morning, and I've never been stressed and worried that they'll be unhappy



Getting the Family on Board with a Thrifty Christmas

A friend refuted the idea of reducing holiday spending with the argument that her teen expected the latest I-pod/phone/contraption. To this I respond: Your teen needs to change his or her expectations. Easier said than done, I know. I've raised teenagers, too. I have been blessed with good-natured kids who have been taught frugality their entire lives.

It would be very different if I had to change their viewpoint at this late date. However, I think it can be done.

Parents seem reluctant to talk to their kids about money and then when the child reaches adulthood and gets slammed with the reality of bills; they are utterly in shock and easy prey to the credit card companies that stalk young people at our college campuses.

Some ideas to make the transition to a simpler Christmas with your kids:

- Focus on activities and traditions instead of gifts

- For younger children, read books like Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House in the Big Woods* or *The Boxcar Children*.
- Lower your own expectations. I hate to break it to you, but if you, as the mom or dad, expect a new car with a big red bow in the driveway, or a \$500 tool set, or a diamond ring, or... well, you get the picture. Lead by example.
- Promote a handmade Christmas. One very "broke" year, we made all of our gifts except for one per person. We made our decorations too, from things found in nature and recycled items around the house
- Help someone with less than you have.
- If yours is a religious family, focus on the "reason for the season." (Hint - that wasn't a wide-screen TV hovering over the stable!)

Opt out of the holiday insanity. Make simplicity your new mode of celebration. Remember that you are the parent and the one who is doling out the money. You are the person who will be opening the bills in January and trying to figure out how you'll pay them. It's time for tough love. The kids will adjust.

This little book, written in conjunction with my teenage daughter, Rachel, has more than a hundred tips for decorating, family traditions, gift-giving, charity, and recipes for delicious, festive, yet budget-friendly food.

Deck the Halls with Festive and Frugal Decorations



Are you sitting down? I'm about to blow your ever-loving mind with some statistics.

Last year, people spent about \$100 on decorations and an average of \$50 on top of that if they purchase a real Christmas tree. This cost doesn't include gift wrap, gift bags, and bows, which often end up being another \$50. Add in cards and postage, and you've spent another \$40.

Oh - and if you want to grab one of those inflatable outdoor decorations, expect to spend at least another \$150. Need more lights for the outdoors? Plan on at least \$40

So, that's \$240 for indoor decorations, gift-wrapping, and cards, and another \$190 in outdoor decorations for a painful total of \$430.

In fact, in the last total I could find, back in 2011, Americans spent more than \$6 billion just on holiday decorations.

We're not doing that.

In fact, we're determined not to spend a penny on decorations this year. We'll still be festive, but we'll do it for free.

Use what you have.

Be traditional.

If you're anything like us, you have decorations filling tubs, boxes, and bags in your attic or storage space. Some folks are nostalgic and love pulling out the same ornaments and decorations every year.

Get colorful.

If you're one of those people who enjoys changing the colors up every year, don't despair. For the price of a can of spray paint, you can pick any color in the rainbow. Bonus: You can change it again next year.

Add in non-holiday décor in the same colors.

If you have a color scheme, add items in those colors from other parts of the house to your main rooms. Grab a blanket and throw pillow from a bedroom, a basket from the bathroom, and a candle from the TV room to pull your color scheme together.

Reuse broken ornaments.

Do you have any of those ornaments with the hanging loop broken off? Fill up your vases or Mason jars for a pop of pretty color and sparkles on a table top or mantle.

Decorate your decorations.

If you have some old, bland ornaments, jazz them up. Use nail polish or glitter glue to make pretty designs for a brand-new look.

Give new meaning to stocking stuffers.

If you have old stockings that you're not using anymore, stuff them with polyfill or the insides of an old pillow. Sew the top shut and pop these adorable new holiday pillows on your sofa.

Use random scraps of garland.

Attach them to the wall with double-sided tape to make a Christmas tree or other design in a tight area without room for an actual tree.

Gift-wrap your home décor.

No, you aren't re-gifting the family portrait. Just use some gift wrap and a bow to wrap it up and make it look like a present during the holiday season.

Turn last year's cards into this year's ornaments.

We always end up with a few extra cards from our previous stash. Cut out the designs on the front and poke a hole in it with a punch. Hang these on your tree with skinny ribbon, twine, or yarn. You can also re-use the cards you received this way.

Put bows on books.

Make an artful arrangement of books and plop a big shiny bow on top. If you're really industrious, you can gift wrap the books first.

Make It

Make a rustic banner out of grocery bags.

Cut bags open and use the unprinted inside. Cut a piece of cardboard into a square or triangle for a pattern. Lay the pattern down and trace around it on the bags. Cut out your shapes, decorate them if you want to, then use a punch to

make holes in the upper corners. Run ribbon, twine, scrap lace, or yarn through the hole, making sure to leave enough at each end to hang your holiday banner.

Get your glitter on.

Collect pine cones from outdoors. Let them dry overnight. The next day, get a paper plate and dump out some glitter onto it. Drizzle white glue on the edges of your pine cones and then roll them in the glitter covered plate. Let them stand on a piece of newspaper overnight to dry.

Make a snowman in your kitchen.

Use construction paper and magnets to give your white fridge eyes, a carrot nose, and some buttons.

Make tin can luminaries.

After using the contents of a can, wash it well. Paint the outside the color of your choice or leave it silver. Then, using a hammer and a nail, pound some holes in it in the design of your choice. A pine tree or star is a simple design. Then, use this as a holder for a tea light candle, either indoors or outside in the snow.

Let it snow.

Yes, it's stereotypical, but paper snowflakes are fun and festive. You can find templates online to print off to make some spectacular ones, too.

Make chains.

Every kid loves making construction paper chains. Not only can they brighten up the Christmas tree, but they can add some pep to windows and doorways, too. For an adult version, make them out of black and white newsprint.

String some popcorn and/or cranberries.

This is an old-fashioned classic and will entertain the whole family through at least one viewing of "Miracle on 34th Street."

Make salt dough ornaments.

It's just like making cookies to make salt dough ornaments. (Although not as tasty.) Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Make dough using 1 cup of salt, 1 cup of flour, and half a cup of water. Knead it well, for about 10 minutes. Roll out a thick layer of dough and use cookie cutters to turn them into trees, angels, and snowmen. Poke a hole in the top big enough for a piece of twine to go through for hanging. Bake, unpainted, for 30 minutes. Then, the sky is the limit for decorating. If you want it to last for more than one year, cover the artistry with polyurethane.

Make clove-studded oranges until your fingers hurt.

Each year, we pick up a crate of the little mandarin oranges and cover them with cloves. The house smells absolutely decadent when we pop little bowls of these natural air fresheners in each room.

Make-over thrift store items.

You can often pick up a huge stash of ornaments from a thrift store or yard sale for little more than a song. Don't worry if they aren't the right colors, either. The kids will have a great time dip-painting them, splattering them, or applying fake snow to them.

Use found items.

Gather up branches.

Go outside and gather some bare branches. Use these to add a wintery rustic touch to your home. Place them in large vases on the floor. You can spray paint them first to match your color scheme, or you can wind some white lights through them.

Collect some pine cones.

You don't have to do a darned thing to pine cones to make them look lovely. Fill bowls or baskets with them for rustic charm. If you want, you can intersperse a few glittery ornaments in there with them.

Make a pine bough bouquet.

If you live somewhere with pine or cedar trees, take some clippings and fill vases with them for a seasonal bouquet.

Make a wreath.

You can use some of the pine boughs from above to make a wreath. Use an old wire hanging for the frame. Wire the boughs on, making it as full as you'd like. Bend the top of the hanger into a loop for hanging the wreath.

Don't let the squirrels have all the acorns.

If you're going with a rustic look, fill a mason jar with acorns. If you aren't quite that rustic, spray the acorns first with some sparkly paint.

Sweeten things up.

Found objects can look lovely with a coating of white glue and granulated sugar. Sweeten up pinecones, branches, stones, acorns, and sprigs from evergreen trees. Add some glittery ribbons and a few inexpensive Christmas ornaments, and you have uniquely beautiful decorations at a fraction of the cost of store-bought.

Wrap it up.

Instead of going out and purchasing colorful gift wrap that will just be thrown away, try some of these ideas for festive and frugal packages.

Decorate paper grocery bags.

If you use paper grocery bags, you've got a free stash of trendy-looking "craft paper" gift wrap. Cut open the bags and turn them wrong side out for plain brown packages. You can leave these simple or let the kids stamp designs on them for added flair.

Use newspaper.

If you still get newspapers, hang on to them. Black and white newsprint makes for an elegant, hipster package and the colorful comics section is fun for kids' gifts.

Hit the thrift store for containers.

Pick up baskets or other decorative containers at your local thrift store and put gifts in them. That way, the container itself is part of the gift and can be reused by the recipient for organization and storage.

Use non-gift wrap paper that you have on hand.

For small gifts, we have been slowing going through our old stash of scrapbooking paper. You may have other pretty bits and pieces, like tissue paper that wrapped a breakable item from a store, an insert in a photo frame, or other decorative papers. You can even use the pages of old books that are falling apart to wrap small items. (You can often find books like that for free.)

Make over ugly paper.

Do you have some gift wrap that you'll probably never use because, well, it's hideous? Turn it wrong side out and use the white side. As with the paper bags above, the kiddos can decorate this, or you can go with a simple, white package. You might also have gift wrap put aside from other occasions that could be turned wrong side out.

Reuse gift bags.

We save gift bags from year to year and reuse them. If the handles break off, repair the torn paper with a piece of Scotch tape and thread through new ribbon or twine.

Make fabric bags.

My children's grandma has been using the same lovely, hand-sewn fabric gift bags for years. The family brings the bags back each year filled with new gifts.

Keep attractive containers.

Sometimes, food items come in containers that can be reused for gift giving. For example, we kept a cute little balsa container from a wheel of Brie, covered the label with pretty paper, and used it as a container for a small gift. Other ideas are fruit crates, jewelry boxes, or muslin/chiffon bags.

Cover unattractive containers.

One year, I stopped my neighbor before she threw out six empty cans of Pringles. I washed the insides carefully, covered them with pretty paper, and used these to hold cookies for gift giving.

Get a package of Chinese takeout containers.

You can very inexpensively pick up a 24-pack of plain takeout containers at your local craft store. These are great for small gifts or homemade treats, and if you're careful with them, can be reused for several years. They come in a variety of sizes.

Upcycle old sweaters into gift bags.

If you have any old sweaters that have seen better days, you can turn them into simple, cozy-looking gift bags. Cut them into rectangles of the desired size, then fold them over. Run a seam up each side, put on the handle of your choice, and pop in a gift.

Embellishments and Extras

Use garden twine.

Instead of pricey ribbon from the store, grab a ball of garden twine to tie up packages. Twine can also be used to fasten on other embellishments and gives a rustic elegance to grocery bag packages.

Add items from nature.

Tie on a few sprigs of pine, some little twigs, or a pretty leaf for a lovely, natural look.

Reuse bows from previous years.

Duh. Of course, you already do that. If the bow is crushed beyond redemption, carefully remove the staple, undo the bow, and slide scissors down the ribbon to make pretty curls.

Make bows from paper.

Find a simple bow-making tutorial online. You can cut strips from flyers, tape them end to end, and fold them into elaborate and colorful bows to give a plain package some pop. (Try this [YouTube tutorial](#) or this [DIY](#).)

Use yarn to make pom poms.

If you have odds and ends of yarn, you can use this to add a pop of color by turning it into pom poms or tassels. (Tutorial for [making pom poms using a fork](#) and [tutorial for tassels](#).)

Use ornaments for gifts within the immediate family.

Tie on an unused ornament to jazz up a gift for a family member. (You may not want to use this for gifts that will be going elsewhere unless you want to part with your ornament.)

Rip strips off an old clothing item.

For a homespun look, take an old shirt and rip it into strips. (Start them with scissors.) Ripping instead of cutting will give you a distressed, frayed edge. Make these strips into bows or ribbon for decorating gifts.

Single earrings add sparkle.

If you have any sad, single earrings, tie them onto a gift for some vintage pizzazz.

Stamp on a gift tag.

Using a stamp in a simple shape, make a gift tag right on a plain paper package. Use a pretty metallic paint pen to put the recipient's name on the gift.

Button it up.

If you have a jar of buttons kicking around, you can use these to embellish a package or gift tag. Either glue them on or thread them through the string tying up your gift.



Sending Season's Greetings

Special delivery.

You can't do anything about the price of postage, but if you want to give cards to people you will see in person, deliver them by hand. Take cards to the folks you'll be spending Christmas with or seeing at a party. Send the kids to deliver cards to neighbors and hand them out yourself to co-workers.

Make your cards.

Use supplies you have on hand to make your holiday greeting cards. If you have kiddos, this is a great activity to keep them involved, and loved ones will enjoy getting their art. If you are making them yourself, beautiful things can be done inexpensively with cardstock and a metallic paint pen.

Hit the thrift store.

Sometimes you can find random boxes of holiday cards at thrift stores and yard sales. Bonus points if they're vintage!

Send a Christmas letter.

Instead of a greeting card, you can write a letter telling everyone about the family's year. (Don't be braggy and obnoxious, though.) Print this off on holiday paper for a festive touch.

Send an email "newsletter."

I know, that sounds so impersonal! But the nice thing about sending it via email is that you can load it with family photos of the new kitten, the kids' school pictures, and your snow-covered lawn.

Use scrap gift wrap.

Make a collage on the front of plain cardstock using scraps from colorful gift wrap. You can cut a simple design like a Christmas ornament or a tree and glue this on.

Make Memories with Holiday Traditions

Don't let the mainstream media and the advertisers tell you what the perfect Christmas is. Don't allow yourself to be pushed into spending money you don't have because the big corporations are telling you what you need or what material objects your children require to be happy. Make the holidays your own by creating memories, not debt.

Think about the traditions that are the most important in your family. When your kids are grown and have children of their own, I guarantee you that they won't look back to Christmas the year they were 13 and be able to list off all of the gifts that they did or did not receive. But they'll remember the traditions that your family repeated year after year.

And that brings me to another reason to focus on traditions – possibly the most important reason of all.

Children who grow up with traditions and with families who are present do not grow up to punch innocent strangers in the face or mow down pedestrians without regard. They don't riot in the streets. They develop qualities like empathy and kindness. They become productive members of society.

This Christmas, instead of going broke and focusing on the number of extravagant packages under the tree, focus on experiences and the things that you can't buy in a store.

I've deliberately left out religious traditions because there are so many faiths that it would be difficult to cover everyone's customs. That doesn't mean that I am not encouraging everyone to spend time in worship. But, I'm sure that you've probably got many of your own religious traditions that speak to your family, like the retelling of Bible stories, putting together the nativity scene, worship, and prayer. Going to church on Christmas Eve in your fanciest clothing, singing the familiar hymns, being surrounded by the happy people, and visiting the warm, crowded church lit by candles is a traditional Christmas Eve activity for many families.

Because each religion is unique, I'll leave those traditions up to you. Celebrating your faith during the Christmas season can make the holiday much more meaningful and peaceful.

The real memories are not things that can be wrapped in paper. The one thing that people always remember is how they feel. Don't make that feeling all about, "Hey, look what I got!"

Embrace those who are dear to you and make that feeling love, peace, and joy, and you will have a better Christmas than any wealthy person sitting in a mansion surrounded by gifts he didn't need, given by people he doesn't love.

No matter how tight the budget is this year (or if it isn't tight at all and you've just opted for simplicity) with an attitude of joy, the simplest of things can become magical.

This chapter is filled with some of our favorite traditions. Adopt them or adapt them, but let them inspire you to make memories.



Seasonal Traditions

Kick off the holiday season by remembering previous holidays.

Each year before we put up the tree, the kids like to look through our Christmas scrapbook at holidays past.

Choosing the perfect Christmas tree.

For people who go with live trees instead of artificial, don't let the trip to pick out a tree be just another thing to check off the list. Get bundled up in sweaters and hats and go together as a family to choose the perfect tree. Make sure to get photos so that you can watch how much the kids have grown from year to year.

Decorating the tree as soon as you get it home.

Continue the outing with a family tree decorating party. The smell of the tree, the feeling of the cold needles, and the music playing will combine to give everyone a feeling of annual nostalgia.

Celebrating Thanksmas.

This is a tradition that we started when I lived in Canada. Since Thanksgiving there is in October, we never had time off during November to celebrate American Thanksgiving on Thursday. We marked the Sunday after US Thanksgiving as "Thanksmas," which was when we ate a traditional dinner of turkey and stuffing, then pulled out the decorations, put up the artificial tree, and decked the halls together.

Looking at Christmas lights.

Every year, we fill thermoses with hot cocoa, make up a goodie bag full of Christmas cookies, and go for a drive to the most festive neighborhoods to enjoy the lights.

Christmas caroling to brighten someone else's day.

We like to go to a local nursing home or veteran's hospital to sing carols. It's even more fun if you can encourage the residents to sing along with you.

Curling up together to watch a Christmas movie marathon, complete with popcorn, eggnog, and cookies.

Each family has a movie (or movies) that mean "Christmas" to them. We're big fans of the animated version of the Grinch and Frosty the Snowman. We still watch them, even though my kids are in their teens and twenties.

Baking for two days straight.

We pick a weekend when we can all be together to bake cookies, bars, and other sweet treats. We bake dozens to enjoy ourselves and to deliver as gifts to friends, loved ones, and neighbors. The two-day cookie baking marathon makes the house smell better than any scented candle or spray ever could.

Making gifts.

We've always been fond of making homemade presents. We love searching Pinterest for ideas, gathering up supplies, and sitting at the table crafting presents for others.

Have a party.

We have an annual pajama party for close friends and family as a little break from the need to get dressed up. We make gingerbread villages out of graham crackers and enjoy a buffet of finger foods and Christmas cookies.

Christmas Eve Customs

Putting on Christmas jammies.

Each year, the Christmas Eve gift is a pair of holiday-themed PJs. What could be better than wearing those for two days in a row? I try to pick something wintery instead of specifically Christmas-y so that the girls get plenty of use out of them.

Eating your traditional Christmas Eve dinner.

Pick a family favorite and make it an annual tradition. We have a meal made up of Hors d' Oeuvres, cheese, crackers, and dips to enjoy while we spend time playing games or watching Christmas movies.

Feeding the reindeer.

Back when my kids were little, we made a tradition of feeding the reindeer each Christmas Eve. We made it by mixing together non-toxic edibles that the birds would enjoy, like oatmeal, nuts, and dried fruit. Before bedtime, the kids would go outside and sprinkle it in the snow to make certain Santa's sleigh didn't miss our house.

Cookies for Santa.

It goes without saying that a big job for little people on Christmas Eve is to put out a plate of cookies and a glass of milk for Santa. Teach gratitude by encouraging children to write a thank you note or draw a picture.

Sneaking off to fill stockings.

Now that the kids are older, we each fill the stocking of another person in the family. On Christmas Eve, before bedtime, we all sneak off to our rooms to load up the stockings and put them in front of the fireplace for the next morning.

Singing along during the movie White Christmas.

That's the "must-watch" Christmas Eve movie at our house, and the kids can (and do) recite every word.

Reading aloud.

The favored read-aloud book in our family is that chapter in Little House in the Big Woods that tells the story of Laura Ingalls Wilder's childhood Christmas. When I was a little girl, I remember reading Laura's description of their celebration and it seemed like the most magical day I could ever imagine. I could

almost taste that exotic orange and the peppermint melting on my tongue. Other classics are the story of Jesus's birth, Dicken's Christmas Carol, and The Night Before Christmas.

Christmas Morning Magic

Those cinnamon rolls that you make every Christmas morning.

Is there a traditional breakfast food that says "Christmas morning" for your family? For us, it's homemade cinnamon rolls, Mimosas (now that the kids are old enough for a sip of champagne), and crisp bacon.

The first person up waking the entire family.

The very best thing on Christmas morning is the excitement of the little ones as they race through the house to let everyone know that Santa did indeed arrive during the night.

Moving the couch cushions to the area around the tree.

Make a comfy seating area on the floor so everyone can open gifts. We like to use couch cushions and fluffy blankets.

Opening presents.

Well, that's kind of a given. We don't like to tear through the packages all at once. Instead, we savor it by going around and one person opening a gift at a time.

Gifts That Won't Break the Bank

Gifts don't have to be outrageously expensive to bring a smile to the people you love. We rarely spend a lot of money, but we always spend a lot of thought. Following, you'll find ideas for making gifts and giving of your time.



Making Gifts

There is nothing I love more than gifts that someone has made for me. I get almost teary-eyed thinking about the time and effort that went into a present that is homemade. Every year a percentage of our gifts to one another are made by us, and we also like to give these kinds of gifts to neighbors, friends, and loved ones. Here are a few ideas for making presents:

Cookies and baked goods

Whether it's clichéd or not, who doesn't love to get a basket of homemade cookies, a tin of brownies, or a little box of candy straight from the kitchen?

Home-canned foods

Aside from sweets, you can give jams, salsas, marinara sauce, and home-canned treats. You can also mail these little tastes of home to friends and family who are far away. It's like opening a box full of hugs.

Bath and body products

These are really easy to make and can often be done completely with items from the pantry. Scented salts, body butters, and exfoliating scrubs are quick, easy, and very appreciated.

Needlework

If you like to knit, sew, embroidery, or crochet, make use of the time you spend watching Christmas movies to whip up some scarves, mittens, or monogrammed pretties. If you have 100% cotton yarn, you can make lovely dishcloths and washcloths too. Other household items include holders for those plastic grocery bags, rag rugs, quilts, and embroidered pillowcases.

Other crafts

Depending on your skillset and available supplies, the variety here is limitless. Consider woodwork, decoratively painted items, handcrafted jewelry, a piece of art, a framed photograph of a beloved place, little wee handprints in plaster...the list could go on infinitely.

Liquor

It's easy to make [fruit-infused liquors](#), then add to them a simple syrup. Decant them into fancy thrift store bottles and top it with a flouncy bow. Some people brew wine and beer.

Spice mixes

If you buy (or grow) your seasonings in bulk, you can easily mix up Italian seasoning, Mexican seasoning, and French herbs de Provence. Put them into tiny jars and cover the lids with something pretty.

Photo albums

Give the gift of memories by putting photos in an album. Use the facing page to write the recipient a little note about the photo.

Recipe collections

Gather up your family's favorite recipes, type them up, then print them out onto nice paper. Place these in a loose-leaf binder. A homemade cookbook makes an especially nice present for a child who has moved out on his or her own.

Mason jar mixes

Put your giant mason jar collection to good use. Measure out and layer ingredients for cookies, soups, or other dishes made from mostly dry ingredients. Put the instructions on a pretty tag and tie it to the jar with ribbon or twine.

Rice-filled heating pads

Make a heating pad the size of your choice. Make a simple square or rectangular pillow, then fill it with uncooked rice. For an even thriftier gift, use fabric from a no-longer-worn item. Sew the bag closed. Attach instructions with a safety pin: Heat the bag in the microwave for 1 minute, then use it to help relieve aches and pains.

Hot cocoa kits

In a zip lock bag, layer cocoa, sugar, powdered milk, a dash of salt, and some marshmallows. Pop this into a mug and tie the instructions to the handle.

Mini manicure set

Using a mason jar to contain it, put together a travel sized nail polish remover, emery board, orange stick, clippers, and nail polishes for your favorite fashionista.

Put together a book collection.

Visit thrift stores and used bookstores and put together a collection of books in a favorite genre or by a favorite author.

Give the Gift of Time

In a busy world, the gift of time can be priceless. By its very nature, it says, “You are important to me.” You can print out little coupons or gift cards and stick these in a stocking or greeting card.

- Babysitting
- Making a homemade meal
- Cleaning the kitchen
- Painting the Fence
- Hugs
- Organizing a messy area
- Building something
- Mending, hemming, or altering clothing
- Dinner and a movie
- Doing someone’s hair or nails
- Going for a hike
- Walking the dog
- Doing yard work

You get the idea. Use your skills or your strong back to help someone out. Commit to spending time with someone. Time means love.

Buy Locally

This year, take a stand against giant corporations by refusing to participate in their holiday game. Before you go and load up your cart at Wal-Mart, Best Buy, and the other big box stores, pause and consider the economy. Are you stimulating the national economy by shopping at Home Depot or Linens 'n' Things? Take a moment to think about who benefits from this shopping spree.

The minimum wage employees who work there? Nope, they just get hit with working crazy hours and missing out on family time, receiving no bonuses for the sales, just their "working-poor" wage.

The Americans who manufacture the items you are purchasing? No, [PBS](#) revealed that more than 85% of the goods sold at Wal-Mart originated overseas. These products are made in sweatshops in the Third World, many by children.

The owners of the big box store from which you are purchasing gifts? Hardly. First of all, there are no local "owners. These enormous conglomerates are corporations, not people. Best Buy, for example, is the largest electronics seller in the United States. They purchase in such vast quantity that smaller stores can't even purchase their products for the price that Best Buy can sell them for, effectively making the small business model obsolete as customers frantically seek to pay the lowest possible price.

This year, change the way you shop by supporting your local businesses. Look for local artisans, crafters and farmers from whom you can purchase unique, high-quality gifts.

Some possible shopping outlets:

- Craft stores
- Bead stores (they nearly always have lovely handmade jewelry for sale)
- Farmer's markets (a lovely fruit basket is always appreciated)
- Local bakeries, creameries and meat shops

- Tiny local shops containing the work of local artists
- Amish furniture stores
- Craft shows and marketplaces
- Gift certificates for local salons and spas
- Antique Stores
- Plants from a local greenhouse
- Gift certificates for a locally owned restaurant
- Make gifts of your own using locally sourced ingredients or supplies

You get the idea - keep the dollars in *your* community and help your neighbors stay in business.

The Gift of Giving Back

We spent many years without very much money. It would have been easy to teach my children that we couldn't afford to help others, but instead, we decided to make giving a priority, no matter how broke we were.

We chose to cut back on our own gifts in order to give to others. This is a family tradition that is as important and treasured as the exchange of gifts between us.

One particularly memorable year, money was extremely tight. If you recall, I mentioned early that my children always knew what the holiday budget was. This particular year, I thought that we might skip giving to others because we had only \$120 to spare for gifts, a holiday meal, and everything else.

When I told the kids that we weren't going to be able to give to others that year, they insisted that part of their very small gift budgets go to buy a gift for a child that might not get any other presents. It was a moment that I'll never forget.



The ranks of the less fortunate are increasing on a daily basis as the economy crumbles. There are many ways that you can give to others who may have fallen on bad times.

- Donate to a food bank.
- Serve at a soup kitchen.
- Become a Secret Santa for a family that you know is struggling.
- Fill Christmas stockings for people at the local homeless shelter. Fill them with toiletries like soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and deodorant. Add socks, gloves, and a hat. Then, put in a few treats like candy, chewing gum, and a deck of cards or a book of puzzles.
- If your grocery store has them, purchase shopping bags full of for needy local families.
- Buy gifts for children who are at a domestic violence shelter.
- Find out how your church is helping the community this year and pitch in.
- Invite a lonely neighbor to celebrate the holiday with you.
- Look out for those who may have lost a loved one during the year. Holidays can be extremely difficult, especially the first Christmas without a parent, child, or spouse.
- Ask at your child's school office if there are any families who might need help.
- If you can afford it, adopt a family. Often, the parents don't ask for anything, but we always try to include some small items for mom and dad, as well as a gift card for the grocery store.
- Make some meals for an elderly neighbor. Even better, invite them to dinner at your house, so they get good food and good company.

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry

A frugal Christmas dinner...that doesn't sound like much fun, does it? Somehow, a traditional holiday meal has become a license to overspend, but it doesn't have to be that way.



In days gone by, people didn't spend hundreds of dollars for one day of holiday feasting, but now spending an entire month's grocery budget on a fancy breakfast, appetizers, and a gargantuan feast is pretty much expected. Hosts try to assemble an elegant meal worthy of Martha Stewart and justify outrageously expensive luxury items at the grocery store because "it's only once a year."

Here's a mind-blowing number: in the UK, [one article puts the average expenditure](#) for Christmas day food at £133.70, which \$202.32 in US dollars. I couldn't find statistics for an average American Christmas food budget, but \$202 is several weeks' worth of food for my family. On top of purchasing gifts and decorating for the holidays, can you really afford to blow your monthly budget for *one day*?

Stop that!

You don't have to go broke to enjoy the holidays. It doesn't matter what the neighbors are putting on their table this year. Don't feel obligated to invest in out-of-season delicacies like fresh berries and asparagus in December. If money is stretched thin (or if you just wish to be more reasonable in your spending) there are lots of ways to make your dinner frugal, but still festive.

I recall cringing when guests' children were wasteful with expensive holiday food I had prepared. No one wants to end the day feeling stressed and worried because so much money was spent. Trust me - you can entertain your family during the holidays while staying within your budget.

Make the presentation special

Even if you are serving more simple fare this year, you can still make your meal special.

- Use fancy toothpicks in the appetizers
- Make kid-friendly shapes with your veggies
- Use decorative cupcake liners to hold individual servings of snacks. (Portioning out servings like this can also help to cut down on waste.)
- Let the kids help. Instead of worrying about the most elegant meal on the block, get the kids involved with food preparation. You're secretly teaching them life-skills, and they will love seeing peoples' reactions when they tell them, "I made that!"
- Let your children make fun centerpieces for the kid's table to really get them into the spirit.

- Set a beautiful table with your nicest china and linens.
- Move store bought items into real dishes to place on the table.
- Gather some items from nature and add some Christmas decorations to make a centerpiece.
- Light some unscented candles.
- Use cloth napkins.
- Rim glasses with Christmas-colored sugar or sprinkles.

Tips for a Frugal Feast

Historically, Christmas dinner has always been a feast, but by necessity, the feast was made up of what was able to be acquired locally and seasonally, or what had been preserved. (Check out [these menus from Christmas dinners over the past few centuries](#).)

Take a tip from history and buy produce that is in-season. Supplement this with canned and frozen fruits and vegetables. Look for Brussels sprouts (frozen might be a better deal and no one will know!), parsnips, carrots, winter squash, and potatoes.

Another way to keep your food bill under control this year is to focus on treats that you can make right from your pantry. If you've been following the stockpile principles in my book, *The Pantry Primer*, then the food in your pantry was purchased at the lowest prices available. Because of this, you can focus on purchasing only a couple of specialty items, like ham or turkey and a treat that is traditional for your family. Then, enjoy delicious yet thrifty treats for the rest of the holiday feast.

Following are some ideas for homemade goodies that will make your guests feel well-fed and pampered, without emptying your pockets. You'll discover that many of the ingredients already reside in your pantry, or are standard groceries that will be in your fridge, like eggs and cheese.

25 Coffee Creamer Recipes

I'm personally non-functional without coffee, so the first recipes for me have to be these yummy, homemade coffee creamers. 'Tis the season for the fanciest possible version of everything, and your hot beverage is no exception.



We make them year round, not just for special occasions. They're way less expensive than the chemical filled, artificially flavored creamers you'll find at the store.

First, Make Sweet Cream

Sweet cream is very basic - it's simply your dairy or dairy alternative, warmed enough to dissolve your sweetener.

Base ingredients:

- 3 cups of any combination of the milk of your choice
- 4 tbsp of your favorite sugar for unflavored sweet cream

OR

- 1 of the variations below (all of them include various types of sugar)

Add the flavor:

Choose an option from the list below. (*My daughter created many of these combinations*). Stir them into a base of 1.5 cups of milk and 1.5 cups of cream. (I have only used cow's milk products to make these, but a friend tells me that the dairy alternatives work well too.

If you don't want to make a full batch of the creamer, stir just a small amount of the flavorings into an individual cup of coffee and add milk.

Bring it to a low simmer:

Mix the sweetener and flavoring into the milk and bring to a simmer on the stove, constantly whisking until it begins to steam slightly. Remove from heat, allow cooling, then store in the refrigerator. Feel free to adjust the amounts for stronger or sweeter flavors. Don't bring it to a boil, because your creamer will curdle.

Choose Your Favorite Flavor Variation

- ***Mocha Java:*** 2 tbsp of cocoa powder, 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar
- ***Mexican Mocha Java:*** 2 tbsp of cocoa powder, 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar, 1 tsp of cinnamon

- ***Nutella aka Chocolate Hazelnut:*** (we make our own "Nutella" from scratch with a food processor) 4 tbsp of Nutella or an organic chocolate hazelnut spread - no other sweetener needed
- ***Gingerbread:*** 2 tsp molasses, 2 tbsp of brown sugar, 1/2 tsp each of ginger, clove, and cinnamon
- ***Almond Toffee:*** 4 tbsp of sugar of choice, 1 tsp of almond extract
- ***Vanilla Latte:*** 2 teaspoons of pure vanilla extract, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar
- ***Great White North Maple Java:*** 6 tbsp of pure maple syrup
- ***Mocha Mint:*** 2 tbsp of cocoa powder, 1/2 tsp of pure peppermint extract, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar
- ***Cinnamon Roll:*** 2 tsp of cinnamon, 1 tsp of vanilla extract, 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar, and a dash of salt (yep, salt)
- ***Caramel Mochiatt":*** 6 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar, a dash of salt, 1 tbsp of cocoa, and 1/2 tsp of pure vanilla extract
- ***Amaretto:*** 1 tbsp of almond extract, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar
- ***Cherry Amaretto:*** 1 tbsp of almond extract, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar, 1/2 tsp of cherry extract
- ***White chocolate mocha:*** 1 cup of white chocolate chips, 1 tsp of cocoa (melt the chips into the milk, whisking constantly)
- ***Mint white chocolate:*** 1 cup of white chocolate chips, 1 tsp of pure peppermint extract
- ***Black Forest:*** 2 tbsp of cocoa, 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar, 1 tsp of cherry extract
- ***Chocolate coconut mocha:*** 2 tbsp of cocoa, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar, 2 tsp of coconut extract (or replace half of the milk with coconut milk)
- ***Irish Cream:*** 2 tbsp cocoa, 1 tsp pure vanilla extract, 1/2 tsp almond extract, 2 tbsp of instant coffee, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar
- ***Eggnog:*** 1 tsp of pure vanilla extract, 2 tsp of rum extract, 1 tsp of nutmeg

- ***Pumpkin Pie Latte***: 3 tbsp of pumpkin puree, 1 tsp of pumpkin pie spice, 1 tsp of cinnamon, 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ***Hazelnut***: 1 tsp of hazelnut extract, 1 tsp of pure vanilla extract, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar
- ***Frangelico Cream***: 1 tbsp of cocoa, 1 tsp of hazelnut extract, 1 tsp of pure vanilla extract, and 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar
- ***Chai Latte***: Simmer 3 Chai tea bags in creamer mixture with 4 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar
- ***Chocolate Raspberry***: 4 tbsp of seedless raspberry jelly, 2 tbsp of cocoa
- ***Almond Joy***: 2 tbsp of cocoa, 4 tbsp of turbinado (or white) sugar, 1 tsp of almond extract, and 2 tsp of coconut extract (or replace half of the milk with coconut milk)
- ***Salted Caramel***: 6 tbsp of muscovado (or brown) sugar, a dash of salt

Top it off with a dollop of whipped cream and a drizzle or sprinkle of something, if you really want to channel your inner barista.

Make Flavored Syrups for Take-Home Gifts for the Coffee Lovers on Your List

Of course, gift-wrapping a package containing a dairy product may not work very well. For giving, try making a flavored syrup (or a few of them), decanting into pretty bottles, and sticking a bow on top.

Syrups, like the kind at the fancy coffee places, can be easily homemade. You need to make a syrup base: with 1/2 cup of turbinado (or white) sugar and 1 cup of water, then add 1-2 tsp of any kind of extract you want - you are only limited by the extracts available to you: vanilla, rum, coconut, cherry, almond, etc.

You need to make a syrup base: with 1/2 cup of turbinado (or white) sugar and 1 cup of water, then add 1-2 tsp of any extract you want - you are only limited by the extracts available to you: vanilla, rum, coconut, cherry, almond, etc.

1/2 cup of turbinado (or white) sugar
1 cup of water

Simmer the ingredients above to dissolve the sugar, then add 1-2 tsp of your chosen extract - you are only limited by the extracts available to you. You can mix them based on the recipes above, or you can try single flavors.

Look for pure extracts without artificial ingredients.

Breakfast Treats

Do you have a traditional Christmas morning breakfast? The key in our house is that the recipe be quick, simple, and bonus points if it can be prepped the night before.

DIY Breakfast Buffet

One of the easiest things you can do for breakfast is to set up a buffet. Place dishes, a toaster, and the coffee pot on a counter. Then arrange simple items that the family members can grab when they're hungry. Some ideas might be:

- Fruit
- Yogurt
- Frozen waffles
- Bagels, Bread for toast
- Boiled eggs
- Butter, Jam, and Syrup
- Sliced, fully cooked ham

Make the buffet pretty and convenient for a fuss-free and inviting breakfast.

Cinnamon Rolls

My cinnamon roll recipe uses a biscuit dough, so there's no yeast, no kneading, and no time to proof. You can use a gluten-free flour blend for this with good results, but I haven't had good luck substituting a one-ingredient flour alternative.

Dough:

- 2 cups of flour
- 2 tbsp of sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 tbsp softened butter
- 1 egg
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 2 more tbsp of butter

Instructions:

1. In a mixing bowl, sift the dry ingredients together.
2. Cut in the butter, then mix it into the dry ingredients using your hands.
3. Whisk the milk, egg, and vanilla together in another bowl.
4. Stir it into your flour and butter and stir it together until you have a soft dough.
5. Turn out the dough onto a floured counter and roll it out until it is about a quarter inch thick.
6. Brush the top with melted butter.

Filling:

- ½ cup of white sugar
- ½ cup of brown sugar
- 2 tbsp of cinnamon powder

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
2. Mix the filling ingredients together with a fork.
3. Sprinkle the filling onto the buttered dough.
4. Carefully roll the dough into a log. If it won't roll properly, cut it into strips and roll the individual strips.
5. Slice the log into 2-inch pieces.
6. Put the cinnamon rolls into a well-greased pan. (I use a square glass pan for this.)
7. If you want, you can top them with additional cinnamon sugar.
8. Bake for 25 minutes until the rolls are well set.

Icing:

- 1 cup of powdered sugar
- 1 stick of cream cheese
- ¼ cup of butter

Instructions:

- Using a mixer or a food processor, combine the icing ingredients until they are well blended.
- Slather the hot cinnamon rolls with icing.
- Don't burn your mouth!

Breakfast Cookies

These are like a bowl of oatmeal in delicious cookie form.

- 1/2 cup of sugar (brown or white)
- 3/4 cups of applesauce
- 1 cup of flour
- 2 tsp of baking powder
- 1/2 tsp of salt
- 1 tsp of cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp of allspice
- 1/8 tsp of powdered cloves
- 1 cup of rolled oats

Now the creative part - from one cup to up to a cup and a half (total) of "whatever" - I've offered some suggestions, but use anything you have on hand that sounds like it would be yummy:

sunflower seeds - walnuts - pecans - raisins - dried cranberries – chocolate chips
- white chocolate chips - flax seeds - butterscotch chips - pumpkin seeds
- cashews - wheat germ - granola - dry cereal

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, stir together sugar and applesauce.
3. Sift flour, baking powder, and salt together then stir into the applesauce mixture.
4. Stir in your other assorted ingredients until the batter is just combined.
5. Drop large spoonfuls of batter onto a greased cookie sheet - they don't spread much, so they will remain approximately the same size.
6. Bake for 10 minutes.
7. Allow them to cool on the cookie sheet for 10 minutes, then move them to a plate to cool further.

Crockpot Breakfast Casserole

Pop this in the crock pot right before you go to bed and you'll have a hot and savory breakfast without a single bit of work in the morning. It serves 6, but if your family is smaller, don't worry – it reheats beautifully.

1 bag frozen hash brown potatoes (or you can shred your own potatoes – you'll want 4-6 cups)

1 lb. of cooked, diced ham (you can also use cooked bacon or breakfast sausage)

1 diced onion

1 cup of shredded cheddar cheese

1/2 a sweet red pepper, diced

1/2 a sweet green pepper, diced

A dozen eggs

1 cup of milk

1/4 tsp of garlic powder

Salt and pepper to taste

Paprika for the top

Butter for greasing the crockpot

Directions

1. Coat the bottom and sides of your crockpot with butter.
2. Layer half of each of the following ingredients in this order:
3. hash browns, ham, onions, peppers, cheese.
4. Then, layer the other half of those ingredients in the same order.
5. In a bowl, whisk eggs, milk, garlic powder, salt, and pepper together.
6. Pour egg mixture over your casserole.
7. Add paprika on top.
8. Cook on low for 8 hours.

Freezer Fruit Salad

This is an anything goes recipe that really can't even be called a recipe. Grab whatever frozen fruit you can find on sale and mix it together in a large bowl.

Some good combos are tropical fruits like mango, pineapple, and papaya, or a berry mélange. Put it in the fridge overnight. As it thaws, the juices will combine. If you feel it needs it, you can sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of sugar in the next morning.

Some variations:

- Serve this over yogurt to get some produce into the children that will soon be fueled solely by sugar.
- Add some chopped mint to the salad for a pop of color and flavor.
- Serve in shot glasses.
- Set this up by the blender and have additions like yogurt and protein powder for whipping up a quick, DIY smoothie.
- Make parfaits by layering yogurt, fruit salad, and granola in mason jars.



Appetizers and Party Food

Party food doesn't have to be expensive. These thrifty and delicious appetizers can be easily whipped up with very little kitchen time or money.

Remember, presentation is everything!

Herbed Yogurt Cheese

This couldn't be easier or more elegant.

- 4 cups of plain yogurt (it's the ultimate in frugality if you use homemade yogurt!)

Directions:

1. Line a colander with a piece of cheese cloth or a flour sack towel.
2. Place the colander in a bowl.
3. Plop your yogurt onto the fabric and then place the whole thing in the fridge to drain overnight.

At serving time, dip your super-duper thick yogurt cheese into a bowl and stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt and the herbs of your choice. Try paprika, cracked pepper, basil, garlic, and/or oregano. That's it. Healthy and delicious.

White Chocolate Cereal Mix

This is a good treat to keep in a snack bowl on the table while you're busy prepping other food. It's as thrifty or as expensive as the cereal you choose. If you aren't into organic, just use the regular Chex cereals from the grocery store. You can also find organic and non-GMO versions of these cereals.

- 12 cups of woven grain cereal (we like to use a few different kinds)
- 2 cups of mini pretzels
- 2 cans of salted mixed nuts
- 2 packages of white chocolate chips (total of 1 pound)

Directions:

1. Carefully melt the white chocolate chips over a double boiler.
2. In a large bowl – like, really, really large, mix all of your dry ingredients.
3. Once your white chocolate is totally melted, drizzle it over your dry ingredients.
4. Use two spatulas to toss the mixture until everything is coated with white chocolate.
5. Line a counter top with waxed paper and spread the mixture out to cool for about 2-3 hours.
6. Break the chunks up and store the mixture in an air-tight container until serving time.

Jalapeno Peach Jam

I usually make this completely from scratch and can it in the summer, but you can also make it from prepared ingredients.

- 1 small jar of peach preserves (1 pint)
- 1 small can of jalapeno peppers (4 ounces)

Directions:

1. Drain the jalapenos, reserving liquid.
2. Add jalapenos and jam to a food processor and puree together until the peppers are mostly chopped. (It's okay to have a few small chunks.)
3. If needed, add some of the reserved liquid. If you don't need it, save it for a different use or discard it.
4. Serve this over a block of cream cheese (thrifty) or baked Brie (not so thrifty) with crackers.

Mexican Layered Dip

Quite a few of the ingredients in this recipe are from the pantry. If avocados are outrageously expensive, you can leave them out and have one-less-layer dip instead.

- 1 can of refried beans
- 1 cup each of red pepper and green pepper OR 2 cups of salsa, drained
- 1 cup of sour cream
- 2 avocados, mashed with a dash of lemon juice and salt
- Shredded cheese

Directions

1. In a glass dish layer the ingredients in the order listed above.
2. Serve at room temperature or cold with tortilla chips.

Tzatziki Dip

This Greek-inspired dip is tasty with veggies or pieces of pita bread.

- 1 cucumber, shredded
- 2 cups of Greek yogurt or yogurt cheese (see above)
- 1 tbsp of fresh lemon juice
- 1 tbsp of olive oil
- 1 1/2 tsp of dill weed
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely minced
- 1 tbsp of dried oregano
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Directions:

1. Line a colander with a tea towel. Place shredded cucumber on the towel and sprinkle it with salt.
2. Let the cucumber sit for an hour, then squeeze it in the towel.
3. Mix all of the ingredients together in a bowl.
4. Cover the dip and leave it in the fridge overnight to let the flavors meld.

Other Munchies

Intersperse inexpensive munchies with the fancier ones. Use nice platters and bowls for things like:

- A pickle plate with different types of pickles
- Marinated veggies
- Popcorn
- Chips
- Vegetables and dip

If times are tight, we avoid putting out meat, cheese, and crackers – the prices of those can really add up.

Christmas Cookies from the Pantry

Do you need to whip up some last-minute goodies for a holiday soiree? Are you desperate to avoid a trip to the grocery store on Christmas Eve? You probably have everything you need to bake these delicious treats! Since my youngest daughter used to be highly allergic to eggs, all of these recipes are egg-free, making the ingredients completely shelf-stable.

Don't forget that Christmas cookies make a wonderful, thoughtful gift that will be appreciated by nearly anyone.



Basic "Chip" Cookie Recipe

We have used all sorts of goodies in this recipe – one delicious year, we used white chocolate chips and dried cranberries. This recipe makes the best light, soft chocolate chip cookies I've ever had, too! Whatever kind of chips that you have on hand will turn this basic recipe into a delicious custom treat!

Ingredients

- 1 cup of brown sugar
- 1/2 cup of melted coconut oil or butter
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1- 3/4 cups flour
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 cups of chips (chocolate, white chocolate, Skor - whatever!)

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).
2. Grease cookie sheets (I use coconut oil for this).
3. With a fork, mix the sugar, vanilla, coconut oil and yogurt until light and fluffy.
4. Sift together the flour, baking soda, and salt and then stir into the creamed mixture until incorporated.
5. Then mix in chocolate chips. Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls 2 inches apart onto the prepared cookie sheets.

Bake for 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven, until the edges begin to brown. Cool for a minute on the cookie sheets before removing to wire racks to cool completely.

Haystack Cookies

These are easy-peasy no-cook cookies.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups of oatmeal
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of milk
- 5 tsp of cocoa
- 1 tbsp of vanilla extract
- 1 cup of natural peanut butter

Directions:

1. Line a large baking sheet with waxed paper.
2. In a saucepan, stir together all of the ingredients except for the peanut butter and the oatmeal.
3. Heat until these ingredients are combined then add peanut butter, constantly stirring until boiling gently.
4. Boil for one minute, stirring intermittently.
5. Remove from heat and pour into a bowl containing the oatmeal.
6. Stir to combine, working quickly before the mixture can solidify.
7. Make the cookies by placing large spoonfuls of the mixture onto the paper-lined baking sheet. Press them down gently with the back of the spoon.
8. Alternatively, use your hand to roll balls of the mixture and then press down – this will make the resulting cookies a bit rounder if you prefer a tidier looking cookie. (Be careful, though – the mixture is hot, that whole boiling thing, you know!)
9. Place the cookie sheet in the refrigerator overnight, uncovered, to allow cookies to become solid.
10. Store in an airtight container in cool conditions – keep them in the fridge if the weather is warm. Reuse the waxed paper by placing it in between the layers of cookies.

Ginger Molasses Cookies

Ingredients

- 2 cups of flour
- 1/2 cup of white sugar
- 2 Tbsp ginger powder
- 1/3 cup molasses
- 1/3 cup of applesauce
- 1/3 cup melted coconut oil or butter
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp of powdered cloves
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 2 tsp baking powder

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F/ 190 degrees C.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the dry ingredients with a fork: flour, sugar, ginger powder, cinnamon, salt, baking soda/powder.
3. In a second bowl, combine the melted coconut oil, applesauce, molasses, and vanilla extract.
4. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients until you have a moist dough. If you need to, add a tsp of water at a time to reach a consistency that feels like playdough.
5. Optional step - you can put the dough in the freezer for half an hour, then roll it out and use cookie cutters. Otherwise, roll the dough into balls, roll the balls in sugar and place on a greased cookie sheet, about 2 inches apart.
6. Bake at 375 for 8-10 minutes. They will come out of the oven looking as though they aren't done - but they are! Let them cool on the cookie sheet for a minute, then use a spatula to move them to cooling racks for at least 15 minutes for best results.

Note: this procedure makes a nice soft ginger cookie - if you want a crisp ginger snap, roll them out thin and bake for 10-12 minutes.

Blondies

Simple, cakey, and delicious, Blondie are a long-time family favorite

Ingredients

- ½ cup of oil (I use coconut oil)
- ½ cup apple sauce
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup turbinado sugar
- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup of Skor or butterscotch chips

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Mix oil, applesauce, sugar, and vanilla.
3. Stir in flour, baking powder, and salt until well combined.
4. Pour/scoop batter into a well-greased pan and Spread it with a spatula.
5. Sprinkle Skor or butterscotch chips on top of the batter, covering evenly.
6. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until the top feels firm when gently pressed.
7. Cut into squares and remove from the pan to a cooling rack.

Chocolate Shortbread Cookies

Ingredients

- 1-1/8 cups of flour
- 1 cup of unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup of salted butter, softened
- 2/3 cup of icing sugar

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F/175 degrees C.
2. Sift together flour, cocoa, and salt.
3. Using a hand mixer, beat butter and sugar until combined.
4. Pat dough into an ungreased pan. The dough won't really hold together, and you will think that it needs more moisture - but it doesn't! Trust me!
5. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes. Allow it to cool for 5 minutes, then remove from the pan and cut into squares.
6. Sprinkle with icing sugar and allow the cookies to cool.

VARIATION:

- Instead of patting the cookie dough into a pan, squeeze together small balls of dough and place them on a cookie sheet.
- Press your thumb into the cookie ball.
- Fill the thumbprint with raspberry jam, crushed candy canes, or Nutella.
- Bake for 20 minutes.
- Remove from the pan and place on a rack to cool. You can sprinkle the cookie lightly with icing sugar if desired.

Holiday Dinner Recipes

It isn't necessary that every item you serve for Christmas dinner to be an outrageous splurge. Focus on one or two more expensive items, like a turkey, a ham, or a prime rib. Then, add some love to simpler fare for the side dishes.

Don't forget classics like:

- Mashed potatoes
- Gravy
- Dinner rolls
- Salads
- Steamed vegetables
- Top canned or frozen vegetables with cheese or breadcrumbs

Here are some of our favorite frugal holiday sides.



Honey Garlic Green Beans

This is a household favorite, and it's also delicious with broccoli, wax beans, and snow peas. I use this sauce to quickly stir fry beans that I canned from the garden, too.

Ingredients

- 1 pound of green beans, washed and prepped
- 2-3 cloves of garlic, finely minced
- 1-2 tbsp of olive oil
- 1/4 cup of honey
- 2 tbsp of soy sauce

Directions

1. Steam your green beans until they are bright green. Be sure not to overcook them for best results. Put aside.
2. In a large skillet, heat oil and begin to sauté your garlic.
3. As soon as the garlic is golden and fragrant, add your freshly steamed beans. Stir-fry for about 2 minutes.
4. Turn the heat all the way up. Add honey and soy sauce, constantly stirring for about 2 minutes.

Serve. If you want, you can top this with a handful of sesame seeds.

Wheatberry Cranberry Pilaf

Here's a delicious, seasonal way to use some of the whole wheat kernels that you may have lurking in your pantry.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of uncooked wheatberries
- 6 cups of broth
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tsp of olive oil
- 1/2 tsp of garlic powder (or 1 tsp of fresh minced garlic)
- 1/4 cup of whole-berry cranberry sauce or 1/8 cup of dried cranberries
- 1 tbsp finely chopped green onion

Directions:

1. Combine wheat berries, broth, salt, pepper, garlic and oil in a saucepan and bring to a boil.
2. Cook, covered for approximately 45 minutes or until the wheat berries are still firm, but tender.
3. Drain the remaining cooking liquid. (This can be saved for a nutritious addition to a soup.)
4. Stir in cranberry sauce and heat, constantly stirring, until warm all the way through.
5. Top with green onions and serve.



Honey Roasted Root Vegetables

The addition of honey makes regular roasted vegetables just a little bit fancier.

Root veggies are in season and will be reasonably priced this time of year.

Ingredients

2-3 pounds of any combination of the following vegetables, cut into chunks:

- Carrots
- Parsnips
- Potatoes
- Rutabagas
- Turnips
- Onion

Sauce:

- 1/4 cup of honey
- 1/4 cup of olive oil
- 2 tbsp of seasoning salt
- 1 tbsp of parsley
- 2-3 cloves of finely minced garlic

Directions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, stir together the ingredients for the sauce with a wire whisk until well incorporated.
2. Immediately add the vegetable chunks and toss well.
3. Place the vegetables on a slightly greased cookie sheet and drizzle any remaining sauce over them.
4. Roast at 375 degrees F for 30-45 minutes, or until fork tender. You will want to stir the veggies a couple of times for even browning.

Southern Candied Sweet Potatoes

This is my mom's sweet potato recipe and requested by my kiddos at every family feast. The sweetness combines beautifully with turkey and stuffing.

- 6 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into thick slices
- ½ cup of butter
- 1 cup of white sugar
- 1 cup of brown sugar
- Salt to taste

Directions

1. Melt the butter in a large, deep skillet, then add the sweet potato slices.
2. Stir in the sugar and then cover the skillet.
3. Reduce the heat to the lowest setting and simmer for 45 minutes to an hour, until the sweet potatoes are candied.



Homemade Cranberry Sauce

Once you try homemade cranberry sauce, you'll never eat the gelatinous contents from a can again.

- 1 bag of cranberries
- 2 tbsp of lemon juice
- 1 cup of sugar
- 1 dash of salt (optional)

Directions:

1. Wash cranberries under running water.
2. Place all of the ingredients in a saucepan.
3. Turn the heat on low, stirring occasionally.
4. The cranberries will begin to pop open, and the sugar will dissolve.
5. Cook for about 10 minutes or until the sauce is the desired texture. (We like ours to be a little bit chunkier.)



Spiced Pumpkin Pie

We like this pie filling in a graham cracker crust.

Ingredients

- 2 cups of fresh pumpkin puree
- 1 cup of sweetened condensed milk
- 3 tbsp of flour
- 1 tbsp of cinnamon powder.
- 1 tsp of powdered ginger
- 1 tsp of vanilla extract
- 3/4 tsp of nutmeg
- 3/4 tsp of allspice
- 1/2 tsp of clove
- dash of salt
- Pie shell of choice (graham cracker crust is delicious with this filling)

Directions

1. In a large bowl, stir vanilla extract into condensed milk.
2. Whisk flour into the vanilla and milk until it is well combined.
3. Stir in pumpkin puree and spices.
4. Pour this mixture into your pie shell.
5. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour or until the filling is firm. You may need to cover the edges of your pie crust with foil.

Allow the pie to cool for at least one hour before slicing it. Some people prefer to chill it for several hours in the refrigerator before serving. Top with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.

Waste Not, Want Not

After the holidays, there are all sorts of remnants of the festivities that can be re-used, recycled, repurposed and preserved. Carry on the frugality by not letting these things go to waste.

Think about all of the things you were able to re-use this year. When you finish opening presents, see what you can save for next year to carry on the frugal traditions.

Aside from these types of goods, lots of leftovers can be preserved to add to your pantry.

Pad Your Pantry with Leftovers

One of the best things about holidays is getting together with family and having a huge feast. One of the worst things about the holidays is that you probably spent close to a week's grocery money on that huge feast. If you are of the frugal mindset or on a tight budget, it can be overwhelming to spend all that money for just one meal.

So now, your refrigerator is stuffed to the point that you have to lean against the door to close it and you never want to see another bite of turkey, ham, or roast beef again, let alone stuffing or green beans.

So what is a thrifty person do with all of that delicious bounty?

Preserve it!

Nearly all of your post-Christmas goodies can be put away for future use, adding to your stockpile. Don't let anything go to waste. Many people wait too long to preserve the food and end up having to throw most of it in the trash. It's important to get on this right away.

Freezing

Nearly all leftovers can be successfully frozen and used in other meals. (For best results, use a vacuum sealing system.)

Don't be deterred if your veggies are in a sauce or highly seasoned. When an item is not particularly appetizing in its original form, soups and casseroles made from combined freezer contents can be delicious. Check out this article about [The Fine and Frugal Art of Repurposing Leftovers](#) for more ideas.

- Freeze vegetables in cheese sauce to be used later in a pureed soup. Cheesy cauliflower and cheesy broccoli soup are big hits in our household. Simply thaw the veggies in cheese sauce and add to some white potatoes boiled in water. Thin the mixture down as desired with milk and serve piping hot.
- Freeze chopped meat mixed with gravy as the basis for a future speedy stew. If you want, you can also add cooked carrots and roasted potatoes to the mixture.
- Freeze leftover dinner rolls. You can reheat them as needed to use as rolls or you can dice them finely and freeze them for use in stuffing or as breadcrumbs.
- Freeze desserts in individual servings for brown bag treats. They'll be thawed out and delicious by lunch time.
- Freeze single servings of casseroles, lasagnas, etc. You'll have the best lunches in the office!

Dehydrating

Another way to preserve your leftovers is by dehydrating them. Whether you have a commercial dehydrator or you use your oven on a low setting, you can fill many jars with home-dried holiday leftovers.

Dehydrated foods have several great benefits to your stockpile. First, they require no refrigeration and can happily reside in a jar in a cool dark place for several months. Second, they don't require lengthy cooking time to prepare when it's time to use them - boiling water is all it takes. And finally, because the removal of moisture causes the food to shrink, the reduced size means that you can store a lot more food in a lot less space.

If you don't have a dehydrator, you can use a low heat in your oven, with the door slightly cracked to allow moisture to escape. If you're new to dehydrating, you can find detailed instructions [HERE](#).

- Dehydrate the remainder of your veggie tray. I find that veggies dehydrate very nicely when they are coarsely grated with the biggest holes in the cheese grater. Be sure and squeeze the excess moisture out with a paper towel to cut down on the drying time.
- Dehydrate leftover turkey or ham to be added to casseroles and soups.
- Leftover fruit can be pureed and then dehydrated into homemade fruit roll-ups.
- Dehydrate mashed potatoes, then run them through the blender for instant potato flakes. You can use these to thicken soups or gravies naturally.
- Dehydrate leftover stuffing, then rehydrate ("Stovetop Stuffing"-style) with broth when it's time to serve it.

Canning

Everyone who reads my blog knows that canning is my favorite way to preserve food. Most of these foods require [pressure canning](#) to be safely preserved. I've included some links to specific instructions.

Can Ham Leftovers and Broth

In a totally different stratosphere from Spam, the cans of flaked ham and the big pear-shaped cans of ham that you get from the grocery store is home-canned ham.

At Christmas, we often get a spiral-cut, naturally cured ham. They're pricey but very delicious. We pick away at it for a few days and then it's time to preserve what's left.

To get our money's worth from the expensive piece of meat, I make broth and can the meat, starting with the rather motley looking leftover piece of ham on the bone.

Directions:

1. Using a sharp knife remove as much ham as possible from the bone.
2. Place the pieces into [sanitized jars](#).
3. The fattier pieces that you won't want to eat can be put aside for broth.
4. Fill pint jars to the top with ham pieces. See the next recipe to learn how to make home-canned pork and beans with the rest of the ham.
5. If you reserved the original cooking liquid, heat it up and ladle it over the ham in the pint jars, leaving 1 inch of headspace. If you don't have the cooking liquid, you can use water or chicken broth for this.
6. Wipe the lip of the jar with a cloth dipped in vinegar and lid the jars.
7. [Pressure can](#) for 90 minutes for quarts at 10 PSI, [adjusting for altitude](#).
Process pints for 75 minutes.

Meanwhile, place the rest of the ham bone and the less than appetizing bits of meat in a large stockpot. Cover with water to make broth. You can simmer this all day.

Process the broth in a [pressure canner](#) for 90 minutes for quarts at 10 PSI, [adjusting for altitude](#). Process pints for 75 minutes.

How to use home-canned ham and broth:

- The flavor of the ham becomes much more intense as it sits in the jar. Be careful about adding salt when you open the jar and add the ham to another food you are preparing.
- The ham and beans make a good base for pork and beans in barbecue sauce or for a bean soup (just add to broth).
- The ham pieces can be sautéed and added to scrambled eggs or in place of bacon to top baked potatoes or soup.
- The ham and broth can be used to make red-eye gravy.
- The ham pieces can also be used in casseroles and scalloped potatoes.
- The broth is a delicious base for soups, cooking rice or wheat berries, or for cooking beans or other legumes.



Can Homemade Pork and Beans

Beans are a pantry staple, but they take a long time to cook!

For this reason, I always have some jars of home canned beans on my shelves. I make them a few different ways, but my two favorites are Basic Pork and Beans and Boston Baked Beans. You can use whatever beans you have on hand for this. Our household favorites are navy beans, white kidney beans, and pinto beans. Sometimes I mix a few different kinds. I have also had good results with canning black-eyed peas and black beans - just follow the instructions for Basic Pork and Beans. And finally, if you need to, feel free to leave out the meat. Your end result will not be as flavorful, but some have religious restrictions or follow a vegetarian diet. Just skip the addition of the meat and carry on with the rest of the instructions.

Once you taste these beans, you'll see why I go the extra mile to make them!

NOTE: I tried this once without pre-soaking the beans, and the results were poor. The beans had to be further cooked in liquid when I opened the jar. They soaked up all the liquid and were not fully cooked. This was resolved by two different methods: adding them to soup and letting them cook for another hour or two when I opened the jar, and making oven-baked beans.

Basic Pork and Beans

After the canning recipe, read on for some variations on the basic recipe. This recipe has worked on any bean I've tried it with, including pinto, navy, black, red kidney, white kidney, chick peas (garbanzos), and black-eyed peas. Adjust the meat you add according to what will blend nicely with your bean of choice, as well as how you intend to use the beans in the future.

Ingredients

- 3 pounds of dried beans
- 1-2 pounds of ham, salt pork or bacon
- salt as needed

- 6 small onions, cut in half
- 12 bay leaves
- water or broth as needed

Directions

1. Rinse and sort dried beans, then soak them in hot water for at least 2 hours. Overnight is better if you have time.
2. Discard the soaking water, then bring to a boil in fresh water or broth.
3. Drain the beans again, this time reserving the cooking water.
4. Distribute the pork evenly across [sanitized pint jars](#).
5. Top the meat with soaked beans, filling each jar no more than 2/3 full.
6. Add to each jar a pinch of salt, 2 bay leaves, and onion.
7. In the bean pot, bring 6 cups of the reserved liquid (topping up with water to get the proper amount if necessary) to a boil.
8. Ladle the hot liquid over the beans, leaving 1-1/2 inches of headspace. The beans must be totally covered with liquid, and there must be room for them to expand.
9. Lid the jars and process in a [pressure canner](#) for 75 minutes for pints, 90 minutes for quarts, at 10 pounds of pressure, [adjusting for altitude](#).

Mexican Variation: Use black beans or pinto beans. Instead of the bay leaf, add 1/4 tsp each of garlic powder, onion powder, and chili powder, plus 1/8 tsp of cumin, to each jar. Add 1 can of tomato paste to the boiling liquid you are going to pour over the beans. These are yummy popped right into a tortilla for bean burritos or heated and mashed slightly to make "refried beans".

BBQ Beans: Use any type of beans. Replace half of the boiling liquid with tomato juice and add 1 tsp of liquid smoke, 1 Tbsp of dry mustard powder and 1 tbsp of white vinegar. Top the contents of each jar with a tbsp of brown or Muscovado sugar

Boston Baked Beans

These beans are tangy and delicious right out of the jar. The liquid is the classic "Boston Baked Beans" sauce containing no tomato product. It thickens up beautifully during the canning process. We often add these beans to speed up a batch of homemade chili. The usual bean for this recipe is the navy bean, but I've also made it with pinto beans with excellent results.

Ingredients

- 3 pounds of dried beans
- 1 pound of bacon, salt pork, or ham
- 6 tbsp dark molasses
- 2 tbsp of white vinegar
- 2 tbsp of onion powder
- 1 tbsp of salt
- 2 tsp of dry mustard
- ½ tsp of powdered cloves

Directions:

1. Rinse and sort dried beans, then soak them in hot water for up to 2 hours. Overnight is even better.
2. Discard the soaking water, then bring to a boil in fresh water.
3. Drain the beans again, this time reserving the cooking water.
4. Distribute the meat evenly across [sanitized pint jars](#).
5. Top the bacon with soaked beans, filling each jar no more than 2/3 full.
6. In the bean pot, bring 6 cups of the reserved liquid (topping up with water to get to the 3 cups if necessary) to a boil. Stir in the rest of the ingredients, simmering until they are well combined.
7. Ladle the hot molasses mixture over the beans and bacon, leaving one inch of headspace - see the photo to the left. The beans must be totally covered with liquid, and there must be room for them to expand.
Lid the jars and process in a [pressure canner](#) for 75 minutes for pints, 90 minutes for quarts, at 10 pounds of pressure, [adjusting for altitude](#).

Can Your Leftover Turkey and Broth

Get the most bang for your turkey bucks by using every last bit of your bird. Instead of eating turkey until you can't stand the thought of more poultry, break out the pressure canner and put it away! You can put the folks at Campbells Soup to shame by making a delicious soup base that just needs the addition of rice or noodles at serving time. The best part is, if your family falls victim to a cold or flu, you have homemade turkey soup at hand in little more time than it takes to open one of those ubiquitous red and white cans filled with sodium, MSG, and other nasty chemicals.

After a few meals of roast turkey, remove most of the meat from the bones and place it in the refrigerator. You'll be left with a rather desolate-looking carcass. Put that in your crockpot along with the reserved neck and giblets (if you didn't use those for gravy). Add some veggies from the holiday snack tray - carrots, peppers, and celery are great additions! Add a couple of tablespoons of salt, a head of garlic and 4-6 onions. Note: there's no need to peel the garlic and onions as long as they are organic - just wash them well. Fill the crockpot with water and add your favorite spices (not sage - it tastes terrible when canned). I used whole peppercorns, salt, oregano and bay leaves.



Put the crockpot on low for 12-14 hours and let it simmer undisturbed overnight. Zzzzzz.....

The next day, strain the contents of the crockpot into a large container - I use a big soup pot and a metal colander. After allowing the bones to cool, remove any meat that you would like to add to your soup. I always give our dog a big treat - a bowl of turkey with gristle, fat, and skin. (She's a little on the skinny side, so I think that the occasional fat intake is good for her.) She also likes the mushy carrots.

Take all of the meat that you put in the refrigerator the night before and cut it into bite-sized pieces. I like a mixture of light meat and dark meat for this purpose. Also, cut up the meat you removed from the crockpot.

Place approximately 1 cup of turkey in each of your [sanitized jars](#). (I ended up with about a cup and a half in each jar.) Add 1-2 cloves of garlic to the jars.

You will have a rich, dark, beautiful stock from the overnight crockpot project. Ladle this into the jars over your cut-up turkey and garlic. Leave 1 inch of headspace at the top of the jars. If you run out of broth, top it up with water - don't worry - your broth will still be very flavorful.

Wipe the lip of your jars with a cloth dipped in white vinegar. Place the lids on and process them in your [pressure canner](#) for 90 minutes at 10 pounds of pressure, [adjusting for altitude](#).

Your result will be a deep golden, rich, meaty soup. This is an excellent base for turkey and dumplings, as well as any type of turkey soup.

Can Your Cranberry Sauce

If you have leftover cranberry sauce, you may can it for future use. (In our house, I actually make a triple batch when I make cranberry sauce, just so I can put some up for later.) I like to use teeny little half pint jam jars for this.

1. Heat the cranberry sauce to a simmer on the stovetop.
2. Ladle the sauce into [sanitized jars](#), leaving 1/4 inch of headspace.
3. Wipe the rims of the jars, then place the lid on them.
4. [Process in a water bath](#) canner for 15 minutes, [adjusting for altitude](#).



Can Thanksgiving Leftover Soup

Round up whatever veggies that you have left over from Thanksgiving. Don't worry if they have some butter and seasonings on them - it will all add to the rich flavor of your soup. However, if they are in a cream or cheese sauce, you need to rinse that off before canning.

My soup contains carrots that were cooked in honey, green beans with some butter, some diced sweet potatoes, and corn with butter. Use whatever you have. Don't be shy about raiding your veggie tray either: chop your crudites into bite-sized pieces and add them raw to your jars - they'll cook beautifully during the canning process.

1. Add one cup of your vegetable mixture to each [sanitized quart jar](#). If you want, throw in some peas and diced potatoes too.
2. Add 1 cup of chopped turkey to each jar (dark meat is perfect for this!).
3. Season with a clove of garlic and 1-2 tablespoons of chopped onion in each jar. Because the vegetables were already salted, I did not add any additional salt to my soup. If you have it on hand, you can also add some carrots and celery.
4. Top your veggies and turkey with one cup of your delicious stock that you made above. Then fill it the rest of the way with water. The flavors will blend - don't worry!
5. Wipe the lip of your jars with a cloth dipped in white vinegar and then place the lids on.
6. Process the soup in your [pressure canner](#) for 90 minutes at 10 pounds of pressure, [adjusting for altitude](#).

Variation: If you want a different type of soup, add 2 tbsp of tomato paste to each jar and season with some Italian spices like basil and oregano.

At serving time, you can add some cooked rice, barley, or pasta to your soup.

Merry Christmas

Dear Friends:

Some of you are reading this book because you want to cut ties with the rabid consumerism. You want to get back to the beauty, peace, and simplicity that the holidays were all about before corporate America hijacked Christmas.

Others are reading it because they've found themselves in a personal economic crisis.

If you are going through a difficult time financially this year, I just want you to know, I've been there too.

I've been really, really broke, and that is the reason that I'll probably remain frugal for the rest of my life.

I know how devastating it is to look at the little faces of your children and realize that there is absolutely no way you'll be able to grant their Christmas wishes. Heck, you may be wondering how to keep the electricity on over Christmas.

I just want you to know that things *will* get better. You'll find a way to make it work. You just have to hang in there while you make it happen. You *will* find a way. It took a lot of time and hard work for me to get out of the horrible poverty that we were living in, but I did it, and I know that you can too.

But for now, it's Christmas time.

Use the tips in this book to make your Christmas as magical as possible. You may find that using your imagination and focusing on traditions makes it far better than a store-bought Christmas ever could be.

Merry Christmas and lots of love, from my family to yours.

Daisy Luther