



Now that you survived "Black Friday," you may be ready for some ideas about how to get through the holidays without spending so much money. Many people wrongly believe that the more expensive the gift, the more meaningful the message behind it. I disagree. In a time when company downsizing is standard and when college tuition and health care prices are escalating, it's important for families to search for ways to build lots of meaning into the approaching holiday season without going into debt.

First of all, extend the Thanksgiving holiday. Each day for the next week, tell other family members something that you are thankful for. Or play Alphabet Thanks. Going around the table saying what you're thankful for is a great tradition, but sometimes people are stumped. To make it more of a game, go around the table, starting with the letter "A" and ending with "Z." As each person takes a turn, he should mention something that begins with the next letter in the alphabet.

I also encourage regular family walks. After dinner walks or evening strolls are great. My husband's family has established a tradition of walking through the "old neighborhood" for as much as an hour after the big family meal. This is a great way for the family newcomers to learn more about childhood stories. It's also a time for children to hear their parents talking about their growing-up years. (Not to mention the fact that it's great for your health!) You may enjoy asking a person to close their eyes and then leading them to a beautiful sight. Line them up with what you want them to see, then give the

"Okay, open!" command. What a neat way to share the magic and beauty of the winter season. Be sure to guide carefully and slowly.

Another way to build meaning into your celebrations without much cost is to use your Christmas tree to display reminders of special times together. Dried flowers from a high school dance, bride and groom cake top from your wedding, seashells from the summer's vacation, postcards that Dad sent you when he was out of town on business, dried peppers, soybean pods or other reminders of the crops you've raised this year can all be decorations on the tree. Make sure each person in your family (pets included) have one symbolic ornament on the tree representing them. Tell the stories behind the decorations.

Take time to sit in candle/fire light and listen to the quiet.

A priceless gift that you can offer is that of your family tree. This fits in wonderfully with the meaning of Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Christmas. Collect pictures, make charts or write narratives of your family tree and give these as gifts to your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Don't think that you have to tell the whole story in one gift. Choose one era of your life, one relative, or one time of year to talk about. Memories and family heritage are treasures that money cannot buy.

In our commercialized society, gift-giving can become ridiculous. Set a different standard for your family. Purchase gifts with special meaning related to your ethnic, cultural, or family heritage. Or give gifts that you've made or that

require your time or talent. Consider asking each person to offer at least one homemade, personally created gift. This might be a child's artwork, a poetic reading, a loaf of nutbread, a computer card, or finally scrubbed whitewall tires. What could you give?

As a family, dig through your closets for old toys. Spruce them up. Wash plastic dolls, glue game pieces, sew new eyes on the stuffed animal. Then give these transformed toys to needy children in your community. By giving to others, you relive the messages of the holidays—"good will to all people," "peace on earth," "miracles are possible," "you can make a difference."

Finally, ask each family member to complete the sentence, "What I want from you that you can't buy..." then create ways to give these gifts instead of spending money. Here are some things that may be mentioned: play a game with them, read to them, let them go to the pet store and play with the puppies, stay up really late, wear your sweater to school, have your hair brushed, have the pot and pan cupboard straightened, have your back scratched. This is an excellent alternative for couples who don't want to or can't afford to spend money on each other but still want to express their care for one another.

A variation of this "gift-giving"

is to give a gift in fantasy. Write a card or find a picture that tells the recipient, "If I could give you anything I wanted to, I would give you..."

After the fact, discuss with other family members what were the best things that happened during the holidays and what things weren't worth the effort. Keep a list of these things and refer to them when you plan next year's schedule.

In a season when time is already scarce, it makes a lot of sense to take a few minutes to pause and plan ways to bring meaning back into the celebrations without breaking the bank! Happy holidays.

Holiday Buffet Ideas

HATFIELD (Montgomery Co.) — Along with the excitement of the holidays comes the desire to entertain family and friends — and the stress that accompanies party planning. According to a recent survey of 1,000 people by the Pork Information Bureau of the National Pork Producers Council, most Americans plan to entertain for the holidays, but many have found a low-stress approach — the buffet.

Of the 52 percent of those polled who said that entertaining will be part of their holiday season, 34 percent said they plan to entertain with a buffet-style meal. "People want to put their best foot forward during the holidays, but without spending an evening shackled to the stove while guests enjoy the party," says Robin Kline, a registered dietician and director of the Pork Information Bureau. "Buffets are perfect because they work for any group and allow the host or hostess to enjoy the party."

According to Kline, the secret to successful holiday entertaining is preparing meals that allow the host or hostess to enjoy good food

and good friends without fussing in the kitchen. Rusty Ryan, Hatfield Quality Meats marketing manager, agrees. "Easy-to-prepare foods are essential to a successful holiday buffet, but they don't have to look or taste simple," he notes.

This year, for example, Hatfield Quality Meats is offering Family Classic hams, which are pre-sliced, pre-glazed and fruited. Ryan explains, "Our customers want to serve great, gourmet-tasting hams that look beautiful on the holiday buffet table, but that don't take a lot of trouble to prepare. Hatfield's fully-cooked, pre-sliced Family Classic Ham, which has a honey glaze and pineapple and cherry garnish, needs only to be put directly on the buffet table — heated or cold."

And the delicious, attractive and convenient aspects of the holiday buffet needn't end with the ham. Following are three top tips for your holiday buffet from Hatfield Quality Meats:

Avoid the Maddening Holiday Rush — plan your buffet in advance, making a detailed shop-

ping list as you go. Buy and begin preparing food several days in advance. Set up the buffet table the day before the party.

Less is More — plan easy-to-prepare, easy-to-serve and easy-to-eat foods. Make it simple for guests to take and eat food from the buffet without awkwardness or messiness. Begin with an entree like pre-sliced ham, and follow through with finger foods, bite-size pieces of cheese, casseroles, stews and other simple items.

Map Out Your Buffet — plan your buffet so it is a convenient and logical as possible. Put plates and your main dish first, followed by side dishes and salads, and, finally, silverware and napkins. Drinks and dessert may be served in a separate room or from a separate table. Place buffet items towards the center of the table, so guests can put down their plates to serve themselves along the way.

For more information on holiday hams or buffets, contact Tim Clemens, Hatfield Quality Meats Consumer Affairs Manager at (800) 523-5291 x8248.



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