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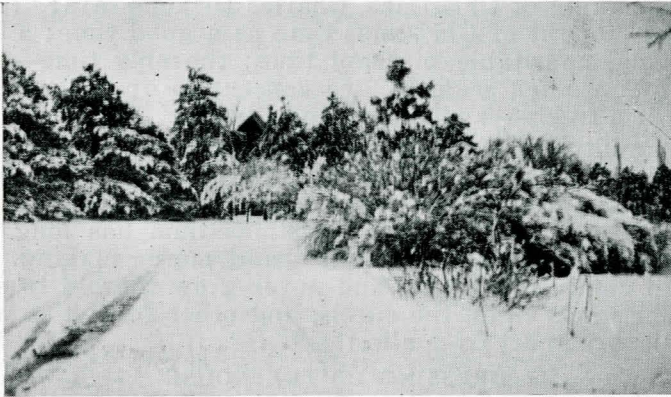
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Extension Circular 5595

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## Spending the Holidays at Home



The University of Nebraska Agricultural College Extension Service  
and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating  
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

## Spending the Holidays at Home

BY LEONA S. DAVIS

Christmas with its activities and pleasures is the outstanding time of the year. It is the one holiday which has significance enough so that its original purpose has never been forgotten thru the twenty centuries of its observance. Christmas has survived because it is the birthday of an ideal which is simple enough to be understood by everyone. The Christmas spirit lives on from year to year because it is a season of good fellowship, good will and good deeds.

In speaking of Christmas, Charles Dickens says: "I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable pleasant time; the only time—when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely—and I say, 'God Bless It.'"

The multitude of traditions and customs which have been passed on to us from one generation to another has developed this spirit of Christmas and endeared the season to the hearts of all people. Christmas time has long been recognized as one of joyousness and merry making. We are all children at heart and never grow too old to enjoy the Christmas trees, the carols, and other festivities which set this day apart from all others.

### DRESSING UP THE HOUSE

Closely identified with the observance of Christmas is the custom of using Christmas greens. The live freshness of evergreens suggest and symbolize ever-lasting life. It is said that the Christmas tree custom originated in Germany by Martin Luther. The story goes that he was walking home on a cold Christmas evening and was especially impressed with the beauty of the clear winter sky dotted with stars which lighted his way thru a pine wood. Luther was so deeply moved that he cut an evergreen tree, took it home, and lighted it with candles to picture to his children the wonder of the starry night and the spiritual lesson implied. The Christmas tree custom has survived the test of time and is one used today to symbolize that same Christmas spirit which Luther felt.

In early English times, it was the custom for the whole family to go to the woods to choose the Christmas tree, the Yule log, the greens and the garlands for house decorations. Fortunate is the family of today that can go forth

as a happy group to personally select and bring in their own Christmas tree.

#### KEEP THE TREE FRESH

Everyone who has had a Christmas tree knows how disappointing it is to watch the tree dry and the needles fall soon after the tree is set up. While there is no satisfactory method for keeping a Christmas tree fresh, there are some precautions which will help make the tree last longer. In selecting a tree select one which has life and luster. Some trees offered for sale have been cut for a long time and may be dry.

To keep a tree fresh for a longer time, carefully cut off several inches from the base of its stem taking care that the pores of the wood will not be clogged. The tree then may be set in a bucket of water, outdoors or in a cool room a few days before it is set up. If possible, set the tree in water during the entire holiday season. A home-made rack can be constructed which holds a small bucket or small tub. Those who prefer a permanent tree may grow one in the yard to use every year.

#### LET THE CHILDREN HELP DECORATE

The making of the Christmas tree decorations will provide much wholesome entertainment for the children of the family. How selfish are the older members of the family who want to do all of the decorating and surprise the younger children on Christmas morning. Much of the great enjoyment of the holiday season comes from anticipation and helping to plan. It robs the children of pleasure if they are deprived of the privilege of helping to decorate the tree.

Long strings of cranberries and popcorn strung alternately make attractive trimmings. Soda straws cut in various lengths and strung with discs of colored paper are fun to get ready. More ornate decorations may be made by cutting out cardboard shapes and covering them with aluminum foil or silver paper and attaching them to the tree with fine wires.

Popcorn may be strung on fine wire and shaped into bells, crescents, half moons, and other interesting forms. Cotton batting and chains made from colored paper are also useful in making the tree attractive. Colored paper cornucopias may be made and hung on the tree as containers for Christmas candies or popcorn.

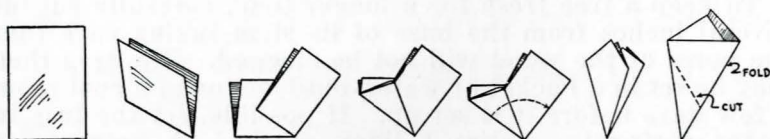
To make the popcorn decorations unusual, interesting effects can be secured by tinting the corn with water colors. English walnut shells which have been carefully pried apart



and the nuts removed may be glued together with a colored cord inserted between halves. The shells may then be painted with water colors and gilded. Pine cones when gilded also make lovely ornaments.

#### MAKE A STAR FOR THE TOP

To make a decorative ornament for the top of the Christmas tree, cut from medium weight cardboard a large five pointed star about seven inches in diameter. Cut twenty small five pointed stars about one and one-half inches across. Cover all stars with silver paper.



How to cut a five pointed star

Using fine wire, cut twenty pieces each, twelve inches long, and cover with crepe paper. Wind the covered wires around a lead pencil to make spirals. Fasten a small star on one end of each spiral. On each of four points of the large star fasten five of the smaller stars. The fifth point of the large star is mounted upright on a wire heavy enough to support it, and attached to the top of the Christmas tree.

#### ELIMINATE FIRE HAZARDS

In order to eliminate fire hazards, make believe candles may be made from clothes pins. Cut a square of stiff colored paper. Apply a small amount of glue on the clothes pin. Wind tightly around the clothes pin and glue the free edge of the paper. Make a red or orange flame from paper and attach. Paint the prongs of the clothes pin dark green. The prongs will slip over the branches of the tree and hold the candle upright. Choice red apples tied to the tree also make attractive decorations.

#### HANG UP YOUR STOCKING

Many families have the happy custom of hanging up their stockings on Christmas Eve. This practice may be carried out with much ceremony and provide real merriment for all members of the family. A special sock made from white cotton flannel and decorated in red may be kept from year to year and brought forth on this annual occasion.

Part of the fun in getting ready for Christmas is getting the house ready and giving it a festive air. Decorations for the Christmas season are almost indispensable and with

a little ingenuity, some type of decoration is available to all. Evergreens lend themselves especially well for this and beautiful wreaths and garlands may be made even by young and inexperienced hands from branches of spruce, cedars and pines. Pine cones and red berries used with the evergreens add to their attractiveness. Coral berries (buckbrush), wild rose apples, and bittersweet if gathered when at their best and kept in a cool place, may be used to good advantage. These with pretty colored leaves and evergreens will serve to make any home cheery at Christmas time. What is more delightful during the holiday season than the fragrance of evergreens thruout the house?

When evergreens are not available for the making of wreaths, a satisfactory substitution may be made by making a holly wreath of paper.

In decorating the house the chief interest is that of the living room and dining table. Boughs hung by red ribbons in the windows or over the fireplace are attractive. If ribbon is too expensive, bows or knots may be carefully made from red crepe paper. In decorating the house, perhaps it is well to keep in mind that a few branches well placed are much more effective than elaborate and ornate decorations.

#### CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTIONS

*"Not what we give but what we share,  
For the gift without is bare."*

With the Christmas season near at hand attention is focused upon the question of gifts. Nothing helps quite as much in creating a happy season as getting into the right spirit regarding gifts. Perhaps of all Christmas customs the one regarding the exchange of gifts has been the most abused. Many people have inwardly rebelled at the spirit of rivalry and strife connected with elaborate formal gift exchange and are glad to get back to a less strenuous season with more real Christ spirit. With everyone counting the pennies more carefully than formerly, this year may mean fewer gifts selected with a greater personal interest in each one. Simple, inexpensive gifts well chosen are often more appreciated than elaborate gifts. A modest, home made gift truly expressing the good wishes of the giver may mean far more to the recipient than expensive gifts of former years. For after all, a gift should not be judged by its material value but by the spirit which prompted it.

In selecting or making a gift, it is well to keep these points in mind. Is the gift a useful one; is it appropriate;



and does it express one's personal regard? The following is a suggestive list of gifts which might be inexpensively made at home:

Aprons	Laundry bags
Braided rugs, mats	Luncheon sets
Card table covers	Padded coat hangers
Dress protectors	Pillow covers—applique,
Enameled food containers	patchwork, quilted
Finger towels	Quilted bath mats
Flower pots containing slips	Recipe files
of favorite house plants	Shoe cushions
Guest towels	Shoe bags, knitted
Handkerchief cases	Tea bags
Hot dish holders	Traveling kit

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR CHILDREN'S GIFTS

Aprons	Scrapbooks
Bean bags	Sock dolls
Bibs	Spool dolls
Doll buggies or cradle made	Stuffed toys (oil cloth)
from grape baskets	Toss board game
Inner tube toys	Wooden cut-out toys

#### CHRISTMAS FOOD SUGGESTIONS

The homemaker who has a keen interest in her kitchen and its activities and who has a desire to give something of herself will find many of her Christmas worries solved if she decides to give gifts from her kitchen this year. Tradition calls for plum pudding or fruit cake for the Christmas dinner and who would not be delighted to receive either of these or a jar or two of their favorite jelly from the well stocked shelves of a friend? Nothing makes a more personal gift than an individual jar of jelly or a box or basket of choice food products attractively wrapped. Too little emphasis has been placed on the joy which comes from receiving a gift of farm products at Christmas time. The following is a list of farm products and gifts from the kitchen which may offer suggestions.

Small containers of jellies, jams, preserves, marmalades, pickles, relishes.

Jars of mince meat, canned fruit, vegetables and meats.

Dressed fowls.

Homemade butter, cream, cottage cheese.

Basket of fresh eggs.

Small sacks of popcorn (to pop), dry beans, wheat, and nuts.

Home ground corn meal, cracked wheat.

Basket containing an entire meal from pantry including jars of canned products.

Homemade soap.

Honey.

Home-made cakes, pies, cookies, tarts, and puddings.

Christmas candies and candied fruit peel, popcorn balls.

## WRAPPING OF CHRISTMAS PACKAGES

Even after a gift has been carefully selected or made, there still remains the opportunity to give the gift an added personal touch thru its wrappings. It is a good plan to bring forth all of the boxes which have been saved thru-out the year, for boxed gifts are easier to wrap and may be more safely sent thru the mail. A gift neatly and cleverly wrapped is much more fun to open. Tissue paper either white or colored tied with colored ribbons, cords, or paper ribbons, and decorated with bright seals is always cheery. A sprig of holly, evergreen, mistletoe, or a cluster of pine cones tucked under the top ribbon helps to carry out the Christmas spirit.

Colored crepe paper makes good wrappings. Attractive color schemes may be worked out choosing a contrasting color of ribbon or cord. Brown wrapping paper when used with seals makes neat, cheery packages. Holiday scenes may be cut from decorative crepe paper or magazines and mounted on the wrapping. Cellophane wrappings give a festive air to the most ordinary package. Gift boxes are clever when covered with shapes cut from envelope linings.

Gifts which come from the kitchen may be cleverly packed in numerous ways. Enameled and decorated tin boxes, coffee cans, discarded cold cream jars, baking powder cans, may be used. Cottage cheese and ice cream cartons may be used for candies and puddings. Waxed paper helps to preserve the moisture of the cakes and cookies.

## HOLIDAY RECREATION

Of the seasons and holidays of the year and of all other occasions for music, Christmas sets most people to singing. It is then that the impulse to sing takes hold of almost every one. It offers a wonderful opportunity for home recreation for the family to gather around the lighted tree and to enjoy an evening of caroling. The National Recreation Association suggests this list of favorite carols:

Silent Night  
O Come All Ye Faithful  
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing  
O Little Town of Bethlehem  
Deck the Hall  
Here We Come A-Caroling  
It Came Upon the Midnight Clear  
Good King Wenceslas  
The First Nowell  
• God Rest You Merry Gentlemen.



This is also a good season of the year for story telling or a reading of the favorite Christmas story. Stories of this nature which the family might enjoy are:

*Bible*—New Testament, Stories of the Nativity

*Dickens*—Christmas Carol

*Scott*—Christmas in the Olden Time

*Washington Irving*—Sketch Book

*Kate Douglas Wiggin*—The Bird's Christmas Carol

*Van Dyke*—The Other Wise Man

On Christmas Eve it is fun to plan a program in which both old and young may participate in recitations, songs, and readings.

A Christmas game which the children will enjoy is "Choosing Christmas Presents". Players are seated in a circle around the tree. Each player in turn is permitted to choose the names of two or three presents, the choice being limited to the names of articles which begin with the same letters as the player's name. Thus, Janet Daniels might choose a jumping jack and a doll for her Christmas presents.

Word building is another interesting game. Select some word or group of words such as Christmas tree, St. Nicholas or Happy New Year, and see how many different words may be formed from these words using each letter but once in the new word.

A good old fashioned taffy pull may solve the problem when the young folk of the neighborhood gather together for an evening of fun.

*"Let's dance and sing, and make good cheer,  
For Christmas comes but once a year."*