

HOLIDAY

GIFT GUIDE



The Animal Lover

People everywhere love their pets, and some people take it to an extreme. It's easy to find someone on your Christmas shopping list who loves to pamper their pooches or cuddle their cats.

When shopping for animal lovers, remember you're shopping for their pet, too. You should look for gifts that will make both the pet and the owner happy when they open it.

A PAMPERED PET

Most animal lovers treat their pets like royalty, and you should look for gifts that do the same.

One area to consider is the place they sleep at night. High-end doghouses or pet beds can be a great way to make them feel more cozy. You can also look for grooming products that will give them a spa-like experience — including a pleasant scent that should make the owner happy.

Finally, think about getting some bling. Sequined cat collars, decorated leashes and even cute clothing and pet accessories can add some sparkle to an animal's style.

SEAT COVERS

Many pet lovers won't go anywhere unless Fido tags along. For people who frequently travel with their pets — especially bigger animals — it makes sense to protect their car while transporting them.

Seat covers can be a good option. Some covers are designed specifically for pets, which means they can be easily removed and cleaned. They're also designed to protect seats from any pet stains that ordinary seat covers couldn't stop.

PHOTO GIFTS

Just like human members of the family, pets can be remembered and celebrated with photos.

Look for gifts that would look great on the mantle. Pet-related photo frames, along with customized photo gifts such as blankets and mugs, can be good options for people who can't get enough of their pets.

You could also consider talking to a local professional photographer to see

if they offer pet photography as an option. A photo package could be a the perfect present for an owner who wants to remember their animals forever.

MICROCHIPPING

Finally, you can get peace of mind by paying to have pets microchipped in case they're ever lost.

Pets that are stolen or wander from home can be lost forever. New tech-

nology can help find them, though, if they end up at a shelter or veterinarian's office where their microchip is scanned. The owner's information can then be pulled up on a computer so the pet can be reunited with them.

Most vet offices offer microchipping as a service. They will charge a one-time fee for the procedure, plus an ongoing fee that covers keeping the computer database updated. See if you can buy both the microchip and the ongoing service as a gift.



The Decorator

Decorators have a knack for making their world beautiful. They make it seem easy to transform the most boring house into a work of art that's worthy of being in magazines or on TV.

They can be hard to shop for, though, because they already have such a keen sense of style that makes most of us envious. If you know what they like, though — their favorite visual looks, their most admired artists and product lines — you can comfortably pick a gift that will satisfy even the pickiest home-decor diva.

WALL ART

This can be one of the riskiest gifts to give because everyone has their own definition of art, but it's also one of the most potentially rewarding if you pick carefully.

In general, you'll want to look for wall art that looks like it would be perfectly at home among the decorator's existing designs. If they have lots of modern abstract paintings on the wall, you obviously won't want to give them a picture of the French countryside.

Look for the best quality art you can find. Local artists can be a great source of original artwork that will have your area's hometown flair, and high-quality prints can be a good option if tastefully selected and beautifully framed.

POTTERY

Pottery and custom glassware can be another fun option. Decorator vases and hand-blown art glass can add color and warmth to a room.

You'll want to find pieces that look sturdy and handmade, even if they come from a factory. Ideally, you should give a custom piece that is truly one-of-a-kind, with slight variations in each and every piece produced.

The color, shape and glazing quality should all come together for a unique, upscale look.

THE UNUSUAL

Good decorators don't just copy what they see in pictures and on TV shows. They have their own, personal sense of style they use to create a gorgeous look that's all their own.

That means you might have to look for unusual or antique items to surprise them.

Just like with wall art, you should look for accessories that would look perfectly at home in their existing decor. Antique shops and flea markets can be great places to shop for those quirky, impossible-to-duplicate items that decorators go wild for.



The Foodie

For some people, food is an obsession. These people — commonly called foodies — don't just enjoy a nice meal. They anticipate it, savor it, study it and talk about it with friends.

If you know people who take their love of fine food to an extreme, here are some ideas for finding them the perfect Christmas gift.

UPSCALE UTENSILS

People who love food enjoy eating out, but they also typically enjoy experimenting with food and cooking in their own kitchen as well.

Look for high-end utensils to make a big impact under the Christmas tree. Think of very nice, upscale versions of ordinary household cooking equipment such as whisks, bowls, utensils and knives. A bowl might seem boring to you, but a solid copper bowl can be heaven for whipping up the ideal merengue for a perfectionist.

TASTING EXPERIENCES

Look for food-related gifts that have to be experienced, not just items for them to open out of a box.

Gift certificates to trendy, high-end restaurants can be a great option. Look for restaurant reviews in the newspaper or online, and try to get them a seat at the most sought-after establishment in town.

You can also consider sending them to cooking school. Many chef training programs offer courses that are ideal for serious food.

EXOTIC INGREDIENTS

Steak and potatoes might be perfectly fine for some people, but foodies will want something a bit more exciting.

Look in your grocery store for specialty foods that are imported from exotic countries. You may be able to find a collection of spices for Indian cuisine, for example, that are packaged tastefully. The harder the ingredients are to find, the more a foodie will appreciate them.

You also might have to look at specific health food or other specialty grocers that offer unusual ingredients. Pay close attention to the expiration dates to make sure they will be useful well beyond Christmas.

HERB GARDEN

Finally, since freshness is so important to any type of cuisine, you can give a gift that will give food lovers the freshest flavor of all: an herb garden for their own home.

Serious gardeners might use a starter kit for the outdoors, but more often you'll find it's helpful to give a pre-made kit that's designed to be used either indoors in a windowsill or outdoors on the patio.

The best herb gardens will not only be useful for cooks, but they also will add a good-looking collection of greenery that can beautify the home.



The Gadget Lover

Some people are always on the cutting edge. From computers, cell phones and cameras to music players and TVs, gadget lovers can be some of the most difficult — and expensive — people to shop for.

Never fear. The holiday gift guide is here, and we've got some recommendations to fit any budget.

PORTABLE HARD DRIVE

Software, movies and music take up more hard drive space with each passing year. While many of us can remember when a gigabyte of storage seemed unfathomably large, today's computers store data on a much grander scale, often with multiple terabytes of storage space.

Even if a computer is new, it can run low on hard-drive space when users download a lot of movies or store a lot of data.

A portable hard drive is a convenient solution that just about any tech lover can enjoy. It lets people store huge amounts of information — often a terabyte or more — and take it with them wherever they go. They can also make great backup drives for important files.

CONTENT

Gadget lovers are very particular about what they buy. People who use Nikon cameras may scoff at Canon shooters, and vice versa. Android phone users might not consider any other options. And let's not even get started on the Mac vs. PC debate.

That's why gift cards can be a good idea for technology lovers. They let people buy exactly what they want — from the right brand to the right accessories.

In addition, gift cards that let people buy content, such as apps, music or movies, can be a good option. They can be used on a wide variety of devices, including phones, tablets or computers, and are available for Apple's iTunes or from other digital retailers, such as Amazon.com.

ROBOTIC HELPERS

What do you get for the gadget lover who has everything? A robot.

Today, robots have gone from imaginary creations in sci-fi movies to real-life, relatively affordable household helpers. You can get robotic devices that can help you clean your home, such as the Roomba for carpeted floors or the Mint for hard surfaces, and even find a robotic lawnmower to cut the grass.

Robotic floor cleaners range from around \$200 to \$600 and can be found in a wide variety of retailers and electronics stores.



The Gamer

Today's video games aren't just for kids. Serious gamers can come in all ages and can make their gaming hobby into a whole lifestyle.

Whether on exclusive platforms like the Sony Playstation, Microsoft Xbox or the Nintendo Wii, or on custom-built gaming PCs, here are some ideas for shopping for the most hardcore game lovers.

ADD-ONS

Video game systems have come a long way from the days of simple joysticks. Today you can buy all sorts of add-ons that make the gaming experience more immersive.

Extra controllers are always a plus, but if you really want to wow the gamer, take a closer look at what accessories are offered for their favorite gaming system. Different devices

can make the games more interactive and the simulators more realistic, taking their gaming experience to a whole new level.

SPEAKERS

While people who love video games will obsess over the most intricate graphics details and want the latest and greatest in 3D special effects, the sound in a video game is more often overlooked.

That's a mistake. Audio — especially rich, powerful, bass-filled audio — can play a big role in how enjoyable and realistic a game can be.

Consider giving a powerful home theater system to a person who uses

game consoles, and look for high-quality PC speakers for the computer gamers.

PORTABLE PLAYERS

Today's video games aren't limited to the home. Systems with powerful graphics and popular titles can fit in the palm of your hand.

Look for a portable version of their favorite video game system. It's important to keep in mind what their favorite specific game titles are, too, and look for a portable version that lets them enjoy their top games in a portable format. Each system offers a different lineup of games — some more thorough than others — so shop

carefully and get good advice from a local retailer.

GAME COMPUTER

Many of today's most popular video games won't run smoothly on any ordinary computer. They work best when the computer has been optimized for high speed and excellent graphics.

To thrill any gamer on your list, think about splurging on a brand-new computer. It's best to get a computer that's already customized specifically for gaming — including with an advanced graphics card and ample memory — so that it can run new games right out of the box.



The Health Nut

While many Americans are content to sit on the couch and watch “American Idol” re-runs on TV, there’s a group that has a much better idea: the health nuts among us.

If there’s someone in your life who gets excited about their latest workout routine and is always careful about what foods and vitamins they put in their body, here are some ideas for crossing them off your Christmas list:

WATER BOTTLES

No matter what kind of exercise people do, one thing is always required: hydration.

Water bottles may seem like a small gift, but they can make a big difference to a person who constantly finds themselves having to hand-wash a new bottle because they use them so often during workouts.

Look for aluminum or other types of metal bottles that are free of any harmful chemicals. If possible, find bottles that can be customized with a special design or saying that matches the health nut’s personality.

FITNESS GADGETS

There is no shortage of fitness-related gadgets designed for people who want to track and share their exercise routines.

Watches are one good example. While they used to be simple devices for telling time, there are plenty of high-tech wristwatches designed specifically for people who love to exercise. Not only are they durable enough for intense workouts, but they also have special functions for tracking distance run, calories burned or measuring your health metrics.

Pay close attention to the features list, because every device is different. Some are more trusted and reliable than others, so look online for reviews of the top products on the market.

HEADPHONES

A staple of the modern workout routine, headphones are a critical part of most people’s morning exercise. Whether hooked up to their phone or MP3 player, or plugged into a treadmill at the gym, the quality and comfort of a good set of headphones will be appreciated by any health nut.

There are lots of different styles, but in general you’ll want one that’s lightweight and designed for active use — not just sitting in a chair.

People can be picky about their favorite brands and styles of headphones. Some people love the tiny earbuds, for example, while others find them annoying. Try to feel the recipient out ahead of time to see what kind works best for them.

GYM TIME

Finally, a gym membership is the obvious gift for a health nut that doesn’t have one already.

Many gyms offer membership plans that can be given as gifts. It’s also ideal for fitting different size Christmas budgets, ranging from a few inexpensive day passes to a full-featured annual membership at an exclusive gym with a personal trainer.

There are plenty of options. Shop wisely, and you’ll help your favorite health nut get even healthier.



The Outdoorsman

Plenty of people like escaping to the great outdoors for hiking, camping, fishing or other natural adventures.

Shopping for the outdoorsman, though, can be harder than buying any knickknack that happens to come in camouflage. Here are some ideas that any outdoor lover could appreciate seeing under the Christmas tree.

KNIVES

The simplest but most important tool for most nature lovers is the knife.

Don't be fooled, though. Not all knives are the same. In fact, knives are designed to do all kinds of different jobs, so even people who have a whole collection of blades can still use a new one that accomplishes a different task.

You'll need to do some homework before you buy a knife to make sure you're not duplicating something the recipient already owns. One good buck knife can be enough to last a hunter a lifetime, but it might not be so good at, say, cleaning a fish or cutting a rope. Look for one that can help the outdoorsman do something better, which means getting a high-quality knife designed to do one specific thing very well.

BACKPACK

Most people already own a backpack, but is it a good one?

The same style backpacks that children use to carry their books isn't likely to last long in the harsh conditions of Mother Nature. A quality backpack made from long-lasting, lightweight materials with strong zippers and straps will stand up longer.

A high-end backpack will cost more than the cheap nylon ones on the school-supply aisle, but its better construction and smarter engineering will be appreciated in the woods someday.

AMMO

Outdoorsmen often love their guns, and what do guns need? Ammunition.

People who like to shoot are also very particular about the types of ammo they want, so you should ask them about it ahead of time. The brand, caliber, case, point style and powder load will all matter to gun owners, so be precise when buying..

SUNGLASSES

Spending time outdoors means dealing with the sunshine, and a good pair of polarized sunglasses can be a thoughtful gift for the outdoorsman.

Look for quality lenses, durability and perhaps camouflage frames.

WARMTH

Finally, considering how many people love to hunt, camp and hike even when it's freezing outside, look for any gifts that can help keep them warm.

Blankets, boots and hand warmers are all good choices that will actually be used on frigid nights. There are even some new options, like electronically warmed shoe inserts, that can harness technology to keep people comfortable.

