

Holiday Decorating



A Very COVID Christmas

This year has been one crazy thing after another. To lift people's spirits, some people have put up their Christmas decorations a little early to add some cheer to the neighborhood.

Heather Johnson is one person who decided that Christmas could come early this year.

"I couldn't stop thinking about how something so small like Christmas lights can lift people's spirits during such a difficult time," she told E! News. "It's something easy [and pretty] homes can do to display hope."

There's even a hashtag for the trend: #lightsforlife.

Brands got in on the trend, too. Anheuser-Busch turned on an elaborate display at their St. Louis headquarters.

"We've been inspired by Americans decorating their homes with holiday lights in the spirit of togetherness. We are proud to join in and turn the holiday lights on every night at our house," the company said in a statement. Hallmark also turned on the tap of Christmas movies, and some stations in the Midwest switched to Christmas music, The New York Times reported.

According to the BBC, the



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trend even crossed the pond. Houses in Europe are putting up lights, trees and the whole nine yards. It gets kids around the globe out of the house and doing something positive.

"The children look to us for how we respond to things like

this," said Emma Dickinson in England. "We don't have much control about what is going on outside of the house but we can control what is going on inside our house, so why not have some fun?"

Elisabeth Forsythe is a social worker in England who

was concerned about people's state of minds, particularly the elderly, who may already struggle with isolation.

"With the current climate, everyone is feeling down, stressed and anxious and I thought, 'What can I do to help cheer everyone up?'

There are a lot of elderly people in my community who are self-isolating and they might not have mobiles or the technology to connect with people," she said. "In the evenings, they can open the curtains and see the light and that sense of community."

Scents of the Season

The long, dark days of winter are the perfect time to break out the warm glow of candles. Keep reading for what scents to burn this year and how to keep yourself safe while staying cozy.

O, CHRISTMAS TREE

Christmas-tree scented candles are always popular this time of year. Magnify your real tree with festive scents from Yankee Candle (look for Balsam & Cedar), Williams Sonoma's Winter Forest, Threshold's Frasier Fur and Bath & Body Works' Fresh Balsam.

HARD CANDY CHRISTMAS

Make your home smell sweet without any of the work with these delicious smelling candles. If you love the warm scent of roasting nuts, go for Bee & Willow Home's Pistachio and Praline candle. Also look for Yankee Candle's Floral Candy and Christmas Eve.

JUST DESSERTS

If candy isn't your thing, there's a ton of toasty scents that'll have your house smelling like your favorite bakery in no time. Look for White Barn's Paris Café, with rich roasted coffee scents mixed with sugared brioche and



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vanilla. Also consider WoodWick candles' Oatmeal Cookie, Pumpkin Butter, and the Café Sweets Trilogy candle with vanilla, caramel and biscotti scents. WoodWick candles feature a special wick that pops and crackles as it burns, making for a cozy, homey feel.

WAX WARMERS

If you're not a fan of open flame, you can buy wax

warmers in your local home store and wax chunks in your favorite scents from most major candlemakers. Just be aware that you're trading the danger of an open flame for the danger of hot, melted wax. Both things should be kept on stable surfaces and out of the reach of children and pets.

CANDLE SAFETY

On average, 22 home candle fires are reported each

day, the National Fire Protection Association says. The two peak days for candle fires are Christmas and Christmas Eve. The group offers these tips for candle safety.

- Keep candles at least 12 inches from anything flammable.
- Blow out all the candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Avoid using candles in the bedroom and in other

places where people may fall asleep.

- Use sturdy candle holders that won't tip over easily.
- Put candle holders on a sturdy, uncluttered surface.
- Don't burn a candle all the way down. Put it out before it gets too close to the holder or the container.
- Never use a candle if there's oxygen in the home.
- Don't use candles during a power outage.

What's Old Is New Again

Vintage Christmas decorations are all the rage in the past few years. Jump on the nostalgia bandwagon in these creative ways.

FRAME OLD WRAPPING PAPER, POSTCARDS AND ADVERTISEMENTS

Look for vintage holiday paper goods at garage sales, thrift stores and online. Put them in fun and funky frames for a great vintage look on sideboards, in hallways or as part of a centerpiece. You can also string vintage cards with mini clothespins on twine for a charming rustic accent. Store your finds in a cold, dry, dark place when the holiday's over to keep them looking great.

ANTIQUe ORNAMENTS

While nostalgia is a huge driver for people looking for vintage Christmas ornaments, there's also a case to be made for the quality craftsmanship and materials of a previous age. Look for ornaments and decorations with a patina and materials and components that are glass instead of plastic. Older ornaments aren't going to be perfectly shiny and blown glass may not be perfectly shaped. Also look for a pontil mark, usually on the bottom of a glass ornament, where the ornament was broken off the glass-blowing pipe.

You can also look at the cap.



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Most older ornament caps — the part that holds the loop or hook on — are simple, not like the filigreed, ornamented caps we have today. The caps may also be stamped with the country of origin. It's fun to look for countries that don't exist anymore, like West Germany. Older metal caps may also show signs of oxidation or rust. Some ornaments from WWII-era America may also have paper caps because

of wartime metal shortages.

LIGHT IT UP

When you're looking for lights, it's best to stick to vintage-look lights instead of the real thing. Electrical wires are susceptible to wear and today's reproductions are much more energy efficient than their aged forebears. If you absolutely must have a vintage light-up piece, consider snipping the cord so it

doesn't get plugged in and become a hazard.

HANDMADE GOODS

While you're shopping, keep a sharp eye out for handmade treasures, especially stockings. Crocheted, knitted or hand-sewn stockings can be a great addition to a vintage Christmas collection. Look for fun embroidery and vintage prints. Remember that some fabrics don't age as well as

others. When not on display, store your vintage stockings in a cool, dry, dark place. If you need to wash them, do so on delicate and lay flat to dry.

Garlands are another popular vintage item that was often usually handmade. Look for glass garlands, sometimes with cellophane or silver tinsel. As it ages, silver tinsel can often take on a golden color that's gorgeous in your holiday decor.

Making Memories

This holiday season, get little hands involved in making their own ornaments for the tree using an old favorite recipe, salt dough.

MAKING SALT DOUGH

2 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup salt
1 cup cold water

1. Mix the flour and salt in a bowl and slowly add water a few tablespoons at a time until the dough is smooth and easy to handle. Knead the dough for 10 minutes and let rest for 20 minutes. Form the dough into the desired shapes and bake for 2 hours at 250 degrees. Allow to cool completely before handling. Don't forget to poke a hole to string the ornaments for hanging.

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR SALT DOUGH

Doughnuts: Cut circles using a shot glass or other tiny circle, then cut out the middle. Adorn with teeny salt dough sprinkles. Bake and paint your favorite delicious colors.

Christmas trees: Cover your tree with tiny trees using no more than a tree-shaped cookie cutter, some paint and some imagination. Use bits of mosaic glass for extra bling.

Handprints: With a little imagination, tiny handprints can become Santa (think of the thumb as the trail of his hat) or a troll doll (have the fingers be the wild hair). Or keep it simple with a mitten



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and pressing a bitty hand into it. Trim with faux fur.

Monogram it: Use cookie cutters to make salt dough into your family's initials.

Stars: Shine bright with a simple star. Make it your own by cutting out the center, using ombre paint, or using a

simple dipped paint. Or all three. Go big or go home.

Gingerbread everywhere: Make legions of gingerbread men and women march all around your holiday decorations. For a neat garlanded look, punch two holes in the chest to run twine through.

Your own twist: Make two thin rolls of dough and twist them into candy canes. Or three and braid it. Instead of using a hole, wrap a ribbon around the crook to hang it.

MAKE IT SHINE

If the matte look of plain salt

dough isn't your thing, you can glitter it up and cover with a shiny decoupage glue.

After paint and before decoupage is also when you want to add any embellishments to your design, like sequins, microbeads and metallics.

No Mantel, No Problem

If you don't have a chimney to hang stockings from with care, don't worry. There are lots of creative and inventive ways to can hang your stockings.

You just need to make sure of a couple of things first. One is that your chosen spot for hanging is away from candles, heaters and any other open flame and two that it's sturdy enough to support your stockings, especially if you plan on filling them up for Christmas morning.

Keep reading for some ideas on where to put stockings that Santa's sure to love.

FROM A SHELF

Hang stockings on a shelf to give a boring bookshelf some holiday flair. You can use festive stocking hangers from the holiday section of your favorite store, or Command Strips, the favorite of indecisive decorators everywhere.

AROUND A CORNER

Drape a fancy garland around a corner (tree shaped, maybe?) and hang your stockings from there. Just make sure it's an out-of-the-way corner to keep people from knocking them over.

FROM DRIFTWOOD

If your holiday has a beachy vibe, hang your stockings from a relatively straight piece of driftwood. This also works for other

kinds of branches.

SPORTY STOCKINGS

If you've got some unused skiing equipment hanging around (get it?), skis and ski poles make awesome wintry stocking hangers.

CURTAIN ROD

Put up a curtain rod or glitzy hooks at intervals on the wall (if this isn't going to be a permanent display, grab those Command Strips again). Just make sure they're at the right height to compliment the rest of your decor.

ALONG A STAIRWELL

Hang your stockings along the handrail to your stairs, if you have them, perhaps wrapped with greenery or fairy lights. Just don't put up so much decoration that you can't use the stairs safely.

FROM A STOCKING HANGER

Yes, this is a thing that exists. You can buy sturdy stocking hangers or stands.

These are also all great ideas if your mantle is particularly close to a fireplace that you intend to use. Stockings are notably flammable and mantles can get pretty hot. Safety first.





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Pet-Perfect Holiday

Don't leave your fur-babies out when you're planning your holiday celebrations. Here are some ways you can bring Fluffy and Fido into your festivities.

ADD PET TREATS TO YOUR HOLIDAY BAKING

Making a tasty cookie for your four-legged friends is just as easy as making a delectable dessert for your human friends. This recipe pleases cats, dogs and everything in between.

- 3 jars baby food, meat or veggies
- 1 ½ cups wheat germ or cream of wheat

1. Mix ingredients together. Drop by the spoonful on a wax paper-covered plate. Seal with wax paper over the top and microwave for 5-8 minutes. Check that treats are formed and firm, then store in the fridge for a quick snack.

TAKE A PICTURE WITH SANTA

Many humane societies and rescue organizations offer

Santa pics as a fundraiser during the holiday season. Dress your pet up in their best and have a pic snapped for a great cause.

Sometimes, mall and department store Santas will also set aside a time for pet pictures. Check your local community calendars for more information.

MAKE A PAWPRINT ORNAMENT

Take the salt dough recipe from earlier in this section and make paw print ornaments. Personalize it with the year for

a special keepsake.

STOCKINGS AND PRESENTS

Add stockings full of tasty treats and toys just for your favorite pets to your giving list. And don't forget donations to rescue organizations and shelters.

The holidays can be a tough time for these organizations. Your contribution or even your time might be a huge help for them.

STAY SAFE

The holidays can be a tough

time for your pets, too. Keep them safe with these tips from the ASPCA:

- Anchor your Christmas tree to keep curious cats and dogs from knocking it over. Also keep pets away from candles and light displays.
- Avoid mistletoe and holly. These festive plants are pretty, but they can be toxic to pets. Use artificial plants instead.
- Keep the people food out of reach, especially bones, cocktails, pork dishes, raisins and grapes, nuts and nutmeg. All of those can make your pet sick or even kill them.

Can the Christmas Tree

Wait ... wait ... wait. Before you start yelling. We don't mean completely. We're just offering these creative alternatives to the traditional evergreen. Or maybe in addition to, if you have enough space. And who doesn't when it comes to Christmas?

CHALKBOARD TREES

Adorn a wooden tree with a coat of chalkboard paint for a tree you can decorate anew every single day. Leave a basket of garlands and sticky putty next to it and see what your family and friends come up with.

A-FRAME TREE

Make a simple triangle or A-frame with wood and line up rungs or slats through the inside for a simple, minimalist way to display your favorite ornaments. Make several in different sizes for added interest.

TERRA-COTTA TREE

Make a tree out of gradually smaller stacked terra cotta pots. A bit of garland and some mini ornaments make this one a winner.

PINECONES

Stack up a pyramid of pinecones for a rustic, woodsy take on a tree. Scent the cones with essential oils and give them a brushing of metallic paint for even more oomph.

PALLET TREE

Cut tree shapes out of a pallet for a modern country tree. Use additional pallet boards to make its own stand. Decorate

with paint and evergreen sprigs.

TOMATO CAGE TREE

A simple tomato cage can make a bold architectural statement with some garland and the right tree topper. Group several together for a stunning display.

BOOK TREE

Stack up a pyramid of hard-cover books for a tree to delight any reader. Be careful with the lights, though.

YARN TREES

Wrap florist cones in yarn for a warm and fuzzy take on a Christmas tree. You can buy varying sizes and group together for the perfect cuddly centerpiece.

CORK IT

Stack and hot glue wine corks onto a floral foam cone for a whimsical take on the Christmas tree. This is good if you plan a wine exchange party for the holidays.

SUCCULENT TREE

Arrange succulents into the shape of a tree. If you're lucky enough to live in a warm climate, you can keep this guy going all year long.

