

# HOLIDAY Traditions



# New Takes on Hanukkah Food

Hanukkah celebrates resilience, faith and family traditions.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem following the Maccabean Revolt and, according to Jewish tradition, the miracle of a small amount of oil that burned for eight days.

Modern takes on food commonly enjoyed during Hanukkah are shaking up the flavors of the season.

Shake up your Hanukkah table this year with culinary crossovers and unexpected flavor profiles. Modern updates swap classic sides for crispy waffle-latkes, pistachio cream stuffed doughnuts and savory noodle kugels to give your holiday feast a fresh, creative twist.

## LATKE INNOVATIONS

**The blank canvas approach:** Treat potato pancakes like a base rather than just a side. Top them with shredded braised short ribs, crispy scallions, and caviar, or go the brunch route with smoked salmon, poached eggs, and fresh dill.

**Flavor spikes:** Mix up the base by making sweet potato and harissa latkes or trendy, briny pickle latkes.

**Air-fried:** Cut down on the mess by air frying some of your dishes. While using less oil than traditional frying, a light coating of oil still nods to Hanukkah's culinary tradition.

## SAVORY KUGEL TWISTS

**Spanakopita kugel:** Ditch the sweet noodle casserole for a savory option with spinach, onions and fresh herbs.

**Mushroom and kale:** Give your kugel an earthy, rustic upgrade by folding in sautéed mushrooms and kale.



© ADOBE STOCK

## UPGRADED DOUGHNUTS (SUGGANIYOT)

**PB&J filling:** Move past standard strawberry jam by injecting doughnuts

with PB&J.

**Shortcut hacks:** For an easy dessert project, you can fry pre-made canned biscuit dough and fill them with dulce

de leche, pistachio cream or caramel corn filling.

## FESTIVE CENTERPIECES

**Gourmet brisket:** Swap traditional sweet-and-sour recipes for a modern, sticky-sweet glaze featuring balsamic vinegar, onions and fresh rosemary.

**Global frying:** Embrace the broader Jewish diaspora by frying up Italian Jewish fried arti-chokes (carciofo alla giudia) or celebrating with Moroccan sfenj (fried doughnuts).

## AIR FRYER POTATO LATKES

Recipe is from Mariano's. Serves 8.

### Ingredients

- 2 large russet potatoes (about 1 1/2 pounds), peeled, grated, rinsed and squeezed dry
- 1 small onion, finely chopped or shredded
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- Avocado or extra virgin olive oil cooking spray
- Applesauce, for serving
- Sour cream, for serving
- Chives, for serving

### Directions

1. Heat air fryer to 400°F.
2. Combine potatoes, onion, eggs, flour, salt and pepper in a bowl.
3. Generously spray bottom of air fryer basket with oil. Place 2-3 tablespoon-sized dollops of latke batter in the air fryer and flatten slightly. Make sure latkes don't touch. Spray tops generously with additional oil.
4. Air fry for 5 minutes, flip and cook an additional 3-5 minutes or until golden brown. Repeat with remaining potato mixture.
5. Serve with applesauce, sour cream or chives, if desired. Refrigerate leftovers.

# New Holiday Traditions

Every tradition started somewhere, and modern families are creating tomorrow's classics.

Here's a look at new customs emerging among families today.

## BLENDING CULTURES

It's increasingly common for families to hold multicultural celebrations. Combining Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, pagan traditions and more makes for diverse gatherings where everyone feels represented. Interfaith families might celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas.

As families discover their roots through genetic testing, they might want to pay homage to their ancestors' religious traditions alongside their own. Making room for everyone's beliefs during the holidays is not only inclusive but helps families learn about other religions, as well.

## TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITIONS

Connecting with far-flung relatives has never been easier thanks to video calling. Families are choosing to expand their holiday dinners with some family members participating virtually. This is also a good option for family members who must work during the holidays.

Another way technology is changing our holiday traditions is with online games. Gather



© ADOBE STOCK

the family around the TV and play a game where participants participate in a shared game with their phones, with the questions and results displayed on the TV. Laughs and happy memories are virtually guaranteed.

Digital photo books allow us to remember the holidays together. Families are creating shared photo albums where loved ones can upload all their snaps from the holidays, then ordering printed books to keep

the memories close at hand.

## NEW GIFT TRADITIONS

Gift-givers are seeking out experience gifts, which allow the recipient to make memories rather than just collecting items. Examples include an indoor skydiving session, a session at a VR lounge or tickets to a concert.

These can even be surprise experiences, where the recipient doesn't know the activity until it's time to go. For exam-

ple, you could gift a mystery day trip with clues revealed throughout the day, a reservation at a favorite restaurant without telling the family where they're going, or a "choose your own adventure" day where each family member secretly plans one activity for everyone else. These experiences can become annual traditions.

The Christmas box trend has spread from the United Kingdom and Ireland to other

countries, including the United States. A Christmas Eve box is a gift box that families open on Dec. 24, typically in the evening before bedtime. The idea is to create a cozy, memorable evening and build excitement for Christmas morning rather than to give expensive gifts. Common Christmas box items include new pajamas, a holiday-themed book to read together, hot chocolate mix, socks or a Christmas tree ornament.

# Making Memories Together

Instead of buying expensive gifts, modern families are opting for experience-based traditions that cost little but mean a lot.

Here are some ideas for a holiday season that won't soon be forgotten.

**Creative activities.** A great way to spend time together is with activities that keep the laughs rolling. Baking cookies or making holiday crafts gives everyone a chance to laugh, talk and create something they'll enjoy long after the decorations are packed away. Make homemade holiday cards or paper snowflakes. Drive around town looking at Christmas lights, or look for a local drive-thru experience with lights, holiday-themed activities and photo ops. Caroling is an old-fashioned tradition that lets musical families spread Christmas cheer.

**Family challenges.** A friendly family competition can become something to look forward to during the holidays. Choose two to three judges and face off to see who can decorate the best cookies or gingerbread house, or organize a holiday scavenger hunt. Create a funny holiday video challenge using your favorite social media app, with each group using the same song, props or dance.

**Unplug together.** Spend



© ADOBE STOCK

more time talking and laughing together and less time looking at a screen this holiday. Break out the board games, read holiday stories or have family coloring time (adults included). Make paper crafts to help decorate the house, or set up a hot chocolate bar to allow everyone to make their own custom cup of cocoa.

**Affordable family fun.** You

don't have to spend a lot to make great memories. Attend a community concert or tree lighting. Keep an eye out for local library or religious events.

**Food and fun.** Spend time together baking family recipes, or compile the recipes into a cookbook and make a copy for each family member.

**Classic cinema.** Make movie night an unforgettable event

with homemade popcorn, blankets and hot chocolate. Settle in to watch holiday favorites like "It's a Wonderful Life," "White Christmas" or "Miracle on 34th Street."

**Preserve family stories.** Make a video of grandparents telling holiday stories and family traditions. Hand down the videos to keep your family's history and traditions alive for

generations to come.

**Get outside.** Bundle up for outdoor activities such as building a snowman, having a snowball fight, going on a winter nature hike or hanging homemade pine cone bird feeders.

**Give back.** Bake cookies for a neighbor, collect food for a local pantry or volunteer as a family at a community event.



© ADOBE STOCK

# Traditions Through the Decades

Holiday traditions reflect changing lifestyles while preserving core values.

Holiday activities in the United States have evolved dramatically over the past century, reflecting changes in technology, culture and family life.

Here's a look at some holiday traditions from days of yore.

## 1940s

- Stringing popcorn and cranberries for the Christmas tree
- Listening to holiday radio programs
- Singing Christmas carols door to door
- Sending handwritten Christmas cards
- Making homemade decorations and gifts due to wartime rationing
- Attending community pageants
- Gathering around the piano to sing holiday songs

## 1950s

- Watching televised Christmas specials
- Decorating aluminum Christmas trees

- Displaying bubble lights and electric decorations
- Visiting department store Santa displays
- Taking Christmas morning home movies

## 1960s

- Watching animated holiday classics
- Collecting Christmas village displays
- Driving to see neighborhood Christmas lights
- Making construction paper ornaments with children
- Exchanging family newsletters with Christmas cards

## 1970s

- Decorating with macramé, yarn and handmade ornaments
- Stringing large C9 outdoor Christmas lights
- Listening to holiday records
- Creating homemade gifts and crafts
- Watching televised holiday parades
- Family board game nights after Christmas dinner

## 1980s

- Decorating elaborate outdoor light

displays

- Shopping at crowded malls on Black Friday
- Visiting mall Santas for photos
- Exchanging annual family photo cards
- Watching holiday movie marathons
- Collecting holiday figurines

## 1990s

- Decorating themed Christmas trees
- Sending photo Christmas cards
- Driving through commercial light displays
- Holiday cookie exchanges
- Watching favorite holiday movies on VHS

## 2000s

- Shopping online for gifts
- Creating digital photo books
- Tracking Santa online
- Watching holiday movies on DVD
- Holiday-themed email newsletters and e-cards

## 2010s

- “Elf on the Shelf” adventures
- Matching family holiday pajamas
- Holiday light displays synchronized to music

- Sharing holiday photos on social media
- Ugly sweater parties
- Holiday escape rooms and themed experiences

## 2020s

- Experience-based gifts instead of more possessions
- Holiday charcuterie boards and hot chocolate bars
- DIY ornament and craft nights
- Family holiday scavenger hunts
- Virtual celebrations with distant relatives
- Holiday baking competitions
- Sustainable decorating with natural or reusable materials
- Volunteer projects and community service as family traditions
- Personalized ornaments commemorating milestones
- Recording family stories and preserving traditions through video

While the traditions themselves may change from one generation to the next, the heart of the holiday season remains remarkably consistent: bringing people together to celebrate, share gratitude and strengthen family connections.

# The Stories Behind our Decor

Holiday decorations do more than brighten our homes — they connect us to family memories, centuries-old traditions and the stories that make the season meaningful.

## FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

Decorations that have adorned our family trees for decades are valuable keepsakes that connect us to our past. Whether it's a fragile glass ornament, a crocheted tree skirt or a well-worn menorah, these cherished items become tangible reminders of holidays shared with loved ones. Ask older relatives about the history of these items, as their stories are the stories of your family. Safeguard these items and preserve them for future generations, so your family's story lives on.

## THE HISTORY BEHIND POPULAR DECORATIONS

While some decorations tell the story of your own family, others trace their origins back hundreds — or even thousands — of years. Have you ever wondered why we hang stockings or open advent calendars? The history of these items tells the stories of our traditions.

**Christmas trees.** The Christmas tree traces its roots to ancient traditions of bringing evergreens indoors during winter as symbols of life and hope. The modern Christmas tree emerged in 16th-century Germany, where families decorated evergreens with candles, fruit and handmade ornaments. Legend credits Martin Luther with adding lighted candles to mimic the stars shining through forest trees.



© ADOBE STOCK

**Wreaths.** Wreaths date to ancient Greece and Rome, where they symbolized victory and honor. Christians later adopted evergreen wreaths, with the unbroken circle representing God's eternal love and evergreens symbolizing hope and everlasting life during winter.

**Menorahs.** The Hanukkah menorah, or hanukkiah, has nine branches—eight for the nights of Hanukkah and a ninth, called the shamash, used to light the others. Families light one additional candle each evening, making the meno-

rah the central symbol of the eight-day Festival of Lights.

**Advent calendars.** Advent calendars began in 19th-century Germany to help Christian families count down to Christmas. Early versions used chalk marks or devotional images before printed calendars with numbered doors appeared in the early 1900s. Today, many contain chocolates, toys or small gifts.

**Stockings.** Christmas stockings are linked to the legend of Saint Nicholas, who secretly dropped bags of gold down

a poor family's chimney, where they landed in drying stockings. The tradition evolved into children hanging stockings in hopes of receiving treats and small gifts from Santa Claus.

**Kinara.** The kinara is the seven-candle holder used during Kwanzaa and symbolizes African heritage and unity. Created along with Kwanzaa in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, it was inspired by traditional African royal thrones and represents the shared cultural heritage of the African diaspora.

# Holiday Tables Around the World

While holiday decorations, music and gifts help create a festive atmosphere, it is often the meals shared around the table that become the memories families treasure most.

Across cultures and continents, traditional dishes tell stories of history, faith and family, connecting generations through recipes that have been passed down for decades.

## **Feast of the Seven Fishes.**

One of Italy's best-known Christmas traditions is the Feast of the Seven Fishes. Typically enjoyed on Christmas Eve, the meal features a variety of seafood dishes such as shrimp, calamari, cod, clams and mussels. The tradition reflects Roman Catholic customs of abstaining from meat before Christmas while celebrating the abundance of the season.

**Tamales.** In Mexico, the holiday season wouldn't be complete without tamales. Families often gather for a "tamalada," spending hours together preparing masa, fillings and corn husks before steaming dozens of tamales. The process is just as meaningful as the meal itself, bringing multiple generations together in the kitchen.

**Stollen.** Germany contributes one of the world's favorite



© ADOBE STOCK

holiday breads: stollen. Filled with dried fruits, nuts and spices and dusted generously with powdered sugar, the rich loaf has been enjoyed during Advent for centuries and is now found on holiday tables around the globe.

**Sufganiyot.** During Hanukkah, many Jewish families enjoy sufganiyot, jelly-filled doughnuts fried in oil. Along

with potato latkes, they symbolize the miracle of the oil that, according to tradition, burned for eight days following the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

**Kwanzaa.** Food also plays an important role during Kwanzaa. Families often gather for the Karamu feast on Dec. 31, sharing dishes that celebrate African and African American

heritage. Menus frequently include foods such as collard greens, sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas, rice dishes and fresh fruits.

**Las Posadas.** Throughout Mexico and many Hispanic communities, Las Posadas reenacts Mary and Joseph's search for shelter before the birth of Jesus. Following nightly processions, participants

gather to enjoy foods including tamales, pozole, buñuelos and warm beverages.

**St. Lucia Day.** In Sweden, St. Lucia Day on Dec. 13 features processions led by girls wearing crowns of candles. Families celebrate afterward with saffron buns known as lussekatter and ginger cookies served alongside hot coffee or mulled beverages.

# Traditions of Generosity

Many families measure the season by how much they give rather than receive.

Volunteering together can become a holiday tradition that teaches children about generosity and community service.

Almost any charity will appreciate your donations or time during the holidays. If you're looking to give back this holiday season, here are some ideas to get you started.

## **VOLUNTEER TRADITIONS**

Soup kitchens, toy drives and nursing home visits are common ways to give back this holiday season. Many popular volunteer opportunities fill up weeks or even months before Thanksgiving and Christmas. Contact organizations well in advance to reserve a spot.

## **THINK LOCAL**

Clean up your community. Spend an afternoon picking up litter in a neighborhood park or decorating a public space for the holidays.

## **SPREAD HOLIDAY CHEER**

Write holiday cards for deployed service members and veterans, or residents of nursing homes. You'll brighten someone's holiday by sharing a few kind words, which can ease loneliness and remind the recipient they are remembered and valued.



© ADOBE STOCK

## **VOLUNTEERING AS A FAMILY**

Many nonprofits welcome families with older children, although age restrictions may apply. Check in to find out what ages are allowed.

Families can also find service project opportunities, which abound during the holidays. Participate in Operation Christmas Child by filling a shoebox with toys, school supplies and personal care items

for a child in another country. Have the kids pick out toys for the boxes, or to donate to Toys for Tots, or “adopt a family” or “angel tree” projects.

## **AFFORDABLE WAYS TO HELP**

You don't have to donate money to help out during the holidays. Donate your time instead of money, or look for opportunities to donate hand-

made items. Organize a neighborhood food drive or help sort donations at a local food pantry. Gather coats, hats, gloves and blankets for shelters or community coat drives.

## **ASK WHAT'S NEEDED MOST**

Instead of assuming what an organization needs, ask before donating items or signing up. Financial donations, spe-

cific supplies or weekday volunteers may be more valuable than additional holiday help.

## **THINK BEYOND THE HOLIDAYS**

While charities appreciate extra help during the holiday season, many need volunteers throughout the year. If you enjoy the experience, consider making it a regular commitment.