

How to create a happy homemade holiday



One of the best ways to kick off the holiday season is to decorate. And while it's easy to load your cart with beautiful décor from your favourite store, Christmas is more personal when decorations are homemade.

No time you say? Between planning dinners for the family and throwing cocktail parties for friends, it can be overwhelming. But it is possible to survive it (and enjoy it!) by keeping everything simple. This season, let your creative instincts shine through as you watch your mantels, stairwells, and tables come to holiday life, with ideas like these:

Create a magical mantle

For most families, the living room is the place where everyone convenes. It's where gifts are exchanged, holiday movies are enjoyed and stories are shared gathered by the fireplace—a major focal point in the room. Give this cozy centerpiece a warm new look by creating a decorative display for your mantel.

Draping a festive garland is one way to achieve a distinctive display. Do-it-yourself banners and garland have become increasingly popular as a great way to personalize your décor.

Start with a heavy fabric, like burlap or the kind used for upholstery, and cut enough pennants for your favourite holiday saying, like "Let it Snow." Then using a snowflake stencil, spray paint the pattern with a silver colour. Krylon 'metallic brilliant silver, for example, works very well on fabric. Spray paint chip-board letters in a bright white. Once everything dries, spell out your message, one letter per pennant, and adhere the letters.

Adorn the banner with plastic snowflakes and holly sprigs to finalize the festive look.

Trim a tree like a pro

The Christmas tree is another major focal point in your living room during the holidays. If you're tired of the same old display year after year, give the tree a fresh look by changing up the ornaments and adding a theme.

Start by choosing a specific colour scheme, such as red and gold. Don't have enough decorations to match your new theme? It's easy and affordable to create your own by using items already around the house. For example, use bulbs from an old string of lights to create a whimsical decoration. Remove two bulbs from the strand and spritz the inside of the bulb with Krylon's ColorMaster spray paint in 'cherry red'. Roll the bulb around to distribute the paint for a beautiful translucent look. Add a little glitz with 'glitter spray' to the outside of the bulb for a festive look, and top off with your favourite embellishments like ribbon or bells. You can even spray paint old ornaments so they fit into your new colour scheme.

Once your new décor is complete, hang ornaments and lights on your tree before displaying it for the whole family to enjoy.

Add elegant table toppers

If you are hosting get-togethers for family and friends, add a sparkle to your table. Not sure where to start? First, choose two or three colours. Select a table cloth, table runner or placemats in your colour scheme and consider the arrangement for the middle of the table. Try replacing the traditional red and green with gold and silver accessories—candles, napkin rings, small figures in the plates and other decorative accents. Include candles so the flickering flames can create a warm atmosphere. Even casually scattered pine cones, fir branches, red roses or poinsettias will add a special touch on the table.

It's easy to make your fine china the highlight of the dinner; but this time, try making your placemats the conversation starter by utilizing antique sheet music – which can be found at old book stores or simply printed at home. These sheets will make for a chic and unconventional base for any place setting.

Remember, it doesn't have to be a stressful time of year, with a little effort and creativity you can turn take your holiday décor from ho-hum to homey in no time.

More information and additional project ideas can be found at www.krylon.ca. www.newscanada.com

How to throw a party stress free



Few things are as taxing as hosting a large group and with the added pressure of the holidays, things can derail fairly quickly. Stop, take a deep breath, and follow this simple guideline to holiday entertaining that is certain to be merry and bright:

- **Set a budget:** It's easy to get spendy when everyone will be scrutinizing the details of your event, but make sure to set a realistic limit. If you plan early enough, there are many DIY projects to spruce up the décor in your house and to inject a holiday spirit without breaking the bank. Head to Pinterest for inspiration and your local dollar store for supplies. Whatever your budget, you can throw a great party.

- **Make a guest list and check it twice:** Who you invite to break bread with is pretty essential to a successful event. Don't feel that you have to invite everyone and their friends in order

to be a good host. It's harder not to invite your crazy Aunt Evelyn, but you can probably skip the gossipy co-worker.

- **Fill their plates:** Whether you're having it catered or tackling the job yourself, the holidays are really a time for old favourites, but don't be afraid to throw in a contemporary spin. Just don't try a new recipe the day of the party. Test the food out on your family to avoid serving 50 collapsed soufflés. And make it easy on yourself by only serving nibbles. People love to graze, it's easier to make the dishes ahead of time and this gives you the opportunity to offer a lot of variety to a group of diverse eaters.

- **Set the mood:** Don't forget an essential element to holiday entertaining: music. The tunes at any event really help to set the ambience, but with everything else that you're doing, don't add the time-consuming task of building a perfect mix. "Make it easy on yourself," says SiriusXM Canada. They advise to simply use your computer or mobile device to access commercial-free holiday music to suit every taste through SiriusXM Internet Radio. From Christmas classics to Hanukkah favourites, keep the party going with hits from the past, current club anthems, or traditional holiday tunes. You can listen free for a limited time at www.siriusxm.ca.

- **When it's all done:** Make sure all your guests have a safe ride home by having a few cabs pre-ordered. Surprise them with an adult "goodie bag" to take along, which may include water bottles, ibuprofen, a recipe for a "hair of the dog" cocktail, and anything that shows you care. Get creative.

And as the door closes behind the very last guest, you deserve to sit down, relax and toast yourself for throwing a sensational, stress-free holiday bash.

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