

HOMESWEETHOMES

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Preparing for the holidays

Many people wait until the last minute to start preparing for the holidays. Why not break with tradition this year and start your planning a little earlier. Doing so will help to avoid that panicky feeling that tends to

creep up during the last week.

Here's a short To-Do list to get started

* Gift Lists. Start preparing gift lists now. Whether you're shopping from a

catalogue, online, in person or plan to make your own gifts, now is the perfect time to start.

* Traditions. If you've been invited to an open house or a party, decide what you want to contribute. If you're hosting a party, start sending invitations out now, plan menus and create a check-list of jobs to be completed.

* Take Stock. Take ten or fifteen minutes to check what household inventories you have, (stamps, paper goods, baking supplies, pantry items, and which items need to be picked up. Take stock now and avoid any last-minute scrambling.

* Address Cards. If you plan to send cards this holiday season, start preparing them now. If the task seems too time-consuming, get a spouse, a friend or the kids to help. Many hands make less work.

* Clean It Up. If you are expecting guests over the holidays, now is the time to clean up around the home. Wash the front door and garage door, clean windows, polish the silver and sparkle up the chandeliers. If time seems in short supply today, it becomes even more so the closer you get to the holidays.

* Outdoor Décor. Put up holiday lights before the cold weather and snow make it uncomfortable to do so. Make sure that lights work properly and replace those that don't.

* Start Cooking. A small investment of time today will pay dividends over the holidays. Start holiday baking now and, while you're at it, create some quick dinners that can be stored in the freezer. There will be days when warming up a pre-made meal is preferable to cooking one from scratch.

* Travelling. Notify friends and family members if you plan to away during the holidays. And don't forget to stop newspaper delivery and make arrangements for feeding the cat and watering the plants.

* Schedule Fun Time. The holidays are a hectic time, but you should allow time for some spontaneous fun as well. Plan an afternoon movie with the kids, invite a friend for lunch or spend an afternoon viewing photo albums with family members. These kinds of impromptu occasions create wonderful memories.

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