



THEPARTYTEACHER.COM

CHRISTMAS SEASON PLANNER

HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

Oh, Christmas.

There's so much we want to do, make, and bake ... so many traditions we want to share with our kiddos ... and at least one party we'd love to throw.

If only we had more time, more energy, and a little more room in our budget.

This planner is designed to help you organize your Christmas season so you control it ... instead of the month of December controlling you.

Just print it out, maybe pop it in a three-ring binder, and make the season work for you this year. I'm sure I've forgotten something in this guide, and that you'll need to customize it to work for you. Just add pages, tape in your favorite recipes, and make it your own!

Remember: Christmas should be fun for everyone – including mama!

Merry Christmas – you can do it!

Jennifer

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Decluttering

If you're like me, and you tend to let your house get cluttered, then that's where we have to start our house prep. You may feel overwhelmed thinking about how to tackle the clutter, but it is do-able and you'll feel so much better once it's done.

Just like when we clean for parties, we're going to focus on the public rooms.

Work one room at a time, and work quickly. Right now, you're focused on obvious clutter-busting. We're not doing deep clutter busting. Now is not the time to empty your closets or cabinets and do a purge. This is about getting rid of the junk that's in your line of sight. (For more clutter-busting tips, read my [12 steps to deep clutter busting](#) and [craft room decluttering](#).) Give yourself a big, satisfying checkmark every time you complete a task.

Go through each room, and work on these two things:

1. Take a trash bag with you and toss any clutter as you go.
2. If you have unfinished projects, clothes, or games scattered about, put those items away in the rooms where they really belong.

Of course, we all have different rooms in our houses, so if you have other public rooms, just apply these principles to those spaces.

ENTRYWAY

- Toss or shred any junk mail.
- Put any mail you need to keep where it belongs: bills to be paid, etc.

COAT CLOSET

- Make room for guest coats by moving your spring jackets to your master bedroom closet or by taking any outgrown coats to Goodwill.
- Gather hats and gloves together in a basket.

KITCHEN

- Empty the dishwasher.
- Reload the dishwasher with any dirty dishes.
- Hand wash any remaining dishes.
- Toss any trash on your counters and/or kitchen table.
- Put out fresh kitchen towels.
- Toss any papers on your refrigerator door.

LIVING ROOM

- Put any magazines or newspapers in the recycling bin.
- Fluff and straighten your pillows and throw blanket.
- If you have any Thanksgiving décor out, put that away.

DINING ROOM

- Is your dining room table a dumping ground? Toss or put away those items in their proper homes.
- If you have any Thanksgiving décor out, store that away.

POWDER ROOM

- Empty the trash can.
- Put out fresh hand towels.
- Stock the powder room with extra toilet paper and Kleenex.
- Put out a fresh bar of soap or refill your soap dispenser.

GUEST ROOM (IF NEEDED)

- If this has become your storage room, you'll have to remove the piles from the bed. For now, if you have to hide the piles in your storage room, do that. After the holiday, declutter the piles. Don't just put them back in the guest room!
- If you're using the closet for off-season clothing, donate what you can to Goodwill and move the rest to your master bedroom closet temporarily.
- Same goes for the dresser: empty at least one drawer for your guests.

FULL BATH (IF NEEDED)

- If your guests are sharing a bathroom, put away personal items that are normally on your countertops. Keep out hand soap, hand sanitizer and tissues.
- Put out fresh towels for your family.
- Empty the trash.

EXTRA ROOM: _____

Let me suggest decluttering your playroom toys. Pre-Christmas is a great time to make space for new toys by donating good-condition toys that your children have outgrown. Toss the rest.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Cleaning

Now that you can see your public spaces, it's time to clean. Just like with our clutter-busting, we're not deep cleaning because you don't have time right now. So, don't worry about vacuuming valances or having drapes dry-cleaned. We're just surface cleaning.

If you can do your clutter-busting on one day and your cleaning on another, give yourself that break. If you have helpers and you can hand out assignments, then by all means, enlist that help! But if it's just you, remember that you're working fast, not deep.

THE BASICS

Here are the basics you'll want to complete all at once before you move on to room-by-room cleaning. We're working from the top down.

- With a Swiffer extender duster, quickly dust your moldings (especially corners).
- Dust your mantle, window and door casings, and picture frames.
- Close your blinds, and do a quick sweep down the front with your duster. (You're not deep-clean dusting in between slats.)
- Dust baseboards and vents. (These are good assignments for kids.)
- Vacuum and/or sweep and mop.
- With a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser, clean up finger prints on door casings and around door handles.

ENTRYWAY

- If you can reach it, dust your light fixture.

COAT CLOSET

- I usually forget to vacuum my coat closet, but now that you've picked up the floor, this may be a good time to run the vacuum over the closet floor.

KITCHEN

- Wipe down any appliances that sit out.
- Wipe down countertops.
- Clean your stove top.
- If your oven(s) need cleaning, set the self-cleaning cycle.
- Wipe down the inside and outside of your microwave.
- Now that your sink is free of dishes, give the sink and faucet a quick shine.

LIVING ROOM

- Dust table tops, tchotchkes, lamps, and chair legs.
- If you have décor you know you will swap out with Christmas décor, go ahead and move your everyday décor to your storage room.

DINING ROOM

- Dust table tops, sideboard décor, and chair legs.
- If you have décor you know you will swap out with Christmas décor, go ahead and move your everyday décor to your storage room.

POWDER ROOM

- Clean your sink.
- Dust the countertop, faucet and light fixtures.
- Polish the mirror.
- Clean the toilet.

GUEST ROOM (IF NEEDED)

- Strip the bed, wash the sheets and remake the bed. (Do this even if the sheets were already clean, because a long-undisturbed bed makes a happy home for silverfish. Don't ask me how I know this.)
- Put an extra blanket and pillow in the closet.
- If your guests are sharing a bathroom with your family, put fresh bath towels on the guest bed so they know which towels are theirs.
- Make sure the alarm clock is running and add batteries if not.

FULL BATH (IF NEEDED)

If your guests have a dedicated bathroom, you probably just need to:

- Clean the toilet.
- Dust the tub and countertops.
- Polish the mirror.

If your guests are sharing a bathroom with your family, you'll also need to:

- Pop the shower curtain in the wash.
- Scrub the tub.

EXTRA ROOM: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Maintaining

Now that you've decluttered and cleaned your public spaces, how do you keep them neat and tidy through Christmas? Of course, when it comes to controlling clutter, it all comes down to a few habits.

- Pick up after yourself as you go.
- Toss what's trash immediately.
- When we decluttered for the holidays, we only tackled the public rooms. Now, as part of maintaining your clean house, try to tackle any other clutter spots once a week. Maybe it's your nightstand or your bathroom counter. Whatever spots are your problem areas, it's amazing how good you'll feel each time you clear one off.
- Try to donate outgrown clothes and toys to Goodwill at least quarterly.

Here is the daily routine that works for me. The lists may seem long, but these are all quick hits. It's not about perfection: you don't need to make your bed with hospital corners – just pull up the sheets and plop the pillows back on the bed.

MORNING

- Make your bed. (You'll feel better about the rest of your room – I promise!)
- When you're done in the bathroom, wipe down your countertops and sink. That way, you won't have to do a weekly cleaning.
- Start a load of wash. One load of laundry daily works better for me than a dedicated laundry day.
- Rinse off breakfast dishes and load them in the dishwasher.

EVENING

- Sort through the mail. Put bills in their place, and toss any junk.
- If you haven't already, dry and put away the morning's laundry.
- Rinse off dinner dishes and load them in the dishwasher.
- Do any hand wash dishes, dry them, and put them away.
- Do a quick pass of the areas that tend to get cluttered. Have your family help you pick up these areas. (After all, they probably helped make the mess.)

WEEKLY CLEANING

Aside from daily to-dos, you'll need to keep up more in-depth cleaning. Speed through these weekly tasks and try to complete them in an hour or so. If you can keep up with the daily activities, it should be do-able. Spend the rest of the weekend with your kiddos!

- Clean all the toilets.
- Clean the showers and tubs.
- Vacuum.
- Sweep and mop.
- Wash sheets and towels.
- Remake the beds.
- Wipe down the microwave.
- Wipe down kitchen counters.
- Wipe down the stove top.
- Toss expired food from the fridge.
- Empty trash cans.

WEEKLY PLANNING

- Plan your dinner menus for the week.
- Make your grocery list.
- Check the calendar so you know who's taking which kids to which activities, appointments, or any event that need special prep.

EVERY OTHER WEEK CLEANING

- Dust (following the steps in "The Basics" section).
- _____
- _____

Certain tasks don't need to be done weekly. Certainly, there are more items you can add to this list, but these are the things I try to tackle monthly.

MONTHLY CLEANING

- Vacuum upholstery.
- Wipe down kitchen cabinets.
- Disinfect light switches, door knobs, etc.
- Dust ceiling fans and light fixtures.
- Dust lampshades.
- Shake out throw rugs and wash bathmats.
- _____
- _____

Decorating

Once your house is a clean[er] slate, you can pull out your holiday decorations and enjoy them! They won't just look like more clutter. (Whenever I can, I store my everyday décor in my Christmas storage bins. That makes the swapping everyday decor for Christmas and back again easier.)

And remember: don't feel like you have to do all your decorating in one weekend. If the "must-dos" start to stress your family out, take a break. Make some hot chocolate, and watch a Christmas movie.

As you review this checklist, think about when it makes sense to schedule these activities for your family.

LIVE TREE

Tree shopping day: _____

If you use an artificial tree, you get to jump right to hanging ornaments. We did an artificial tree last year for the first time, and while I missed the scent of the real tree, boy, it was so much easier.

Here's your live tree shopping to-do list:

- Charge your camera battery.
- Get the kids dressed in something Christmas-y.
- Be sure to get pics of the tree picking and bringing the tree home.

Tree decorating day: _____

We usually get our live tree in a stand and then call it quits for the day.

- String lights around the tree. (This may take us another day. My husband is a little particular about lights – ha! His trick is to string lights around the trunk and then around the branches. It makes the tree look lit all the way through.)
- Hang ornaments.
- Vacuum up needles, then add your tree skirt.

INDOOR DECORATONS

Indoor decorating day: _____

- Add any décor to your mantel.
- Hang your stockings.
- Put out your Christmas photos from years' past.
- Hang your front door wreath.
- Add any other Christmas touches around your house. We have some table top items, an indoor wreath, and a garland for the front stairs, and try to get those all out on one day.
- Once you finish with a Christmas storage box, put it back in your storage area.

OUTSIDE DECORATONS

Outside decorating day: _____

We point a spotlight on our front door wreath and call it day on our outside decorations. Here are some fill-in-the-blanks if you are more ambitious than we are.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

ADVENT

For 2017, Advent begins Sunday, December 3.

- Pull out your Advent calendar or make one. My [Advent calendar Pinterest board](#) can give you some ideas.
- If you use an Advent wreath, buy four white candles and one blue candle. Add your Advent wreath to your dining table.

GETTING READY FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

- Pull out your cookies for Santa plate and mug. Wash them if needed.
- If you have Christmas china, pull it out and set the table Christmas Eve morning.
- Iron tablecloths and napkins.
- Polish your silver, if needed.
- Set up your dessert buffet with cake plates and serving pieces.
- Pick up any baked goods, ham, or flower arrangements you've ordered. Make sure you know what time the shops close if you're picking up on Christmas Eve.
- Charge your camera battery.

Gifts

The three big questions when it comes to gifting are:

1. What is your holiday budget? [Dave Ramsey](#) has great resources for Christmas budgeting, knowing how much is enough, and balancing Christmas with getting out of debt. I've got a budget worksheet for you on page 12.
2. Who are you buying for?
3. How does your extended family handle gifting?

EXTENDED FAMILY GIFTING

Do you buy for everyone? Draw names? Buy only for the kids? Do you set a dollar limit? Do you stick to a gift-giving theme, like ornaments only or food gifts only?

It can be tough if your extended family wants to spend more than you are comfortable with. But, remember that your responsibility is to do what's right for your immediate family. Hopefully, you and your spouse will agree to your family budget and present a united front to your extended family if they don't understand your choices.

PLAN YOUR SHOPPING

Use my Christmas Gift Planner on page 13 to plan your shopping for each person on your list. Planning in advance will help you take advantage of sales and avoid impulse purchases.

- Start jotting down ideas for each person.
- Write down your kids' clothing sizes, shoe sizes, and favorite colors. I promise that Grandma will ask about sizes, and this way, you won't have to run to their closet to check.
- If you want to order handmade gifts, do that as soon as possible to allow the maker time to create and ship your gift.
- If you will order online, try to order early enough to avoid rush shipping fees.
- My kids pick out their own gifts for each other, so that means scheduling two individual shopping trips.
- If you make baked goods, cocoa mix, or other treats for gifts, add those supplies to my grocery shopping list on page 21.
- Add an envelope to your Christmas Season Planner binder and keep all your receipts and gift receipts there.

GIFT DELIVERY

- If you have to mail gifts, check [USPS.gov](https://www.usps.gov) to find the last day to mail packages to arrive by Christmas.
- Do you travel for Christmas? If so, will you wrap and mail gifts ahead of time or will you travel with unwrapped gifts?

WRAPPING GIFTS

- I like to use a plastic tote to store gifts for each immediate family member, plus a separate (smaller) tote for each stocking. It's an easy visual cue as to how my shopping is coming along. After the holiday, stack all your totes inside each other and pack them away in your storage room.
- Buy wrapping paper. If you have a nearby Hobby Lobby, they have generous rolls of paper. The paper is well-sized and thick. I always buy a few rolls when it goes on sale. I also like to choose four coordinating patterns: one for each family member. It gives the tree a neat and tidy look and makes it easy to know whose gifts are whose.
- For some reason, writing out Christmas tags over and over – not to mention the drug store tags my husband always picks up “in case we need more” – just bug the fool out of me. I like to order preprinted tags or stickers: To Meg / Love, Mommy and Daddy. To Grace / Love, Mommy and Daddy. Boom, stick, done. Two great resources are <https://www.chickabug.com/> and <https://www.whhostess.com/>.
- Buy Scotch tape, tissue paper, clothing boxes, bows or ribbon, and gift card holders.
- When will you do your wrapping? A little bit each night after the kids are in bed? Or will you pick one day and tackle all your wrapping then? Add that to your calendar on the last page of this planner.

Christmas Budget Planner

Christmas costs can sneak up on us. It's more than just gift buying. I've left you some blanks so you can fill in whatever I've forgotten. Try to get a sense of your total planned spending and then consider where you can trim.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Gift donation(s)	\$
Cards	\$
Stamps	\$
Thank you notes	\$
Meals	\$
Desserts	\$
Immediate family gifts	\$
Extended family gifts	\$
Teacher gifts	\$
Gift wrapping materials	\$
Neighbor gifts	\$
Holiday outfits and jammies	\$
Shipping	\$
Haircuts	\$
Christmas tree	\$
Indoor decorations	\$
Outdoor decorations	\$
Christmas storage bins	\$
Travel	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$

Christmas Gift Planner

I print one of these out for each member of my family, and use it to keep track of shopping for each person. Since we leave Santa gifts unwrapped, I also track which gifts are from Santa and which I need to wrap. This list also helps me see if I have the same number of gifts per child.

Name: _____ Budget: \$ _____

Item	Cost	Source	Purchased	Santa (Unwrapped)	Wrapped	Sent
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	\$		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TOTAL \$ SPENT:	\$					

Menu Planning

Thinking about making Christmas Eve dinner, Christmas breakfast, and Christmas dinner makes me long for a Downton Abbey-style kitchen staff.

I do love to cook and bake, but that's a lot to prep in a short amount of time. There's also only so much room in my fridge to prep dishes ahead of time. Not to mention: there's more to do than just cook over those days. And, I want to spend time with my family and not just in the kitchen. So, how to manage it all?

- Plan your menus two weeks in advance.
- Add your recipes to this guide so you have everything in one place. It's way better than juggling multiple cookbooks.
- Review your recipes, make your grocery list, and do your shopping gradually to spread out the cost and time required. (And, if you can get someone else to do the shopping: bonus points!)
- Clean out your fridge and freezer to allow room for make-ahead dishes.
- As soon as your kids are old enough, enlist baking helpers.
- Plan what you'll make on which days. Also plan the order you need to prep and cook day-of menu items. See pages 18 and 19 for a fill-in checklist.
- Play Christmas music or listen to a podcast while you're cooking.
- Before you start cooking, fill a sink with hot, soapy water. Once you're done with a pan or spatula, pop it in the sink. The pre-soaking makes washing up easier.
- Minimize the number of new dishes you try. The pressure of a new recipe can be more stressful than you need.
- Not everything has to be made from scratch.
- Make sure to pad your extra cooking days with take-out meals or a casserole or soup you can eat twice. You'll need the break!

Here are our traditional menus. We look forward to these treats every year! (Christmas lunch is fend-for-yourself breakfast leftovers.)

CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER

- Ritz Carlton Turkey
- Pecan Cranberry Wild Rice
- Strawberry Salad
- Allen's Green Beans
- Bread or rolls
- Red Wine
- Jack Daniel's Chocolate Pecan Pie
- Vanilla Ice Cream

CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

- Paula Deen French Bread Casserole
- Bacon
- Strawberries
- Mimosas

CHRISTMAS DINNER

- Montreal Steak
- Pork Roast
- Sweet Potato Gratin
- Caesar Salad
- Leftover Bread
- Leftover Wine
- Leftover Pie

Our Recipes

- Strawberry Salad from [Kraft Recipes](#)
- French Toast Casserole from [Paula Deen](#). (Three notes: 1 – I don't do the extra syrup because this is plenty sweet without syrup. 2 – There also is a "light" version if you are horrified by the calorie count. I say just don't look at the calories once a year. 3 – Use the super skinny French bread because it's easier to completely cover with the butter mixture.)
- Jack Daniel's Chocolate Pecan Pie from [Southern Living](#)
- Mimosas from [Divas Can Cook](#)
- Sweet potato gratin with rosemary crust from [Southern Living](#)

RITZ CARLTON ATLANTA SLOW COOKER TURKEY

This recipe original appeared in our local paper and I can't find it online, so I've reproduced my version here. I LOVE this turkey, especially because you can put it in the Crock Pot in the afternoon, go to Christmas Eve services and come back to dinner already made.

1 boneless turkey breast, about 5 pounds
Coarse salt and ground black pepper, to taste
1/4 cup Madeira wine
1 onion, halved and thinly sliced
1/2 teaspoon thyme leaves
1 large garlic clove, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon honey

Remove netting from turkey and rinse turkey. Cut off excess skin. Season the turkey with salt and pepper. Place plastic liner in oval slow cooker. Place breast side up in slow cooker. Pour Madeira over the turkey; add onion, thyme, garlic and honey. Seal with lid and cook on high heat for 3 to 4 hours, turning once.

Remove turkey to a cutting board and drape with tin foil. Let turkey rest before slicing. Pour broth into a fat separator or remove grease with a spoon. Strain the broth into a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper. Keep warm over low heat.

When ready to serve, thinly slice the turkey, then spoon Pecan Wild Rice onto the plate. Place turkey on top of rice and spoon over some of the reserved warm broth. Serve immediately. (It was suggested that you serve with Persimmon Creek Riesling, \$22.99.)

RITZ CARLTON ATLANTA PECAN WILD RICE

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 cups cooked white rice, such as basmati
1-1/2 cups cooked wild rice
1 cup chopped pecans
1/4 dried cranberries (optional: add apricots and currants also)
Coarse salt and ground black pepper to taste

Heat butter in a large skillet over medium heat until melted. Add rice, wild rice, pecans and dried fruit. Stir to combine. Taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper. Serves six. You can make this ahead of time and reheat it.

McCORMICK MONTREAL STEAK SEASONING PORK ROAST

This is my sister-in-law Beverly's recipe and it could be easier. The more seasoning you use, and the longer it can rest in the fridge before baking, the deeper the flavor will be.

Pork tenderloin
Olive oil
McCormick Montreal Steak Seasoning.
Cooking spray

Spray a Pyrex roasting pan with cooking spray. Add your pork tenderloin. Brush olive oil all over the pork tenderloin. Liberally sprinkle on seasoning til you have a solid coating of seasoning. Let rest in the fridge til you're ready to bake

Bake tenderloin uncovered according to package directions, depending on how many pounds of pork you have. (Generally, about 30 minutes at 400 degrees. Add 5-10 minutes broil time at the end to get a crispy finish.)

JUDY LEWIN'S SPICED CIDER

2 quarts apple cider
1 quart cranberry juice
2 – 3 cinnamon sticks, broken in half
1 teaspoon whole cloves
1 lemon, sliced
4 tablespoons brown sugar

Pour cider and juice in percolator. Place remaining ingredients in basket and perk.

Plan Your Menus

CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER

	Make ahead? When?
Entrée: _____	_____
Side dish 1: _____	_____
Side dish 2: _____	_____
Salad: _____	_____
Bread: _____	_____
Dessert: _____	_____
Beverages: _____	_____

CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

	Make ahead? When?
Egg dish: _____	_____
Meat: _____	_____
Bread dish: _____	_____
Fruit: _____	_____
Beverages: _____	_____

CHRISTMAS DINNER

	Make ahead? When?
Entrée: _____	_____
Side dish 1: _____	_____
Side dish 2: _____	_____
Salad: _____	_____
Bread: _____	_____
Dessert: _____	_____
Beverages: _____	_____

Baking

In addition to your family menu planning, you may be baking cookies for Santa and extra treats to give as gifts. List your baking plans here. Then, look up the recipes and add any ingredients to your grocery shopping list on the next page. Also add those recipes to this guide.

<i>Treat</i>	<i>Recipient</i>	<i>Date to Bake</i>

TAKE STOCK OF YOUR PANTRY

Check off these baking staples if you already have enough of them. Add the rest to the grocery list on the next page. I like to shop for staples a week or do before shopping for fresh ingredients, just to help spread out the size and cost of the grocery store run.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All-purpose flour | <input type="checkbox"/> Condensed milk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cake flour | <input type="checkbox"/> Dark Karo syrup |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White sugar | <input type="checkbox"/> Vanilla extract |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sanding sugar | <input type="checkbox"/> Cinnamon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dark brown sugar | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutmeg |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salt | <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kosher salt | <input type="checkbox"/> Unsalted stick butter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cocoa powder | <input type="checkbox"/> Milk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baking powder | <input type="checkbox"/> Half and half |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baking soda | <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy cream |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chocolate chips | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking spray |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaporated milk | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigerated pie crusts |

Traditions

Somehow, we have gotten into the habit of cramming in way too many traditions on Christmas Eve. Along with church and a big meal, it makes for an exhausting day. (Exhausting for mom and dad. Our kids have the energy to cope, and I guess keeping them extra busy helps make the day pass quickly for them.)

Here's a list of our December traditions. You may share some of these or have others that haven't made my list. In any case, it's time to start thinking about how to schedule all these — plus, all the prep required to be ready for your traditions.

VISIT TO SANTA

- Purchase kids' outfits they also can wear to Christmas Eve services. (Clothes, shoes, socks, tights, etc.)
- Schedule haircuts.
- If necessary, schedule your appointment with Santa.
- Write letters to take to Santa.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

- Pick out a family photo for your cards.
- If you want to have a new photo made, book a holiday mini session with a local photographer. If you have young children, try to work around nap times. If you book a morning appointment, give yourself enough time to get everyone photo-ready.
- Update your Christmas card address list.
- Buy stamps.
- If you use an online service like [Minted](#), choose your card design, submit your photo, and customize your message. Approve the proof promptly to receive your cards as soon as possible. I typically have Minted print addresses on my envelopes. I know it's not as personal, but it is a huge time saver.
- When your cards are delivered, sign them, write your notes, add stamps, and pop them in the mail. Don't put this off: just turn on a movie like *The Family Stone* and get the job done.

SCHOOL BREAK IDEAS

We don't typically have snow, so I can't send the kids out to make snow forts or sled. It's just plain cold, so we focus on indoor activities.

- Make coffee filter snowflakes.
- Bake Hershey Kiss pretzel treats.
- Wrap gifts (This may sound mundane, but my kids love wrapping.)
- Make crayons in holiday shapes out of broken crayon bits.
- Schedule play dates.
- Make Christmas-scented play-doh.
- Drive around to see Christmas lights.
- Make cookies for Santa. Maybe invite some friends over to help and put on a Christmas movie while you're baking. Be sure to add any supplies to your grocery shopping list.
- Ice skating.
- Do red/green at-home mani pedis.
- Family movie night with the classics like *Miracle on 34th Street*.
- Family slumber party under the Christmas tree (this was my hubby's idea).
- Shop for and drop off Toys for Tots donation. (I think it's important for the girls to be involved and understand that not all kids will have a holiday like theirs.)
- Lego-building contest.
- Make orange and clove pomanders.

ADD YOUR TRADITIONS

There are probably local must-dos on your list, also. We always have to ride the [Pink Pig](#). Add your traditions and extra school break ideas here.

	Date?
Tradition #1:	_____
Tradition #2:	_____
Tradition #3:	_____
Tradition #4:	_____
Tradition #5:	_____
Tradition #5:	_____
Tradition #7:	_____
Tradition #8:	_____
Tradition #9:	_____
Tradition #10:	_____

CHRISTMAS EVE

Our Christmas Eve schedule revolves around the time of the church service we choose to attend – and so our CrockPot becomes a vital part of my Christmas Eve survival plan.

- Church
- Dinner
- Sprinkle reindeer food in your front yard.
- Have the kids open their Christmas jammies.
- Have the kids put out milk and cookies for Santa and carrots for the reindeer.
- Wish the Elf on the Shelf goodbye for the year.
- Tuck the kids into bed with a reading of *The Night Before Christmas*.
- Assemble Christmas breakfast and refrigerate.
- When your kids are fast asleep, play Santa.
- Don't forget that the Elf needs to fly home tonight.

December Calendar

I've left the dates blank on this calendar so you can print it, add the appropriate dates, and print a new one to use year after year. Use this calendar to list all your holiday commitments and activities in one place.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—	—