“Do’s and Don’ts” of Holiday Decorating

The holiday season is here and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is urging consumers to keep safety in mind as they decorate for the holidays. Flickering candles, blinking holiday lights and fragrant evergreens are beautiful staples of the holiday season, but when used improperly, these holiday decorating “must haves” can pose deadly dangers.

Each year, during the 60 days surrounding the winter holiday season, about 11,000 people are treated in hospital emergency rooms due to decoration-related injuries with falls, cuts, shocks and burns topping the list. The National Fire Protection Association estimates that each year an average of 240 fires involving dries-out Christmas trees result in 16 deaths and $13 million in property damage. An average of 13,000 candle related fires are estimated by CPSC staff to occur annually, resulting in 170 deaths and $390 million in property damage.

“Deaths, injuries and the millions of dollars in property damage related to holiday-decorating hazards are preventable”, said CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord. “Keep the holidays festive, by keeping your family and friends safe from harm.”

Use the following safety tips when decorating this year:

Trees and decorations:

✔ When purchasing an artificial tree, DO look for label “Fire Resistant.” Although this label does not mean the tree won’t catch fire, it does indicate the tree is more resistant to burning.

✔ When purchasing a live tree, DO check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and do not break when bent between your figures. The bottom of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
✓ When setting up a tree at home, DO place it away from fireplaces, vents and radiators. Because heated rooms dry out live trees rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic, and do not block doorways.
✓ When trimming a tree, DO use non-combustible or flame-resistant materials.
✓ In homes with small children, DO take special care to avoid sharp or breakable decorations, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children who swallow or inhale small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
✓ To avoid lung irritation, follow container directions carefully while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Lights:
✓ Indoors or outside, DO use only lights that have been tested for safety by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as UL or ETL/ITSNA. Use only newer lights that have thicker wiring and safety fuses to prevent the wires from overheating.
✓ Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Throw out damaged sets.
✓ If using an extension cord, DO make sure it is rated for the intended use.
✓ DON’T use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
✓ When using lights outdoors, DO check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoors use and only plug them into a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected receptacle or a portable GFCI.
✓ DO turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Candles:
✓ Keep burning candles within sight.
✓ Keep lighted candles away from items that can catch fire and burn easily, such as trees, other evergreens, decorations, curtains and furniture.
✓ Always use non-flammable holders and keep away from children and pets.
✓ Extinguish all candles before you go to bed, leave the room or leave the house.

Fireplace:
✓ Use care with “fire salts,” which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that, if eaten, can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting. Keep them away from children.
✓ DON’T burn wrapping paper or plastic items in the fireplace. These materials can ignite suddenly and burn intensely, resulting in a flash fire.
✓ Place a screen around your fireplace to prevent sparks from
igniting nearby flammable materials.

Get a free brochure with holiday decorating and toy safety tips at CPSC’s web site www.cpsc.gov (http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/611.pdf)

To see this release on CPSC’s web site, please go to: http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscub/prerel/prhtm109/09064.html

Healthy Holiday Eating

Holidays and eating special food seem to go hand-in-hand. If you have healthy eating habits most of the year, extra eating for days probably doesn’t make that much difference. But if “holiday eating” starts on Thanksgiving Day and is beginning of a six-week eating marathon, then strategies to control your calorie intake may be needed.

To prevent uncontrolled eating during the holidays a little planning can keep diets on balance. Before parties or other events, cut back on calories and increase your physical activity. Practice saying “No thank you” to dishes that are high in fat and calories. Decide what is the desirable choice to you and enjoy eating that item. Give yourself permission to eat one or two favorite holiday foods without feeling guilty. Do not feel obligated to try every food that is available. To avoid offending the cook, try saying, “I’d love just a little taste,” or “That sounds delicious, maybe I’ll try some later.” Focus on people, both old and new friends, instead of the food. With eating as a secondary focus, making healthy food choices will be easier.

Trimming calories from holiday food is possible with a few simple adjustments. Some helpful tips include:

- Purchase an un-basted turkey. Self-basted turkeys are considerably higher in calories due to the fat that is injected into the breast.
- Use lemon juice, garlic, onions and herbs to season food.
- When making pumpkin pie filling, use evaporated skim milk, less sugar and a little more spice.
- Mix sparkling water with fruit juice for a bubbly beverage with fewer calories.
- Use a gravy separator to skim fat from meat drippings before making gravy.
- Baste the turkey with fruit juice rather than meat drippings.
- When baking, replace up to three-quarters of the oil called for in a recipe with pureed fruit, such as applesauce, banana or pumpkin.
- A typical sweet potato recipe calls for sugar, butter and marshmallows. Substitute these ingredients with orange juice and spices.

Planning ahead, making healthy choices and incorporating physical activity into your daily routine are the keys to good health anytime of the year, but can be especially helpful during the holiday season.
Top Ten Turkey Tips

Whether you’re tackling a Thanksgiving turkey for the first or hundredth time, these 10 tips will ensure your big bird is the best it can be.

1) Thawing a frozen turkey requires patience. The safest method is to thaw the turkey in the refrigerator. Be sure to plan ahead. It takes approximately 3 days for a 20 pound turkey to fully defrost.

2) For crisper skin, unwrap the turkey the day before roasting and leave it loosely covered in the refrigerator overnight.

3) Cooking times will differ depending on whether your bird was purchased fresh or frozen. Plan on 20 minutes per pound in a 350 degree F oven for a defrosted turkey and 10 to 15 minutes per pound for fresh.

4) For optimum safety, stuffing a turkey is not recommended. For more even cooking, it is recommended you cook your stuffing outside the bird. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. If you like the “stuffed” appearance, stuff the turkey after both it and the stuffing are fully cooked.

5) For even roasting, truss your turkey. This is simply tying it’s legs for a nicer presentation.

Here’s how: Use kitchen string to tie the turkey’s legs together, pressing the legs close to the turkey body. Turn the turkey over and fold its wings back behind it. Tie another piece of string around the turkey’s neck skin, leaving two long ends hanging. Pass each string end through a wing. Tie the string ends together, pinning the turkey wings horizontally.

6) Before roasting, coat the outside of the turkey with vegetable or olive oil, season with salt and pepper and tightly cover the breast with aluminum foil to prevent over-browning.

7) Don’t be a peeping tom (pun intended)! Once you get the turkey in the oven, resist the temptation to open the oven door and admire your handiwork. When the oven temperature fluctuates, you’re only increasing the likelihood of a dry bird. About 45 minutes before you think the turkey is done, remove the foil from the breast to allow it to brown.

8) Remove the turkey from the oven when the deepest spot between the leg and the breast reads 165° degrees F on an instant-read thermometer. Pop-up timers are only indicators and should not be fully relied on you should always use a thermometer.

9) Tent the bird with foil and let rest for at least 15 minutes before carving. You can safety let the
turkey set for up to an hour without losing too much heat.

10) For a nicer appearance, remember to carve your turkey with a very sharp or electric knife.

**Tips for “Greening” Your Holiday Shopping Mailing and Gifts**

Did you know: American throw away 25% more trash during the Thanksgiving to New Year’s holiday period than any other time of year. The extra waste amounts to 25 million tons of garbage, or about 1 million extra tons per week. To help offset this, here are a few tips for reducing your impact this holiday season.

**Start with your Shopping**
Instead of using many more plastic bags while shopping during this busy shopping season, bring your own shopping bags. Plastic and cloth bags can be folded and carried in purses and pockets until they are needed. Consolidate your purchases into one bag rather than getting a new bag at each store on your shopping rounds.

Give cloth and net shopping bags as gifts. Use them as wrapping for others gifts.

Plan your shopping in advance. Consolidating your shopping trips saves fuel (and aggravation).

**Greening Your Holiday Mail Shopping Light:**
When buying gifts you will send by mail, pick items that are easy to ship and won’t require excess packaging.

Reuse packing cartons and shipping materials such as peanuts, wood shavings, shredded newspaper and bubble wrap.

Avoid using polystyrene “foam peanuts” as a packing material. Use recyclable materials such as shredded newspaper or cardboard or peanuts made of cornstarch. While polystyrene peanuts can be reused, there are virtually no collection programs available to recycle them.

Drop off extra packing peanuts at local private mailing centers.

**Card Sense:**
Did you know . . . the 2.65 billion Christmas cards sold year in the U.S. could fill a football field 10 stories high? If we each sent one card less, we’d save 50,000 cubic yards of paper.

This year consider e-greetings to family, friends and business associates who are online. You can create your own e-mail greeting card or go online to the many E-greeting card sites and use their service.

Only send paper cards to those you will not see during the holidays. Wish the rest a happy holiday in person. Update and pare down your mailing list. And ask your friends to join you in this.

E-cards save the most energy and material resources, but we all have friends and relatives who aren’t online (amazing but true!). Sometimes there’s just no substitute for a thoughtful handwritten letter tucked inside a personal paper card. But, as with all
other expenditures, you can make the most of your paper card purchases by opting for:

- Cards with 100% post-consumer recycled, processed chlorine free content.
- Tree-free cards made from kenaf, hemp, coffee and tea waste (eco-friendly and a nice texture).
- Homemade cards that offer the warmth of an additional personal touch from you or your kinds (made on recycle paper, of course!).

Cards that avoid non-recyclable glossy layers and attachments.

**Earth-friendly Gift Giving**
The very best thing we can do for the Earth is simply to preserve natural resources by consuming less. This doesn’t mean that we should stop gift giving. Giving gifts that help to sustain the Earth is an act of friendship toward all living things, not just the recipient of the gift.

Make a family calendar marked with important dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries and family gatherings; you can decorate the calendar with family photos. Fill the calendar with reminders, personal messages and memories.

Put together a little book of favorite family recipes or collect them and give them in a wooden recipe box.

Help your children prepare gift boxes for the homeless (each box filled with food, treats and personal toiletries). This is a great way to teach to appreciate their own good fortune and to instill in them the values of community service and kindness to others.

Make an audio or video their family tree. Using a tape reorder or a video camera, interview elderly relatives about their childhood, courtships and other precious memories.

Write a letter listing ten things you love about the recipient.

Offer a monthly lunch date with an elderly relative or friend.

Offer your talents, such as photography, financial planning, hairstyling or yard work.

Put together a photo album that traces the family as back many generations as you are able, make photo copies (color copiers do an excellent job on color photos) of the groupings. Put together an album for each member of the family with several special pages of pictures of them from birth to the present.

Tips for Donating Used Clothing

Donating old clothes to charity is a great idea for many reasons. It's a great way to de-clutter your closets and drawers. The environment also benefits since clothing thrown away rather than donated ends up in the landfill.

Donating old clothes can be especially helpful to society as people who need affordable clothing often have access to donated clothes.

Make sure that the clothing you donate is wearable. Yes, there are people who
really need affordable used clothes, but nobody should have to wear stained or ridiculously outdated items. Look for a place that recycles fabrics and/or use stained or dated old clothing for rags for household cleaning and dusting. Stained, but clean towels and blankets are often appreciated as donations by animal shelters.

Now is a good time to donate clothing; you can clear your closets and drawers of clothing that you won't be wearing any longer and make room for new clothes you may get as holiday gifts. But remember to try to donate your old clothes in season so the secondhand shops and other charities will be able to distribute or sell the clothes faster rather than having to store them for another season. Smaller organizations may not have a lot of storage space.

Give thought to where to donate certain clothing items. If you have some really special pieces of clothing to donate, such as a glamorous evening outfit or a collection of career, maternity or baby clothes, you can often find special programs in your area in need of these items. For example, some organizations have special projects such as offering good used prom dresses and suits to high school students, or professional business attire to job seekers.

This program places an emphasis on elderly and disabled population who are in resident care facilities, while giving our community the opportunity to share their holiday spirit.

On December 8th, join us at 6:00 pm for refreshments and at 6:30 pm the social gathering and assembling of items. Please plan on attending and completing a wonderful community service project.

In the meantime, please tell everyone you know that we are collecting the following items. All of these can be dropped off at the Cooperative Extension, 4024 Richlands Hwy. Please remind our staff that they are for the Elder Cheer Holiday Program. Items requested by Onslow County Elder Cheer are: lotion, candy (diabetic), aftershave, fruit baskets, socks, cassette tapes, key chains, watches, blankets, deodorant, electric blankets, combs, perfume, slippers, hair brushes, night gowns, batteries, gospel tapes, holiday novelties, toothbrushes, writing paper, stationery, support hose, powder, pajamas, disposable razors, personal care items (soap, shampoo, etc.), small flashlights, fashion jewelry, live plants, pens, window mounted bird feeders.

County Council is also in need of baskets, tins and gift bags to help wrap these items. All of these items are due in the 4-H office by December 4th. For more information, contact Wanda Mills, 455-5873.

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**November Spotlight**

**CHRISTMAS CHEER**

**TIME IS HERE AGAIN**

Onslow County 4-H County Council is again participating in the Elder Cheer Program. Since 1996 the Onslow County Adult and Family Services unit at the Department of Social Services has coordinated the Elder cheer program.
Candied Yams - for the Holidays

Makes 20 balls

Ingredients:
- 2 large cans sweet yams
- 1 bag large marshmallows
- 6 tablespoons brown sugar
- ¾ cup butter
- 5 cups corn flakes

Drain the yams until a little moisture is left. Mash yams in a medium bowl with your hands. Roll them around a marshmallow. [They should be about the size of a lime.] Crunch up corn flakes and roll the balls in the bag. Set yam balls in an un-greased round or rectangle pan. Cook on 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes. Remove from oven. Pour butter over. Sprinkle with brown sugar. Let cool for a few minutes before serving. Do not worry if they are not all in one piece when finished. Enjoy! This is a traditional dish from Basque, Spain.