



Manatee County Employee Enrichment Program 20 Holiday Tips

1. When you get home tonight, check out: <http://familyfun.go.com>. This website is sponsored by Disneyfamily.com. It has a lot of ideas and activities for family interaction including printable coloring sheets and holiday themed word games. You will also find craft ideas and recipes. There is also a coupon tab, but be careful coupons only save you money if you were planning to purchase the item already. Never buy an item just because you have a coupon.
2. Thanksgiving is the number one day in America for families to gather. It is also the day the highest number of food borne illness or food poisoning cases are reported. The reason is the day holds a greater opportunity for exposure to bacteria that causes food poisoning. The common symptoms of food poisoning nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are often associated with overeating, which also happens on Thanksgiving. To protect your family from sickness and to ensure the quality of your leftovers, practice these safe food handling tips:
 - A. Avoid cross contamination – do not allow non-cooked foods to touch surfaces like cutting boards or utensils like knives and spoons that have been touched by raw or cooked foods.
 - B. Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Any perishable foods allowed to sit at room temperature for more than two hours should be thrown away.
 - C. Refrigerate perishable leftovers within two hours and use within three days. Freeze leftovers if you will not use them within that time period.
3. Plan your meals and menus ahead of time. For some people a weekly schedule works very well and for others three or four days is better. Planning your meals helps you: save money by purchasing on sale items, you can incorporate leftovers into future meals and eat healthier.

Include flexibility – if something comes up and your plan has to change, do what you need to do, then pick right back up with the next meal planned on your schedule.

Try this at home: For tips on using leftovers, check www.leftoverchef.com

You enter the main ingredient you have leftover along with any additional ingredients you have on hand and several recipes using your ingredients will be provided for you.

Gifts that you make or assemble yourself will always cost less than ones you buy. When times are tough, think about gifts that specifically address the needs of the recipient. Start with a theme: Super Bowl Party, Taco Night, Breakfast, or for the sake of an example, an Italian meal. Identify the container, look for a basket, pots or pans in good shape at yard sales or thrift shops. If you have no time for looking around, purchase an inexpensive reuseable shopping bag in holiday colors.

For the Italian dinner include pasta, sauce, canned vegetables, cookies or pudding mix and your recipes. If you want to add the perishables just before you deliver the gift that's great or you can add the shopping list for the items needed to finish the meal. Either way it is a thoughtful gift that will save time and money in the future.

4. Instead of purchased gifts, give gifts of time and service. Think about skills you have, create a coupon or gift certificate for the service, and specify that the recipient provides the materials. Ideas may include: babysitting; house watching; pet watching; yard mowing; trimming, edging, or pruning; sewing or quilting; cooking or baking; wood working; or "handyman" household projects.
5. Gifts do not have to be new items to have value or to be treasured. Look around your attic or garage; you may have an heirloom that would be perfect for an antique-loving friend or relative. Another idea is to visit pawnshops for jewelry, exercise or sports equipment, or tools. Choose a reputable business that has roots in the community. Do your homework and comparison-shop for value. If you are shopping for items and your experience with that type item is limited, take an expert with you to help evaluate before you make a purchase. Ask about return policies and warranties before you purchase, in the secondhand market, these are usually very limited or nonexistent, but it is better to know up front.
6. Time is often a limited resource during the holiday season. Here are some ideas for stretching your time:
 - A. Organize yourself – make a list of things you have to get finished, errands, gifts, etc.
 - B. Share your list with a family member or close friend.
 - C. Identify the commonalities.
 - D. Split the errands. For example, one goes to the post office, the other to the party store.
 - E. Arrange your list to prevent backtracking or repeat stops.
 - F. Cross off the tasks completed, this provides a feeling of accomplishment.
7. Holiday Cards
 - Holiday cards can be costly, for both your wallet and the environment. This year, try sending e-cards instead. There are sites where you can create a customized slide show, add photos and music to really personalize your message.
 - Making a short phone call would still cost less than a postage stamp and your loved ones would probably much rather hear your voice than receive a card in the mail.
 - If you must send cards, try to cut your list in half and buy cards that are made from recycled or sustainably produced paper products. If you have old holiday cards, cut them in half and make postcards. You'll save on postage too.
8. Shopping for a Christmas tree:
 - A. The most important consideration is freshness. Ask where the trees came from and when they were cut. Look for a vendor that keeps trees under cover away from sunlight. Trees kept in water to prevent dehydrating are ideal.
 - B. Inspect the tree; look for signs of dryness or deterioration. A fresh tree will be green, have a strong pine fragrance and flexible needles. If the foliage is discolored, the bark is wrinkled, or the fragrance is musky, choose another tree lot.
 - C. Another test is to tap the tree on the ground or run your fingers down the length of a branch. If you get a "rain" of needles, the tree will not last very long and can be a fire hazard.

Source: Rob Northrup, Hillsborough County Extension Forester
9. Preparing Your Tree for Decorating:
 - A. Get your tree in water as quickly as possible. Research has shown that plain tap water, **without** additives such as aspirin, bleach or fertilizer is best. Some commercial additives and homemade formulations can be detrimental to the tree's ability to uptake water.

- B. Cutting an inch off the base of the tree before mounting will enhance water absorption. Keep the tree's base in water throughout its time in your home. Once it dries out its vessels become clogged and water absorption is almost nonexistent.

Source: Rob Northrup, Hillsborough County Extension Forester

10. Add some diversity to your Holiday plans. This season is an excellent time to create understanding and appreciation for the customs, traditions, and beliefs of those who celebrate in ways that differ from yours. The internet is a good place to research the games, activities, music, traditions and foods that are part of celebrations like Hanukkah, Kwanza, and Christmas, but a really great place to get information is to ask a coworker or friend to share their family's holiday experiences with you and yours.

11. Wrapping Your Gifts

- There are plenty of alternatives to traditional paper: decorate brown paper bags, use towels, bandanas, scarves, or sleeves from old flannel shirts, reuse gift bags from previous years, and use magazine pages to wrap small gifts or even comic paper. You can also use wallpaper remnants you might have on hand.
- If you sew, you could use scrap material to wrap gifts.
- Old holiday cards can make great gift tags.
- Consider old holiday lights, tape measures, shoelaces, or other household items to make interesting and unique package decorations. You can also save and reuse ribbons from year to year.
- Save tissue or wrapping paper from other gifts throughout the year. Then decorate the wrapped gift with holiday images or even just the words "Happy Holidays!" You could add some stickers, stamps, paint, markers, or glitter. Great projects to do with kids.

Source: University of Florida Green Team

12. Invest your Resources Wisely!

One of the mistakes common to the season is referred to as the "overkill syndrome." We tend to "over" eat, "over" spend, "over" do and "over" commit our limited resources to the point of regret. This year try new strategies to avoid this syndrome. Plan your budget for gifts, food, and entertainment and then stick with it. Have a light snack before you go to Holiday food functions, this will help you eat wisely and accomplish your goals associated with diet. Plan your time, choose social obligations with care. These simple steps will help you gain greater enjoyment in the company of family and friends without giving in to the "frenzy" so often associated with this time of year.

Source: Dr. Carole Prather, *former* Family Consumer Economics Specialist, University of Florida Extension Service

13. Stretching Your Grocery Dollars at the Grocery Store

- Stick to your shopping list; avoid impulse shopping
- When trying a new food, buy a small quantity in case you do not like it.
- Use in-store flyers to find items on sale.
- Invest in staple foods like canned fruit, tuna, or sauces when they are on sale.
- Avoid buying pre-cut fresh foods; cut your own to save money.
- Use coupons only for foods you would normally buy and if a cheaper store brand is not available.
- Check manufacturers websites for coupons especially for items you plan to purchase that are "on sale" in store advertisements.
- Buy larger packages only if the unit price is less and if you will be able to use it all before it goes bad.
- Consider using store brands; they are usually of quality similar to named brands and usually cost less.

Source: University of Florida publication "Managing in Tough Times"

14. Consider shopping local first! Here's why - if you want to help improve your local economy, shop with locally owned vendors. Research shows that every dollar spent locally has a far-reaching impact on the

local economy. Think about it. If I eat in a locally owned restaurant or shop in locally owned stores, the dollars I spend are reinvested locally with a portion going to the wage of the employee, other portions to the suppliers of the product I purchased, the side industries related to the business I'm supporting, and my local government benefits through the taxes I pay.

The worker in that business also pays rent or a mortgage, buys gas, eats out, or buys groceries, pays taxes, and shops locally adding more dollars to my community. If I shop on line or from companies outside my community, I'm supporting businesses elsewhere. While there is nothing wrong with that, buying local supports me and my neighbors. We all get more bang for our buck! The same research also indicates that local business owners support local charities who are workers and volunteers supporting me and my neighbors. Definitely something to consider.

15. The most dangerous time of the year is from Thanksgiving until the close of the weekend after New Year's Day. Take a moment to inspect electrical equipment, such as decorations, lights, cords, and space heaters. Make sure they can carry the electrical load without overheating. Be careful of the open flames from candles and fireplaces, never leave them unattended. Make sure space heaters are away from bedding, drapes, and other furnishings. A busy kitchen can also invite danger, sharp knives, hot pots and pans, need an attentive cook!

Finally, watch the "holiday cheer" found in the form of alcohol, it does not mix with driving, cooking, or open flames. Ensure the safety of your home and your family as you celebrate.

16. Tips for Poinsettia Care

- The gorgeous poinsettia "flowers" that catch our eyes are really bracts. The true flowers are the small yellow structures in the center of the colorful bracts. For greatest longevity, select plants with tightly closed yellow flower clusters.
- Avoid plants with wilting leaves, or spots on leaves and bracts. Whiteflies can be a nuisance. Before making a purchase, brush your hand lightly over the foliage. Tiny white specks flying around the foliage are the whiteflies. Walk away from these plants.
- In buildings, place poinsettias in bright light (where you can read the print of a newspaper). Avoid placing them near drying air from heat or air conditioning vents.
- Keep potting soil moist and very well drained. Avoid leaving water in saucers placed under the pots. Punch a hole in the bottom of decorative foil to allow good water drainage.
- Enjoy your poinsettia in your landscape. Plant it in the landscape after the threat of frost has passed. Prune it when it becomes leggy but stop pruning after mid August so it may prepare for its winter blooming.

Source: P. Dessaint, and L. Hickey, Manatee County Extension Service

17. Involve every family member in planning and preparation for the festivities involved in your holiday celebrations. Whether its is gift giving, menu selection, shopping, or decorating let everyone contribute their time, energy and financial resources. For example; if mom does all the shopping and gift wrapping herself, children are deprive of the experience of giving or if grandma always prepares and serves the holiday meal it may become a burden if grandma physically cannot carry the load anymore.

Think of ways to expand your Holiday traditions by involving every family member. Let children help with shopping and have everyone bring a dish to Grandma's. Holiday belongs to everyone in the family, so should the responsibility!

P.S. Guests like to help too!

18. After the holidays, natural decorations like Christmas trees, garlands and wreaths can be recycled with yard waste. Remove all tinsel, ornaments, lights, and wire. Trees should be cut into 4-foot pieces and bundled as instructed for disposal of yard debris. Place your bundles at the curb on Wednesdays during the month of January. Check with your service provider, the local newspaper, or other sources for alternate holiday garbage pickup schedules.
19. Now is the time to pause, take a deep breath and enjoy your family and friends. If you did not get it done, it probably will not matter in the big scheme of things! After all, when you think back, who remembers which tasks were left undone last year? What comes to mind are the laughs, smiles and maybe a few tears as moments of past holiday celebrations are remembered? Making memories are what holidays are all about. Enjoy!

Fact sheet written December 2008 by Brenda Rogers, Manatee County Extension Director, unless otherwise noted

Website: <http://manatee.ifas.ufl.edu>.