

Gift Giving: The Easy Way

For most people one of the biggest projects leading up to Christmas is gift buying. From the gift list to the shopping to the wrapping - giving gifts can consume a large amount of our time and energy. We may always have one or two people on our lists that are impossible to buy for, but there are ways to ease the burden of your gift buying chore. Here are some tips to make gift shopping simpler and some gift ideas that are stress free both for you and the recipient.

- 1. Keep a Gift List** - If you have your gift list from last year, use that as a starting point. If not, make sure you start early so you can buy gifts well ahead of time as you find things on sale. Re-evaluate last year's list - do you really need to purchase something for all the same people? Maybe a friend has moved and sending them a card will suffice? Are you going to be spending this Christmas with any family members that you didn't buy for last year? Keep in mind - it's wonderful to want to purchase gifts for everyone you know, but you should also be realistic about your Christmas budget - decide ahead of time how much you will allot for gifts. Starting with those closest to you (i.e. - children, siblings, parents, etc.) decide how much you will spend on each person. If you run out of money before you complete your list, you might need to mark some people off or look for gift alternatives that don't cost money.
- 2. Shop Year Round** - The week after Christmas, make sure your Gift List is completely up-to-date. Add any last minute gifts you had to buy, mark off any you ended up not giving. Then start over for next year. Create a habit of adding items to your Gift List as you discover them - all year long. Make notes of gift ideas as something gets your attention. This will make gift shopping much easier. Also be mindful of sales throughout the year - if you know you want to purchase a specific electronic item for your child and it happens to be on sale in August - go ahead and buy it in August.
- 3. Shop Online** - You don't want to pay extra for the convenience of shopping at home. That means you need to be mindful of your shipping costs and make sure you factor that amount into your spending budget. If an item costs significantly more online, a trip to the store may be a better option. For everything else - why not shop in your PJs while eating your favorite sugar-coated cereal?
- 4. Complete Your Shopping Early** - I don't mean "in the morning". I mean, get every gift purchased early in the year. Ideally, gift shopping will be completely finished before Halloween or, at the latest, with in the first two weeks of November. You may be used to waiting until December to shop but by then you're just adding to the holiday stress that is already present during the end of the year. Imagine how relaxing your holiday season will be if you aren't driving all over town and fighting traffic to get your shopping done.
- 5. Gift Wrap Station** - Ideally, you would designate a space in your house just for gift wrapping. Leave your wrapping paper, scissors, tape, etc. all in one place for quick and easy access each time you come home with a new gift. For those of us with children, this isn't always practical. My "gift wrap station" is actually a rubbermaid tote that holds everything (bags, tissue paper, gift boxes, gift tags, scissors, tape, bows, pen). Once I have several gifts ready to be wrapped I can put my wrapping tote on the kitchen table and get to it. Everything is in one place - I don't have to search for any supplies - and when I'm finished I can slide it into the closet where curious hands won't find it.
- 6. Inexpensive Gift Ideas** - baked goods, candy in a decorative basket, flowers (potted for friends with a green thumb), personal services (babysitting, cleaning, a home cooked meal), a basket with cleaning supplies (especially if you're a couponer and can pull household goods from your stockpile), hand made crafts (especially crafts made by your children for their grandparents), scrapbook, personalized photo calendar, re-gift (be thoughtful with this one - but if there's an item you have received in the past that isn't perfect for you and your aunt/sister/cousin would love it, re-gift it)
- 7. Clutter Free Gift Ideas** - restaurant gift card, movie pass, spa gift card, gift card to a favorite clothing store, class/ lessons of interest (cooking, dancing, karate, scrapbooking, etc.), plan an experience (My husband and I have always said we would rather do something fun together than try to buy each other gifts - we plan a date night or day trip or attend a concert - we tend to remember these types of gifts much better than traditional gifts and it alleviates the stress of trying to find the perfect present.), take a child to the zoo or sporting event
- 8. Gifts with Purpose** - Consider making a donation to your favorite charity (or their favorite charity) in honor of your gift recipient. There are any number of local charities to choose from regardless of where you live. Additional options: [Worldvision](#), [The Mentoring Project](#), [Blood:Water Mission](#), [Invisible Children](#). Or consider gifts from companies who follow the one-for-one model - when you buy their product they also give one to someone in need. [TOMS](#) is one of my favorite one-for-one companies - for every pair of shoes you purchase they give a pair to a child in need.