

Creative Homemaking Guide to Christmas Recipes, Traditions, & Crafts



by Rachel Paxton

<http://www.creativehomemaking.com>

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About Creative Homemaking:

My name is Rachel Paxton, and I have been a freelance writer and webmaster for more than 17 years. I am the mother to five children, ages 27 to 5. I have a BA degree in English and business.



I love homeschooling my children and finding new things to write about every day, from DIY projects, to cooking, to gardening. My favorite hobbies are canning, gardening, reading, and scrapbooking. My newest hobby is Pinterest! Follow my boards on [Pinterest](#) to see what I have been up to. You can also follow me on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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Introduction

Anyone who knows me knows how much I love holidays, especially the Christmas season. There are always new recipes to try, crafts to make, new family traditions to start. I especially love making homemade gifts to give to friends and family members.

This book is a labor of love that is almost 20 years in the making. In it you will find some of my favorite holiday recipes and crafts that I have made over the years.

I hope you enjoy these recipes and crafts as much as my family and I have. I had a lot of fun making them, and I think they will inspire you to be creative this holiday season too.

Blessings,
Rachel Paxton

Snowman on a Stick

If you need a quick treat for a children's holiday party, these snowmen on a stick are really easy to make and cute too. If I can make these cute snowmen, you can too! They only take a few minutes to make.



To make them you will need:

- Mini powdered donuts (three per snowman)
- Fruit-by-the-Foot
- Mike and Ike's candy
- Black food coloring
- Skewers

You will need three donuts for each snowman. First carefully poke a skewer through three of the donuts to form the first snowman. I first tried using long lollipop sticks because I thought they would be cuter, but you really need something like a skewer that is sharp on the end to go through the donut without breaking it.

Use the Mike and Ike's candy to form the snowman's nose and buttons. You can either leave them whole or cut them in half. I found they fit in the holes better if they were cut in half.

To form the eyes and mouth, use a toothpick to carefully create little dots. If you have trouble finding black food coloring try checking out a local craft store such as Michael's or Joann's. I couldn't find any at Walmart, but Michael's had it.

To make the snowman's scarf, cut a thin slice of a Fruit-by-the-Foot and wrap it around the snowman's neck. I made six snowmen, and one Fruit-by-the-Foot was enough for all of the

snowmen. It's a good thing, because I think there was only one left in the box by the time I got around to making the snowmen!

That's it! These can be stored in an airtight container for a few days, maybe a week, depending on how fresh the donuts are.

If you have an [elf on the shelf](#), you can have him "make" the snowmen on the stick and surprise your kids with them for breakfast!

Melted Snowman Cookies

These melted snowman cookies are really cute and fun to make for the holidays. They take a little preparation, but you can make the cookies one day and decorate them another day. The cookies also freeze well if you want to store them for holiday gift giving.

Ingredients:

1/2 c. shortening
1/2 c. peanut butter
1/2 c. granulated sugar
1/2 c. packed brown sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. baking soda
1 egg
3 tbsp. milk
1/2 tsp. vanilla
1/4 c. unsweetened cocoa powder
1 1/2 c. all-purpose flour

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Mix together the shortening and peanut butter until well blended. Beat in sugar, brown sugar, baking powder, salt, and baking soda. Add milk and vanilla, beating well.



Mix in the cocoa powder and flour until everything is well blended.

Place the dough in the refrigerator for about an hour so the dough will be well chilled.

Shape the dough into balls approximately 1 1/2 inches across. Bake on ungreased cookie sheet for about 10 minutes. Allow cookies to cool on cookie sheet for a few minutes before transferring to wax paper to cool completely.

At this point you can continue and decorate the cookies, or place them in an airtight container or in the freezer until you are ready to decorate them.

Decorations:

16 oz. white candy melts
1 tsp. shortening
Orange sprinkles
Miniature chocolate chips
Miniature peanut butter cups or bells

Before you prepare the frosting, get out all of the decorations and set them out.

Cut the peanut butter cups or bells in half. I thought the bells looked more like snowman hats than the peanut butter cups did.

Place the candy melts in a microwaveable bowl along with the shortening. Microwave on high for 1 minute and then stir. Microwave 30 seconds and stir again. The chocolate should be melted at this point but if not, place in the microwave again for another 30 seconds.

Spread the melted chocolate on the cookies to resemble melted snow. I just used a spoon to spoon it on the cookies. I thought the chocolate would harden too quickly, but it actually took at least 15 minutes for it to harden again. If you work fast you won't have any problem finishing the cookies before it hardens again.

After you place the "snow" on the cookies, place a peanut butter cup or bell on each cookie for the snowmen's hats. Use the miniature chocolate chips for eyes, and orange sprinkles for the nose (I found a bunch of orange sprinkles in my Halloween decorating supplies).

These melted snowmen are really cute. Each one looks different, they each have their own personality. They are perfect for a creative holiday gift. Just store them in the freezer until you need them.

Peppermint Oreo Truffles

These peppermint Oreo truffles are fairly easy to make, but they are a little time consuming. If you are looking for a festive holiday dessert to impress your friends and family, then these truffles are a great choice. They are absolutely delicious, and worth the effort of making them.

Ingredients:

1 package Oreo cookies (not Double Stuffed)
1 8-oz. package cream cheese
16 oz. white candy melts or white chocolate chips
Candy canes or peppermints for garnish

If you don't have the time to make these all at once, then make the cookie balls one day and frost them another day. You have to freeze them anyway before you place the candy coating on top.



You make the cookie balls by placing all of the Oreo's in your food processor and pulsing them until they are fine crumbs. You can also use a rolling pin to crush them if you don't have a food processor, but the food processor does a better job.

Place the cookie crumbs in a bowl and use a fork to stir in the cream cheese. It works best if the cream cheese is room temperature. Be patient as you stir in the cream cheese, it takes a few minutes to get it all worked in.

Roll the cookie crumb mixture into small balls. I started out using a teaspoon to measure mine, but that turned out to be too small. Two teaspoons is about right. After I got a few I liked I stopped measuring it and just judged the size of the balls by looking at them.

Place the cookie balls in the freezer until solid, at least an hour.

When you are ready to decorate them, place the white candy melts or white chocolate along with a teaspoon of vegetable oil or shortening in a microwaveable bowl. Microwave on high for 1 minute and stir. Microwave another 30 seconds and stir again. At this point the chocolate should be melted, but if it isn't place it in the microwave another 30 seconds.

Dip each cookie ball in the melted chocolate and place on a sheet of waxed paper. Sprinkle chopped up candy canes or peppermint candies on top, and then let the balls sit until they harden. This will take about 15 minutes.

These truffles can be stored in the refrigerator or freezer until you are ready to serve them. This recipe makes about 36 truffles.

Andes Mint Cookies

Ingredients:

1 box Devil's Food Cake Mix
1/2 c. vegetable oil
2 eggs
1 box Andes Mints

These cookies are so easy to make. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix the cake mix, vegetable oil, and eggs together in a bowl. Drop by spoonfuls onto a cookie sheet and bake for about 8 minutes. Cookies should still be soft on top but lightly browned on the bottom.



Remove cookies from cookie sheet and place on waxed paper. Place one unwrapped Andes mint on the top of each cookie while the cookies are still warm. Let the candy sit for a couple of minutes until completely soft. Use a knife to gently swirl the chocolate on top of the cookie.

Let cookies set until the chocolate re-hardens (although some may disappear from the counter while they are sitting).

These cookies freeze well if you are baking a bunch of cookies to give away as gifts for Christmas.

Gingerbread Roll

I know pumpkin rolls are really popular, but this is a gingerbread roll. I'm not going to lie and say this is really easy to make. If you are a beginning cook, you may not want to try this for one of your first baking projects.



Considering this was my first time making a roll cake, I don't think it turned out too bad. The homemade whipped cream is a nice touch. If you are pressed for time, you could substitute Cool Whip instead for the icing, but it definitely wouldn't taste the same.

Ingredients:

3 eggs
1/4 c. molasses
1/4 c. honey
1 tbsp. melted butter
1/4 c. sugar
1 c. flour
1/4 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
Pinch of salt
Powdered sugar

Filling:

1 1/2 c. heavy cream
1/3 c. powdered sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Line a 15x10-inch jelly roll pan with parchment paper. Grease and flour the parchment paper.

The parchment paper will let you easily remove the cake from the pan after it is removed from the oven.

Separate the egg whites and yolks. In a large mixing bowl, beat the egg yolks until they are thick and creamy, 2-3 minutes. Beat in the molasses, honey, and melted butter.

In another bowl, beat the egg whites with a mixer until soft peaks form. Slowly pour in the sugar and continue beating until firm peaks have formed.

Gently stir the egg whites into the egg yolk mixture.

Stir the flour, baking soda, salt, and spices into the egg mixture, slowly stirring until just blended.

Spread the batter into the prepared baking pan. Bake for about 10-11 minutes, or until the top of the cake springs back when you push on it with your finger.

Let the cake cool in the pan for a few minutes. While the cake is cooling, sprinkle powdered sugar on a damp tea towel. Make sure to sprinkle a lot of powdered sugar on the towel. I just sprinkled on a little bit and the cake stuck to the towel a little when I tried to peel it off the towel.

Very carefully turn the pan over on to the damp towel. Remove the pan and parchment paper. Roll the cake up, starting at one of the short sides. Let the cake cool completely.

While the cake is cooling, make the filling. Beat the heavy cream, sugar, and cinnamon together until firm peaks form (homemade whipped cream...yum!!).

Very gently unroll the cake and spread about 2/3 of the whipped cream on the cake. Roll up the cake again and place it on the tray you are going to use to serve it on. Spread the rest of the whipped cream over the top of the cake and sprinkle cinnamon on top. Let set an hour or two before serving.

Although this isn't the easiest cake to make, it is worth making at least once. You can't beat homemade gingerbread and homemade whipped cream. Your holiday guests will be very impressed. It really is delicious.

Crock Pot Chex Mix

If you are looking for a quick holiday treat, try this crock pot chex mix. It only takes a few minutes to throw it all in the crock pot!

Ingredients:

- 3 c. corn chex
- 3 c. wheat chex
- 3 c. cheez it crackers
- 3 c. pretzel sticks
- 2 c. nuts (optional)

You can vary this recipe according to what your family likes. You can also use rice chex or try different flavors of cheez it's mixed together.



Put all these ingredients in the crock pot and then in a small sauce pan mix together 1/2 c. butter, 2 tsp. garlic powder, 1 tsp. onion powder, and 2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce. I also added a little bit of Johnny's Seasoning Salt. Heat until butter is melted. Pour over the cereal in the crock pot.

Cook the chex mix in the crock pot on low for 2 1/2 hours, stirring it every 30 minutes or so. That's it, it turned out perfect!

Candy Cane Kiss Cookies

If you like the Hershey's chocolate kiss cookies that a lot of people like to make for the holidays, then you will love these candy cane kiss cookies. The chocolate kiss cookies are normally made with a peanut butter cookie dough, but this cookie dough is more like a sugar cookie dough. They are easy to make, and delicious!

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 c. powdered sugar
- 1 1/4 c. butter, softened
- 1 tsp. peppermint extract
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 3 c. flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1 bag candy cane Kisses

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Have your kids help you unwrap the bag of candy cane kisses.

Combine the butter, powdered sugar, peppermint extract, vanilla extract, and egg. Beat until mixture is creamy, approximately 2 to 3 minutes. In a separate bowl, stir together flour, baking powder, and salt. Add the dry mixture to the wet mixture and beat until the mixture is well blended.

The mixture will be a little bit crumbly, but that is okay. If you want you can chop up a few of the peppermint kisses and stir in them in the dough. I decided not to do that so that I would have more kisses to put on top of the cookies, but if you want to add some to the dough, stir in about 1/2 cup.



Roll the dough into 1 inch balls and roll them in granulated sugar. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or just until the cookies are set. Immediately after you remove the cookies from the oven, transfer them on to waxed paper. While the cookies are still hot, press a peppermint kiss into the center of each cookie.

Let the cookies sit undisturbed until the candies harden again. They will get soft but will harden again as they cool.

Homemade Peanut Butter Cups

Who knew that it is so easy to make your own homemade peanut butter cups? You might ask why you would go to all the effort to make them. Well, first off they are really easy to make so it won't take up a lot of your time. Second, they are homemade so they taste better and are healthier too! You will actually know what is in them when you eat them: four simple ingredients.

To make these homemade peanut butter cups you will need:

16 oz. semi-sweet chocolate, chopped (I used chocolate chips)
1/2 c. creamy peanut butter
2 tbsp. butter or margarine, softened
1/4 c. + 2 tbsp. powdered sugar
Cupcake liners

First you will need to line a cupcake tin with cupcake liners. This recipe will make a minimum of 12 peanut butter cups, depending on how thick you make them. You may be able to get a few more out of it.

Place half of the chocolate in a microwaveable bowl and microwave for 1 minute. Stir and microwave 30 seconds. Stir again. If not completely melted yet, heat another 30 seconds.

Pour a very thin layer of chocolate into the bottom of each cupcake liner. Shake the pan back and forth to evenly distribute the chocolate in the bottom of each tin.

Place pan in freezer for 15 minutes for chocolate to harden.

While the chocolate is hardening, use a hand mixer to mix peanut butter, butter, and powdered sugar until light and fluffy.

Remove pan from freezer and place a spoonful of peanut butter mixture into each cupcake tin on top of the chocolate layer.

Shake the pan again until peanut butter mixture is smoothed out on the first layer of chocolate.

Place the pan in the freezer for another 15 minutes.

Heat the remaining chocolate in the microwave. Pour on top of the peanut butter mixture and shake the pan once again to evenly distribute the chocolate. Return to freezer for an additional 15 minutes.

These peanut butter cups can be stored at room temperature, or in the refrigerator or freezer. Peel away the cupcake liners to serve, the liners give them the signature "peanut butter cup" look!

These peanut butter cups would make a great holiday gift for family or friends.

Candy Cane Bark

This candy cane or peppermint bark is really easy to make. You just melt the chocolate and pour it into the molds. I found some really cute Christmas tree molds at Walmart for only \$3.50.

To make this easy candy cane bark you will need:

- Chocolate melts
- Candy canes
- Vegetable oil
- Silicone mold

This recipe is really versatile. You can use white or milk chocolate for these. I decided to just use the white melts with crushed candy canes mixed in.



To crush the candy canes, place them in a large ziploc bag and crush them with a mallet or hammer. I used a rolling pin to smash them. I saw a neat trick for getting the candy canes ready to mix in the chocolate. When you crush the candy canes, a lot of powder settles down to the bottom. You want to get this powder out before you mix the candy in. Sift the candy through a fine mesh sieve to sift out the bigger pieces of candy. I crushed up one box of candy canes for this recipe.

One bag of melts makes about 1 1/2 pans of bark, depending on the size of your molds. You will also get more out of it if you are making the candies thin. Don't heat more chocolate than you have molds for. You can always make another batch after the first batch is done.

To melt the chocolate, place the pieces of chocolate in a microwaveable bowl and heat on high for 30 seconds. Add one teaspoon of vegetable oil for each bag of melts that you are heating. Stir and cook another 30 seconds. Continue until chocolate is completely melted.

Stir in the crushed candy canes. I put in about 3/4 of the candy and reserved 1/4 to sprinkle on top.

Pour melted chocolate into silicone molds. If the molds are deep, don't fill them up all the way, or you will have really thick pieces of bark. I filled mine about halfway.

Sprinkle remaining crushed candy canes on top and place molds in the refrigerator for about an hour until candy hardens so that you can remove them from the pan.

If you want to layer two colors of melts (red and white would look pretty), pour in a thin layer of the first color and let set for about an hour in the refrigerator. Prepare and pour in second layer and refrigerate for an additional hour before removing the candies from the pan.

This candy cane bark is so versatile. If you don't have a mold, you can just pour the melted chocolate in a thin layer on waxed paper and break it into pieces when it hardens. You can make this bark for any holiday and make it any flavor by adding different kinds of crushed candy. I made this fun jelly bean cookie bark for Easter last year.

North Pole Cupcakes

These North Pole cupcakes are really fun and easy to make. I had fun making them recently as a fundraiser for a holiday bazaar.

Ingredients:

- Cake mix
- Can of frosting
- Candy canes
- Sprinkles
- North Pole labels

To make these cupcakes you can either use your favorite flavor of cake mix or you can use a homemade cake recipe. I made some chocolate cupcakes and white cupcakes, according to the directions on the cake mixes.



You could use white or chocolate frosting to frost these cupcakes. I used white frosting to make it look more like snow.

Next unwrap all the candy canes. You will need two boxes of candy canes to decorate one batch of cupcakes. After the cupcakes have cooled, frost the cupcakes with the icing. Instead of using a knife to frost the cupcakes, I used a pastry tip to give the cupcakes a more decorated look.

To make the "north poles", gently break the curved portion off of each candy cane so that you just have the straight portion. Gently push one candy cane into the center of each cupcake.

To make the North Pole labels you can either make your own or download the labels that I created. I laminated my labels so that they could withstand getting wet or moistened by the frosting.

After you print out the labels, cut them apart and stick them on the candy canes with a little dot of frosting.

That's it! These cupcakes are really easy to make and kids really like them. They are a fun, festive dessert to surprise your friends and family with during the holiday season.

Holiday Peanut Butter Toffee

This is a fun holiday toffee recipe. Did you know you can make toffee out of saltine crackers? I was definitely skeptical but decided to give it a try. I've seen several different recipes using saltine crackers. The recipe I tried is the peanut butter variation. If you are looking for a more traditional toffee, then try this recipe.

To make this easy toffee recipe you will need:

- 1 "sleeve" saltine crackers
- 1 c. brown sugar
- 1 c. butter
- 2 1/2 c. chocolate chips
- 1/3 c. peanut butter
- Red and green M&M's

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a rimmed cookie sheet or jelly roll pan with parchment paper. Arrange a layer of saltine crackers on the parchment paper, completely covering the bottom of the cookie sheet with crackers.



In a sauce pan, bring the butter and brown sugar to a boil, and boil for 3 minutes. Do not stir while the mixture is boiling.

Pour the butter and sugar mixture over the crackers and place the pan in the oven for 5 minutes.

Place the peanut butter on top of the crackers in several spoonfuls and place the pan in the oven for a minute to soften the peanut butter. Spread the peanut butter evenly over the crackers.

Sprinkle chocolate chips on top and place the pan in the oven for another minute. Use a spatula to spread melted chocolate chips out over peanut butter.

Chop M&M's into small pieces and sprinkle on top of melted chocolate chips. Place pan in freezer for about an hour to get chocolate to set. Break candy into bite sized pieces.

I made this for a family holiday get together and it was a big hit. No one knows there is saltine crackers in it! It is really good and very easy to make.

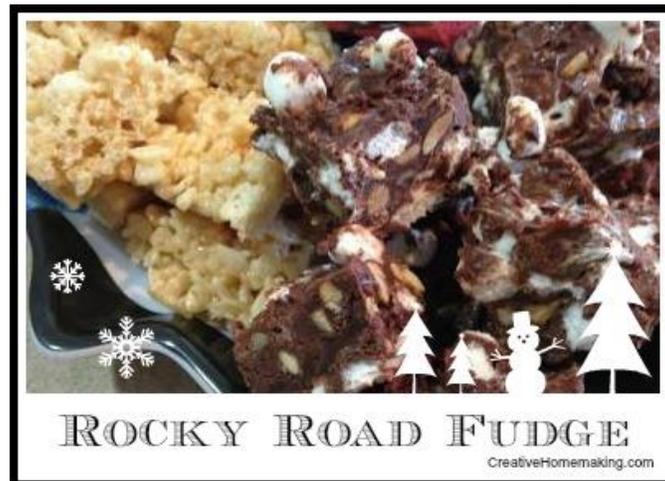
Rocky Road Fudge

Ingredients:

12 oz. (2 cups) chocolate chips
1 can [sweetened condensed milk](#)
2 tbsp. butter
Pinch of salt
1 1/2 c. mini marshmallows
1 c. chopped peanuts

You can make this fudge either in the microwave or on the stove top. I made it in on the stove top by melting the chocolate chips, sweetened condensed milk, butter, and salt in a medium sized sauce pan, stirring until the chocolate was completely melted and smooth.

To heat in the microwave, combine the same ingredients in a microwaveable bowl and cook in 30 second increments until chocolate is melted and smooth.



After the chocolate is melted, remove the pan from the heat and quickly stir in the mini marshmallows and peanuts. Instead of peanuts you can also use walnuts or pecans.

Pour the chocolate mixture into a greased 8x8-inch baking dish. Refrigerate for several hours until firm. The chocolate will be really soft at first, but it will get completely hard again in the refrigerator.

Cut into squares and serve.

Note: If you ever run out of sweetened condensed milk, you can make your own! Just follow these easy instructions for making [homemade sweetened milk](#).

Gum Drop Cookies

Gum drop cookies are an old-fashioned kind of bar cookie. You can make them in a jelly roll pan or in a 13x9-inch baking dish, but a jelly roll pan will give you nice straight edges to your bar cookies. I was skeptical with how these would turn out, but it turns out they are really good and also easy to make.

Ingredients:

4 eggs, beaten
2 tbsp. orange juice
2 c. brown sugar
2 c. flour
1/8 tsp. salt
1 tsp. cinnamon
1 c. gum drops, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a jelly roll pan or a 13x9-inch baking dish.

Beat the eggs and the juice together. Add brown sugar and mix well. Stir in flour, salt, and cinnamon.



Before you stir in the chopped gum drops, lightly coat them with flour so they won't stick together. Stir them into the cookie batter.

Pour into prepared baking pan and bake for 25 minutes. Makes approximately 24 squares.

If you are baking for Christmas, these cookies can be stored in a ziploc bag in the freezer until you need them.

Christmas Crafts

DIY Silver Grapevine Wreath

This silver grapevine wreath is very easy to make. You only need a few inexpensive supplies and you can have your wreath made and ready to hang on your front door in less than an hour.



For this wreath you will need:

- Grapevine wreath
- Metallic silver spray paint
- Silver and white holiday sprigs
- White or silver wide ribbon
- Hot glue gun

Grapevine wreaths are very inexpensive. You can find them at any craft store. They are very versatile for any season, so if you find them on sale, buy a couple and put them away for another holiday project.

Lay the wreath on some newspapers and spray all over with metallic silver spray paint. After this coat dries, apply one more coat of paint.

Using a hot glue gun, accent the wreath with pinecones and silver or white holiday sprigs.

Attach a white or silver ribbon to hang.

That's it! In less than an hour you will have a beautiful holiday wreath to hang on your front door.

Cinnamon Stick Reindeer Ornament

If you are looking for a quick, easy Christmas ornament or package topper for the holidays, these cinnamon stick reindeer are really cute and easy to make. You can make them yourself or have your kids make them with you.

Supplies needed:

- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 2 googly eyes
- 1 small red pom pom
- Red ribbon
- Hot glue gun

The above supplies will make one reindeer ornament. I suggest you look for cinnamon sticks in bulk, as they are much less expensive than buying them in a jar. I got mine at WinCo, and they were very inexpensive in the bulk section.



You will need a hot glue gun to assemble these ornaments. I was going to have my son help me make these but I quickly realized that the ornaments are fairly small, and there is a lot of hot gluing that needs to be done so I decided to do it myself because he is not quite old enough to use the hot glue gun himself.

To form the reindeer, place two of the cinnamon sticks in the shape of a "v". Place the third cinnamon stick horizontally on top of the "v", towards the top. Hot glue all of the cinnamon stick together.

Glue on the google eyes and pom pom for the nose. Cut a piece of ribbon for the hanger and glue it on the back of the reindeer. I also wrote the year on the back of the ornament with a Sharpie marker.

These ornaments go together really quickly. It is easy to make a bunch of them at one time. I was really pleased with how they turned out. They are super cute and the cinnamon sticks make them smell great. They would be great on top of a Christmas present to give as a gift for the holidays.

Epsom Salt Snow-Covered Candle Holders

You can purchase Epsom salt in the pharmacy section of any drug store or Walmart. Not only did I use it to make my snow covered candle holders, I used it to fill some clear glass Christmas trees I had found at Good Will. They looked really pretty on our wedding reception tables.

To make these snow covered candle holders you will need:

- Large round glass candle holder
- Epsom salt
- Large paint brush
- Clear spray sealer
- Modge Podge

I found the glass candle holders for this project for approximately \$1.00 each at a local thrift store. You can also find them at many craft stores like Michael's. You want the wide candle holders that you would use to place pillar candles in.



Pour about 2 cups of Epsom salt on a paper plate. To place the "snow" on the outside of the candle holder, first use a wide paint brush or foam brush to coat the candle holder with a layer of Modge Podge. Make sure surface is covered evenly.

Next gently roll the candle holder in the Epsom salt until candle holder is well coated. If you missed any spots with the Modge Podge it is best to rinse everything off and start over. It doesn't work well to try to add extra Modge Podge. Let Modge Podge dry then gently brush off any additional Epsom salt.

Use a clear spray sealer to hold the Epsom salt in place. Note that after a week or so the Epsom salt will lose its sparkle. It's best to do this a day or two before you are going to use them. They will still look good later, but they really sparkle when you first make them. The great thing about these is that all of this stuff washes off the candle holder. Just soak it in warm water and all of the coatings will come right off so you can use the candle holder again later.

You can use these containers as more than just candle holders. I used them to display forks and spoons at the wedding reception.

DIY Ornament Wreath

This is the first year I've seen these pretty DIY ornament wreaths. I needed to make a wreath for our daughter's winter wedding reception, so I decided to make a silver and white version of this ornament wreath. I love how it turned out.

You can make this wreath with ornaments purchased from the Dollar Store. You will need a variety of ornaments in different sizes. Most of the wreath will be covered with regular sized ball ornaments (30 or more), and then you will need some smaller ornaments to fill in the gaps between the larger ornaments.

To make this ornament wreath you will need:

- Styrofoam wreath
- Ball ornaments (approximately 30)
- Small ball ornaments
- Hot glue gun
- Ribbon (optional)
- Pearl beads (optional)

You can make this wreath in any color. They are beautiful when you make them all one color like red or silver, but using a variety of colors is very pretty too. A silver and white one is very elegant.



You will want to use shatterproof ball ornaments for this project. They are really popular right now, so also easy to find. You don't want any of the ornaments to break after the wreath is complete.

First remove all the caps off the ornaments. You will be inserting the open ends of the ornaments into the styrofoam wreath.

Before I started gluing on ornaments, I decided to tie the ribbon for hanging around the styrofoam wreath first. The finished wreath is a bit bulky, and I didn't want to have to wrap the ribbon all the way around the ornaments.



Next start gluing the regular sized ornaments around the outside of the styrofoam wreath, with the open ends facing the back of the wreath. Have the back of the wreath facing you on the table, with the open ends of the ornaments also facing you. You want to make sure that all the ornaments are laying evenly on the table or when you hang the wreath up it won't lay flat on the door.

Make sure to place some hot glue between ornaments too. You might have to press them together for a few minutes to make sure they take hold.

Next glue ornaments around the inside center of the wreath. Now the edges are all done let dry for a few moments and turn the wreath around so that the front is facing you.

Continue gluing ornaments to the front of the wreath. To get these ornaments to hold in place better, you can gently press the open ends of the ornaments into the styrofoam and place the glue inside the indentation on the wreath. Continue gluing ornaments until the front is covered. When

you run out of room begin gluing smaller ball ornaments in place to fill in any gaps. Pearl beads can also be used to fill in small gaps.

After you are finished hang the wreath up and make sure you haven't missed any spots on the wreath, and enjoy!

DIY Ornament Tree

This ornament tree is a beautiful DIY holiday decoration that would make a great addition to any holiday table.

You can buy all the supplies you need from any local craft store. The cost of this project is approximately \$10, and you can complete the project in about an hour.

To make this ornament tree you will need:

- Styrofoam cone
- Ball ornaments (approximately 30 medium)
- Silver tinsel
- Hot glue gun
- Ribbon (optional)
- Holiday greenery (optional)

You will need several boxes of ball ornaments to create this ornament tree. Medium ornaments work best. It is recommended to use shatterproof ornaments for this project so that the finished project won't break easily when you put it away to store it.

You can buy shatterproof ornaments very inexpensively at the Dollar Store. For this project only silver ornaments were used, but you could use ornaments of any color. Shiny metallic ornaments and glittered ornaments complement each other well.

The silver tinsel will be used to cover the styrofoam cone so that you cannot see the cone through the ornaments. Wind the tinsel around the tree and glue the ends in place at the top and bottom of the tree. Cut off any excess tinsel. The cone should be completely covered, you shouldn't be able to see any white styrofoam through the tinsel.

Next remove all the metal ends of the ornaments. You will not need that part of the ornament for this project.

Beginning at the base of the styrofoam cone, gently press the open ends of the ornaments into the cone. This will create an indentation to put hot glue into. Place a dab of hot glue in the holes that you make and then press each ornament into place. You may need to hold the ornament for several seconds until the glue holds.



Continue gluing ornaments around the base of the cone. Next start the second row of ornaments, directly above the first row, slightly staggering the ornaments along the ornaments in the first row (you don't want the ornaments directly above each other).

Alternate ornament colors, if desired. As you complete a row, place hot glue in between the ornaments to help hold them together and press together for a minute or so to help get the glue to take hold.

Continue gluing on the ball ornaments until you reach the top of the styrofoam cone. You will need approximately 30 ornaments, depending on the size of the cone. Check the entire tree and look for places where more hot glue may be necessary to hold the ornaments in place. Look to make sure none of the ornaments have popped out of place.

If desired, you can top off the tree with a sprig of holiday greenery or a decorative bow. You can also hot glue pearl beads in between the ornaments, if desired (the pearl beads look really pretty with silver ornaments). Consider creating several ornament trees in a variety of heights to make a festive table centerpiece for your holiday table.

DIY Peppermint Tray

These peppermint candy trays were all over Pinterest this year. I even saw how to make them on TV! This is something you have to try at least once. Your kids will love watching the mints melt in the oven. It makes a great conversation piece for your holiday table. Very cute.

To make this peppermint tray, all you need is a cookie sheet with a rim around the edge, parchment paper, and 3 or so bags of starlight peppermint or spearmint candies.



First line your cookie sheet with parchment paper. I just sprayed mine with cooking spray and that worked okay too, but you will have an easier time getting the finished tray out of the pan with parchment paper.

Have your kids help you unwrap all the candies and line them up in rows on the parchment paper.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees and place the cookie sheet in the oven for about 8 minutes, or until the mints have completely melted.

It will take a few minutes for the candy to re-harden after you remove it from the oven. While it is still soft you can use a pizza cutter to even up the edges of the sides of your "tray" or even cut it into a new shape. After the tray cools off completely, carefully remove it from the pan. It is fragile.

You can also use cookie cutters to cut the candy into shapes before the candy hardens. If you would like to make an ornament, use a drinking straw to make a hole in the top of the ornament. Let the ornament sit on the cookie sheet until it hardens.

These trays look really pretty on a holiday table. You can use them to display cupcakes or other holiday treats.

Easy Felt Christmas Tree for Kids

I saw this idea for this felt Christmas tree on Pinterest, and I was really excited to make it for my kids. It is very inexpensive and only took a couple hours to make.

You don't even really need a pattern to make this tree. Here is what you will need:

- 1 yard green felt
- Assorted felt pieces
- Wonder Under fusible web (optional)
- Sequins (optional)
- Hot glue gun
- Command velcro strips



You can purchase felt by the yard at most craft stores. If your craft store does not sell fabric, look in the kids' craft section and you might find a pre-packaged piece of felt. I found a pre-cut 3 ft x 3 ft piece of green felt for about \$5, although I think it is cheaper if you buy it by the yard.

You don't even need a pattern to cut out the tree. As in the photo above, fold the top right corner in toward the center of the piece of felt. This will create a line that you can cut along. Do the same for the top left hand corner. You will then have a large triangle left in the center to use for the tree.

You can really have fun with the ornaments. You can cut them into different shapes, but it is easiest just to find something round to use as a pattern and then cut a bunch of round circles out of a variety of pieces of felt.

You can use Wonder Under to iron pieces of felt together to create patterns on the ornaments, or you can also use a hot glue gun to glue pieces of felt together.

Sequins look really pretty on these felt ornaments. You can glue them on with a hot glue gun. Just make sure that your tree is age appropriate for your child. You will not want sequins around

children who are three years old or younger. Your child could also use fabric paint to help decorate the ornaments.



Christmas presents can be made by cutting felt into the shapes of squares and rectangles. Don't forget to make a star for the top of the tree.

This tree can be as easy or complicated as you want it to be. You could really spend some time on the ornaments if you wanted to. Most toddlers will be very happy no matter what the ornaments look like. They can take them off the tree and place them back on wherever they like.

This felt tree is great for ages 1-5. It might help take some of the fascination off the real Christmas tree and give your kids something fun to play with. Kids love decorating this tree over and over again.

I used Command velcro strips to attach the tree to my wall. These strips are removable after the holiday season. They do cost a couple of dollars, however. You could also use staples or thumbtacks.

How to Make a Tin Can Luminary

A tin can luminary is a fun, easy craft project for all ages. They are great for any holiday and only limited by your imagination! You can transfer any simple shape onto a tin can to create a beautiful candle holder for any occasion.



I chose to make luminaries for Christmas this year. You can choose any simple design to transfer onto your tin can. I used a favorite clip art program on my computer to look for easy Christmas designs to print out. I chose a Christmas tree, a snowman, and a pair of gingerbread men.

Here's what you need to get started:

- Empty tin cans (washed and labels removed)
- Design to transfer onto can
- Hammer
- Large nail
- Tape
- Dish towel



It is easiest to punch the holes in your tin can if you freeze some water in it first. Fill the can with water, leaving 1/4 inch space at the top for the ice to expand. Place in freezer until frozen. Your can may bulge a little at the bottom while in the freezer, but after you remove the ice you can use the hammer to flatten out the bottom of the can.

You might want to freeze a couple more cans than you think you'll need in case you make a mistake and have to start over again.

After the ice has frozen, take the tin can from the freezer and tape your design to the can. I used packing tape, but you can also use duct tape. The tape won't stick to the cold can, but you can wrap the tape all the way around the can so it will stick to the paper.

If you don't have a design on paper, you can also draw a design on the can freehand with a permanent marker. You can also just punch the design freehand without drawing it first.

Lay the can on a folded dish towel so the towel will catch the ice chips that try to escape. It will also hold the can in place. Using the hammer and nail, tap holes around the border of your design, trying to punch holes evenly and not too close together. You want a simple design so that when you see only the holes in the can you will be able to tell what it is!



After punching the holes, remove the paper and tape and admire your design. It is really so easy! If you plan to hang your luminary, also punch two holes at the top of the can. You can make a handle out of wire (from a craft store) or a wire coat hanger.

Place the tin can under running warm water to melt the ice. Dry the can with a towel and place a votive candle in the bottom. You will need a long lighter or match to light the candle.

To further decorate your tin can luminary, you can spray paint the can any color you wish. Be creative!

This is a great family project. Just make sure kids have adult supervision while using the hammer and nails. Have fun!

Keepsake Christmas Ornament Box

I love handmade Christmas ornaments. Throughout the years I have collected a number of them, made by myself and several family members. These ornaments will make great keepsakes for our children and grandchildren.



I have been looking for a creative way to store these keepsake ornaments. In the past I have stored them with all my other tree ornaments, but I wanted a special place to store them, especially my daughter's ornaments that we have been collecting for her throughout the years.

After purchasing about \$20 in supplies and spending a couple of hours working on the project, I ended up with a beautiful keepsake ornament box that I hope my daughter will cherish for years to come.

To complete this project, you will need:

- Unfinished wooden box with lid
- Modge Podge (for decoupage)
- Christmas cards
- Scissors
- Paint brushes
- Craft paint (optional)
- Acrylic sealer/finisher spray

All of the above items can be purchased at a craft store. The craft store I went to had a variety of boxes to choose from. I chose a small box that was \$12.99. It was just what I was looking for!

The box I chose has a raised border around the edges that looked like it would be difficult to work around with decoupage, so I chose to paint it instead. I painted all the borders with several coats of red acrylic paint.

Next I went through a big pile of old Christmas cards to find suitable images to decoupage onto the box. This was the fun part! Not only can you cut out pictures, you can also cut out holiday sentiments from friends and family members. Just in the past couple of years, several members of our extended family have passed away, and projects such as this keepsake ornament box are a great way to remember lost loved ones. Cut the cards into a variety of sizes and shapes.

Using a paintbrush, apply Modge Podge or a similar decoupage medium to the back of your cut out, then place the cut out on the box. Paint a coating of Modge Podge over the cut out. Continue pasting cut outs to the side of the box until it is covered, then go over the entire side again with another coating of Modge Podge. After the box is completely dry, you can apply another coating for good measure.

After the box is complete (and dry), you can spray an acrylic sealer/finisher spray over the entire box to protect the artwork and eliminate the tackiness of the decoupage.

That's it! There is no limit to the possibilities of decorating this beautiful ornament box. I haven't tried it yet, but I plan to line the inside of the box with felt to give it a more finished look.

Craft Stick Snowflake Tree Ornaments

These snowflake tree ornaments are easy and fun for preschoolers to make. They are made with craft (popsicle) sticks that you can buy at any craft store. My boys' favorite part was painting them. Give them some paint and a paintbrush, and they're happy!

For this project you will need:

- Craft or popsicle sticks
- Elmer's glue or glue gun
- Craft paint
- Glitter
- Paint brush
- Ribbon

I had my boys do this project on a paper plate. You will need four craft sticks for each snowflake. We used Elmer's glue to glue them together. If you are in a hurry you might want to use a glue gun. The Elmer's glue works well but takes a couple of hours to dry.



Glue two sticks together in the shape of an "x". Glue other two sticks in the spaces between the first two sticks to make the shape of a snowflake or star.

After the glue has dried, the ornaments are ready to paint. I wanted to make pretty white snowflakes, but of course my boys had their own ideas. I at least talked them into making them red and green. You can then add glitter or use paint that has glitter already added.

After the paint is dry, glue a piece of ribbon to the back of the snowflake so you can hang it on the tree.

Egg Carton Tree Ornaments for Preschoolers to Make

These ornaments made from egg cartons are a fun Christmas craft for preschool-aged children to make. You can hang them on your own tree or give them away as gifts. Your child will enjoy the sound they make.

For this project you will need:

- Styrofoam egg carton
- Elmer's glue
- Glitter
- Small bells
- Yarn
- Paintbrush
- Paper plate
- Scissors

Use the scissors to carefully cut apart the styrofoam egg carton (see photo). Each egg carton will make 12 bells.



Give your child a paper plate with some glue poured on it and let he or she use a paintbrush to cover a bell with glue.

Next let your child sprinkle glitter all over the bell and set aside to dry. It will take several hours to dry completely.

After the glue is dry use the point of the scissors or a sharp knife to poke a small hole in the top of the bell.

Cut a length of yarn about 6 inches long. Thread one end of the yarn through the top of the small jingle bell and pull through until both ends of the yarn are even.

Turn styrofoam bell upside down and thread both ends of yarn through the hole and out the top of the styrofoam bell. The jingle bell will keep the yarn from pulling all the way through.

Turn styrofoam bell right side up and tie the two ends of the yarn together as a hanger to hang the ornament on the tree.

Christmas Tree Craft for Kids

This is a fun, easy Christmas tree craft that would be easy for a toddler or preschooler to do for Christmas. To make this project you will need:

- Green construction paper
- Red, yellow, blue, purple construction paper
- Hole punch
- Scissors
- Glue stick

On the green construction paper draw the outline of a Christmas tree and cut it out.



Fold the tree in half lengthwise and use the hole punch to punch holes all over the tree.

Cut out small squares of different colors of construction paper. Don't forget to make a star for the top of the tree.

Have your child glue the small squares of paper on the **BACK** of the tree, covering each hole with a square of colored paper. When you turn the tree to the front side, it will look like the tree is covered with tiny lights.

If you want to hang the tree in a window, use tissue paper instead of construction paper for the "lights" and the light will show through the holes when you hang it in the window.

Homemade Gifts

How to Mail a Care Package

The holidays are approaching fast, and this time of year many people are starting to think about holiday gift giving. One way to send a gift during the holidays is to send a care package to a friend or family member that lives far away. What better way to show someone that you care than by mailing them some home baked goodies during the holidays? Here are some tips for keeping your baked items safe during shipment.

Packing Cookies

When mailing cookies, there are several important things to keep in mind.

First, it is important to select a type of cookie that holds up well in the mail. Crisp or brittle cookies will likely break during shipment. Try to mail cookies like oatmeal cookies, bar cookies, chocolate chip cookies, and they will likely make it to their recipient in one piece.

It is also important to wrap the cookies well. Try to double box them to keep them as safe as possible. Pack them in a rigid container such as a ziploc container and then pack that container into the shipping box.



When placing cookies in the smaller container, first wrap them in plastic wrap, wrapping 2 to 3 cookies together and then placing them in the container.

It is not a good idea to pack two different kinds of cookies in the same package. For instance if you pack peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies together, the chocolate chip cookies will likely take on the flavor of the peanut butter cookies. Try to keep different kinds of cookies as separate as possible.

Pack the container as full as possible so that the cookies don't have very much room to move around. Less room means less chance the cookies will break during transit. If you do have extra space in the storage container, crumble up some small pieces of waxed paper and place them in the gaps between the packages of cookies.

After placing the ziploc container in the packing box, fill in all the gaps between the ziploc container and box with crumpled up newspaper so that the ziploc container does not move around during shipment.

Packing Canning Jars

If you have canned some jams and jellies that you would like to mail to someone special, then it is important to wrap these jars very carefully so that they don't break while being shipped.

When packing mailing jars for shipment, first you want to place each individual jar in a ziploc bag. This step ensures that if one of the jars break during shipment that the contents of the jar will not spill all over the box.

Roll any excess portion of the ziploc bags around the canning jars and then wrap each individual canning jar in bubble wrap, using tape to secure the bubble wrap in place.

Place the wrapped canning jars in the mailing box and then place extra bubble wrap and/or crumpled up newspaper between the jars. Make sure the box is packed tight, but the lid on the box should lay flat on top. Make sure the jars aren't bulging out of the package.

The most economical way to mail canning jars is by using flat rate priority mail. You can pack quite a few jars into a large flat rate box, and as you can imagine how heavy that would be, you are not charged for the extra weight when using flat rate.

When labeling care packages, make sure to label the package "fragile" and "handle with care" to help reduce the chances of the package being handled roughly during shipment. There is no 100% guarantee your package will arrive safely, but by following these tips, the recipient of your package is likely to receive your care package safe and sound.

Candy Trains

I was looking for an easy gift to give to my nieces and nephews for Christmas and decided to make these fun candy trains. You probably have seen many variations of these trains, there are different ways you can make them.

To make mine I used:

- Roll of Lifesavers
- Chocolate bell
- Hershey's Kiss
- Pack of gum
- 4 wrapped peppermints
- Hot glue gun

I had a heck of a time trying to find some of these items. You would think it would be easy to find rolls of Lifesavers. It should be easy to find a storybook of Lifesavers at Christmas time. Well all of the storybooks I found had gummy Lifesavers in them, and I looked at like three different stores. I finally found some, but none in the storybooks. I thought that was pretty strange.



I also had a hard time trying to find small packs of gum. I finally found a bunch of those at the Dollar Store.

After finding all of the items you need, it is very easy to put these trains together.

For the base of the train, hot glue a roll of Lifesavers onto a pack of gum. Glue the Hershey's Kiss and chocolate bell on top of the Lifesavers. Glue on four wrapped peppermints for the wheels, two on each side of the train.

For how little work these are, they are very cute! And sure to please any little one on your Christmas list.

Homemade Dog Biscuits

If you need a quick inexpensive gift for a dog-loving friend, these dog biscuits are really fun and easy to make. Great for last minute gift giving!

Ingredients:

1 c. flour
1 c. whole wheat flour
3 tbsp. vegetable oil
2 tbsp. oatmeal
2/3 c. water
1 tsp. beef boullion powder

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and mix together until a soft dough forms. Roll out the dough on a floured surface. Roll to 1/4 inch thickness. Use a dog bone shaped cookie cutter to cut out biscuits. Place on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake for 15 minutes.



My dogs LOVED these dog biscuits. They are not as pretty as the ones from the store, but they must taste good! If you are going to give them as gifts, you might want to store them in the refrigerator. I left some in a cupboard for a couple of weeks and they started to get moldy after awhile.

This is a fun quick activity. I will definitely be doing it with my kids again.

Ice Cream Sundae Kit

If you are looking for a quick easy gift to put together to give to someone for a holiday gift or to give away for a raffle prize, this easy Ice Cream Sundae Kit makes a great gift.

First you will need a basket to put everything in. I bought mine at the Dollar Store, they had a great selection of holiday baskets of different sizes and shapes, perfect for this project.

Next you will need to put together a variety of ice cream toppings. A great place to find inexpensive toppings is in the bulk food section of a grocery store like WinCo. I bought mini chocolate chips, gummy bears, multi-colored sprinkles, peanuts, and toasted coconut.

I put the toppings into snack sized ziploc bags and then decorated the top of each bag with a small piece of holiday scrapbook paper that I folded over the top of each bag and stapled in place.



You can also add jars of hot fudge sauce, caramel, etc., to the basket. Here is my recipe for [homemade hot fudge sauce](#).

Last but not least you can add ice cream cones or waffle bowls to the basket. You could even add nice glass ice cream sundae bowls instead.

I put some shredded red paper in the bottom of my basket but everything just kind of sunk down into the basket so I wadded up some red tissue paper to put under the shredded paper and that seemed to do the trick.

I also made some pretty labels to put on the front of the baskets (the fancy labels I found in the wedding section at Michael's).

These baskets are great as last minute gifts or for people you don't know what to buy for. You could make them for holiday bazaars or give them away as raffle prizes at holiday brunches or parties.

Homemade Hot Fudge Sauce

If you are looking for an easy, inexpensive gift to give to family and friends, you can't go wrong with homemade hot fudge sauce. Seriously, who doesn't like hot fudge!?



You may already have everything you need on hand to make a couple of jars of hot fudge sauce. I figured that even if you have to go out and buy canning jars to put the hot fudge in, you are still looking at less than \$2 a jar for this delicious, homemade treat.

Hot fudge sauce is not just for ice cream...it can be put in chocolate milk, hot chocolate, even coffee!

Note: These jars need to be stored in the refrigerator.

Ingredients:

2 c. white sugar
1 c. brown sugar
1 c. baking cocoa
4 tbsp. flour
1/4 c. butter or margarine
1 1/2 c. water
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla

In a saucepan, stir together the dry ingredients. Add margarine and water, stirring well. Bring to a boil, and continue boiling for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove pan from heat and stir in the vanilla. The hot fudge will thicken as it cools.

This recipe is very forgiving. I accidentally put in 3 cups of white sugar and the sauce turned out very thin. I added another 2 tablespoons of flour and cooked it for another 10 minutes, and the sauce still thickened and turned out great.

This recipe makes enough for approximately 1 1/2 pint jars, so if you double the recipe, you will have enough for 3 pints.

This hot fudge sauce makes a very attractive gift. You can tie a ribbon around the jar lid, or add a scrap of fabric under the jar ring for decoration. Give the jar by itself or as part of a gift basket containing other items for ice cream sundaes. After your friends taste this hot fudge sauce they will never buy it from the store again!

Holiday Cards Stitched with Love

With all you have to do during the holiday season, you probably haven't given much thought to making homemade Christmas cards. Homemade cards don't have to be difficult or take a long time to make. With a couple pieces of scrapbook paper, card stock, and your sewing machine, you can surprise your family and friends with your creative holiday cards. I have included below instructions for two different easy designs.

Supplies:

Green and white checkered scrapbook paper
Coordinating green scrapbook paper
Red card stock
Paper cutter
Scissors
Glue stick
Sewing machine
Green sewing machine thread
Gold embroidery thread
Embroidery needle

Card #1:

The green checkered scrapbook paper will be the base of the card. Use the paper cutter to cut paper to desired card size, then fold paper in half to create card.



The focus of the card will be a Christmas tree cut from the green scrapbook paper. You can use a stencil if you wish, but I just cut one freehand to have more of a handmade look.

Next cut a piece of red card stock slightly smaller than the face of the card. Glue the green Christmas tree onto the center of the red card stock.

The stitching comes next. Using an embroidery needle and gold embroidery thread, sew a freehand star at the top of the Christmas tree. Using the sewing machine and green sewing machine thread, sew inside the border of the Christmas tree.

Next glue the finished piece of red card stock onto the center of the front of the card.

Card #2:



This card is similar in design to the first card. Use the same checkered scrapbook paper for the base of the card.

Instead of one tree, I cut out one big one and two smaller ones, and glued them next to each other.

Using embroidery thread sew stars on top of trees as before. Instead of using sewing machine to sew inside the Christmas trees, I sewed inside the border of the red card stock.

Next glue the finished piece of red stock onto the center of the front of the card.

Lighted Holiday Potpourri Jars

Lighted potpourri jars are a festive addition to any holiday decor. They are inexpensive, easy to make, and make great hostess gifts.

Supplies Needed:

- 1 package Christmas lights (20-bulb strand)
- Wide-mouth canning jar
- Potpourri
- Holiday ribbon
- Pinecones, small holiday decorations
- Doily or holiday fabric cut to fit over the mouth of the canning jar
- Glue gun

Plug in light strand and see if any bulbs are burned out and need to be replaced. Arrange light strand and potpourri in canning jar while lights are on so you'll be able to get it just right and be able to see what it will look like when it's finished.



Place doily or fabric on top of jar, arranging the cord of the light strand so it's coming out where you want the back to be. Tie some ribbon around the neck of the jar to hold the fabric in place. When you get it arranged the way you like it, use the hot glue gun to glue the fabric and ribbon down in several places so it will hold.

Decorate the outside of the jar with festive decorations like pine cones or artificial holly berries. Craft stores have a variety of holiday decorations you can cut apart and re-arrange any way you like.

Experiment with different potpourri scents. The lights in the jar will warm up the potpourri and help the scent fill the room. These jars are very pretty and will look different depending on if you use clear or colored lights. These are great for last-minute present ideas or hostess gifts. Happy holidays!

Note: Only plug in for 1-2 hours at a time. Leaving it plugged in for long periods of time could cause a fire hazard.

Dipped Marshmallows on a Stick

These dipped marshmallows on a stick are really fun. I made them for the hot cocoa bar we had at our daughter's wedding reception, but you can make these at home any time for a fun treat for your kids. They are a fun way to stir your hot cocoa and enjoy a tasty treat too.

To make these dipped marshmallows you will need:

- Large marshmallows
- Candy melts
- Crushed candy canes
- Candy sprinkles
- Lollipop sticks

I used lollipop sticks to make these, but you can also use coffee stirring sticks. They are a much less expensive choice, but I do think the lollipop sticks do look fancier if you are making these for a special occasion.



Line a cookie sheet with waxed paper. Place all the marshmallows you are going to use on the lollipop sticks and place on the cookie sheet. You can use the extra large marshmallows if you like, but I just used the regular sized large marshmallows. Make sure that you buy more marshmallows than you are going to need. Not all of the marshmallows that come in the bag are going to be perfectly shaped so you may have to weed out a few.

Next melt the chocolate in the microwave. You can use milk chocolate or white chocolate. I used white chocolate and then rolled the marshmallows in crushed candy canes. These ones were the BEST.

To melt the chocolate, place chocolate in a microwaveable bowl and heat on high in the microwave for 30 seconds. Stir and heat another 30 seconds. Repeat one more time and the chocolate should be melted.



I thought these marshmallows would be hard to dip, but it was really very easy. Have all your toppings poured onto paper plates before you are ready to start dipping. You can use crushed candy canes, sprinkles, or even flaked coconut.

Pick up one of the marshmallow sticks and gently roll the marshmallow in the melted chocolate.

Roll the stick between your hands to shake off the extra chocolate. Next roll the marshmallow in the topping of your choice.

Place the marshmallow back on the waxed paper and continue with the remainder of the marshmallows.

These marshmallows can be stored in the refrigerator until you are going to use them. It is recommended not to make them more than three or four days in advance of when you are going to need them or the marshmallows will start to dry out.

To serve, you can place the marshmallows on a serving tray next to your hot cocoa fixings. If you are going to give them as gifts you can wrap them individually in cellophane and tie with a ribbon. These make a great holiday gift.

How to Make Homemade Vanilla Extract

I have been working on this little project for the last couple of months, because I wanted to make sure it was worth you making the effort to do it in time for Christmas. It definitely is! If you have never made homemade vanilla extract before, you should...at least once. It makes a great Christmas present, and once you taste it you won't want the cheap imitation anymore!



To make your own vanilla extract, you will need to assemble some supplies. You may need to order some of the supplies online because it's hard to find some of these things in stores, especially the cute brown bottles to store the vanilla extract in.

If you are doing this for Christmas gifts, you should be able to get the vanilla beans locally (although they are cheaper online). Go ahead and get the vanilla extract started because it needs to sit for a month or so before you give it as a gift for Christmas. You can order the bottles in a couple of weeks if you can't get to it now. To make homemade vanilla extract you will need:

- Vodka
- Vanilla beans
- Bottles
- Labels

Making the vanilla extract is in fact very simple. All you have to do is drop some vanilla beans in a bottle of vodka and let it sit for a couple of weeks, ideally 4-6 weeks. The longer you let it sit the better the flavor.

If you are doing this just for yourself you can just drop the vanilla beans in the bottle of vodka (any inexpensive brand is fine) and then you can either use it directly out of that bottle or place it in another smaller bottle and keep refilling it with fresh vodka as you use it.

Most people recommend placing 8-10 vanilla beans in the bottle of vodka. Slice the vanilla beans in half lengthwise before you put them in. If you don't want to use an entire bottle of vodka, fill up a quart sized canning jar with vodka and place 5-6 split vanilla beans in the jar. That is what I decided to do. Place the jar or bottle in a dark cupboard and just let it sit. Once a week or so you want to take the bottle out and shake it up a little bit to distribute the flavor throughout the jar.

My vanilla extract has been sitting for at least 6 weeks, and it smells wonderful. You can definitely smell the vodka but it also has a nice vanilla scent. Don't worry, whatever you are cooking won't take on the flavor of the alcohol, just the vanilla. It is so much better than the cheaper imitation version.

When the extract is ready you can pour it into some smaller bottles to give away as gifts. On Amazon you can get these great 4 oz. glass bottles for about \$1 each. They come in packages of 12. Before you pour it into the bottles, however, pour it through a fine strainer or cheesecloth to remove any small pieces of vanilla that are floating in the jar.

If you want to put a cute label on your bottle, I did a lot of research on how to best do that. Most pre-made labels that you can buy at the office supply store are too big to place on a 4 oz. bottle.

After doing some searching around I found some sticker paper made by Avery. I couldn't find it at the store but you can get it from Amazon. It is just what it says, full sheets of sticker paper that you can run through your printer. You can design whatever size label you want and print it on the paper. I can't wait to make the labels for my bottles. Here is one [label](#) I thought was really neat, and here is another [label](#) I found that is free to print. I think I am going to use those for my bottles.

For about \$2, you can also purchase a mini funnel that will fit into the top of the 4 oz. bottles. This makes filling the bottles a lot easier.

If you can't find any vanilla beans locally, you can also buy them in bulk from Amazon. I have never seen them cheaper than this. You can usually only buy them two or three at a time at the grocery store, and they will cost you about \$10. The ones from Amazon are a really good deal.

So that's all there is to it. It will take longer to make the bottles look pretty than to actually prepare the extract. You have to make these at least once, your family and friends will be very impressed with your homemade Christmas present!

Post-it-Note Holder

This post-it-note holder is really easy to make. You can make two or three of them in less than an hour for just a couple of dollars each. To make this project you will need:

- Clear 4x6 picture frames
- Post-it-note pads
- Scrapbook paper
- Stickers or buttons for embellishment
- Hot glue gun

You can buy clear plastic picture frames (the kind that stand up) very inexpensively at Walmart or the Dollar Store.

When you choose your post-it-notes, don't buy the cheap variety. The cheaper brands tend to fall apart easily, and you don't want your pad of post-it-notes to fall apart after you glue it to the picture frame.



First cut out a piece of scrapbook paper to fit the inside of the picture frame. If there is a piece of paper already inside the frame, remove it and use it for a pattern.

Place the piece of paper you just cut inside of the frame. This will be the background.

Next cut out a contrasting piece of scrapbook paper slightly bigger than the post-it-note pad.

Use the hot glue gun to glue this piece of paper to the front of the picture frame.

Glue the back of the post-it-note pad to the center of the piece of paper you just glued on the outside of the picture frame.

You now have your basic post-it-note holder. Embellish the holder with stickers, buttons, etc. These post-it-note holders are so easy to make and teachers love them.

Chocolate Cake in a Mug

This is a fun gift for your child to bake and give to his or her teacher as a gift. They will really enjoy baking cake in a mug!

Ingredients:

4 tbsp. flour
4 tbsp. sugar
1 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa
2 tbsp. egg*
3 tbsp. milk
3 tbsp. vegetable oil
3 tbsp. chocolate chips

*Note: One egg equals approximately 3 tablespoons, so to get 2 tablespoons of egg you will need to whisk one egg together to mix up the whites and yolk and then measure out 2 tablespoons of egg for this recipe.

Place all of the dry ingredients into the coffee mug of your choice. Stir in the egg.

Add the milk and vegetable oil. Next stir in the chocolate chips.

Place the mug in the microwave and cook on high for 3 minutes.

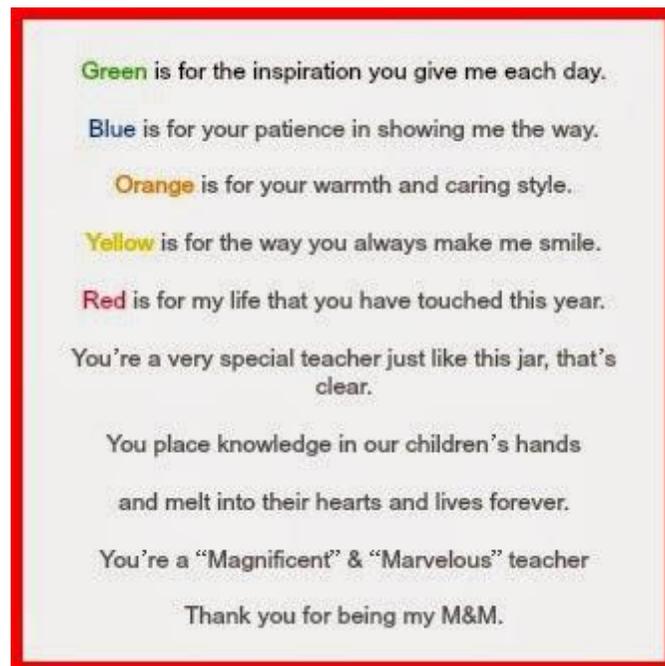
M&M Jar for Teachers

Everyone likes M&M's, so this is a quick gift idea for any teacher. For this gift you will need:

- Pint sized canning jar
- Large bag of M&M's (peanut or plain)
- M&M poem



All you have to do for this gift is fill up a jar with M&M's and attach the included poem to the jar. Print out the M&M poem on your printer and mat it with a piece of construction paper or scrapbook paper. Use a hole punch to punch a hole through the corner of the poem and tie it to the top of the jar with twine or ribbon.



Butterscotch Cookies in a Jar

Any teacher would love homemade cookies or other goodies baked by you or your children. Another easy idea is cookies in a jar. The cookie mix is all ready for the teacher to bake when they are ready to enjoy them.

To assemble these cookies in a jar you will need:

- 1 1/8 c. flour
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 c. packed brown sugar
- 1/2 c. white sugar
- 1 c. flaked coconut
- 1 c. rice cereal
- 3/4 c. butterscotch chips
- 1/2 c. chopped pecans

Layer all of the above ingredients in a clean quart sized canning jar, starting with the flour first.

To decorate the jar, tie ribbon or twine around the top of the canning jar lid. You can also cut a square of holiday fabric slightly bigger than the top of the jar and place it under the jar ring. Cut around the edges of the fabric with pinking shears.

Attach the following recipe to the jar: Mix together the contents of the jar with 1/2 c. softened butter or margarine, 1 egg, and 1/2 tsp. vanilla. Gently mix ingredients together until moistened.

Roll dough into walnut sized balls. Place dough on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes.

Cowboy Cookies in a Jar

Cookies in a jar have been around for quite awhile, but people still enjoy getting them as a gift for the holidays. What's easier than dumping the contents of a jar in a bowl and making up a delicious batch of cookies? This recipe for Cowboy Cookies only takes a few minutes to put together.

Ingredients:

1 1/3 c. flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. salt
1 1/3 c. oatmeal
1/2 c. brown sugar
1/2 c. sugar
1/2 c. chopped pecans
1 c. chocolate chips

Directions:

Layer all of the above ingredients in a clean quart sized mason jar in the order given, flour first. Make sure every layer is as flat as possible before adding the next layer.



Place lid on jar and decorate with ribbon or twine.

Attach following directions to jar: In a mixing bowl, combine 1/2 cup melted butter, 1 egg, and 1 tsp. vanilla extract. Pour in the entire contents of the jar and mix gently with a spoon to combine.

Place walnut-sized balls of cookie dough 2 inches apart on a greased cookie sheet and bake for about 11 minutes or until lightly browned. One batch makes 3 dozen cookies.

Flavored Honey

If you are looking for a really quick, easy gift to give this holiday season, then consider making flavored honey to give to your friends and family.

Honey is great because it has an indefinite shelf life. It does not have to be refrigerated and does not have to be canned. All you have to do is add the flavoring and re-package it, and it is ready to give as a gift.



To add flavor to honey, you can either add the flavoring directly to the honey in the jar, or you can warm the honey with the flavoring in it and then pour it into mason jars when cool.

Flavorings that you can add to honey include orange zest, lemon zest, cardamom, vanilla beans, and cinnamon sticks. You can remove the vanilla beans or cinnamon sticks before you give the honey as a gift, or you can leave them in the honey for added decoration. The longer the flavors have to combine the better. It is best to let the flavored honey set 2 to 3 weeks to make sure the honey has taken on the new flavor.

These are just a couple of the creative things you can come up with to give to people as a homemade gift this holiday season. Try one or two or these or come up with your own. Whatever you decide your friends and family will truly appreciate your homemade gift from the kitchen.

Christmas Traditions:

A Christmas Ornament Tradition

When my husband and I got married, my mother-in-law introduced me to one of her favorite Christmas traditions. She has five children, and for years she has been collecting ornaments for each of her children so that they can take their collection of ornaments with them when they have their own families.

I decided to start this tradition in our own family. Every year my daughter picks out a new ornament for her own collection. It's fun to look through all of the old ornaments and see how her collection has grown. The variety of ornaments shows how her tastes and interests have changed throughout the years.

You would think only girls would be interested in collecting Christmas ornaments. Actually, my husband has a lot of Christmas ornaments he really enjoys. He has several ornaments representing his favorite college and NFL football teams. He also treasures many of the keepsake ornaments his mother has made for him throughout the years.

There are a variety of ornaments you and your children can choose from to collect. If you have the time and desire to make them, you can purchase many types of ornament kits at craft stores. You can find beaded ornaments, ornaments made from felt, ornaments made from plastic canvas, and many others. This year I found a Nemo felt ornament kit at Walmart. My boys love Nemo and I thought they would be fun to make. They are turning out beautifully, but are taking much longer to make than I expected. I'll maybe have them done by next year! You might choose to make ornaments with your children. Clay ornaments are easy and fun to make.

If you don't want to make ornaments, buying them can be fun too. This year I purchased my boys' ornaments at a Christmas craft show. They had clay ornaments made to look like Thomas the Tank Engine that were absolutely adorable. They personalized the ornaments with their names and the year for free. Christmas bazaars are a great place to look for unique ornaments.

Look for ornaments while you are travelling. Many gift shops have ornaments you can purchase to remind you of your favorite vacation spots. Ebay is also a good place to find ornaments. Last year I purchased an ornament on Ebay that had my husband's favorite football team on it. I'd never seen another one like it, and he loved it.

As you can see, collecting Christmas ornaments can be fun for the whole family. Every year your kids will look forward to picking out their new ornament to put on the tree. Make sure to write their names and the year on the back or bottom of the ornament with a permanent marker so you can keep track of everyone's ornaments!

31 Ideas for Elf on the Shelf

If you have been looking at Pinterest recently, you have probably run across the "Elf on the Shelf". This is a mischievous little elf that visits your home during the holiday season. Your kids will love getting up every morning to see what mischief your elf has been into.

Some people tell their kids that the elf is checking in on them for Santa, to see if they have been good. I didn't want to take this activity to that extreme so we have just been having fun seeing what adventure our elf comes up with next.



My 7-yr-old's know that their elf, "Buddy", isn't real. I don't think my 3-yr-old really thinks he is real either, but he sure is having a lot of fun with him. Every night I pose Buddy in a new place in the house and every morning my boys are excited to wake up and see where he is and what he has been doing while there were sleeping.

You can buy different kinds of elves at Amazon.com. Here is a list of adventures I have compiled for your elf friend. There is an adventure for every day of December.

You can see more photos of our elf's adventures on my Elf on the Shelf board on [Pinterest](#).

1. Rolling down the stairs in toilet paper
2. Reading a story to stuffed animals
3. Drinking syrup out of the bottle
4. Making snow angels in cake flour
5. Caught in the candy bag
6. Held hostage by Lego men
7. Doing a jigsaw puzzle
8. Christmas movie and popcorn
9. Nerf gun fight
10. Creating a paper chain
11. Hanging from chandelier
12. Drawing or coloring a picture
13. Playing the Wii

14. Turning toilet water blue
15. Making cookies
16. Cutting out pictures from toy catalog
17. Marshmallow fight with stuffed animals
18. Hiding in the Christmas tree
19. Driving the car
20. Playing with Lincoln Logs or Tinker Toys
21. Playing with Legos
22. Playing cards or board game with stuffed animals
23. Playing with Etch-a-Sketch
24. Playing on the swing set
25. Reading himself a good book
26. Cutting out paper snowflakes
27. Hiding in kids backpack
28. Hiding in Christmas stocking
29. Drinking hot cocoa or hot cider
30. Hiding in the bathtub or shower
31. Listening to an iPod

This is a great holiday tradition to start with your family. Let your older kids get in on the fun and help plan your elf's adventures!

Writing the Perfect Christmas Letter

I don't know about you, but I always look forward to receiving Christmas letters from family and friends during the holiday season. Often it is the only news you receive from some of them throughout the year.

I started sending out our family Christmas letter the year after I got married. Some adult children are content to share their family news in a letter from their parents, but I wanted to start our own family tradition with our own annual Christmas letter.

Sitting down to write a letter can be an intimidating task. It's easy to put off until the last minute if you're overwhelmed with the idea of trying to figure out what to say. There are several things to take into consideration when writing your own family Christmas letter.

Some people get very creative with their Christmas letters. There are a variety of formats to choose from. You can buy holiday printer paper at any office supply store. Just print out your letter on the decorated paper, and you're all set to go. If you're printing out a lot of letters and don't want to spend as much on the paper, you can also just choose colored paper with no design...red or green paper look festive all on their own with your letter printed on them. You can also copy your letter on to the paper with a copy machine instead of printing each one on your printer. If you are into rubber stamping, you could also hand-decorate your letters after you print them.

Or, you can go paper-less! You can email your letter to family and friends if they have Internet access. This would allow you to insert pictures into your letter and not worry about having to print them. Some families have web sites set up to post family pictures and happenings. This would also be a great place to post your Christmas letter for all to see.

So what should you write in your letter? Keeping things short and to the point is definitely a fine art. I try to keep my letters to a page, if possible, a page and a half at the most. It also depends on how large your family is. The point is not to lose the reader's interest with too many pages to read.

I start my letters out with a greeting, and then a paragraph or two of major family happenings, like births, deaths, weddings, etc. This is also a good place to briefly describe any favorite family vacations for the year. I then write a short paragraph about each family member to get everyone up to date about who just got their driver's license, braces on or off, started their first job, etc. I just try to hit on the major milestones that people would be interested in knowing about.

You'll find that once you sit down to start your letter that the words will just start flowing and you'll be done with it in no time. Who knows better what happened in your family this year than you? It's also a good idea to let someone else read it before you send it out to make sure you got your facts straight. Especially about your kids! That could definitely come back to haunt you later.

Try to send your letters and cards out during the first week of December. I love getting letters and cards at the beginning of the season. Hearing from family and friends is a great way to get

into the holiday spirit, and once you have those letters out the door your time is freed up for other important tasks.

Make sure you keep a copy of your Christmas letter for yourself. I place a copy of mine in a binder in which I keep all of the holiday letters I receive. Someday this will be a wonderful keepsake for my children and grandchildren.

Keepsake Christmas Album

Do you hate throwing your Christmas cards away every year as much as I do? This year I decided to try to come up with some way to preserve our Christmas cards.

What you need:

- Christmas cards
- Cardstock
- Decoupage
- Ribbon
- Hole punch
- Scissors

Instructions:

I found a way to organize all the Christmas letters I've been faithfully filing away for the past six years. I decided to make an album for our Christmas letters using decoupage to decorate the covers with this year's Christmas cards.



I love decoupage. It's so easy to do and so versatile. It's really hard to get it wrong. I started by finding something to paste the Christmas cards on. I had some dark red card stock (next to the paper at the office supply store) that seemed heavy enough to withstand all the gluing. Next I cut our Christmas cards into all different shapes and sizes. I cut out little characters, scenes, holiday greetings, and even signatures of loved ones who had sent the cards. I next arranged the cutouts, overlapping one another, on the card stock, and started applying them one by one with the decoupage finish.

There are several kinds of decoupage finish available. You can find a variety at your local craft store. I have two different kinds: Plaid Royal Coat Antique Decoupage Finish, and Mod Podge Gloss-Lustre. The first one gives an antique-like appearance. The paste yellows when it dries, making your collage look aged. The more you apply, the yellower it gets. The Mod Podge dries clear. I used the antique finish and was quite happy with the result. You use the finish to actually

glue the individual pieces on with a paintbrush, and then when you're finished (adding scraps here and there to fill in the blank spots), you brush a coat over the entire page. After it dries for about 10 minutes, you can apply another coat. I found that adding several coats made the pages more sturdy...more like a album cover, like I wanted. I had just enough Christmas card cutouts to cover two pages, one for the front cover, and one for the back cover.

After the pages were dry, I used a three-hole punch to punch holes in the covers. I decided I would use wide fabric holiday ribbon to tie the covers together. That way every year I could untie the bows and add new letters to my album. I used 2 1/2 -inch-wide wire satin ribbon (dark red). I liked the wire ribbon. It was easier to adjust the bows and looked really nice. It was also leftover from my holiday gift making this year, so I didn't have to buy any extra.

When the covers were ready, I arranged our Christmas letters from oldest to most recent, and punched holes in all of them. I then placed them between the covers and inserted the ribbon through the holes and tied big red bows to hold them together. I chose not to string ribbon through all three holes just the top and the bottom.

I was really happy with how my keepsake Christmas album turned out. It was easy, took only about two hours to make, and I didn't have to buy anything extra to make it. After you buy the decoupage finish (about \$5 a bottle), the uses for it are almost limitless. You can apply it to almost any surface, giving you the opportunity to create timeless keepsakes in a variety of ways.