



Christmas Countdown

A six week plan to help take the chaos out of Christmas



Suzi Moret

Blogger, Author, Speaker

www.ClassIsIn.com

About the author

From my heart...

I often have to stop to remind myself that life is a journey, not a destination. I am learning that in order for me to have a rich and fulfilling life I must “enjoy the journey”.

Have you ever driven somewhere and once you arrived you can't remember getting there? That is because you were on autopilot. That is how most of us arrive on Christmas Day. We are harried and worn out, and for the life of us we can't remember anything about the trip, (except maybe that all along the way the kids were asking “are we there yet?”)

It is my desire that this season be different. This year I want you to experience the love, peace and joy as you make the journey to your destination (Christmas Day). I'm not going to tell you this is going to be easy. Simple yes, easy no. What I'm asking you to do is to get up every day and live life consciously. When you do, you will be amazed at the joys you will find in many of the little things along the way.

Remember, this is a journey. There will be challenges all along the way. We may be tempted to go back on autopilot, but stay awake! Even in the most challenging of circumstances there is joy to be found. If you think about it, some of your best memories are from what seemed at the time, a disaster of sorts.

So, are you ready? Let's get started . . .

Suzi



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The Reason for the Season...

As Christians we know the real "Reason for the Season" is to honor and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus. We do this by decorating our homes, giving gifts to one another, spending time with our friends and loved ones, as well as participating in and attending special holiday programs and the list goes on. Too often in the midst of the hustle and bustle we forget to bring this message into our preparations and celebrations.

If your family has already established some special ways that you keep Jesus a part of your holiday season, that's great! If not how about getting started this year?

Here are a few suggestions to get you thinking:

- Let the children help set out the nativity scene. Use this as an opportunity to explain the true meaning of Christmas. Let the anticipation build by waiting until Christmas morning to add the baby Jesus!
- Have one member of the family read aloud the Christmas story. Luke chapter 2. As the story is being read, set out the pieces of the nativity scene.
- As a family, make a birthday card for Jesus to use as a part of your decorations.
- Have a birthday cake as dessert for your Christmas dinner. Don't forget to sing Happy Birthday.
- Have each member of the family choose food items, toys and gifts for a needy family. Let each person add a personal message to the card. "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me." Matthew 25:40



Family Traditions



Traditions are beliefs or customs that are handed down from generation to generation.

In a world that is constantly changing, it is important that we have a few things that we can count on. That is why traditions are crucial in keeping families bonded and connected. They bring with them a sense of security. Most often they are just simple things, it's just that you do them year after year.

When I was a little girl, my brothers and I were allowed to open one gift on Christmas Eve. It is a tradition that I have continued with my own children and I'm certain they will do the same.

What are some of your family traditions? When did they begin? What do they mean to your family? _____

Traditions develop over time and often begin spontaneously, but you can start them on purpose. Simply begin doing something year after year. Then, allow some time for your traditions to get established.

What are some traditions you might like to start? _____

Lastly, since change is inevitable as children grow up and start families of their own, it's important to know that it is ok to discontinue a tradition that has become a burden instead of a blessing. Just make sure that when you discontinue one, you replace it with a new one.



The Giving of Gifts...

The way families or a group of people exchange gifts, is like a language of its own. If you have entered into a new family or relationship and haven't picked up on the language yet, you may find yourself in an awkward situation. This language is unwritten and most likely unspoken. Be careful. Ask questions. Dig deep. Most people assume that everyone does things the same way. You can save yourself a lot of heartache if you simply learn the language.

If your gift list is out of control, it may be time for a change. Remember that there is no right or wrong way to do anything. There is different. As the seasons of our life change, so may the way we do certain things. If you need a change, chances are your family and friends may be ready for one too. The best place to start is by asking. Be bold, be brave, be the one to bring up the difficult subject. You may be surprised, even relieved at what you discover. It's just possible, that they are feeling the same way but are afraid to bring it up.

When making a change, come to a solution that everyone is comfortable with. Remind each other that everyone is not in the same place in their lives at the same time. Don't make gift giving into a competition. Do make it into what it is meant to be....a gesture of love, coming from the heart. Be creative. Often the best gifts are the simple ones. A framed photo of special time you shared in the past might just be the best gift that person receives that year.

Keep it simple. Keep it within your budget. In the end you will be glad you did.



Christmas Cards...

As lives change and people move away, sending Christmas cards is a great way to stay in touch. It's a great way to let people know that we still love and care about them even though things are different now.

Being the creative person that I am, I have sent a lot of different things over the years. And since my list is pretty long I am always looking for the least expensive. If you would like to try something new, maybe you will find some ideas in the list below.



- Use kid art. Have your child draw a picture of your family with a Christmas tree or something in the scene. On another sheet of paper, let them write a message and say from The _____ Family, Christmas 2014. If you have a scanner great; if not, take it to a printer and have it printed on red or green cardstock. We did this for many years and they are some of our most favorites.
- Gather up the family and snap a quick photo. Thanksgiving is a great time since you may all be together. Don't try to get everyone to look just right. Have fun. Be creative. Take it to your local superstore. They will have many card styles to choose from. They are very economical and the turnaround time is usually quick. Of course the earlier you get it in the better!
- Newsletters are another economical way to go. Just write or type a few bullet points about each member of the family such as age, grade, interests, hobbies etc. If you are computer savvy add some clipart. Or you can buy some great scenic paper at your local office store to print on.



The Heart of Decorating...

Why do we decorate anyway? Knowing the reasons why we do things helps them to take on a deeper meaning. I hope you find this information helpful. Here is what I found:

The **Christmas Tree** symbolizes everlasting hope because it remains green all year. The needles point heavenward making it a symbol of man's thoughts turning toward heaven.

The **Star** that we place on top of the tree symbolizes the fulfillment of God's promise to send a savior to the world.

The **Wreath** symbolizes the eternal nature of love. Real love never ceases. Love is one continuous round of affection.

The **Holly Leaf** represents immortality. It represents the crown of thorns worn by our Savior. The red berries represent blood, shed by Him.

The **Gifts** we give represent God's gift of his Son. The wise men bowed down before the holy babe and presented him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. We should give gifts in the same spirit of the wise men.

The **Angels** heralded in the glorious news of the Saviors birth. They sang "Glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace and good will to men.

The **Bell** symbolizes guidance and return. Lost sheep answer to the sound of a bell.

The **Candy Cane** was created to represent the shepherd's staff because Jesus is our Good Shepherd. It is white because Jesus is good and pure. The red stripes are his blood that he shed for us. It is made of hard candy because Jesus is our Rock. It is sweet because Jesus love for us is sweet!



The Heart of Decorating 2...



I've heard some people talk about decorating as if it was a chore. The Christmas spirit is contagious. It is what you make of it, so you may as well make it a fun event. It can be a great opportunity to start a new tradition. Serve a particular food such as chili or pizza or perhaps cookies and hot chocolate while decorating the tree. Do it again in years to follow and a tradition will be born.

Decorating the house is also a great time for family bonding. Young children are usually begging to help. Teens on the other hand may act reluctant but, secretly want to participate and are wanting to be begged. Do beg or insist if necessary. Trust me on this, they really want you to make them participate even though they act as though it is silly.

I hope you have collected or will collect special ornaments through the years. I have kept all the things my girls made in school and church. They become more precious as the years go by. As we get out each ornament we reminisce about the fun times we shared. It really helps to put the date on them too if you can.

I found myself envying those beautiful designer trees but since I knew how important all of our memory ornaments were, I always opted for the family tree. Then, I went to someone's house and they had two trees! One was a designer tree and one was a family tree. It had never dawned on me to do that. Yes, I now have two trees. My creativity is satisfied and my family is still happy.

If your children are grown or you live alone you may be tempted to not decorate. Please don't give in to this temptation. Do it for yourself. Call a friend to help. Make a new friend. Find ways to connect. Not only will your spirit be lifted but you will be lifting someone else's too. Another opportunity to share the reason for the season!



The Art of Decorating...

There are many tips and tricks to decorating here are a few of mine:

- Start early before things get too hectic! Put it on your calendar and alert the whole family that they need to be there. Remember this is important for family bonding.
- Turn on some Christmas music to get everyone in the mood.
 - You may just be thinking of traditional Christmas music. There are so many different genres nowadays! Pandora and Spotify are great places to discover music that your whole family can enjoy (even the teenagers).
- Don't try to do it all in one day. If necessary, spread it out over a couple of days or weekends. This is especially important if you buy a live tree like we do. We put out all of our decorations after Thanksgiving or early in December, then add the tree a week or two later.
- Wrap your pictures hanging on the wall and add a festive bow! This is one of my favorites and it is the first thing I do each year. Everywhere I look I see Christmas and it helps me stay in the mood.
- If you have a fireplace and you buy the preformed logs, wrap them in wrapping paper too. Extend the paper out on both sides and then give it a slight twist like a candy wrapper then tie a bit of ribbon. You can put it in the fireplace paper and all!
- Don't forget to add a few decorations to the bathroom. You can even wrap extra rolls of toilet paper. Yes, I really do this!
- Plain glass ornaments are very inexpensive and go on sale early in the season. Dress them up by gluing some ribbon and berries to them. Or, fill a large vase or bowl with them. Perhaps add a touch of greenery or candle in the center.
- Buy a bag of mixed nuts. Place them in a shallow box, then spray them with metallic gold spray paint. Add some to your bowl of glass ornaments or hot glue them along with a piece of craft wire in clusters of three. Tie them onto your tree or wreaths or garland. They will last for years.
- Large superstores such as Costco and Sam's Club now have large rolls of beautiful wired ribbon. Most rolls are 50-55 yards and cost less than \$8.00. That is about 16¢ per yard compared to \$2-4 per yard at a fabric or craft store. Wired ribbon makes beautiful bows. To make bows, make a loop, pinch it together then make another loop

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and pinch in the center, continue 2-3 loops on each side then place a piece of wire over the center and twist tightly. For a fuller bow make one with 2 loops and one with 3 loops then twist the two together. These bows are beautiful on your wrapped picture frames and packages. You can dress them up by gluing one of your golden nut clusters or a small glass ornament in the center too!

- Tie large wired ribbon bows to the tops of your Christmas tree branches. This adds an elegant touch to any tree. Use them year after year by storing them loosely in a large storage bin.

Loosely twist wired ribbon on your garland swags. When the season is over, remove and roll the pieces up and secure them with paper clips. I've been using the same ribbon and bows four years in a row now!

- For a quick tree skirt you can use a sheet or decorative fabric (about 5 yards). Simply fluff around the base of your tree.
- Buy Christmas fabric in 3-4 yard pieces. Use the pieces to fluff on the top of any place you are going to decorate such as an entertainment center, hutch, or buffet table. There is no need to hem the fabric, simply tuck in the raw edges.
- Add varying height to your buffet table. Use anything that will create a stable base such as a large unopened can, a cooking pot or heavy bowl. Place on the table, then, fluff a tablecloth or fabric over the items. Add a few silk poinsettia blossoms, ornaments and or greenery. Now set your platters or bowls on top and you have a display as fancy as any. No one has to know what is hiding underneath!
- If you find yourself running out of space when placing food on a narrow buffet you can make more room by opening the top drawer or drawers. Just empty them out and line with fabric or napkins. Then, fill them with your small plates, napkins, utensils, even tortilla chips! I got this idea from those fancy gift shops. Think about it, they always have the drawers open and have more gift items displayed in them.
- When entertaining a lot of people at once, buy soda in large bottles. Supply plastic cups, a pen and some labels so your guests can label their own cups. Not only is this economical but it cuts down on waste too. No more half empty cans of soda lying around.
- Stemmed glasses make great votive candle holders. Just add a colored votive and place them anywhere you like. You can even tie a bow at the base for a little extra!



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- Buy a box of beveled mirror tiles from the local hardware store. Use them as a base for special ornament collections, or as serving platters for cookies or other treats. Be sure to place them on those hidden risers we talked about!
- For an inexpensive centerpiece- start with a silk pine wreath from your local craft store (\$2-3 on sale). Place a glass bowl or candle holder in the center (you probably have something hiding in a cupboard) add a candle. Glue or use wire to attach a combination of the following: ornaments, pine cones (sprayed gold if you like), ribbon or bows, silk or fresh flowers. I make these into pool floats by using wire to attach the wreath to a 12" x 1" Styrofoam circle then hot glue a small glass bowl in the center. I weight them down with fishing line and weights.
- Turn anything into a tree ornament. Tie or hot glue a piece of ribbon to a baby shoe or sock, a small toy (kid's meal toys are often just the right size), a small picture frame, or any other small object that may have sentimental meaning to you or a family or friend. This is a great idea for a meaningful gift.
- Paint your live tree! That's right! Make the tips white like fresh fallen snow by using white craft paint and a foam brush. It's much less than flocking, more realistic and a lot more fun!
- Use your imagination! Have fun! Get creative! Turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. If you have serving dishes in boxes, get them out and use them! What are you waiting for?



Getting Started - Step 1...

The Vision

The best way to ensure success in any venture is to begin with a vision of how you want it to turn out. So let's begin by sitting down with a piece of paper and ask yourself to describe your ideal Christmas. What does it look like? Smell like? Sound like? What activities are you and your family doing together? Will you be traveling or staying at home? Think about past experiences. What things would you like to do the same? What might you want to do different? Ask as many questions as it takes to get a clear and detailed vision.

The Plan

Once you have described your ideal Christmas you are ready to make a plan. This is where you will write each subject or category on a separate sheet of paper then list the things that you would like to accomplish in each category. Categories might include many of the subjects we have already talked about such as gifts, cards, decorating, traditions, and so on.

The reason you need a separate sheet of paper for each category is you will need to have room to keep adding ideas as they come to your mind.

Organizing Your Plan

I suggest using a 3-ring binder to keep track of your plan. Put in some lined paper, plastic sleeves and dividers if possible. The sleeves are for you to keep track of ideas and recipes you might cut out of magazines along the way. You can also use them to keep track of your receipts as you shop. Keep as much information as possible so you will know what to do more or less of next year.



Getting Started - Step 2...

The Commitment

As we all know... just making a plan isn't the answer. We must commit to working the plan. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Any time we ask ourselves to commit to doing something in a new way, our natural self tries to go back to what we are used to doing whether it worked in our best interest or not. It's just a law of the universe. If you've ever gone on a diet, you know what I mean.

So...repeat after me.

I promise myself that I am going to have the best Christmas holiday season ever. I am going to enjoy each day of the journey for what it is. I am going to accomplish this by making a plan and then sticking with my plan. Since everything may not go according to my plan, I am aware that I may need to make adjustments along the way but I will not, I repeat, I will not use challenges as an excuse to give up!

Are you committed?

Let's get going!



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Week Six November 13-19

- If you haven't started your organizing notebook, let's get started. Begin by selecting the categories you will need to live your ideal Christmas. These are your master lists. Lists are the key to successful organizing. Keep your master lists in your notebook. Make weekly "to do" lists that you can carry with you.
- Once you have made your master lists you will need to go through each one and write down all the things necessary to accomplish them. What works best for me is to ask myself a series of questions. Who will be involved? What will I need? How much time & money will it take? And so on.
- Create a master calendar to begin recording upcoming events such as school and church pageants, rehearsals, parties etc. You will also use this calendar to schedule and block out time for your personal commitments such as decorating time, shopping time, baking time, wrapping time etc.
- If your family will be traveling this year and you haven't made your reservations and arrangements, do so now.
- Decide what type of cards or correspondence you will use. If you will be sending cards buy them now, get started making them, or locate the ones you bought on sale after last Christmas. If you will be sending a newsletter buy the paper and envelopes.
- Purchase your postage. The easiest way to do this is to order online at www.USPS.com.
- Schedule a date next week for your family photo session.

Review your master lists daily and add to them as needed



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Week Five November 20-25

- Take 15 minutes for yourself. Light a candle, put on some soft Christmas music, maybe even sip a cup of tea. If you can't get a moment of peace at home, get a coffee drink or soda, park way out in a parking lot and sit in your car with a Christmas CD playing. Visualize your ideal Christmas. Just let your mind go where it wants. *This is not a luxury, it is a necessity. We should all do this every day, but once a week is critical.*
- Record your thoughts from your visualization. Did anything new come to your mind? Did you think of a new or better way to accomplish something? Write it down.
- Begin purchasing and gathering your supplies. For example, for gift wrapping you will need wrapping paper, tape, ribbon etc. What supplies will you need to have for decorating? Remember to add things like extension cords, cable ties, and wire.
- Take your family photo. Next, take it, or if possible, send it digitally to a place to have it printed. I suggest places like Costco, Sam's Club or Wal Mart.
- Schedule on your calendar a couple of shopping days. Be specific. Make a commitment. Keep the commitment to yourself. Remember this is the only way this plan will work.
- Schedule time this week to address your Christmas cards. If you already have a computer database and can print labels quickly that's great. If not, put that on your to do list for next year and write them out by hand. Now is not the time to create a database. That will only add more stress.



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Week Four November 27-December 3

- As soon as Thanksgiving is over, set up a gift wrapping station. A card table tucked in the corner of a family room, rarely used dining room or garage is great. Remember that it is only temporary and can be taken down or moved at any time. Stock it with wrapping paper, tape, ribbon, bows and gift tags.
- Take your 15 minutes to yourself. Don't be tempted to cut this out. Remember, it is critical.
- Review the ads in the Sunday newspaper. Look over your list to see if you can purchase any of the items on sale. Organize your list to be as efficient as possible.
- Pick up your family photo prints. But before you go, look over your lists to see if there are any items you can pick up at the same time! Always, always, always be reviewing your lists.
- If you have packages to mail, get them to the post office this week. The best time to go is first thing in the morning. If this is not possible and the lines are too long you may want to consider spending a bit more and take them to an independent postal store.
- Plan your family meals for the week. Choose meals that are simple and easy to prepare. This will allow you more time to do the things on your list.
- If you are going to write a newsletter do so now. Also, begin signing and writing any notes in your cards and put them in the envelopes that you addressed last week.
- Schedule some time to start decorating.



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Week Three December 4-10

- Continue decorating. As you remove decorations from each box you can store away the items that you are replacing. It is not necessary to keep everything out all year. Be sure to keep track of how many boxes you have. I've been known to misplace a box and things have been "lost" for years. I must admit, though, it is always fun when they are "found".
- If your family buys a real tree, late this week is a good time to get it. Be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Give this responsibility to one of the younger children. Tell them how important this job is and it will make them feel very special.
- Be sure to take your 15 minutes of quiet time to relax and visualize. Also, give yourself a pat on the back for all you've accomplished so far. Even if you are behind! Remember to look at what you have done, not what you haven't done.
- Review your lists. If you are behind on anything, now is the time to catch up.
- If you've ordered gifts online that haven't yet arrived be sure to check on their status. If something isn't going to arrive in time, now is the time to find a replacement.
- If you are planning on doing any baking, gather up your supplies and take inventory. Purchase anything you still need.
- Have some activities to keep the children busy while you are working on your tasks. Even better, take turns with another mom. That way you can both accomplish so much more.



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Week Two December 11-17

- If you are hosting Christmas dinner this year, decide on the menu. Be sure to talk it over with any others who will be participating. I suggest using my friend Teri's "24 hour rule". When someone offers to bring something, you simply tell them that you have a 24 hour rule. The 24 hour rule is that you need the items at your house at least 24 hours in advance. I love this rule because just in case something happens you will have time to take care of it.
- If you will be going to someone else's home for dinner, now is a good time to find out what your responsibilities will be if any. It's no fun to find out at the last minute that someone is counting on you to do something you didn't know about.
- Take time to relax and take some deep breaths. Check your calendar and make arrangements for transportation to and from rehearsals, parties, etc.
- The children will be out of school soon. Have some things planned that they can help with. Remember to keep them involved. Involving kids can sometimes make things take longer. I was often tempted to put off having them help because I could get it done faster. I found that if I involved them in the beginning, they usually got bored quickly and I could then finish up the project myself. A win-win!
- Continue checking and revising your lists. How are you doing? Be sure to keep it real. If you see there are just too many things to get done in the time you have left, look to see where you can make changes. It is ok!!! You are ok! You are doing great!



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Week One December 18-25

- I hope you have been enjoying the journey. Whatever you have accomplished so far is fantastic! If you have not done as well as you had hoped, remember there is always next year.
- Record your thoughts on a journal page. What have you learned? What has gone right? What might you want to improve on next year?
- Now is the time to finish up any loose ends. Review your lists. Are there any more gifts you need to purchase? If so, do so. How about cards? Have you received one from someone who was not on your list? If so, take the time now to reciprocate.
- Do something spontaneous with your family. Pile in the car to go for a drive to see some of the special neighborhood lights. Play a game while sipping hot chocolate. Sit by the fire and read the Christmas story. Or, just watch a good Christmas movie. You will be surprised what a break will do for everyone.
- Go caroling. Gather up the kids, you may even invite some of their friends. Even if you only go to a few neighbors homes it will make a great memory. So, print some lyric pages from the internet, get bundled up, and knock on some doors. You will be blessed as you bless others. Keep it short and simple. One song per home is enough.
- Put away the wrapping station. Put together anything that needs put together. Remember to have extra batteries on hand. Relax and enjoy. You deserve it!



Chocolate Goodies...

Chocolate Magic

I use chocolate melts in a at least dozen different ways. I'm always looking for quicker, more economical ways to do things. Here are some of my favorites. They make great gifts too! Just bag them up in those cute holiday bags (you can even get these at a dollar store) and tie with a ribbon!

Note: You can melt chocolate in microwave! Heat on medium heat for 1 minute. Stir. Continue heating at 20 second intervals.

- **Pretzel Bark**—While those dipped pretzels are delicious I find them way too time consuming so I created what I call Pretzel Bark. First, line your cookie sheets with parchment or wax paper. Arrange a layer of pretzels (they can overlap slightly) on your cookie sheets. Next, melt a bag of white chocolate melts. Using a wooden spoon, quickly scoop and drizzle over pretzels. Let chocolate harden then break apart and serve or store. It stores well in Ziploc bags for a few weeks. Serve in any type of pail or tin or even a gift wrapped box lined with tissue paper. You may also top with any of the following.
 - Toffee bits (these are my daughter's favorite)
 - Colored sprinkles
 - Crushed candy canes
 - Finely chopped and toasted nuts such as almonds, pecans or hazelnuts.
- **Snowy Oreos**— Melt white chocolate, then dip Oreo cookies (about 2/3 of the way) and lay on parchment or wax paper lined cookie sheets. Add sprinkles or crushed peppermint candies for a festive look. This is a great project for little ones to help with. They enjoy adding the sprinkles!
- **Drizzled Cookies**— You can liven up any kind of cookie whether it be homemade or store-bought. Arrange a layer of cookies on a parchment or wax paper lined cookie sheet. Using a disposable pastry bag works best if you have it, or you can use a Ziploc bag (the freezer type are thicker and work better). Just fill with melted chocolate and snip the tip off. Drizzle chocolate using a quick zigzag motion. It is ok if some of the chocolate goes onto the paper, using a more flowing motion gives it a better look. If

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you do it too slowly it will look wiggly.

- **Candy Canes-** Dip the straight part of candy canes in melted white chocolate. Add colorful sprinkles or sugars as desired. A great project to do with the kids!
- **Nut Clusters-** Melt white or dark chocolate. Stir in some toasted almonds or peanuts. Drop by spoonfuls onto lined cookie sheets. Cool completely. These look great in those colorful little paper cups!
- **Other Barks-** Just melt chocolate then stir in one of the following: nuts, toffee bits, crushed candy canes, raisins, cookie crumbs etc. Pour onto lined cookie sheets. Cool completely. Break into pieces. Great in cellophane bags or tins!
- **Filled Cookie Cutters-** Place shaped cookie cutters on a lined baking sheet. Melt chocolate. Pour into cookie cutters. You can add small bits of cookies, toffee or candy canes, as well adding some on top for decoration you like. These make great gifts for coworkers or children's friends. Just bag them up and tie with a ribbon!





Easy Appetizers...

I like to be prepared to entertain guests at a moment's notice: to make this possible I keep some ingredients on hand at all times for a few of my favorite recipes. I hope you find these recipes helpful this season!

Artichoke Dip-This is my most requested recipe and the easiest!

You will need **1-15 oz. can whole or quartered artichoke hearts, 1-7 oz. can diced mild green chiles, 1 cup mayonnaise and 1 cup Parmesan cheese.** To prepare: chop artichoke hearts, big or small; it's your call. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl or even right in the 9" round or square baking dish! Bake at 325° for about 20 minutes, stirring once or in the microwave on medium power for several minutes stirring often. **Do not over bake** or the dip will separate. Serve with corn tortilla chips. You can garnish with some chopped fresh tomatoes and green onions if you like.

Cran Mustard Cocktail Sausages- These are great to take to a potluck. They are not only easy but economical as well. It is best to purchase the sausages in 3 lb. bags at Costco or Sam's Club.

For each **3 lb. bag of sausages** you will need **1 can of whole or jellied cranberry sauce and 2 cups of yellow mustard.**

You can prepare these in a crock-pot, in the oven or on the stove. Just mix the mustard and cranberry sauce together and pour over sausages. The juices of the sausages will mix with the sauce. Once heated thoroughly they can be kept warm on low heat or in a chafing dish for several hours. Serve with frilled toothpicks!

Chili Cheese Sauce- This is always a hit, especially with teens and couldn't be easier! You need **1 large 6 lb. can nacho cheese sauce. 3 cans (15 oz. each) of your favorite chili with or without beans.** Mix together in a crock-pot. Heat thoroughly. Serve with corn tortilla chips. Very economical and goes a long way!

Cream cheese is a must have during the holidays. It is a great appetizer base. Just place on a serving plate and top with one of the following topping combinations. Serve with **crackers, pita chips, thin slices of plain or toasted baguette.**

- **Shrimp Cocktail**- you can buy those cute little prepared **shrimp cocktails** or make your own by spreading about **a cup of cocktail sauce and 1 cup or 1 6 oz. can of shrimp.** Garnish with lemon wedges and parsley if desired.
- **Pesto**- Just pour and spread about **1 cup of prepared pesto sauce** from the deli section of your supermarket. It is great just like this or you can add some **chopped sun dried tomatoes and toasted pine nuts.** Use leftovers as a sauce on hot pasta!

Christmas Countdown

- **Salsa**-Just top with about a cup of your favorite **salsa** Garnish with **chopped fresh cilantro and green onions** if desired.
- **Chili**- Heat a can of your favorite **chili** and pour it on!
- **Chutney or Jelly**- There are a variety of different **chutneys** and **jellies** available in your supermarket or specialty shops. Just spread it on right out of the jar!

Easy Bruschetta Sauce- Stir together: 1 can (15 oz.) petite diced tomatoes or 2 cups chopped fresh tomatoes, 1/4 cup prepared pesto sauce, 2 Tablespoons finely chopped red or white onion, 1-2 Tablespoons Balsamic Vinegar, 2 Tablespoons or more of grated parmesan cheese. For *bruschetta*, thinly slice a **baguette** about 1/4 inch thick on an angle, brush with **olive oil or butter**, then sprinkle lightly with **Parmesan cheese** Place on lined baking sheets and bake in a 350° oven for about 5-7 minutes or until lightly toasted. Serve with the sauce in the center of a serving dish surrounded by bruschetta slices. Use leftovers on hot cooked pasta or as a topping on cooked chicken breasts.



Christmas Countdown



Sample Gift List...

When creating my gift lists I begin by asking myself the questions Who? What? and Where? I cross them out as I purchase them. My list looks something like this:

Who?	What?	Where?
My Family		
Mom & Dad		
Brother & Sis-n-law		
Child	Toy or book	Sam's ?
Sister & Bro-n-law	Gift Basket or ?	Sam's ?
Child	Gift card	Best Buy
Child	Gift card	Best Buy
Hubby's Family		
Mom & Dad		
Sis		
Sis		
Friends		
Friend 1	?	?
Friend 2		
Coworkers	Cookie & Candy Trays	Make

Christmas Countdown



Sample Gift List Shopping List...

The next thing I do is group the gift items by where I will look for them.

Internet	Department Store
Target	Other
	Best Buy
	2 gift cards
Book Store	Sam's Club
	Toy or book for Child

Christmas Countdown



Sample Grocery Shopping List...

Recipe & Ingredients	Where to buy
Artichoke Dip	
2 cans artichoke hearts	Trader Joe's
mayonnaise	Sam's Club
Parmesan cheese	Have in fridge
2 cans green chiles	Grocery
Tortilla chips	Sam's
Cran Mustard Cocktail Sausages	
3 lbs. cocktail sausages	Sam's
1 can cranberry sauce	grocery
Mustard	Sam's or grocery
Fried Toothpicks	Smart-n-final
Pretzel Bark	
Pretzels	Sam's Club
5 lbs. White Chocolate	Michael's crafts or cake supply
Toffee bits	Cake supply store
Chili Cheese Sauce	
3 cans chili	Sam's Club or grocery
1 can cheese sauce	Sam's Club

Christmas Countdown



Sample Shopping List by Store...

Sam's Club	
Mayonnaise	
Tortilla chips	
1 pack cocktail sausages	
Mustard	
1 box pretzels	
Canned Chili & grocery	
Cheese Sauce	
Grocery	
2 cans green chiles	
1 can cranberry sauce	
Mustard	
3 cans chili	
Trader Joe's	
Artichoke hearts	

Christmas Countdown



Sample Master "to do" List...

What?	Week #
• Get out Christmas CD's	
• Set up Wrapping Center	
• Wrap logs	
• Take family photo	
• Bake cookies for cookie trays	
• Make candy and pretzel bark	
• Etc.	
•	
•	
•	
•	

Christmas Countdown

Sample Weekly "to do" List...



November 13-19	
• Schedule family photo session	
• Create notebook	
• Create master calendar	
• Make travel arrangements	
• Decide on cards	
• Buy postage	
• Create master lists	

Christmas Countdown

Sample Daily "to do" List...



1st Priority	2nd Priority
• Make travel arrangements	• Buy stamps at www.usps.com
• Schedule family photo	• Make appt for haircut
• Talk to sis about gifts	• Look into online shopping
• Buy notebook supplies	
• Buy or print calendar	
• Make dinner	
• Get gas in car	

Christmas Countdown



Notes...

[illegible]



Journal Page...

Date:

Christmas Countdown



Memory Page...
