

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Now the days pass quickly and yet drag with peculiar reluctance as the holidays approach. Anticipation slows the intervening hours, yet preparations hurry them along and shorten the remaining days.

For most of us, getting ready is as much a part of Christmas as the celebration itself. Decorating the house, planning entertainment, creating special tree ornaments, personalizing cards and choosing, wrapping and tagging gifts keep our minds and hands busy and occupy most of our free moments. Finally, and second only to the religious observances, is preparing holiday foods.

It's not too early to start; in fact, if you plan to make this Christmas a creative one, it's almost too late unless you've organized your plans and know exactly what projects you'll include this season. To help with that organization, here are a few ideas you may find enable you to wake up on Christmas morning in a state of readiness.

Miniature trees make delightful gifts for friends of all ages. Delivering them the week before Christmas, sharing the spirit of the holidays, brings joy to all concerned. Children love helping to make little trees and often succeed in creating beautiful results with but little supervision.

Glue a variety of macaroni shapes to a 12" to 17" styrofoam cone set firmly in a low dish. Cover the entire surface of the cone with pasta shapes, making sure the twists stand out from the surface for dimension; save one appropriate shape for the tip-top. When the glue is completely dry, spray with gold, silver or white enamel, and sprinkle with glitter. Red cinnamon candies glued here and there among the branches add a finishing touch. Use small shells collected from the beach in the same way; leave natural or spray-paint and sprinkle with glitter.

A quick and easy tree that's an eye-catching table ornament can be made with a long thin knitting needle and a variety of Christmas balls. Use four large balls as the base, slipping the metal loops over the needle and setting them on a large flat plate. Four slightly smaller balls will form the second tier of branches, followed by additional rows of smaller and smaller ones, as the tree takes shape. Crown the tip of the needle with a tiny silver or gold ball. You can use balls all of one color or mix them for the effect you like best. Tuck small-sized balls around the four large ones, at the bottom.

A toothpick tree takes a while to make but is surprisingly attractive and can be stored for use another year. You'll need 16 styrofoam balls 1" in diameter, and several boxes of plain round toothpicks. After dipping the tip into white glue, insert toothpicks into the balls as thickly as possible. The porcupine globes may either be left natural or spray painted. If you use a styrofoam base, spray it, as well, or cover with aluminum foil. Use seven balls for the bottom, pushing them together to stabilize them. The second layer will take five spheres, the next, three, and the last will perch on top. Tuck cranberries, tiny ribbon bows or gum drops among the "needles."

Let the youngsters make their own Christmas cards using strips of white construction paper, 3½" X 8", folded once and leaving a 1" flap at the bottom. Draw an outline of a tree on the front and color it green. With a punch, make random holes in the tree. Inside, glue multicolored paper or crayon bright circles so the colors will show through the holes. Ink "strings" on the balloons and "hand" greetings from the strings. Fold up the 1" flap to carry the child's name. This card will stand up for display.

A similar strip of paper can be decorated with a cookie cutter dipped into tempera paint, spread thinly on waxed paper, and then stamped on the white paper. Overlapping shapes are effective and ten-cent postals can be used to save envelopes and postage.

Last year's Christmas cards offer a wealth of cut-and-glue materials for children's personalized cards, as well as a source of free gift tags. Snip away unwanted portions, leave enough white space for names, and tie or glue on gift-wrapped packages.

Gift-wrapping paper can carry intimate messages. Choose the financial page for men's gifts, a fashion ad for the ladies', and the comics for children. Or spread water colors on a wet brown paper bag, crumple, smooth out, and let dry for a stained-glass window effect. Left-over wallpaper may lend itself to snip-and-glue projects, too.

Useful gifts children can make include decorated bushel or peck baskets to hold kindling for the fireplace or woodstove. Sponge the outsides with green or red tempera paint; glue on appropriate decorations cut from felt scraps: snow men, mittens or socks, bells, candles, stars, angels, reindeer, trees, candy canes and holly are possibilities. Add gold braid around the top and bottom; tie a red bow on the handle, and line the bottom with a circle of plastic to keep litter from sifting through.

With 16 bottle caps and two shades of green felt, a child old enough to use needle and thread can make a trivet. Cut 16 circles, 3" in diameter, from light green felt; cover each cap by running thread around the edges of the circle and drawing up tightly over the bottle cap. Sew the caps together in the shape of a bunch of grapes; then sew them to the darker green felt backing. Trim away excess, cut a stem and a few leaves from the scraps, and sew to the top of the trivet.

You can even put Christmas color into your menu. Make a spinach casserole from two 10-oz. packages of frozen spinach. Defrost, bring to a quick boil, drain, cool, and squeeze out excess water. Mix with a jar of sour cream and an envelope of dried onion soup. Pour into buttered casserole and top with prepared stuffing croutons. Serves 6.

Hot dog buns make tasty snacks everyone will relish. Slice them the long way into four pieces, roll in a stick of melted oleo in which a clove of garlic is crushed, sprinkle with parmesan cheese and sesame or poppy seeds. Brown in a 300° oven until crispy.

For a sweet cookie, treat your family to the traditional little Greek specialties that resemble tiny snowballs and will literally melt in your mouth. Cream two sticks of butter (not margarine this time) until very light and fluffy; gradually add ¾ cup of confectioners sugar, beating in thoroughly. Beat in one egg yolk and an ounce-and-a-half of good brandy or cognac. Gradually blend in 4½ cups sifted flour. Measure carefully.

Flour hands and shape dough into inch-and-a-half sized balls; place on ungreased baking sheets. Stick one hole clove into each cookie. Pop into a 350° oven and bake 15 minutes. Remove from pan when slightly cool and dust with confectioners sugar. These are best, freshly made, but can be stored a short while in air-tight tins or plastic containers with tight-fitting covers. Makes about six dozen cookies.

Christmas holidays are always rich in traditions unique to each family; these are important and should be preserved, but adding extra touches, creative ones that all generations can enjoy brings special meaning to the holidays. Investing time and effort in thoughtful gifts puts a little elasticity into Christmas budgets, too.

It's remarkable how precious hand-made gifts or remembrances grow when the giver includes love and affection. This year, celebrate the season with personalized presents for your cherished nearest and dearest.