

Create Memories With Christmas Family Traditions



By: Taylor Flanery, Sandee Lembke & Crystal Maleski

Christmas Traditions Make The Season Special

What makes Christmas such a special time for you? What makes it so special for us is the time we spend with our families, the memories we create year after year and remembering moments when kids were younger and treasuring how they've grown.

It sounds cliché, but it is so true. Christmas is not about gifts and commercialization, but is more about the time we spend with family. We started sharing our holiday traditions among ourselves and we kept saying things like, "Oh, I love that idea!" or "We doing something similar, and love it too." Then it hit us – let's share some of our favorite family traditions and holiday ideas with everyone else as our gift to our website readers. So, that's the genesis of this little book.

Each of us has different interests, strengths and passions so we've gathered a wide selection of ideas to get your own mind going about what you might like to do this coming season.

We joked, it seems like Crystal's family traditions all center on food since she loves to cook, and many of Sandee's traditions center around entertaining, since she truly is the party queen. Taylor's family still has some pretty young ones, and they're still creating and adapting traditions each year. What she found is that trying to do too many of these traditions perfectly made her stressed out. So, she's focused more on choosing what things are most important for her family, and then planning and scheduling these activities into their busy lives.

Our hope is that you'll enjoy this e-book and get some ideas for yourself about Christmas traditions to start with your family – or encourage you to continue with the traditions you've already started in past years. The ideas presented are meant only to be a spring board for your own family's imagination and interests. That's the beauty of traditions – they don't have to cost lots of money, there is no right or wrong way to do them, and whatever you have time for will be enough to create lots of wonderful memories.

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Table of Contents

Topic	Page #
Choosing Traditions	3
Our Family Traditions	4
Table Centerpieces	8
Natural Decorations	10
Creative Wrapping	11
Gifts From The Kitchen	13
Author Biographies	16
Prioritizing Traditions Worksheet	17

Choose Only The Most Special Traditions For A Stress Free Christmas Season

Christmas traditions are meant to be special, memorable times with your family. But before we get started sharing our ideas and thoughts I want you to keep one thing in mind -- you aren't Wonder Woman, so you can't do everything this Christmas season that you think is a good idea and sounds fun. There isn't enough time and energy for it, plus even if you could do it all nothing would seem as special if you cram too much stuff in.



Therefore, the first step toward creating and sustaining your family traditions this Holiday season is to decide which of them you want to continue doing, realistically consider which ones you'd like to start, and just as importantly, decide which ones to just stop forcing on everyone, including yourself. By focusing only on the most special events and activities you will keep yourself less stressed, allow yourself enough time to do the traditions and most importantly, to enjoy them, which is the whole point, right?

To help you with this mental exercise we created a little worksheet page, called "Prioritizing Your Family Christmas Traditions", that you can fill out (you'll find it at the back of this e-book). Since your traditions involve your whole family try to make filling the worksheet out a family affair – ask your kids, your spouse or significant other, and other family members to share what they like to do and what is special to them so everyone gets to help choose the priorities (although Mom and Dad get veto power, of course). Also try to choose activities that reflect your values and beliefs as a family, because prioritizing those activities over others will be most fulfilling to you.

Once you've prioritized which Christmas traditions you and your family want to do this year the next step is to plan and schedule in some time into your schedule to actually do them. If you aren't careful life happens and you won't actually get around to doing the things you've planned. If you'd like some additional guidance and timeline for some traditional holiday activities, read Taylor's annual series, [Stress Free Holidays](#), which lists tasks and activities to do, week by week, for a fun and stress free season with your family.

Now, let's take a look at some of our family traditions.

Taylor's Christmas Traditions

Taylor has three children under the age of 10 and she likes to include them in the holiday preparations whenever possible. Read about some of the family traditions that she has already established with her young family.

My family has several fun family Christmas traditions but one of our favorites doesn't even come on Christmas day but much earlier, when we're putting up the Christmas tree.

Although I'd love to have a real tree we have allergy issues in our household which make an artificial tree the only real choice for us. So, soon after Thanksgiving each year the kids begin to pester Mom and Dad about getting the tree up, with the lights on.

We typically set aside a weekend afternoon to get it all done, since it takes a while to put the tree together and put all the decorations on it. We play Christmas music and sing carols, and drink some hot apple cider or hot chocolate while we work (and play) as a family. I also like to make some simple Christmas type treat, like sugar cookies (from a mix) that we can munch on and that get us all in the Christmas mood.



The kids like to help put the pieces of the tree together, which they think is like a big 3D puzzle, and then we all help decorate it. My son, the little electrician, loves to test the lights, while my girls have lots of fun artfully putting all the ornaments on.



Yes, it could look a lot more sophisticated and elegant if I did all the decoration by myself, but the kids have so much more fun being a part of the action and are so proud of their tree when they're done that I absolutely would never dream of excluding them from the task.

Once we've got all the lights, garland and ornaments on then the most special part is putting our Christmas Angel on top.

She is actually a little china doll my mother gave us, and she was so pretty we put her at the top in a place of honor one year and she became a fun family tradition from then on. Every year my youngest, who loves dollies, renames her and we call her that all season long. I'm guessing soon she'll start remembering the name from year to year and she won't have to be rechristened each season anymore.

If you don't already get your family involved in Christmas decorating I suggest giving it a try this year. It is something kids like to do, and decorating as a family can be so much fun for everyone. Making a special afternoon with special snacks and drinks.

Crystal's Christmas Traditions

Not surprisingly, many of Crystal's family traditions revolve around food especially cookies. In her own words:

Like many households, baking cookies is just as much fun as sharing them and eating them. My mother was a wonderful baker and was known for elaborate plates of cookies she shared with neighbors and friends. I would love to have photos of her beautiful cookies, but am thankful that I do have her recipes. She usually made up these plates with a row of Spritz Wreath Cookies on the bottom and decorated cut-out cookies on top.

Mom's Christmas Wreath Spritz Cookies

Yield 6 dozen

3 cups unsalted butter, softened (mom actually used Fleishman's oleo, it's your choice what to use)

2 cups granulated sugar

4 egg yolks, beaten

2 teaspoons vanilla

1 teaspoon salt

8 cups, all purpose flour

Cream together the butter and sugar. Add the egg yolks and the vanilla, mixing well. Combine the salt and the flour and add to the butter mixture. Stir until just combined. Place dough in a cookie press and form wreaths. Decorate with

green sprinkles and diced maraschino cherries.. Note: Mom used to pipe out a long string of thick textured rope with the cookie press and then use her hands to break off 3” pieces and form those into a round wreath.

Delicate Cut-Out Christmas Cookies

½ pound unsalted butter, softened
1 cup confectioner’s sugar
1 Tablespoon milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 ½ cups flour

Cream together the butter and sugar. Add mix and vanilla, mixing well. Add the flour and combine until just mixed. Cover and chill dough slightly. Roll out a small amount of dough (this is important, work in small batches!) thinly. Use cookie cutters to cut out shapes. Place shapes on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake at 375°F for 8-10 minutes. Do not brown. Cool completely before decorating.

Frosting for Rolled Cookies

2 cups confectioner’s sugar
A pea sized amount of Crisco
1 teaspoon vanilla
Milk (start with 1 teaspoon and add 1 teaspoon at a time until desired consistency is achieved)

Whether you make cookies to give away or make them to eat yourself, the process of making cookies can be a wonderful family tradition.

Christmas Eve Dinner

Having a seafood dinner on Christmas Eve is one of our newly established traditions. We usually go to church in the late afternoon and come home and enjoy a feast. Although we’re not Italian, I always make a version of a seven fish’s dinner. My version is a red clam sauce with fresh seafood served over pasta. This is an easy dinner that I can prep somewhat in advance. For the past few years we have also invited some family friends over who don’t celebrate Christmas. They have told me that there isn’t much to do on Christmas eve as many stores and restaurants are closed. Sharing our tradition with a family of a different faith has been very enjoyable for our family.

Christmas Morning Breakfast

I have discovered that Christmas morning is one time that I don’t want to be cooking but inevitably after all the excitement wares off; my kids start to get

hungry. I love making a breakfast casserole the night before that I can pop into the oven while presents are being opened. Sometimes I make a traditional [Quiche](#) or my family also enjoys it when I pull an [Apple French Toast Casserole](#) out of the oven. Since we've gone to church the night before we've also made it a tradition to stay in our pajamas for much of the day, enjoy each other's company, and assemble or play with all the new gifts.

Sandee's Christmas Traditions

Sandee loves to plan parties and entertain but she is also a photography nut. What do you get when you combine a mother with a photographer? Someone who is obsessed with taking pictures of her family! Here, she tells us about some family traditions that developed when her children were still very young.

Family Photo

I have two children. When my second was 3 months old, I insisted that we have a family portrait professionally done at Christmas time. I dressed myself and the kids in red and cajoled my husband into doing the same.

It was an experience I do not wish to repeat. He grumbled and complained the whole time, the kids cried through it, I gained some gray hair and the photos were ridiculously staged and downright pathetic looking.

The following year, I asked my father-in-law to take a picture of my family of 4. It was in the summer and the background was a beautiful garden of yellow daylilies. Everybody was relaxed and it was one of the best pictures ever taken. And so the tradition began.

Every single year since then without fail, we have taken a family photo. Sometimes we have another person take the shot, but most of the time we just set up a tripod and do it ourselves. We could have just taken the photos of the children but I insisted that my husband and I be in the shots too and I am so glad I did. This year our photo was taken at a Cubs game with a great shot of the field in the background.



Christmas Newsletter

Several years ago, I began doing a family newsletter and sending it out, along with our family photo, to friends and relatives every Christmas. Early on, I wrote the whole thing including a section about each family member. Now that my kids are young adults, we each write our own section. I always keep it to one page so each family member only has to do a couple paragraphs at most.

Without giving it much thought at the time, a family tradition was created that resulted in the most wonderful progression of family portraits showing us all growing up together. From barely any hair to shaggy locks, from braces to perfect white teeth, from permed to gray hair, it's all there in our cherished family portraits. And the newsletters documented family happenings from year to that we probably would have forgotten about had we not written them down.

Hopefully we have given you some family tradition ideas that you might like to try with your family. Next we share some of our favorite ideas for centerpieces, wrapping gifts, decorations and some gift ideas from the kitchen.

Table Centerpiece Ideas for Christmas Dinners

Christmas is a great time to bring friends and family together for intimate dinners, large get-togethers, or gag gift exchanges. A great way to establish family traditions is to make your own table centerpieces for these occasions. Kids love arts and crafts so get everybody involved and make it an annual event. Here are a couple ideas.

Christmas Bowl Centerpieces

You could easily get ten different table centerpiece ideas from this one suggestion. Take a look at the basic supply list below and add your own creativity to come up with original centerpieces for your holiday events.

Basic Supply List

- Some type of glass bowl or vessel in an attractive shape and with a large top opening. You can choose clear glass, colored glass, cracked glass, or any other variation you find in a color appealing to Christmas. Clear, green, red and blue are the best options. Small fish bowls will work if you already have them around the house. Clear is best if you want to use decorative or colored pieces for the next supply on this list.
- Small stones, fish bowl chips, glass pieces, whole cloves, cinnamon sticks or any other smaller sized item in a color that corresponds well with the bowl. If you can find something related to Christmas, such as small reindeer or Santa charms, you can mix them in with solid color pieces for extra charm.
- Fake greenery, mistletoe, garland, pine tree clippings or Christmas tree garland. Anything that can be arranged around the bottom and slightly up the sides of the bowl will work. Something with red berries is a nice touch.
- Pillar candles in red, green, white, silver, gold or blue are optional.



Once you gather your supplies, these centerpieces are very easy to put together. Place the smaller stones, cloves, cinnamon sticks or glass pieces inside the bowl.

Push the pillar candles into the smaller pieces in the center of the bowl and then arrange the greenery against the sides being careful not to get too close to candle wicks. Another option is to skip the pillar candles and instead fill the bowls with water and float candles at the top.

Colored water can be used to match your party theme. Using this one idea, the centerpiece options you can come up with are only limited by your supply list and creativity.

Amaryllis Tree Centerpiece

There aren't a lot of variations on this centerpiece idea, but it looks beautiful and tends to get a lot of curious questions from guests. Start by hollowing out a fresh pineapple. Cut the top off and remove the fruit from inside. You want to keep the brown outer shell as it will serve as the trunk of your tree centerpiece.

Set the pineapple trunk in a large bowl and place something around it to hold it center. You might use fresh cranberries, blueberries, cherries, or some type of small stones or glass pieces if you have them on hand. The bowl can be something from the kitchen, something decorative, or some type of plastic Christmas bowl you pick up at the dollar store.

Top off the tree with fresh amaryllis blooms, putting some water inside the pineapple trunk so they last longer. You can either leave the stems long so the blooms look like the top of a tree or you can cut the stems short so they fit tight against the pineapple shell.

This is one of those table centerpiece ideas that will liven up a party because it is quirky and unusual. Think about other fruits or vegetables you could use for the base. A watermelon? An eggplant? You get the idea.

Many of the best Christmas table centerpiece ideas are created from everyday items that you already have around the house. Look around and you will find many creative ideas of your own.

Visit the Theme Party Queen website for more [holiday table centerpiece ideas](#).

Make Natural Christmas Tree Decorations with Your Family

Making natural Christmas tree decorations with your family is a great way to start a new holiday tradition. You can begin with the traditional popcorn on a string, but consider getting a little more creative with the ideas described here. Even smaller children can be useful when putting these natural decorations together.

Dried Fruit Ornaments

If you have a food dehydrator at home and some simple Christmas ornament hooks, you have everything needed to busy the children creating natural Christmas tree decorations. Select fruits of various colors and textures.



Sliced lemons and oranges work well, but you can use any fruits that you have on hand or which fit your color scheme for the tree. Purchased dried fruit can be used too.

The simplest way to create these ornaments is to allow children to hook the pieces onto the ornament hooks alone or in different combinations.

A dehydrated orange slice with a couple cranberries on top is an example of a simple natural ornament with a great color combination. Apricots and blueberries are beautiful together too.

You can also create more elaborate natural Christmas tree decorations by using multiple hooks and shortening the hooks as needed. For example, a dried lemon slice may have a fresh cinnamon stick with cranberries dangling beneath it. Stickers or other decorative elements may be placed on top of the lemon slice to give it a more elaborate appearance.

Cinnamon Stick Bundle Ornaments

This is a very simple craft project that will fill your home with the scent of cinnamon without a lot of time investment. Have everyone in the family select a holiday ribbon and use it to hold a bundle of four or five cinnamon sticks together.

Use thick ribbon, thin ribbon, splashy ribbon with glitter and velvety textures. The more variety the better, as it adds color and texture to your tree. Use hooks to hang the bundles from the tree or sit them in the branches if your tree will hold them.

Nut and Pine Cone Ornaments

Take the family out for a scavenger hunt for nuts, pine cones, and other natural things that catch their attention. Bring your finds back home and use craft glue to attach the smaller nuts to the outer edges of the pine cone.

You can also use dried cranberries and other items from around the home to add some color. Glue and glitter on the tips of the pine cones will add a bit of sparkle to reflect off the tree lights. Colored spray paint can add more color. Gluing small beads to the cones will work as well.



Nuts can be used as side decorations to the cones or grouped together and decorated to create smaller natural tree ornaments. Acorns work beautifully.

Make small holes in the top of the cones and thread ribbon through to tie them onto branches of your tree. You may want to put initials or dates on the ribbon so you always remember when these decorations were made and who made them.

Find additional ideas for [natural Christmas tree decorations](#) at the Theme Party Queen website.

Creative Gift Wrapping Techniques to Show You Care

Most of us know how to buy wrapping paper from the store, cut it to the appropriate size, and secure it around a gift. What many do not know is how to use more creative gift wrapping techniques that delight the recipient even before they open the gift.

When you put more thought into your wrapping technique, you show the recipient that you really care about them and tried to give them something special. No matter what is inside the wrap, they will appreciate the gift just for the thought and care that went into the wrapping.

The ideas below are perfect for involving all family members, and done annually, could very easily become fun family traditions.

Scrapbook Wrapping

First, gather photos of the gift recipient. If you are giving this gift to one of your children, consider using a variety of pictures from various stages of their childhood up to their current age. If the gifts are for Grandma and Grandpa include photos of them, or perhaps, the grandkids.



Next, find scrapbooking supplies, like paper, stickers and stamps that correlate well with the pictures. If you don't have any supplies on hand, find them at a craft store or dollar store where they can be purchased inexpensively.

You can either decorate store bought gift wrapping with the photos and supplies (a solid color works best) or you can attach the supplies directly to a cardboard or shoe box. If you just decorate the box without paper, make sure they can open it without tearing apart the box in case they want to save it.

Using double stick tape or a favorite adhesive, attach the photos to the box. You can either spread them out on all sides of the box or create a collage on the top. Add some decorative stickers and throw in some lettering to spell their name or other meaningful words and you are all set. Kids will love helping with creative gift wrapping techniques like this one.

Fabric Wrapping

There are a lot of Christmas themed fabrics in the sewing department toward the end of the year and they are perfect for wrapping. You can wrap gifts just as you would with paper wrap and tie them up with ribbon. If you have trouble getting sticker name tags to stick to the fabric, consider embroidering the fabric wrap for a personalized touch. You can also tie on name tags with ribbon.



A variation of this wrapping technique is to wrap the gift in items that can be used once the gift has been unwrapped. For example, you may wrap a small gift to your aunt in a Christmas themed dish towel or a gift to your niece in a pair of Christmas themed socks.

If you are a quilter, purchase a variety of fabrics and quilt them together for beautiful handmade wrappings your recipients will want to keep forever. This is a good idea for young girls, since they can use the small quilts for their baby dolls.

Because we are so busy with all the other responsibilities around the holidays, gift wrapping has become more of a chore than anything else. Why not start a family tradition when the kids are little of wrapping gifts together?

Not only is it a great way to spend family time, but using creative gift wrapping techniques like these will help children exercise their creative sides and teach them the importance of gift giving. It is the consideration and care behind the gift (and wrapping!) that counts, not necessarily the gift itself.

Gifts From The Kitchen

Another family tradition you may enjoy is to create homemade gifts from your kitchen which is a wonderful way to give a personal gift from the heart. You can place the finished product in a decorative container that can be part of the gift, or you can also dress up a disposable container with clear cellophane wrapping paper and ribbon.

Cinnamon Sugared Pecans

- 1 pound pecan halves
- 2 egg whites
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Beat the egg white and vanilla in a small bowl. Pour the pecans into a large zip style bag.



Pour the egg white mixture over the pecans in the bag, seal the bag, and toss to coat all the nuts with the liquid mixture. In a separate bowl, combine the sugar, salt and cinnamon.

Pour this into the bag with the pecans and once again, toss to coat. Generously grease (butter works well) a rimmed cookie sheet. Pour the pecans onto the sheet and spread them out into a single layer. Bake for 60 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes. Initially the nuts will look very wet and even a little frothy. As they bake and as you stir them they will become less wet and more glazed. After 60 minutes, remove from the oven and cool. Store these in a sealed container.

Double Peanut Brittle

- 1.2 cup dark brown sugar
- ½ cup light corn syrup
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 Tablespoon water
- ¾ cup unsalted dry roasted peanuts, chopped

2 Tablespoons smooth peanut butter
2 Tablespoons unsalted butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon baking soda

Use butter to grease a large rimmed baking sheet. Mix the brown sugar, corn syrup, sugar and water in a large microwave safe bowl. Microwave this mixture for 3 ½ minutes, stirring once.



Stir in peanuts and peanut butter. Microwave an additional 3 minutes, stirring 3 times. Stir in butter and vanilla. Microwave until a candy thermometer registers 300°F (approximately 4 minutes). Add baking soda and stir until light and foamy. Immediately pout this mixture onto a baking sheet and smooth with a metal spatula. Let cool about 30 minutes and break into pieces. Store in an airtight container. Yield 1 pound or about 8 servings.

Safety Note: To insure safety, use a microwave safe bowl, and use pot holders to handle the bowl with care.

Instant Hot Cocoa Mix

1 cup unsweetened powdered cocoa
2 cups sugar
4 cups non-fat dry milk
Dash of salt



Combine dry ingredients and transfer into smaller decorative lidded jars. Directions for use: Mix 3 Tablespoons of this mix with 6 ounces of hot water and stir.

Homemade Hot Fudge Sauce

12 ounce can, evaporated milk
1 pound bag of caramels
½ pound butter
12 ounce chocolate candy bar

Place ingredients in a double boiler and stir until smooth. Cook for 30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. Place mixture into a pre-heated blender (rinse it with hot water and dry to heat it up) and pulse the blender on and off until the mixture forms a whirlpool. Store covered in the refrigerator. Yield 1 quart.

Apple Cinnamon Nut Bread

Wet Ingredients:

6 Tablespoons softened butter
¾ cup granulated sugar
3 Tablespoons milk
2 eggs

Dry Ingredients:

1 ¾ cups, all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking soda

Additional ingredients

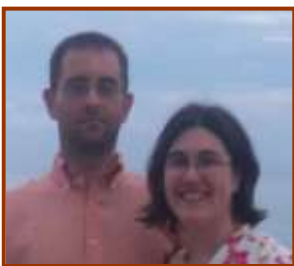
1 cup chunky applesauce
1 cup chopped walnuts
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 medium apple - peeled, cored, and cut into small cubes

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, mix together the wet ingredients. In a separate bowl mix together the dry ingredients. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and stir until combined.



Add the additional ingredients. Stir until well blended. Grease and lightly flour the desired loaf pan (see below for sizes). Bake as directed below. Cool for about 1 hour in the pan after baking. Run a knife around the edges of the pan and invert pan to remove the loaf from the pan. Continue cooling on a wire rack. This recipe will make either 1 (10" x 5" x 3") loaf pan which should be baked for about 60 minutes or 2 (8" x 3-7/8" x 2-15/32") disposable foil pans which should be baked for 45-50 minutes.

Author Biographies



Taylor Flanery is a former lawyer who is now a work at home Mom of three young children, nine and under. Her dream for years was to spend more time with her kids, and to be there when they came home from school each day, and now she does while still helping to support her family.

When she's not busy taking care of the kids or spending time with her husband she can be found freelancing and consulting, and also working on her websites, which include Household-Management-101.com, Stain-Removal-101.com and her newest one, Home-Storage-Solutions-101.com.



Sande Lembke worked for 20 years in Corporate America holding various customer service, sales and management positions. Besides being a wife and a Mom of two grown children, she is now a very proud e-business owner who is lucky enough to be able to work from home on websites she is passionate about.

Her primary website, Theme-Party-Queen.com , is focused on helping busy entertainers plan successful adult theme parties. She provides simple party planning tips, easy recipes and fun game ideas as well as suggestions for helpful party products. Her mission is to help visitors plan stress-free home parties.



Crystal Maleski has worked as an occupational therapist and Rehab Director, but spends most of her time now sharing her love of cooking with others through her site, Make Dinner Easy .

She provides free weekly dinner menus, easy dinner recipes, and a printable grocery shopping list. Christmas is one of her favorite times of year, and she especially loves making homemade gifts from the kitchen.

**Wishing You a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year
From Our Homes To Yours!**

Prioritizing Christmas Traditions Worksheet

Step 1: Brainstorming Possible Traditions

List Your Favorite Childhood Traditions

List Traditions Your Family Currently Has

Ideas For Possible New Traditions To Start This Year

Step 2: List Your Values and Priorities For Your Family

What Is Most Important To Your Family? (ex. time together, activities, charity work, etc.)

Step 3: Prioritize The Christmas Traditions To Establish Or Continue

Which Activities Above Do You Enjoy The Most And Fit With Your Families Values?