

Compliments of Stacey Shanner

Good to Be HOME

ISSUE 36

Crafting a
**COASTAL
CONDO**
Retreat



Stacey Shanner
REALTOR®

**WHAT'S YOUR HOME
REALLY WORTH?**



**SCAN TO SEE
YOUR ESTIMATED
HOME VALUE!**

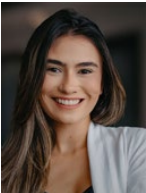


Front of Tear Out Card 1





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Back of Tear Out Card 1

SERVES
10

BRUNCH crumble

INGREDIENTS

- 14 oz. cooking apples
- 1 oz. vegan butter
- 7 oz. blackberries
- 2 tsp. cinnamon
- 3 tbsp. maple syrup
- Cold soy yogurt to serve

TOPPING

- 7 oz. porridge oats
- 3½ oz. vegan butter, softened
- 3½ oz. raw cane/turbinado sugar
- Pinch of salt

🕒 MAKE AHEAD

The crumble can be made up to step 6 ahead of time. Cover with cling film (plastic wrap) and store in the fridge for up to 2 days before using.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/ Start by peeling, coring, and chopping the apples into ½ in. cubes.
- 2/ Place a large saucepan over a medium heat and add 1 oz. of vegan butter. Once bubbling, add the apples and sauté for 10 minutes, stirring often until the apples have softened.
- 3/ Add the blackberries, half the cinnamon, the maple syrup, and 3 tbsp. of water. Mix together and let simmer for around 15 minutes till the sauce has thickened.
- 4/ Whilst the compote cooks, make the crumble topping. Place the oats, 3½ oz. vegan butter, sugar, remaining cinnamon, and a pinch of salt in a bowl and mix together.
- 5/ Preheat the oven to 400°F.
- 6/ Pour the compote into an ovenproof dish and top with the crumble. Place in the oven for 20 minutes until the top is caramelized and the compote bubbling.
- 7/ Remove from the oven and let rest for 5 minutes before serving with a big spoonful of soy yogurt.

Recipe from *The Brunch Club: Delicious Recipes and Hosting Tips for Feeding Friends* by Georgia Hearn. Published by OH. Photography © Danielle Wood 2026.



Dear Bill and Judy,

It's been said that there's no place like home for the holidays, but what does this truly mean? For some, the saying (and song) elicits visions of a warm, welcoming ambience. For others, it's the people who embody the festive joy and make the season bright. This issue of Good to Be Home earns its name by focusing on both, providing tips for turning your place into an enchanting one that makes everyone feel right at home.

This transformation often begins before Thanksgiving approaches in the form of home preparation. Inside, you'll find four key spaces to focus on so your get-togethers go off without a hitch. And don't forget about the unofficial greeter at your door, the wreaths. Delve into everything from the type to buy to methods for discarding it.

Have you ever thought about how you can truly make loved ones eager to visit during the holidays? One way is to consider the various types of folks you'll be hosting and their respective needs. The article inside on the topic identifies a few guest personalities and offers suggestions to accommodate them. On the flip side, be sure to check out the expert advice for showing gratitude to your host.

For those who are considering buying or selling, home may have a different meaning this season. Though the holidays may seem like a less-than-ideal time for doing so, they could actually provide a golden opportunity. The enclosed article shares some key factors to consider if such a transaction is on your to-do list.

Here's wishing you a happy holiday season! As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

Stacey Shanner



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Gearing up for the holidays can feel downright magical, from the satisfaction of cool breezes carrying amber leaves to the excitement of trimming your home with all your nostalgic, comforting decorations. In all the fun, though, don't forget to maintain and repair your home accordingly. Direct some of your energy into the following areas at least a week before you open your doors to guests, and you can be better prepared to host festive gatherings with ease.

1
Optimize
your
entryway

This frequently used area will naturally develop some wear and tear over time. Doing this maintenance to help ensure that your guests' first impression of your home is a positive one:

- Check that all railing or handles on your walkup are secure, and tighten any fasteners and repair any loose flooring.
- Test your doorbell, and replace any failing batteries. Confirm that your smart lock app is sending the proper notifications and that your subscription is up to date, if applicable.
- For proper door operation, lubricate around the handle and clean any debris around the latch and strike plate. Then tighten the doorknob's screws to ensure that it's firm and secure.
- Replace any loose or worn weatherstripping, which can appear unsightly and allow cold drafts indoors, impacting your energy bills.

4
Examine
your
breaker

Nothing can ruin a holiday party or an ordinary cold winter morning like a sudden power outage, which can impact your hot water, warm air, and stored food. Here's what you need to look out for:

- Locate your breaker box, and inspect it for signs of damage, including a burnt odor, melted screws, or burn marks.
- If the box keeps "tripping," or automatically switching off power to certain areas, you may be overloading it or it may have faulty wiring.



2
Test major
kitchen
appliances

For many people, the holidays are primarily about food, so make sure that your home is equipped to handle big meals and long cooking sessions. Here's a checklist:

- Clean all stove burners, and give your oven a wash with a multipurpose cleaner. Then test the knobs to ensure that they operate the appliance properly.
- Turn on your oven, and place an oven-safe thermometer in the center to verify that it reaches the set temperature.
- Set your refrigerator dial to 40°F and freezer to 0°F. Use a thermometer to make sure their actual temperatures match these settings.
- Empty and sterilize your dishwasher's filter and spray arms, then run a cleaning cycle to confirm that the machine is prepared for postparty wash-up.

3
Inspect
your
plumbing

Hosting means creating a sanitary experience for everyone cooking and dining, so you'll want to ensure that your plumbing is up to task. These are the top areas to cover:

- Turn off your main water shutoff valve, then run a faucet indoors to confirm that the valve is working properly. (You may need to flip it if a clogged or frozen pipe bursts.)
- To prevent these pipe issues, check all exposed ones for leaks, and insulate any that run outdoors or in unfinished spaces like the attic.
- Look around your water heater for signs of leaks and corrosion, and listen for any popping or hissing noises, which could indicate pressing issues like mineral buildup.
- Test all toilets and sinks that guests will use. Do they operate properly, without any unusual sounds, slow flows, or odors?

If you come across any troublesome issues in these four fundamental areas of your home, be sure to contact a repair expert in the respective field as soon as possible to remedy them. Granted, your home may have other needs, but with this starting point, you'll be on your way to readying your home for intimate gatherings and large shindigs alike.

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All photos inside are provided by Getty Images unless noted.

HOUSE HUNTING

during the holidays

written by
ANDRE RIOS



With multiple festive affairs on the horizon, many Americans have begun shopping—not only for holiday gifts but also for fantastic real estate. However, low competition and high buyer motivation between November and February may make it easier than you think to buy or sell. And while there are unmistakable challenges you might face before the New Year, including weather and scheduling conflicts, 'tis still the season to be jolly. With the following info in hand, you could very well make your buying or selling dreams come true.

FOR BUYERS

Here are some of the top considerations for eager house hunters around the holidays.

Schedule only intentional viewings

Taking a tour of every open house in town may be a fun way to spend a weekend, but because this time is packed with gatherings, sellers may be less likely to entertain window shoppers.

So if you plan on viewing a home, be sure that you're serious about potentially putting in an offer. This particularly holds true if you schedule a private tour, which can be especially time-consuming for a seller. That means talking to your agent about the property and considering if its price point, location, and features suit your wish list *before* arranging a visit.

Look for key features

Thankfully, there's also a key advantage to house hunting during the festive season: you can weigh how holiday-friendly each home is. Does a property offer enough living and dining space for entertaining? Does it feel cozy and welcoming? Most importantly, does it give you that palpable sensation that leaves you speechless, ultimately inspiring you to make new memories in its ambience?

Consider winter weather

Every season comes with its trials, but it's especially pertinent to determine how well a home remedies cold conditions. Depending on your region, they may include risks of frozen pipes, increased heating costs, and deteriorating plants in the landscape.

Taking this cautious approach can protect you from making an unwise investment. A good place to start is to carefully review each home's disclosure form, which must list any notable flaws about the property. Additionally, scheduling a home inspection will grant you an expert's latest perspective on the home's condition. Depending on the feedback, you may even want to draft a contingency into your offer proposing that the home must pass a new inspection and that the seller will make any necessary fixes before you buy.

FOR SELLERS

If you're hoping to hand over ownership of your home for a great price, here's what to consider first.



Consider investing more

Starry-eyed house hunters eager to make their holiday wishes come true could have higher or even unrealistic expectations at this time. Moreover, savvy buyers may know that many owners are eager to sell and try to take advantage of your situation. As such, these choosier individuals could express stronger criticism of any flaws they identify in your home (or hear about from an inspector or agent) and use them to request a lowball offer. You may therefore need to invest accordingly.

Ask your agent if any features need improvement, and then use this list to plan upgrades. Focus on what buyers will be more likely to see in listing photos or on tours, including the front entryway, kitchen, and primary bathroom.

Pare down your trimmings

Staging your home to sell means something different around the holidays. While the usual tenets will still apply, such as painting your walls in neutral colors and eliminating clutter, seasonal decorating



IF YOU INTEND TO KEEP YOUR HOLIDAY TRADITIONS ALIVE WHILE SELLING, SHOW RESTRAINT. FOR EXAMPLE, **CHOOSE A SMALLER TREE AND NEATLY DECORATE IT, AND MINIMIZE OTHER DECORATIONS** SO BUYERS CAN STILL ENVISION THEIR BELONGINGS IN THE SPACE.

becomes an additional concern. Should you charm buyers with the holiday spirit or shirk all timely decor and risk appearing like a humbug?

It's a good idea to display simple, tasteful decor that represents winter generically, not a specific religious holiday, such as dressing your coffee table with white-and-silver centerpieces. If you intend to keep your holiday traditions alive while selling, show restraint. For example, choose a smaller tree and neatly decorate it, and minimize other decorations so buyers can still envision their belongings in the space.

FOR BUYERS AND SELLERS: PRACTICE PATIENCE

Remember that a real estate transaction requires several hands on deck, not just the seller, buyer, and respective agents. Mortgage lenders,

inspectors, real estate lawyers, and other professionals may be integral to your purchase, but keep in mind that holiday schedules can limit each of these parties' availability.

This means that it may take more time than you'd like for you to close the deal. Talk to your agent about establishing a realistic timeline that factors in seasonal delays, and consider adjusting your moving schedule accordingly.

Though the holidays are a season of whimsy, high spirits, and delight, avoid getting caught up in these feelings as you approach either buying or selling a home (or both). With these tips in mind and an agent's consistent guidance, you can make prudent moves and ring in the New Year with a successful transaction under your belt.



Crafting a COASTAL CONDO Retreat

Designer **Renée Gaddis Interiors** shares how she shifted from the fashion world to the design world and discusses a high-rise Naples, Florida project.

interview with **RENÉE GADDIS**
written by **MATTHEW BRADY**
photography by **TROY CAMPBELL**



Tell us about yourself and your path to interior design:

I was born and raised in Des Moines, Iowa, and studied fashion design at Iowa State. After getting engaged, I moved to Florida with my college sweetheart, but I wasn't able to find a job right away. I eventually connected with an interior designer who offered me a position, insisting that many design principles translate between fashion and interiors, such as how fabrics drape and the importance of space planning.

I dove headfirst into it, getting my interior design certification and license. While I fell into this field at the beginning, it's now a passion. In hindsight, I feel like I should have always been on this path.

Does fashion inform your design?

Yes. I still look at fashion magazines and Instagram sites in my spare time. Doing so makes me feel a little ahead of the game since interior design is actually somewhat delayed from fashion. Something like a new color or color combination that's on the runway today will slowly trickle into home fabrics, for example.

“I LIKE TO SAY THAT DOWN HERE, THE GREEN FROM THE PALM TREES AND THE BLUE FROM THE SKY AND WATER SERVE AS NEUTRALS. BASICALLY, ANYTHING YOU'RE SEEING OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW IS CONSIDERED A NEUTRAL INSIDE.”

Is this project a primary home or a vacation home for the clients?

A vacation home. They're a husband and wife from Chicago with a daughter and son. Their daughter, who's probably in her early thirties, was heavily involved in the process as well because her parents are planning to keep the home in their family for a long time. She was more focused on the look and design, yet her parents highly valued comfort. It was a refreshing balance and a fun project.

Did you have to run any ideas by a condo association?

I do a ton of condos down here, around a 75/25 split with houses. This one was a new build, so the association wasn't even created yet. The developer owned everything, and we worked with them pre-close on all the finishes and other touches. Once the clients bought it, we added details like built-ins, paint colors, and ceiling touches.

With the property being a Florida high-rise, did you have to factor weather into its design?

Definitely. This condo's on the twentieth floor, a big consideration for hurricane season. Most transplants close everything up outside before returning home for months. But we created two layers of protection here: The hidden sliders in the windows are hurricane-proof, and the lanai shutters allow the clients to keep their balcony furniture in place if there's bad weather.



Would you talk about the openness of the condo?

The elevator leads you right into their unit. When you step off and look to the right, you get a spectacular, unobstructed view of the outside. This required a very open floor plan in the main area with few walls. In addition, we made subtle tweaks to make it feel even more open, such as doorless kitchen cabinet uppers.

What do the decor's natural elements add to the home?

The clients wanted the unit to have a coastal vibe, which we included with some of the furniture and fixture choices. A fun example of this is the kitchen table, which looks and feels like a giant tree trunk—it's very heavy. Another is the woven raffia light fixture in the guest bedroom, which provides an earthy, natural feel. I also love the wave in the pretty blue-green kitchen backsplash.

Are the colors informed by the locale as well?

Very much so. I like to say that down here, the green from the palm trees and the blue from the sky and water serve as neutrals. Basically, anything you're seeing outside your window is considered a neutral inside.



“IF A CLIENT’S BUDGET ALLOWS FOR SOMETHING CUSTOM-MADE, THAT’S EVEN MORE FUN. FOR EXAMPLE, WE SPENT AMPLE TIME DESIGNING THIS PROJECT’S WINE WALL.”

What were the clients' goals for the kitchen?

The wife loves to cook. She knows where she wants things and how she wants to do things, so we added a lot of intentional touches in the kitchen to make it a comfortable yet practical space. I wanted it to feel like her kitchen at home.

It was just one example of the custom design that we did for them. Another is the massive ottoman. They wanted a spot to put their feet up as well as a place for cups or snacks. The two tables on the ottoman are on casters so they can easily roll back and forth. On the window side, we also chose these cool, amazingly comfortable open-backed chairs that allow the clients to enjoy the view outside.

The ceiling fixture choices are also very interesting.

Very much so. The master bedroom has lights that look like conch shells made of blown glass, adding a touch of beachiness. I am not a huge lover of regular ceiling fans, so we instead added some “fandeliers,” fixtures that look like chandeliers but are fans. A fandelier is my new favorite thing! I wish I invented it.

Do you enjoy finding unique items for each client?

I love it. I find them all over the place, whether through traveling, looking through magazines, or scrolling through social media. And if a client's budget allows for something custom-made, that's even more fun. For example, we spent ample time designing this project's wine wall. The clients don't drink a ton, but they wanted a cool wall that stood out in the living room.





Do you lean toward a particular design style, or are you a chameleon, changing based on what your client needs?

I think I'm a chameleon. I'm always trying to truly understand what home is to clients and what they're looking for. My job is to do the best I can to exceed their expectations. I also have a passion for learning, so I love getting to discover more about whatever my clients are looking for.

Some designers have a style they do over and over again, creating the same look with different materials, lighting, and furniture. I don't know if I could do that. I'm constantly evolving, and I think that once I try one thing, I want to do something different.



You're a big supporter of children with heart disease. Would you share why and how you advocate for them?

Our daughter has a rare heart condition that was discovered when she was just eighteen months old. At age three, she received a pacemaker, and now, in her twenties, she is 90 percent dependent on it.

It was a huge learning curve for my husband and me. She was our first child, so we were already navigating the uncertainty of new parenthood when we were suddenly faced with serious medical challenges. Those early years were scary, filled with countless doctor appointments and surgeries. At the time, there were no pediatric cardiologists or even a hospital system in our area, which meant we had to drive hours to Tampa or Miami to get her the care she needed.

Those experiences shaped us deeply and are the reason we are so passionate about this cause today. We are actively involved with the American Heart Association and helped get a local children's hospital up and running so that other families wouldn't have to endure the long-distance travel we did. Anything we can do to help children with heart disease feels even more meaningful than bringing a design project to life.

For more info, visit renee-gaddis.com

"I'M ALWAYS TRYING TO TRULY UNDERSTAND WHAT HOME IS TO CLIENTS AND WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR. MY JOB IS TO DO THE BEST I CAN TO EXCEED THEIR EXPECTATIONS."

NAVIGATING THE POST OFFICE'S BUSY SEASON

written by **MATTHEW BRADY**



Everyone knows about the hustle and bustle of the holidays, but that pales in comparison to what the US Postal Service experiences. In 2025, it processed approximately ten billion mailings and packages from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day, a number that would even impress Santa.

Don't let your packages and cards get caught in the season's rush. You can't control holiday delays, but you can improve the odds of your items arriving on time by following these tips.

Note important deadlines

Mid-December is the busiest postal week of the year. Fortunately, the USPS usually shares recommended holiday mailing and shipping dates in mid-September and then a reminder in December. Knowing these cutoffs in advance can help you plan accordingly.

Pack packages properly

To ensure that your gift arrives in one piece, use a sturdy box and don't test your packing tape's limits by overstuffing it. If your item's smaller than the box it's shipped in, protect it by filling the gaps with padding like bubble wrap or packing paper.

Print a shipping label for optimal readability. For an extra layer of protection against the elements, you could tape over the entire label (except the barcode) with clear packaging tape. Finally, note that the maximum package weight the post office accepts is seventy pounds.

Make final preparations

Everything's sealed up and ready to go! Here are some other considerations before you send your festive goods on their merry way:

- Double-check that any "to" and "from" info is legible, whether it's handwritten or printed.
- Consider weighing your package and paying for your postage before going to the post office.
- Remember that you can schedule your package to be picked up from your home.

For more info, visit usps.com

A GUIDE TO HOLIDAY TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

written by **MATTHEW BRADY**

The festive season can get quite hectic, especially if you're traveling to see loved ones or conduct business. That's why the right gear can be the difference between a fun trip and a frustrating one. Here are some must-have products to help make your excursions merrier.

Cozy clothing

Whether you're traveling by plane, train, or automobile, it's essential that you stay as comfortable as possible—so your choice of clothing matters. Flexibility is also key this time of year. It may be warm one day and snowing the next, and you may be traveling to an entirely different climate. A versatile coat like the Quince Puffer Jacket is a perfect solution and can serve you well all winter long. It's renowned for being super soft and warm yet breathable and packable.

And since you'll likely be doing your fair share of walking wherever you go, consider buying some comfy footwear. For example, the Allbirds Wool Cruiser line has a stellar reputation for being a lightweight, comfortable shoe that's perfect for travel.



Cubes

If you're going for ease with your clothes, why not also do so with their containers? Travelers can't get enough of travel cubes, which make luggage organization super easy, save space, and can even minimize clothes wrinkles. An excellent example is Shackle's high-quality, customer-approved line of organizers, which makes packing both a breeze and stylish by offering different sizes (five-pack, seven-pack, and eight-pack) and colors (over a dozen).

Contingency items

The truth is, not everything goes right during the holiday season. This maxim certainly holds true for travel, so plan for any pitfalls. For instance, a portable first aid kit, such as the compact one from General Medi, is vital in a medical pinch. It can help with setbacks ranging from surface wounds to CPR. It even has lip balm!

Connectivity lifesavers

Likewise, there's perhaps no worse feeling while traveling, especially on business, than realizing that your phone's unusable due to connectivity or charging problems. A portable hotspot like RoamWiFi provides reliable 4G internet access wherever you go, while a handy portable charger can save you from having to vie for charging station spots in the airport or vehicle.

When it comes to holiday travel, planning is paramount. Give yourself the gift of less stress and more comfort: As you prepare for your journey, be intentional when choosing the gear you bring. And if your loved ones frequently travel for business or pleasure, keep in mind that the items in this guide also make for thoughtful, much-appreciated presents.

MUST-HAVES FOR

effortless entertaining

written by **LAUREN KIM**

Between work, family, and everything else vying for your attention, your days can quickly blur together. The good news is you can take control by starting at the top: of your day, that is. By adopting a few simple daily habits, you can create a sense of calm before jumping into the morning.

Covered charcuterie board

A stylish platter filled with meats, cheeses, and snacks is a perfect centerpiece for any get-together, and a covered one will help keep everything fresh and presentable. Pair your board with elegant serving utensils like cheese knives, spreaders, and small forks to make it easy for guests to sample its tasty offerings.

Slow cooker

This convenient set-it-and-forget-it appliance will keep everything from hearty chili to mulled wine heated and ready to serve. Look for a slow cooker with a Warm setting to maintain the ideal serving temperature without overcooking its contents.



Additionally, an oval-shaped one will be the most versatile because it can accommodate larger cuts of meat and a variety of dishes. If you expect to host a crowd or multiple events, consider acquiring two vessels, such as a seven-to-eight-quart one for your main course and another with sections for appetizers like cheeses or dips.

Slow cookers can also simplify cleanup since their pots are usually nonstick and dishwasher safe.

Dinnerware

A versatile collection of white plates will not only make your food look great but also match just about any holiday tablescape; add a few similar serving dishes to elegantly



A versatile collection of white plates will not only make your food look great but also match just about any holiday tablescape.

present everything from fresh crudités to pastry-wrapped hot dogs. However, just be sure that your choices are made of a durable material like porcelain so they last year after year.

You could then add stainless-steel flatware in silver or even gold or matte black for a modern touch of elegance, accompanying it with eight-ounce tumblers, which are ideal for both cocktails and mocktails. Finally, complete the look with colorful cloth napkins of your choice for an extra dash of festivity.

Cleanup products

To make packing up and storing leftovers as simple as possible, have a collection of glass containers with lids on hand. And consider gifting yourself a robot vacuum so it can clean your floors after your guests are gone—providing you with well-deserved time to relax and bask in a job well done.



all about **WREATHS**

written by **DAN O'BRIEN**

On a winter street, doors

communicate something subtle yet powerful. Some remain bare; others carry a circle of green. You may notice the adornments without even stopping. There's a fir bough here, a frosted ribbon there.

The wreath is one of the few decorations that lives between private life and public space. It marks the season without demanding a religious belief. For centuries, this ring of greenery has signaled continuity during the year's coldest stretch. Today, it is displayed for a few weeks, then returned to the ground or the closet.

Though artificial wreaths are all too common nowadays, framing your entryway with a natural piece will add an authentic, warm touch that nods to the natural environment.

A time-tested symbol

The wreath's shape carries ancient meaning. The circle, unbroken and without beginning or end, was long understood as a sign of eternity, life's unending cycle, and renewal. Humans have cherished this simple geometry across time, not only for its beauty but also for what it quietly suggests about continuity and return.

Before wreaths adorned front doors, they encircled heads and hearts across ancient worlds. In Greece and Rome, laurel wreaths were worn like crowns, symbols of triumph, honor, and status. Victorious athletes at the original Olympic Games received wreaths made of olive branches, a practice that later spread into art and public ceremony.



Later, in the forests of northern Europe, evergreen wreaths took on a different life. Made from branches that kept their color even in winter, they became signs of resilience and hope through the darkest days. People in Germanic and Scandinavian cultures hung evergreens at the solstice to celebrate life enduring against the cold.

Over time, this form moved inward. As doors became personal statements, we adapted how we used wreaths. They stopped speaking for a village and began speaking for households.

The domestic life of a wreath

A wreath's lifespan is decided long before it reaches a door. Species, cut date, and weather shape its endurance. Evergreens harvested in colder conditions last longer; those cut too early fade

quickly. If you plan on purchasing an organic wreath, late November through early December offers a narrow window when freshness and durability briefly align.

People who make wreaths speak plainly about materials. Fir and pine hold their scent. Cedar dries faster, taking on a silvery softness as it ages. Juniper keeps its color but sheds when disturbed. And once you hang a wreath, it responds to the cold, sun, and wind.

Your doorway adds its own limits. South-facing doors with glass panels introduce warmth that speeds drying. Windy entries tug at fastenings and loosen needles. Dense forms tend to withstand exposure better, while looser arrangements belong on sheltered porches.

When you hang a wreath, you must balance the dimensions and finish of your door, the weather, and the wreath's weight. Over-the-door padded hooks can protect your door's finish. Adhesive hooks can work outdoors if rated for cold and load, though they require patience and a clean surface.

Care and disposal

Caring for a wreath is mostly a matter of attention. In colder climates, the season often does the work on its own, preserving the greens through consistent low temperatures. During a brief thaw, you can lightly mist it with a spray bottle to keep the branches flexible. In milder or drier regions, you can soak the greens before hanging.

When the season has passed, removal completes the ritual. On a dry day, cut away wire frames and synthetic ties and set them aside for reuse.

The greens themselves still have a role to play. Evergreen clippings break down slowly, making them useful long after they leave your door. Layered onto garden beds, they insulate soil and protect roots from sudden cold. Tucked around shrubs, they shield against wind and temperature swings. Many towns collect wreaths after the holidays, sending them to farms, shoreline-restoration projects, or municipal compost sites.

Being true to its longtime tradition of renewal, the wreath's presence lingers after the holidays. It simply takes its place for a while, then steps back and returns to the soil, making the next season possible.





SMALL MORNING RITUALS

for big daily joy

written by **ALLISON GOMES**

Between work, family, and everything else vying for your attention, your days can quickly blur together. The good news is you can take control by starting at the top: of your day, that is. By adopting a few simple daily habits, you can create a sense of calm before jumping into the morning.

Journal briefly

When you first wake up, take five minutes to write freely. You might jot down a dream from the night before, a goal for the week, or something your child said that made you laugh. This brief pause allows you to reflect, reset, and refocus your thoughts before tackling your to-do list.

Enjoy your favorite drink

Savoring your favorite morning beverage might seem like a small thing, but it can help start your day on the right foot. So instead of gulping it down while doing other tasks, give yourself time to sit and enjoy the sweetness of your latte or the soothing warmth of your tea.

Light a candle

You can set a cozy atmosphere for your morning by simply striking a match or turning on your candle warmer. Either way, a lit flame can bring a soft glow and calming scent that can make your tasks a little more enjoyable.

Welcome the sunlight

Sunlight brings a host of benefits, so open the blinds or step outside for a few minutes each day. Embrace the natural light as you breathe deeply or stretch your body. Even just a moment in the sun can lift your mood and help you feel more awake.

When you embrace simple rituals, you'll soon realize that joy can be found even in life's quiet, intentional moments.

SHORTER DAYS BETTER SLEEP

written by **ANDRE RIOS**



When autumn's cool and colorful days take over, sunlight also gets noticeably shorter. This change may send your sleep cycle into a tizzy. However, if you make a few adjustments to your habits, you can not only navigate this seasonal shift but actually thrive in it.

The science of sleep

The decreasing daylight hours of fall directly impact circadian rhythm, the body's internal twenty-four-hour clock that regulates sleep and wakefulness. Less natural light exposure can disrupt the production of melatonin, which tells your body that it's time to sleep, potentially making it difficult to wind down and wake up naturally. Conversely, a lack of light can affect cortisol, which helps you feel awake in the morning.

Tricks to getting slumber

With these details in mind, you can take the following changes to recalibrate your rest.



Watch your intake

Limit alcohol and caffeine, especially in the late afternoon and evening. While alcohol might initially make you feel drowsy, it can disrupt sleep later in the night, leading to fragmented rest. And caffeine, a stimulant, can stay in your system for up to twelve hours, so go easy on the pumpkin spice lattes after noon.



Stick to a consistent schedule

Go to bed and wake up at roughly the same time every day, even on weekends. Such regularity reinforces your circadian rhythm, making it easier for your body to anticipate sleep and wakefulness.



Create a sleep sanctuary

To trigger deep slumber, ensure that your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool (65–68 degrees). And because fall temperatures can waver between warm and chilly, craft a layered bed that includes thin, heat-dispelling sheets and a cozy blanket so you can easily adjust to comfortable conditions for rest each night.



Power down before bed

Avoid screens, including phones, tablets, and computers, for at least an hour before bedtime. The blue light emitted from these devices mimics daylight—something you'll naturally crave more of in fall. This can suppress melatonin and signal to your brain that it's still daytime. Alternatively, read a book, listen to calming music, or meditate.



Embrace the morning

As soon as you wake up, expose yourself to natural light. Open your curtains, step outside for a few minutes, or just sit by a window while you have your coffee. This can help reduce your melatonin and kick-start your cortisol production so you feel awake and alert.

Take the shorter days of fall as an invitation to cozy up and enjoy healthier sleep. If you proactively adjust your habits, you can better embrace this season of change while watching out for your wellness.

**Talk to your doctor for personalized advice on improving your sleep.*

THE GIFT OF DONATING

written by **DAN O'BRIEN**

The holidays arrive with familiar pressure: to spend more, give more, and do more. Yet for many households, generosity doesn't come from excess. It comes from fulfilling the essentials. Food pantries fill faster; people look to shelters for warmth. Families seek small comforts that matter. When approached with care, donating can become a regular part of your domestic life, helping you extend more kindness outward without overwhelming yourself.

FOOD

Most residences contain opportunities for generosity waiting to be noticed, such as food staples bought with good intentions and set aside for later. A good look often reveals soups, grains, and canned goods ready to move on. Checking dates and choosing items that would still be served at one's own table sets a simple, respectful standard.

The way these items are gathered matters; small acts of care travel with the donation. Grouping similar foods and packing boxes with order rather than haste turns the task from disposal into offering.

CLOTHING

As temperatures drop, outerwear becomes more than clothing; it offers much-needed protection. In addition to sweaters and other cold-weather options, check your closets and storage for forgotten or ill-fitting coats and jackets that could be passed along. Just remember: If it wouldn't stand up to a cold walk outside, it isn't ready for donation.



TOYS

These items often require a different kind of attention because they hold memories and have sentimental attachment, marking stages of childhood and growth. As a result, letting them go can be difficult. However, inviting your children to participate can make the transition smoother while also teaching them an important lesson: that joy can be found as much in giving as in receiving. When deciding which toys to give, make sure that you're sorting complete sets and intact pieces and that items are safe for others. Placing small parts in labeled bags and taping instructions to a box also makes it easier for recipients.

Clearing out spaces like pantries, closets, and playrooms benefits everyone living in your home. Practiced thoughtfully, small donations become a seasonal habit rather than a scramble, a reminder that what is already present may be exactly what someone else needs.



WHEN DECIDING WHICH TOYS TO GIVE, MAKE SURE THAT YOU'RE SORTING COMPLETE SETS AND INTACT PIECES AND THAT ITEMS ARE SAFE FOR OTHERS.



HOW TO BE A **GRATEFUL GUEST**

written by
SUZY LINS



If you're attending holiday parties, you have to offer more than a side of mashed potatoes. Professional etiquette trainer Suzy Lins, also known as the Manners Maven, offers her tips for being a more gracious guest this season.

The etiquette for being thankful remains the same throughout the year, but we become more aware of it during the holidays because we attend more parties and exchange more gifts.

BE THANKFUL

A lot of work goes into hosting, so showing your appreciation for a host's efforts is essential. The first way to do so is to RSVP by the deadline given on the invitation, if you were given one. At that time, express appreciation for the invitation and let them know if you will be attending. At the gathering, seek out the host to thank them at some point before you leave. Giving a simple gift is another nice gesture—even if it's inexpensive, like a box of chocolates, a bottle of wine, or festive holiday napkins.

One of the most common mistakes people can make when attending a holiday party, though, is forgetting to thank the host after the event. If it was a casual occasion and you typically communicate via text with them, a text the next day is fine. For a party or more formal event, sending a handwritten thank-you note within a few days to a week is a nice gesture to show your appreciation.

BE POLITE

You should check the dress code on the invitation and dress accordingly to show the host (and other guests) respect. If no dress code is listed, reach out to the host and ask. A good holiday party attendee should also arrive on time: not too early and not too late, ideally within ten to fifteen minutes of the start time.

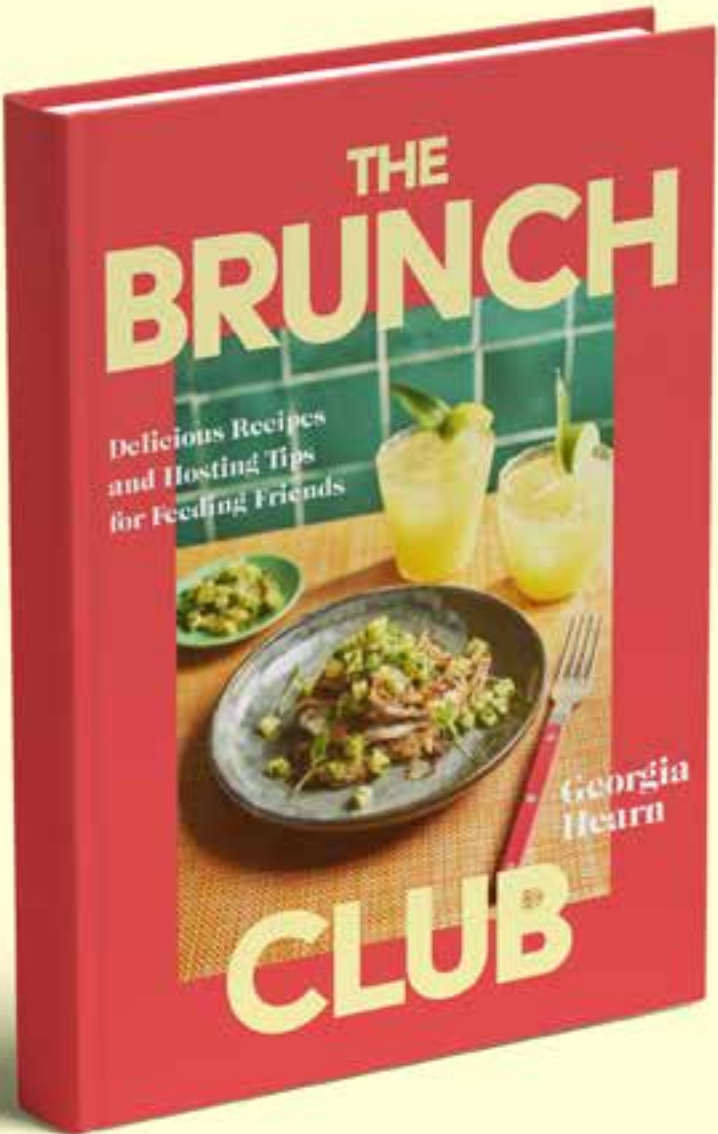
BE CONSISTENT

The etiquette for being thankful remains the same throughout the year, but we become more aware of it during the holidays because we attend more parties and exchange more gifts. Practice gratitude all year long to ingrain it in your nature, better ensuring that it will be on full display come each holiday season.

For more info, visit
themannersmaven.com

HEADSHOT COURTESY OF SUZY LINS

HEARTY DISHES *for the holidays*



Take your hosting to the next level this season with these rich, eye-catching recipes from *The Brunch Club* cookbook.

scan here
to get *The Brunch Club: Delicious Recipes and Hosting Tips for Feeding Friends* cookbook.



Recipes from *The Brunch Club: Delicious Recipes and Hosting Tips for Feeding Friends* by Georgia Hearn. Published by OH. Photography © Danielle Wood 2026.



Serves
10

brunch **CRUMBLE**

The ingredients of this nostalgic pudding lend themselves so nicely to a brunch recipe, with fruit and oats playing the starring roles. Paired alongside cold soy yogurt for a perfect contrast, the buttery caramel, crispy crumble topping is so delicious! I think this recipe is wonderful served hot, warm or cold.

INGREDIENTS:

- 14 oz. cooking apples
- 1 oz. vegan butter
- 7 oz. blackberries
- 2 tsp. cinnamon
- 3 tbsp. maple syrup
- Cold soy yogurt to serve

TOPPING

- 7 oz. porridge oats
- 3½ oz. vegan butter, softened
- 3½ oz. raw cane/turbinado sugar
- Pinch of salt

INSTRUCTIONS:

1/ Start by peeling, coring and chopping the apples into ½ in. cubes.

2/ Place a large saucepan over a medium heat and add 1oz. of vegan butter. Once bubbling, add the apples and sauté for 10 minutes, stirring often until the apple has softened.

3/ Add the blackberries, half the cinnamon, the maple syrup and 3 tbsp of water. Mix together and let simmer for around 15 minutes till the sauce has thickened.

4/ Whilst the compote cooks, make the crumble topping. Place the oats, 3½ oz. vegan butter, demerara sugar, remaining cinnamon and a pinch of salt in a bowl and mix together.

5/ Preheat the oven to 400°F.

6/ Pour the compote into an ovenproof dish and top with the crumble. Place in the oven for 20 minutes until the top is caramelized and compote bubbling.

7/ Remove from the oven and let rest for 5 minutes before serving with a big spoonful of soy yogurt.

recipe by **GEORGIA HEARN**
photography by **DANIELLE WOOD**

Serves
6-8

PEAR AND ALMOND SPONGE

with plum jam and yogurt

A frangipane tart is my all-time favorite pudding and this is the brunch version. The vanilla and almond sponge topped with flaked almonds and pear slices make it particularly aesthetically pleasing, so it's perfect for hosting. You can swap the fruit throughout the year, depending on what's in season, and play around with jam pairings.

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 pears, peeled, cored and finely sliced
- 5 oz. salted butter
- 5 oz. light brown or caster (superfine) sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla paste
- 3 eggs
- 7 oz. ground almonds
- 3½ oz. plain (all-purpose) flour
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- Pinch of salt
- 2 oz. toasted flaked almonds
- Plum jam, crème fraîche, and thyme springs to garnish

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1/** Start by preheating your oven to 350°F, lining a cake or brownie tin (15 x 8 in.) with baking paper and prepping your pears.
- 2/** Then place the butter, sugar and vanilla in a mixing bowl and whisk till really smooth and creamy.
- 3/** Add the eggs, ground almonds, flour, cinnamon and pinch of salt and continue to whisk till you have a really smooth fluffy batter.
- 4/** Pour the mix into your lined baking tray and smooth with a palette knife. Spread the pear slices out over the top, pressing slightly into the batter. Do the same with the flaked almonds.
- 5/** Bake for 40 minutes or until cooked through and golden brown on the top. Remove from the oven and let cool.
- 6/** When ready to serve, split between your plates and serve with a spoonful of crème fraîche, spoonful of jam and a scattering of thyme sprigs.

recipe by **GEORGIA HEARN**
photography by **DANIELLE WOOD**





Serves
4

truffle TARTIFLETTE

There is nothing more comforting and special than a plate of tartiflette! It's decadent, cheesy and indulgent and I hope transports you straight to any previous mountain trips where you may have partaken of it during après ski. The addition of truffle makes it just that little bit more special.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb. 9 oz. russet or Yukon gold potatoes, peeled
- 1 oz. butter
- 2 brown onions, finely sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 tbsp. dried thyme
- 3½ fl. oz. crème fraîche
- 3½ fl. oz. double (heavy) cream
- 1 tbsp. truffle oil
- 9 oz. Gruyère cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper to season
- Sliced truffle to garnish

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1/** Start by preparing your potatoes. Set a saucepan over a high heat with a pinch of salt and bring to the boil. Chop the potatoes into slices ¼ in. thick and add to the saucepan. Boil for around 15 minutes or until tender. Drain and leave to one side.
- 2/** Place a frying pan over a medium-high heat and add the butter. Once the butter is bubbling, add the sliced onion and fry till golden brown and caramelized, stirring often.
- 3/** Next, add the garlic and thyme. Stir continuously and once the garlic is fragrant remove the pan from the heat.
- 4/** In a bowl, mix together the crème fraîche, double (heavy) cream, truffle oil and some seasoning and set aside.
- 5/** Heat the oven to 400°F and get yourself a lasagna dish.
- 6/** Place half the cooked potato slices over the base of your dish. Next, add half the onion mix and half the grated cheese. Repeat with the remaining potato, onion and cheese.
- 7/** Pour over the truffle cream.
- 8/** Place the tartiflette in the oven for 10–15 minutes or until golden brown and bubbling. Remove from the oven and serve topped with truffle slices.

recipe by **GEORGIA HEARN**
photography by **DANIELLE WOOD**



SUMAC ROASTED STRAWBERRIES

and whipped mascarpone french toast

Many of us have nostalgic memories of the way we ate French toast as kids. For me, it was in summer with chopped strawberries, a drizzle of cream and lashings of maple syrup. Whilst that still sounds absolutely delicious, I wanted to make a more grown-up version with the addition of vanilla, sumac and mascarpone.

INGREDIENTS:

- 9 oz. mascarpone
- 3½ fl. oz. double (heavy) cream
- 4 oz. icing sugar
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 14 oz. strawberries, hulled and halved
- 1 tbsp. sumac
- Pinch of salt
- 3½ fl. oz. milk
- 4 eggs
- 1 tbsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 oz. butter
- 4 thick slices of brioche

INSTRUCTIONS:

1/ Start by preheating your oven to 400°F.

2/ Place the mascarpone, double (heavy) cream, half the icing sugar, the lemon zest and 1 tsp. of the vanilla extract in a bowl and whisk till lightly whipped. Store in the fridge until ready to use.

3/ Now place the strawberries, sumac, remaining vanilla extract, remaining icing sugar, lemon juice and a pinch of salt on a lined baking tray and mix together. Roast for 20 minutes, mixing halfway through, until soft and sticky. Leave to cool to room temperature.

4/ Next, whisk together the milk, eggs and cinnamon in a shallow bowl. Then set a frying pan over a medium heat and add half the butter. Let it start to bubble and melt.

5/ Next, dip two of the brioche slices into the egg mix for around 30 seconds to let it soak up some of the liquid. Place in the hot frying pan and fry for 2 minutes each side until golden brown and caramelized.

6/ Remove from the heat and repeat with the remaining brioche.

7/ Split between four serving plates and top with a dollop of whipped mascarpone. Then spoon over the roasted sumac strawberries and their juices and serve!

recipe by **GEORGIA HEARN**
photography by **DANIELLE WOOD**

HOSTING FOR DIFFERENT GUEST TYPES

written by **DAN O'BRIEN**





When you host a seasonal gathering, you're not just staging an event. You're managing a room full of people who arrive with unique habits, appetites, good intentions, and quirks fully intact. The night works when you understand this reality and accept that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work.

Fortunately, most gatherings include the same cast of characters. Knowing how to accommodate them appropriately is often what separates a tense host from a relaxed one.

The early arrivals and the helpers
Early arrivals come ready: coats off, eyes scanning, and energy already

on. They're usually the ones who text "Parking now" or ring the bell ten minutes early, not out of impatience but eagerness. Put a small snack and an easy drink (olives, cheese, or sparkling water with citrus) near the door so they can settle without hovering while the rest of your guests trickle in. A place to stand, lean, or sip buys you time and gives them purpose.

The helpers arrive with a similar lightness but ask the question outright: "How can I help?" Not everyone means to commandeer your evening; many genuinely want to share the load of preparation or flow. Give them one contained task, such as folding napkins, lighting candles, or

pouring the first round, and the room starts working sooner. Avoid vague responses; specificity keeps them useful without putting them in charge.

The quiet guests and the ones who love to chat
Not every guest craves attention. Many are content to observe, listening to laughter while seated in a cozy corner, a warm drink in hand. They're often the ones who arrive on time, choose a chair, and stay there, happy to absorb the atmosphere before participating. Seat them where they can see the room and enter conversation on their own terms. A side table, a good lamp, and a clear sightline do more than forced introductions.

On the other end of the social spectrum is the guest who floats: the butterfly who easily connects people. They drift between circles, introduce neighbors to each other, and generate new conversation just when the room starts to cluster. They're the ones refilling glasses unasked or pulling a newcomer into a story already in progress. Resist the urge to manage them. While your hands are busy with practicalities, their presence keeps the energy buoyant.

Guests with careful appetites
Food can be served with a side of anxiety for guests with allergies or other dietary concerns. They're often discreet, quietly scanning labels or asking questions at the counter. To allay their concerns, include at least one clearly safe option and label it plainly. A neutral mention, such as "nut-free and dairy-free," is enough to make someone feel seen without drawing attention.



Then there are the picky eaters: those with firm texture preferences or selective dislikes. They may eat slowly, separate foods on their plate, or quietly skip a dish altogether. They don't need an entire separate menu; they need assurance. Including a straightforward crowd-pleaser, like bread, roasted potatoes, a simple protein, or dessert, creates a fallback that keeps plates full and conversations flowing. Reliability matters more than novelty.

Abundance and absence at the door

Guests arrive with different forms of generosity. Some come bearing armfuls: maybe three bottles of wine, a homemade dish in foil that's still warm, or a bouquet or holiday treat. They may apologize for "overdoing it" while unloading everything at once. Receive these gifts with gratitude, and integrate what fits your plan. What doesn't may make for a gracious encore later in the evening.

Others show up with nothing in hand except their energy and warmth. They're the ones who will likely linger to talk, help clean without being asked, or stay until the very end. Hospitality isn't transactional. Some people bring wine; others bring laughter. Both are welcome.

A good gathering feels loose and welcoming, not perfectly planned. It's defined by the home's feel: inclusive, warm, easy-going, and alive. Plan for the array of people and personalities on your guest list, and you just might find that the night practically runs itself.

THE SECRETS TO

STELLAR GIFT- WRAPPING

written by **ANDRE RIOS**

Giving a gift is like designing your home. It's not only about how it looks but also about how it makes people feel. This holiday season, one of the best ways to make an extra-special impact on your loved ones is to wrap their gifts in jaw-dropping style.

Even if you think wrapping presents is either a pain to make time for or painfully difficult, you don't need to hand your items over to someone else. Follow this guide to get successful results right in your own abode.

GATHER YOUR GOODS

Event designer Colleen Kennedy Cohen tells the Spruce about the wrapping supplies she always keeps on hand, including the usual essential materials (i.e., gift boxes, paper, and bows) as well as items like craft scissors and gift-wrap tape. However, Kennedy Cohen also includes other specialty products such as twine, calligraphy pens, and natural toppers like holly branches in her stash to kick the results up a notch. Assemble these provisions, and you'll be ready to get to work.



LEELOOTHEFIRST/PEXELS

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

With your tools now on hand, you're ready to wrap! Here are foolproof steps for decorating a simple boxed item:

1 Lay it in tissue paper or surround it with crumbled tissue for cushioning and to keep it in place during step 2.

2 Next, measure your wrapping paper. Roll it out, and place the box in the center of it upside-down. To estimate how much paper you'll need, fold the paper over the box until box is completely covered. Feel free to overestimate.

3 Cut the paper in one straight go, using a straight edge like a ruler to make clean cuts if it's not grid-lined on the back.

4 Ensure that the box sits in the middle of the paper, and pull one side of the wrapping so it touches the center of the box lengthwise. Use a small piece of tape to hold it in place.

5 If you have enough slack to do so, take the other end of the paper and fold it in slightly for a neater seam. Then pull that side over to meet the other end of the paper, and tape it.

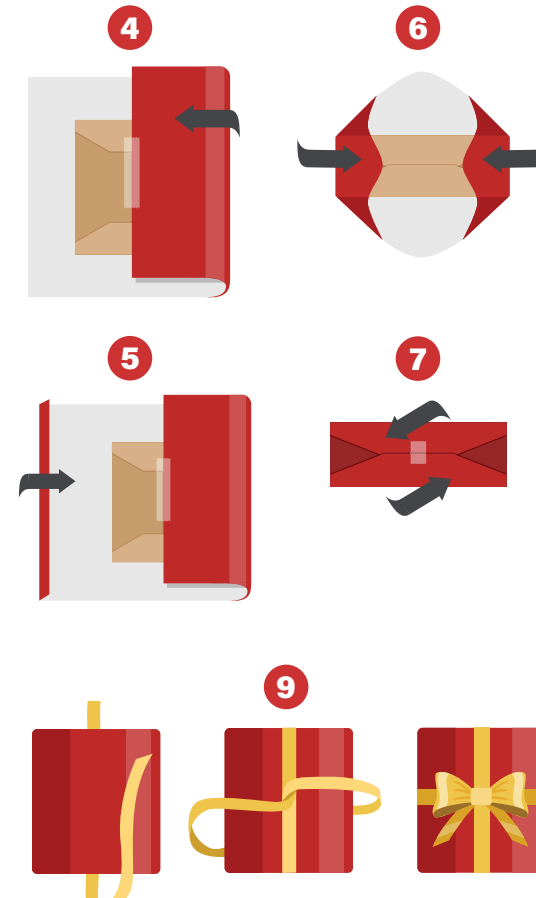
6 Now move to the shorter, exposed sides. Starting at one end, press the flaps against the shorter, vertical sides so two wings protrude. Crease the paper so you're left with two neat triangles on each end.

7 Next, press the upper wing down against the lower one so they're flush with each other, and bring them up against the side of the box in one crease. Fold the point of the fold in as much as necessary so it can sit flush with the top edge.

8 Repeat on the other side.

9 To craft a simple, classic look, measure ribbon by rolling one piece each to surround the box lengthwise and widthwise. Cut each ribbon so they meet neatly in the middle, then cover the seam with a bow. Finally, consider finishing the box with a decorative element like a flower or candy cane.

With the right supplies, these steps, and a bit of practice, you'll be prepped to wrap anything in style. Ultimately, the extra effort you put into your gift wrapping will show in the results—and, hopefully, in a priceless glow in your recipient's eyes.



TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR GIFT

Didn't do the neatest job with your wrapping?

Cover any exposed edges with stickers, extra ribbon, or adhered decorations like fresh flowers.

Dealing with unusual products that don't fit neatly into a box or bag?

Kennedy Cohen has the answer: Wrap them in soft, appealing fabric, then gather and tie the ends. Or simply place it in a basket, and tie a bow around the handle.

For all that you put into your home,
YOU DESERVE TO GET THE
most **OUT.**



Stacey Shanner, Realtor®

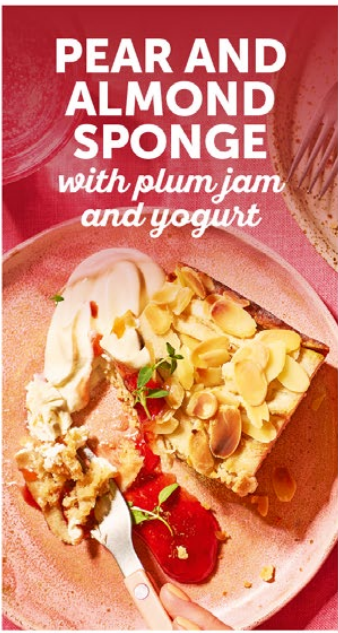
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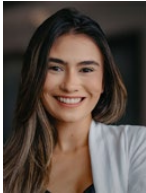
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Front of Tear Out Card 2

PEAR AND ALMOND SPONGE

with plum jam and yogurt





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SERVES 6-8

PEAR AND ALMOND SPONGE

with plum jam and yogurt

INGREDIENTS	INSTRUCTIONS
• 4 pears, peeled, cored, and finely sliced • 5 oz. salted butter • 5 oz. light brown or caster (superfine) sugar • 2 tsp. vanilla paste • 3 eggs • 7 oz. ground almonds • 3½ oz. plain (all-purpose) flour • 1 tsp. cinnamon • Pinch of salt • 2 oz. toasted flaked almonds • Plum jam, crème fraiche and thyme sprigs to garnish	1/ Start by preheating your oven to 350°F, lining a cake or brownie tin (15 x 8 in.) with baking paper, and prepping your pears. 2/ Then place the butter, sugar, and vanilla in a mixing bowl and whisk till really smooth and creamy. 3/ Add the eggs, ground almonds, flour, cinnamon and pinch of salt and continue to whisk till you have a really smooth fluffy batter. 4/ Pour the mix into your lined baking tray and smooth with a palette knife. Spread the pear slices out over the top, pressing slightly into the batter. Do the same with the flaked almonds. 5/ Bake for 40 minutes or until cooked through and golden brown on the top. Remove from the oven and let cool. 6/ When ready to serve, split between your plates and serve with a spoonful of crème fraiche, spoonful of jam, and a scattering of thyme sprigs.

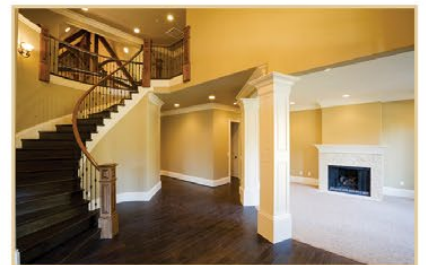
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