

Safety first when stringing holiday lights



Holiday decorations help make a special time of year even more memorable. Whether you're hanging mistletoe above a doorway or decking the halls, safety must be a priority when decorating a home for the holidays.

Accidents can happen no matter what type of holiday decorating you're doing, but stringing holiday lights around your home may be especially dangerous. This season, keep the following safety tips in mind when stringing lights so this season of celebration starts off safe and sound.

- Work with at least one partner. Never go it alone when stringing holiday lights. Make sure someone is there to hold

the ladder steady as you climb up and down. Partnering up when stringing holiday lights allows decorators to use both of their hands to climb up ladders instead of using one of their hands to carry lights. Once they reach a point where it's safe to hang lights, they can then have a helper hand them the lights. If possible, work in groups of three so someone can hold the ladder steady at all times.

- Inspect lights before hanging them. Lights are not built to last forever, and over time holiday lights can suffer damage that has the potential to be dangerous. Wires can fray, and sockets can crack or break. Inspect

lights and wires before hanging them, replacing any that pose a hazard. When replacing bulbs, be sure to replace them with bulbs of equal wattage.

- Use an extension cord of adequate length. Exterior holiday lights are often plugged into extension cords that extend to a shed or garage. Do not connect several extension cords to power holiday lights; instead, use just a single cord that's lengthy enough to reach the outlet. Connecting extension cords is a fire hazard. In addition, make sure the amperage of the decorations matches the amperage rating of the extension cord, which can be found on the product label or

possibly on the manufacturer's website. Make sure the extension cord is not plugged into the power source while you are hanging the lights.

- Make sure lights do not pose a safety hazard inside. Some people string holiday lights indoors as well. Lights might be hung on Christmas trees or along hallways. Such lights and the cords connecting them to power sources should never pose safety hazards,

so make sure they are not lying on the floor. Staple lights to the wall and never place them beneath furniture or rugs. Lights can overheat when placed beneath rugs, and lights that are not properly secured to a wall can pose certain dangers, including being potential tripping hazards.

- Hang the correct lights. When stringing lights, make sure you hang lights designated as exterior lights on the exterior of your home and those designated as interior lights inside your home. Hanging lights in the wrong places poses a fire hazard and creates additional safety

concerns, so adhere to manufacturer instructions when stringing lights.

Safety should reign supreme when stringing holiday lights around the house.

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Exploring the origins of New Year's resolutions

For millenia, people around the world have commemorated the arrival of a new calendar year by adhering to various traditions. Once such tradition is making resolutions for the year ahead. Resolutions are promises to oneself geared around personal fulfillment and betterment.

Resolutions are widely practiced, but some people may not understand the origins of New Year's resolutions and why they have become the norm.

Some historians tie the practice of making resolutions to the ancient Babylonians. More than 4,000 years ago, the Babylonians celebrated the New Year in March rather than January. The spring harvest was in March, and a festival called Akitu, which lasted 12 days, was celebrated. An important part of the festival was the crowning of a new king. Special rituals also affirmed a connection to the gods. The Babylonians made promises to the gods, which included vows to return borrowed objects and pay outstanding debts.

Resolutions can also be traced to ancient Rome. The Romans were instrumental in creating a more formal calendar, and the start of the new year was moved from March to

January (January and February were added to the Roman calendar under the rule of Numa Pompilius). Julius Caesar wanted to honor January's namesake, Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. Janus' two faces enabled him to look back into the past and forward into the future. Sacrifices to Janus were made, and worshipers exchanged gifts with one another. A custom of setting resolutions began during this period as well, with Romans promising to be good to one another.

Eventually, these resolutions were funneled into prayers and fasting when Christianity was adopted by the Roman Empire. Other religious parallels include the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, which is a day of atonement and reflection as celebrants examine their wrongdoings and seek forgiveness and to behave better moving forward. Yom Kippur

follows Rosh Hashanah, Judaism's own new year.

Resolutions also may be loosely tied to Medieval times. During this time, knights took a "peacock vow" at the end of the Christmas season. Each year, these knights would reaffirm their commitment to chivalry.

Today New Year's resolutions are largely a secular tradition, but they're still connected to a desire to be a good person and put one's best self forward.

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