

Holiday gift-wrapping tips and tricks



Brown paper bags make for sturdy and versatile wrapping materials.

After all the holiday presents have been purchased, the task of wrapping can begin. Although some people find wrapping is relaxing and provides a chance to embrace one's artistic flair, many others find wrapping gift after gift becomes tedious quite fast.

While there are no statistics on just how many gifts the average person purchases over the course of the holiday season, the National Retail Federation says the average consumer will spend around \$800 on all things holiday. That means there will be a lot of gifts to wrap before the big exchange. Those who want to make gift-wrapping less tedious this holiday season can consider these ideas to streamline the process.

Gather all supplies

When the time comes to wrap gifts, there's nothing more frustrating than hunting for wrapping supplies. Have paper, bows, bags, tissue, pens, tape (double-sided tape streamlines the process), scissors, ribbon, and any other wrapping accoutrements at the ready.

Set up a folding snack table near your wrapping area to hold the supplies so they don't get in the way.

Choose the right location Always wrap on a large, flat and sturdy surface. Avoid wrapping on a carpet, which will give gift wrap a wrinkled look and increase the amount of time needed to wrap.

Square it up

If you are a master at wrapping rectangular or square gifts but fail when presents are oddly shaped, place misshapen gifts into boxes and then wrap the boxes. Gift bags also can be used for such gifts, but wrapped boxes may look more appealing under the tree.

Fabric over paper

If you think gift wrap is wasteful, think about repurposing fabric into beautiful wrapping for presents. A square of leftover fabric, a piece of a t-shirt or even a portion of a sweater that has seen better days can be transformed into an innovative package for gift-giving. Tie the gathered ends into a bow

and skip the tape as well. Dress up with ribbon and a tag for extra flair. Fabric bends and moves, making it more forgiving for oddly shaped gifts as well.

Stock up on paper shopping bags

On your next trip to Trader Joes or Whole Foods, bring home more than organic produce. Walk away with paper bags and free gift wrap. Craft a DIY stamp roller or handmade stamps to dress up plain brown bags. Or wrap the gift in twine and add a sprig of evergreen for a rustic look. Children can even use markers or crayons to create their own designs on gifts, personalizing even further.

Diversify gifts

Identify each recipient's gifts by wrapping in a different color or style. Just jot down the key to decoding the wrapping, and you'll save time on individual gift tags.

Wrapping presents doesn't have to be a chore. With some time-saving tips and tricks, the work can be a breeze.

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Santa letter-writing secrets



At the tip of the North Pole resides a jolly man who collects letters from children asking him to deliver all of their hearts' desires. Although Santa Claus does a thorough job of making sure children's treats are delivered on the same night, sometimes he needs assistance with reading and responding to the thousands upon thousands of letters sent to him each year. That is why he often relies on an extensive list of helpers to handle much of his holiday correspondence.

According to Smithsonian, the practice of writing to St. Nick dates back more than 150 years. Early depictions of Santa show him as a disciplinarian. The first Christmastime Santa letters were actually sent by Santa, rather than the other way around. Such letters encouraged children to be good boys and girls. Eventually, an illustration by Thomas Nast depicted "Santa-clausville, N.P." as Santa's address, providing children with a place where they could send their correspondences to the big guy in red.

The Universal Postal Union, an intergovernmental

organization that coordinates postal policies across 192 member nations, indicates that 1,350,000 letters to Santa were sent by Canadians, while Americans sent more than one million and Britains mailed roughly 800,000 such letters in 2012, the most recent year from which figures are available. To account for the staggering number of letters sent, various post offices and postal programs were established to help Santa with the task of tackling children's wish lists.

In Canada, children can address letters to Santa and use the postal code H0H, 0H0. In 2016, the USPS instituted a new letter-writing option that enables parents or guardians to include a personalized response letter back to children who address letters to Santa. The package can be postmarked to: North Pole Postmark Postmaster, 4141 Postmark Drive, Anchorage, AK 99530-9998.

Many other letters to Santa end up routing to various post offices where thousands of volunteer "elves" can adopt letters and make children's wishes come true. A "Letters to Santa" program enables

children in serious need to get items that can help keep them safe and happy.

Parents may also investigate a number of services that will provide letters from Santa, Mrs. Claus or elves for nominal fees. These letters can be personalized with details. Santa has even gone high-tech with personalized videos and pictures as well. A quick web search can yield the instructions on how prospective helpers can get started.

Children can improve their chances of letters being read and received, with these tips.

- Identify who is writing the letter and share some details about your life.
- Make sure you've been nice and well-behaved.
- Ask Santa how he has been and engage in some polite conversation.
- Politely ask for the toys you'd like. Understand that Santa is busy, so keep the list brief.
- Thank Santa in advance for his kindness. Hopefully, he'll have time to reply.
- Write and mail the letter as early as possible, as things tend to get busy as Christmas nears.

Now that's a happy new year!

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