

Gifts no food fanatic should go without

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own fruits and vegetables. Locally grown produce has become increasingly popular among foodies focused on eco-conscious cooking practices, and it does not get much more local than home cooks' own backyards.

• **Cutlery set:** Though it's easy to overlook, cutlery goes a long way toward making home cooks' jobs easier. The right cutlery set, which may include one or two chef's knives, a vegetable knife, a santoku knife, a bread knife, and other knives home cooks

will appreciate, can make preparing a meal easier and more efficient than cooking without a set. High-end cutlery sets can cost several hundred dollars, but shoppers on more limited budgets can still find quality cutlery sets for less money.

• **Food getaway:** Many foodies love to travel so they can experience cuisines popular overseas or in different regions of the country. Men and women whose spouses love food can plan a food-themed getaway weekend to a locale that specializes in a type of food their significant others enjoy or have

always wanted to try. For example, men and women who love lobster may enjoy a trip to Maine's annual Lobster Festival, while those who can't get enough barbecue may appreciate a trip to one of the country's more notable barbecue spots, such as Memphis, Kansas City, North Carolina or Texas.

Food-themed gifts make the perfect holiday present for food fanatics, and shoppers have an endless array of options to satisfy their favorite foodies' appetites.

How to avoid the holiday shopping rush

Holiday shopping can be both fun and hectic. While it's fun to scour stores looking

for can't-miss gifts for your loved ones, shopping amongst the crowds also can prove hectic.

While online shopping has made department stores somewhat less crowded come the holiday season, the opportunity to see and feel potential gifts in person compels many people to do the majority of their holiday shopping in-store. There are ways for such shoppers to avoid the holiday shopping rush as they begin their quests for the perfect gifts.

• **Shop during off-peak hours.** Weekends and weeknight evenings tend to be the busiest times to go holiday shopping. Professionals who have weekends off may put off their shopping during the week, choosing to do so on Saturday and Sunday afternoons when they have extra time to browse and comparison shop. Shopping off-peak hours, such as during weekday mornings or even early mornings on weekends, is a great way to avoid crowds. Parents of young children might want to take a morning or even a full day off of work to get their holiday shopping done so they can avoid shopping with their kids in tow. You can probably move around more quickly if you choose to shop while the kids are in school, and this also affords you time to find gifts for the kids.

• **Make a list.** Knowing what you want to buy online can decrease the amount of time you spend wandering around malls and stores. The longer you linger without an idea of what to buy, the greater the chance you will be joined by fellow shoppers. If possible, call stores before you leave the house to confirm if they have certain items in stock, or buy items online from retailers who offer an in-store pickup option.



Checkout lines for in-store pickup items are often separated from more traditional checkout lines, further reducing your risk of waiting in long lines.

• **Shop local businesses.** Small local businesses may not boast the inventory of larger retailers you're liable to encounter at the mall, but local small businesses tend to deal with thinner crowds than national stores during the holiday season. Items in such businesses may be more unique than items sold at nationwide retailers, and when you shop at smaller businesses, you likely won't be forced to hunt for parking spots or wait on long checkout lines.

• **Start shopping early.** Crowds only grow bigger and more impatient between Black Friday and the final days before Christmas, so shoppers who can find the time to shop before the height of the shopping season might find parking lots and checkout lines more to their liking. In addition, shopping early affords shoppers more time to find the best deals.

The holiday shopping rush hits full swing in the weeks before Christmas Day, but there are many ways shoppers can get their shopping done and avoid the crowds at the same time.

