

Stay safe when stringing holiday lights

Lighting displays are one of the many things that help make the holiday season a special time of year. Often awe-inspiring, holiday lighting displays present a perfect opportunity for communities and individuals to showcase their festive sides.

Safety should always be a priority when stringing holiday lights both inside and outside a home. The National Fire Protection Association notes that, between 2009 and 2014, fire departments in the United States responded to an average of 210 home fires that started with Christmas trees per year. Lighting displays strung on home exteriors also can pose safety risks if homeowners do not exercise caution. Fortunately, various strategies can help homeowners safely decorate their homes' interiors and exteriors this holiday season.

- Choose a fresh tree. The NFPA recommends celebrants who prefer natu-



ral Christmas trees choose ones with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Dry trees are more likely to catch fire than freshly cut trees. Adding water to the tree stand each day will keep trees fresher longer. When placing the tree, avoid placing it too close to heat sources, making sure it is at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents, or lights.

- Check all lights before stringing them. All lights, including those going on trees inside a home and

those being strung outside, should be inspected prior to being strung. Look for any worn or broken cords and replace any defected lights.

- Employ the buddy system. When stringing lights, always work with at least one other person. This makes it safe for home-

owners who must climb ladders to string lights on especially tall trees and/or on their home exteriors.

- Avoid working in inclement weather. The weather during the holiday season can sometimes be unpleasant or unpredictable. Check the forecast before stringing exterior

lights to ensure Mother Nature won't pose a threat. Avoid hanging lights if the forecast predicts wet, icy or windy conditions that can make ladders unstable.

- Turn lights off when going to bed and/or leaving the house. Interior and exterior holiday lights should not be left on when no one is home or everyone inside is sleeping. If

left on overnight or when no one is home, lights may contribute to fires that damage homes and may even prove fatal.

Holiday lighting displays help make this time of year special. Following some simple safety procedures when decorating with lights can ensure everyone enjoys a safe and happy holiday season.

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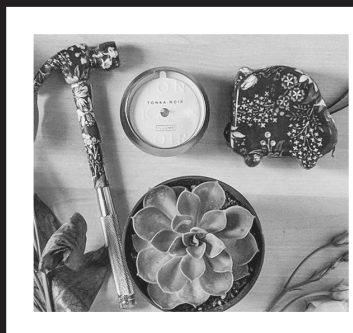
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Gingerbread goodness

Gingerbread is a broad term that can describe anything from a firm and crispy cookie to a moist, soft cake. Traditionally, gingerbread is seasoned with ginger, cloves, nutmeg, and other aromatic spices. Molasses and brown sugar counteract the spice with sweetness. North Americans have been baking gingerbread in various shapes or forms for more than 200 years, and the recipes even pre-date the American revolution. However, gingerbread dates back even further to the Shakespearean era, with The Bard having mentioned it in one of his plays. Gingerbread's name can be traced to medieval England and once referred to any kind of preserved ginger. The term went on to reference ginger-flavored cakes in the 15th century, and gingerbread eventually became popular throughout the world. Even though gingerbread cakes and cookies have been made for centuries, Germans are often credited with creating gingerbread houses, according to Smithsonian. They were probably modeled after the witch's candy cottage in the German fairy tale, "Hansel and Gretel." Even though gingerbread can be made any time of year, it is particularly associated with the Christmas season, with gingerbread men and other fanciful shapes turning up on cookie platters.

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