

Shopping facts and figures

The holidays are here, and that means millions of people will spend time decorating, making shopping lists, purchasing presents, and stocking up on entertaining essentials. Various groups and consumer watchdogs track trends in holiday spending and giving, and many facts and figures may surprise holiday enthusiasts.

- Economists with the National Retail Federation say online and retail sales in 2017 increased by 10.5 percent over the previous year. The combination of job and wage gains, modest inflation, and elevated consumer confidence has led to higher holiday spending.

- Between Thanksgiving Day and Cyber Monday 2017, more than 174 million Americans shopped in stores and online, offers the NRF. Black Friday still reigns

supreme, with 77 million consumers. However, Small Business Saturday was not far behind, with 55 million consumers.

- Data from Prosper Insights & Analytics says people planned to spend an average of \$967.13 in 2017 on the holiday season. That was up 3.4 percent from the year prior.

- Tracking of spending on video games by The NPD Group reflects a growth of 15 percent when compared to a year ago. All categories have shown gains, including software, hardware, accessories, and game cards. Fortnite has been a significant software sales driver for 2018, ratcheting up legions of fans seemingly overnight.

- Many people pride themselves on shopping early for gifts, but there are eleventh-hour con-



sumers as well. NRF says around 15 percent of last-minute shoppers plan to buy gifts at supermarkets or grocery stores.

- Charitable giving tends to skyrocket at the end of the year, when the spirit of giving synonymous with the season inspires individuals to give back. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, the average total cash contribution to charity by individuals is roughly \$245.

- The NRF notes that, in 2017, only about 12 percent of consumers

finished their holiday shopping by the second week of December.

- Research from Forbes found that gift cards will continue to reign supreme. Gift cards are convenient for gift-givers, and PWC found that 42 percent of people prefer to receive gift cards for the holidays.

- Sales are strong for both online and brick-and-mortar retailers. Accenture's "10th Annual Accenture Holiday Shopping Survey" discovered 84 percent of consumers plan to go online, partic-

ularly to Amazon.com, to research and price-check gifts before looking or buying elsewhere.

- The Accenture survey also found that at least three-quarters of shoppers are enticed by coupons and other promotions to shop at stores they have not visited before.

- Don't let the holiday buying season fool you. Shopping continues even after Santa has slid down the chimney. The NRF states 48 percent of shoppers will take advantage of after-Christmas sales in stores.

Thanksgiving quiche puts sweet potatoes front and center

Sweet potatoes are a favorite side dish at Thanksgiving dinner tables. Packed with vitamins, nutrients, fiber, and delectable flavor, sweet potatoes have earned their place on holiday dinner tables. While many holiday hosts bake, fry or mash their sweet potatoes, these beloved tubers can be prepared in other ways as well.

If you want to put a new twist on this Thanksgiving staple, whip up this recipe for "Sweet Potato Quiche," courtesy of the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission. Submitted to the NC State Fair Tailgate Recipe Contest by Kristen Fryborg, this recipe marries sweet tubers with decadent cheese, rich cream and savory spices.

Sweet Potato Quiche

Makes 8 servings

2 cups sweet potatoes, peeled and diced into small cubes

3/4 cup yellow onion, diced

2 1/2 tablespoons olive oil

1/2 teaspoon salt

Black pepper to taste

Egg mixture:

4 eggs

1 cup heavy cream

1/2 teaspoon fresh rosemary, minced

1/2 tablespoon fresh parsley, minced

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper

3 ounces Gruyere cheese, shredded

Pre-baked deep dish pie crust

Preheat oven to 400 F. Mix together the first five ingredients and place on baking sheet. Roast in the oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

While sweet potatoes and onions are roasting, shred cheese and set aside. Whisk the egg mixture and set aside.

Once potatoes and onions have finished roasting, spoon them into the pre-baked pie shell. Next, layer the shredded cheese on top of the sweet potatoes.

Reduce oven to 375 F. Pour egg mixture over the cheese and potatoes. Place quiche in the oven on a center rack. Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until eggs are set.

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