



HAPPY HOLIDAYS WITHOUT THE STRESS

Every year, the frenzy of the holiday season can leave us feeling a little frazzled. Here are a few reminders and planning tips to help you enjoy this festive time of year as serenely as possible. This timeline was made with Christmas in mind, but it can easily be adapted to suit any holiday.

FLOWERS

Beautyberry, Christmas roses, mimosa flowers, buttercups, anemones, amaryllis, hyacinths, poinsettias in assorted colors (red, white, pink, peach), mistletoe, eucalyptus branches.

TABLE DECOR

A centerpiece in shades of green and white to evoke the forest; warm, joyful colors; a chic British look; a pale color palette for a New Year filled with lightness.

PLACE CARD AND GIFT IDEAS

A homemade wreath;
Christmas cookies or fortune cookies;
a sachet of potpourri; a homemade tin of tea; dried citrus slices.

PARTY IDEAS

A disco ball; a large pitcher of eggnog;
a great festive playlist.

END OF OCTOBER

- Start thinking about your holiday cards: make a list of recipients, choose a design (photo, illustration, something homemade with recycled book pages, etc.).

SIX WEEKS AHEAD

- Make your wish-list for Santa.

FIRST WEEK OF DECEMBER

- Purchase gifts, wrapping paper, and gift tags, and send any long-distance gifts.
- Make an inventory of your decorations: what do you have already? What do you want to make yourself? Do the string lights still work?
- Start thinking about the table setting: do you need to order a centerpiece

from your favorite florist? Or will you make one yourself? Can your children help? Is the tablecloth clean and ironed? Do you need to polish any silverware?

- Take your time writing your holiday cards.
- Buy a Christmas tree to fill your home with its wonderful scent.
- Finish concocting your Christmas Eve and Christmas Day menus, and make your shopping lists (see p. 18 for my personal method). It isn't always easy to meet the special dietary requirements of all your guests, so just do your best!
- Order your turkey (for my cooking tips, see the facing page).
- Decorate your home. Hang a beautiful wreath on your door (see p. 134 for my homemade version).
- Start putting together your New Year's Eve party playlist.
- Light pine- and spiced orange-scented candles and make your own potpourri (see p. 134) to fill your home with holiday aromas.

TWO WEEKS AHEAD

- Make sure you have all your gifts and party favors, and finalize your seating plan.
- Clean out your refrigerator—you'll need lots of space!
- Shop for all unperishable items, such as wines, oils, and spices.

- Think about what you'll wear. It can also be fun to ask all your guests to dress according to a certain theme or to wear a certain color.
- Ask your children to sort through their toys and give away any that are in good shape but they're too old for.
- Watch a Christmas movie with your family.

ONE WEEK AHEAD

- Give your house a deep clean, make guest beds, etc.
- Buy batteries for children's toys that will need them.
- Go and see the department store window displays, or take a tour around your neighborhood to look at the Christmas lights. Enjoy a mulled wine at the Christmas market with friends.
- Make Christmas cookies (see recipes pp. 170–71) to give as gifts to your mail carrier, neighbors, friends, children's teachers, etc. Wrap the cookies up in a box with a pretty ribbon.

THREE DAYS AHEAD

- Shop for perishable items.
- Pick up your turkey.
- Start preparing the table setting—not only to get ahead, but also to give yourself plenty of time to make adjustments or buy additional supplies, such as ribbon, without last-minute stress.

TWO DAYS AHEAD

- Prepare any foods you can in advance, such as making pastry for pies or preparing vegetables.
- Pick up flowers or plants from your florist or garden center, or gather branches in the woods.
- Set up a bar area for adults and for children, so your guests can serve themselves. Make sure you have sufficient ice for buckets to chill champagne, white wine, juice, etc., as space is often at a premium in the fridge.
- Donate food and gifts to those in need.

ONE DAY AHEAD

- Finish setting the table and wrapping gifts.
- Determine what time you'll need to put the turkey in the oven and set an alarm on your phone to remind you.
- Prepare treats for breakfast and teatime, such as pecan scones or clementine and pistachio cake (a favorite recipe from my first book).
- Keep (at least) 1 hour free for yourself: have a home “spa” session (put on a facial mask or do your nails), read a book, watch an episode of your favorite series, do a yoga session, take a walk—anything that makes you feel good.

- Relax and sip a cocktail while singing Christmas carols.
- Leave out a glass of milk, cookies, and carrots for Santa and his reindeer.

My turkey roasting tips

- Like chicken, turkey must be at room temperature before it goes into the oven.
- Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C/Gas Mark 6). Place the turkey in a roasting pan and place in the oven for 20 minutes, then remove, turn the turkey over, and return to the oven for an additional 20 minutes.
- Ensure the turkey is breast-side up, lower the oven temperature to 340°F (170°C/Gas Mark 3), and roast slowly until it is done, basting regularly.
- The chart below gives approximate cooking times, which may vary depending on your oven. If the skin browns too quickly, loosely cover the turkey with aluminum foil.

TURKEY WEIGHT	COOKING TIME
10–12 lb. (4.5–5.5 kg)	2½–3 hours
12–14 lb. (5.5–6.35 kg)	2¾–3½ hours
14–16 lb. (6.35–7.25 kg)	3–3¾ hours
16–19 lb. (7.25–8.6 kg)	3½–4½ hours
20+ lb. (9+ kg)	3¾–4½ hours

HOMEMADE KITCHEN WREATHS

During the holiday season, I love hanging wreaths everywhere: on the front door, on our wooden garage door, in the living room, and in the kitchen. I make some of the wreaths myself, especially those for the kitchen. I start with a base of pine or fir branches, ivy, or even moss that I've found outside, then I add fresh herbs such as sprigs of sage, rosemary, oregano, and thyme. I hang this wreath over the stove so that I have fresh herbs from the garden at hand when I cook. They dry out over time, of course, but the scent is divine. This makes a nice gift and is a great idea for a workshop with friends over a cup of tea and a slice (or two!) of cake.

POTPOURRI TO FILL YOUR HOME WITH FESTIVE FRAGRANCE

This is a little gift idea that I love! You'll need drawstring bags or small jars, containers, or bowls, as well as twigs or branches and some decorative ribbon, if you wish.

Here are some tried-and-true potpourri combinations:

- Arrange dried orange slices, cinnamon sticks, star anise pods, and pine cones in an attractive container.
- Arrange cinnamon sticks, pine branches, whole cloves, whole nutmeg,

fresh cranberries, 1 whole clementine, and 1 star anise pod in an attractive container.

- Combine dried lemon slices, rosemary sprigs, and a cinnamon stick.
- Pour some apple juice into a saucepan and add apple peel, cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, and dried orange slices. Bring to a simmer for a few minutes, then pour into small bowls and place around the house for 3–5 days.

How to make dried citrus slices

Dried citrus slices are pretty and have a wonderful scent—they are also simple to make.

- Preheat the oven to 230°F (110°C/Gas Mark ¼) on fan setting, if available.
- Wash and dry citrus fruit of your choice. Using a very sharp knife, cut the fruit crosswise into approximately ¼-in. (5-mm) slices. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and place the fruit slices on it in a single layer. Place in the oven for 4 hours, turning the slices over halfway through the cooking time. Transfer them to a rack to finish drying out completely.
- You can use the dried slices to make garlands, to decorate your Christmas tree or table, and to garnish mulled wine or winter cocktails (see Coffee Chai Disco, p. 138).



MY ART OF ENTERTAINING

Recipes and Tips from
MISS MAGGIE'S
— KITCHEN —

Héloïse Brion

Flammarion