

tip talk

special
holiday
edition

organizing, cleaning, recycling & more



holiday checklist: things you'll probably forget

Details always slip your mind? Not this year. Check these off your list in the first week of December, says Cynthia Townley Ewer, founder of OrganizedChristmas.com.

- ✓ **ARRANGE BABYSITTERS ASAP**—for you and guests.
- ✓ **COMPILE HOLIDAY TUNES** Make a few mix CDs now.
- ✓ **STOCK FROZEN MEALS** “You want anything healthy that you can put on the table quickly, whether it’s store-bought frozen lasagna or leftovers,” says Townley Ewer.
- ✓ **BUY TOILET PAPER** Lots of it. Really.
- ✓ **INVENTORY YOUR TABLEWARE** Now’s the time to make sure your set for eight hasn’t slid down to seven.
- ✓ **CREATE GUEST BASKETS** Arrange sample-size shampoo and lotions in a toiletry basket with small towels. “Every guest forgets something,” says Townley Ewer.
- ✓ **BAKE GOODIES WITH A LONG SHELF LIFE**, like cookies and gingerbread. “Otherwise you’ll be up to your elbows in flour after midnight on the 23rd.”
- ✓ **CHARGE DIGITAL CAMERAS AND CAMCORDERS** And make sure the memory card is empty. “Nothing kills gift opening like asking everyone to wait while you charge,” jokes Townley Ewer.

gotta have it!

Sometimes it seems like everything I cook crumbles while I’m making it. You know: the drumstick that falls off the turkey, the wrap that won’t stay. No more, now that I’ve found the foodloop by Fusionbrands. These reusable notched silicone loops are microwave- and oven-safe, adjust from 1 to 4 inches and link together to hold larger items. I also use mine to loop together fresh flowers in a vase. \$9.99 for four; amazon.com



THE BEST WAY TO recycle it

FOAM PEANUTS

Some are now made from vegetable starch. To test, toss one under water—if it disintegrates, you’ve got nontoxic, biodegradable peanuts. As for the nonrecyclable plastic kind, call The Peanut Hotline (800-828-2214) for a list of businesses that accept them. ▶



WORD OF THE MONTH: **SPIRIT**

One word, so many meanings!

1 (noun) Disposition or outlook. *This should lift your spirits: The average American gains only 1.1 pound from October to February. The catch? That pound isn't lost during the year.* **2** (noun) A distilled liquor. *If you ask visitors to bring spirits like brandy, vodka or whiskey instead of wine or beer, you'll extend the servings of your liquor cabinet threefold.*

3 (verb) To carry off quickly. *One rule: The cook is not the cleaner. After a feast, the dishes should be spirited away and cleaned by children and guests.*

CLEANING GURU SAYS:

empty it out

I cleaned obsessively before my family arrived last Christmas...and only realized my blunder once they were here: I didn't clear out space for their belongings—luggage, boots, coats. This year, I'm leaving an empty surface in each room for their stuff, and I'm clearing off entryway hooks and shelves for their winter gear.



LAST-MINUTE \$ SAVER Last year, the moment I tore open the wrapping paper on my iPod I wanted to play music through my stereo speakers. So I ran to the store and spent \$30 for a connector cord. Instead, I should've cooled my heels and ordered off the Internet, where they're significantly cheaper—the same one would have cost me about \$10, including shipping.



5 things to do with disposable cups

- 1 RAISE YOUR CENTERPIECE** Don't lose it behind the roast! Turn four small cups upside down to elevate it (push them together to hide them).
- 2 MAKE A STRING OF LANTERNS** Have kids decorate plastic cups. Then take a strand of lights and pop each light through the bottom of a cup.
- 3 SAVE YOURSELF DISHWASHING** Put out a permanent marker and have guests write their name on their cup to keep track of it.
- 4 SET JELL-O FAST** Follow the speed-set instructions on the box, pour into small paper cups and refrigerate. It'll be ready in 20 minutes.
- 5 MAKE A SIFTER** Poke holes in a cup bottom to sprinkle powdered sugar on desserts. Just toss it when you're done. **wd**