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Tools and Tips for Keeping the Holidays Organized

By Stacey Agin Murray

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by: **Stacey Agin Murray**

It's November 1st. You've walked into your favorite store to buy half-priced Halloween candy and what do you see? Christmas decorations! "Oh, no!" you think to yourself. "That can only mean one thing..."

The HOLIDAYS are coming!

Don't stress—you're going to start early and be more organized this year...Here are some tools and tips for staying on top of the busy and sometimes stressful holiday season.

TOOL #1: Lists

Why keep lists? Whether they are written on paper or typed onto your computer, a list allows you to do a sort of 'brain dump' of everything you need to recall at a moment's notice. There are so many different things to remember when it comes to holiday time: Your husband's shirt size, the spices you need for this year's stuffing, what store has gift wrap on sale, etc. Unless you have an incredible memory, keeping lists will help get you through some of the stress of the holiday season.

Some examples of list topics you may need during the holidays are: food shopping list lists of dishes to prepare when entertaining gift list invitation lists

TOOL #2: Calendar

This may be the most important organizing tool you use this season. Why use a calendar? A calendar is a tool that helps you plan what you need to accomplish in a day, a week, or a month. And boy, is there a lot to accomplish during the holidays! As opposed to just making to-do lists, sometimes seeing time in visual blocks on paper (or electronically) helps one to manage their time more efficiently...

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Examples of activities to be scheduled during the holidays are: food shopping gift shopping cooking wrapping gifts trips to the post office holiday parties (whether hosted by you or someone else)

Become a 'Master of Time Management.'

How will you know how much time to put aside for each task? Work backwards from the day or time that a task needs to be done by. Estimate how many hours/days it would take to complete the task. Schedule the time and mark your calendar accordingly.

For example:

Task:

Cooking a turkey for Thanksgiving (to be ready by Thursday at 5pm)

Steps: Purchase turkey at least one week before Thanksgiving (enter task in calendar for the week before Thanksgiving) Defrost turkey 2–3 days before Thanksgiving depending upon size (calculate defrosting time and enter task in calendar to be started on Monday or Tuesday before Thanksgiving) Cook turkey. This can take 3–6 hours depending upon size (calculate cooking time and write on your calendar for Thursday what time the bird needs to be in the oven by in order to finish cooking by 5pm)

A schedule is a guideline and should be flexible. Try to schedule tasks to be completed ahead of deadline. This allows for any problems or emergencies that may arise.

TOOL #3: Quality Storage Containers

Dishes

Are your holiday dishes in a box in the attic? A great product for protecting and storing your holiday (or any type of) dishes are China Keepers. They are padded/quilted, made of either cotton or vinyl and come in different shapes and sizes depending upon your storage needs.

*Lillian Vernon Online sells them in six different patterns including one set decorated for the Christmas season (

).

Holiday Decorations

Some people decorate their homes only in the winter and some people choose to decorate for every holiday in the year. Whichever person you claim to be, it is important to keep your decorations from being ruined due to improper storage and care. A few options are: large plastic bins with ornament dividers ziploc bags for small items such as ornament hangers and anything small enough to get lost in a big box small plastic bins for lights, candles, and the ziploc bags of smaller items wreath boxes specially designed for wreath storage (found at

)

*Label everything so you can find it easily next year.

Leftover Food

Wrapping leftovers in tinfoil might be a quick way to get them from frying pan to fridge but you'll be spending a great deal of time figuring out what's inside of them. Use food containers such as those made by Rubbermaid or Tupperware or 'disposable' containers such as ones made by Glad and Ziploc. They're found in most supermarkets. They stack well and if you want to give out leftovers to your guests, they're not very expensive to replace.

Tips for staying organized throughout the holiday season: Wrap gifts and write holiday cards as early in the season as possible. I don't know anyone (including postal employees) that want to be in the post office around the time of December 25th... Shop early in the season, at off-peak hours or online if at all possible. When storing ornaments, group them by theme. This will make it easier to find exactly which ones you want. After the holiday, sort through ornaments, wall/door hangings, linens, etc. and purge anything that you do not need, want, or is beyond repair.

Above all, remain calm. If you stay organized, the holidays will be less stressful and you will enjoy yourself even more. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Stacey Agin Murray, professional organizer and owner of Organized Artistry, LLC, transforms 'mess' into 'masterpiece' with patience, organizing know-how, and a sense of humor. For more articles and to get your FREE e-list of 'Top Ten Tips for Organized Living' visit

Seven Tips for Organized Holiday Travel

By Myers

Seven Tips for Organized Holiday Travel by Myers

Traveling for the holidays? Here are seven tips for organized packing and traveling.

1. Check the weather forecast at your destination. Build your travel wardrobe around one basic color (black, navy or brown) to expand wardrobe options and limit luggage.
2. Use mini toiletry items to save space. Fill them only three-quarters full. Place in freezer bags to avoid leakage.
3. Use plastic dry cleaner bags around clothing to reduce wrinkles.

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4. Pack these separately: camera, jewelry, keys, money and jewelry. Make them accessible if you're traveling by car.
5. Pack snacks and bottled water for yourself and the kids. Fill a cooler if you're on the road.
6. Stock up on entertainment. Music, books and toys are life-savers if you are stuck in traffic or on a delayed flight.
7. Pack an extra bag for items you buy or receive on your trip. This especially applies during the holidays.

Myers is a professional organizer, speaker and author. FREE "50 Ways to Manage Your Time" tips booklet. Visit <http://www.ineedmoretime.com>

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