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Use Your Photographs to Create Unique Christmas Gifts

By Kelly Mann

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Having a tough time coming up with creative Christmas gifts this year? The answer might be right in front of you - in your photograph albums, boxes, or file folders. Don't just give the traditional framed photo though. Instead, give your recipients thoughtful, personalized gifts that are also functional. Here are my five favorite photograph gift ideas:

1. Photo transfer coasters: You can transfer photos onto many mediums, from fabric to wood. T-shirts and tote bags are popular, but why not try something really different? Purchase a set of stone coasters (You know, the super-absorbent kind with cork on the bottom.) Then, buy some photo transfer sheets at any craft store. Some transfer sheets allow you to print your digital photos directly onto the sheets, while others allow you to photocopy a printed photo.

2. Photo Mouse pad: This is an excellent, useful gift idea for all of the techies in your life. Many photo development stores (online and off) offer mouse pads printed with your favorite photograph. Another option is to buy mouse pads with an opening to add your own photo. These are nice because you can change out the picture over time and they generally look as good as or even better than the printed ones.

3. Photo Calendars: Photo development stores offer a variety of calendar designs where you specify your 12, or sometimes more, photos and they print and bind the calendars for you. However, these are some of the easiest gifts to make yourself if you have a computer and a photo quality printer. Most greeting card software offers calendar templates or you can purchase specific calendar-creating software. These make great gifts that your family will ask for year-after-year.

4. Photo Magnets: This is one of the easiest photo craft gifts to make and you can be fairly certain your recipients will have a place to put these. The easiest way to make photo magnets is to purchase small magnet frames from a craft store and add your own photos. A slightly more unique approach is to purchase magnet photo paper, print your photos directly onto the magnet paper, and cut them out.

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We like to recycle all of those magnet advertisements we get all year by gluing photographs directly to the front and cutting around the magnet's shape. This gives you a nice assortment of shapes and sizes and generally looks a little nicer than the printable magnet sheets.

Our favorite photo magnet gift is to glue very small printed photos to the back of flattened clear glass beads. The glass beads found in craft stores for flower arranging work best and, if you're lucky, you can even find some that are about an inch across instead of the more common half inch size. Glue the picture to the back of the bead, with clear-drying glue, on the printed side of your photo. Once it dries, glue a small magnet to the back. Small, very strong magnets can also be found at most craft stores. These gifts look especially nice wrapped inside a small tin.

5. Photo Soap: "Consumable" gifts are in this year! Everyone's house is cluttered and gifts that don't need a permanent home are well appreciated. Imbed some photos into homemade soaps, and

encourage your friends and family to actually use the soap, promising more next year. It's easier than you might think. First, you'll want to buy some melt and pour soap and some soap molds (plain rectangles or ovals work best.) Cut and laminate some photos so that they are slightly smaller than your soap molds. Melt a small amount of clear soap and pour into the bottom (which will end up being the top) of a mold. Once it dries, place your laminated photo on top (face down) and pour some more clear soap to cover. If you want, you can add a third, colorful soap layer behind that one, adding a framed look to your photograph.

These are just a few ideas of how to use your photos to make unique Christmas gifts this year. For detailed instructions on these and more ideas, feel free to visit the photograph gift page of our website,

Author Kelly Mann is a digital camera and computer enthusiast who offers ideas and tips on ways to share your photographs, from e-mail and screensavers to gifts and crafts, on her website,

Create Your Own Personal Christmas Traditions

By Donna D. Fontenot

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Create Your Own Personal Christmas Traditions

The Christmas holidays are steeped in familiar, old traditions. Decorating our homes, trimming the tree, exchanging gifts, hanging mistletoe and many other traditions are staples of the season. And while these old traditions can create warm memories, you may be missing out on something special. This Christmas season, take some time to consider creating your own special family tradition. Perhaps a

glimpse into my own family's unique tradition will inspire you to discover one as well.

My Family's Personal Christmas Tradition

Many years ago, my mother became addicted to garage-saleing. She would wake up bright and early every Friday and Saturday morning (year-round), retrieve the newspaper from the driveway, and circle all of the garage sales near her neighborhood that were listed in the classified section. Then, with a group of 2–3 lifelong friends, she would begin her quest for that perfect 'gift' that someone else was discarding. She rarely paid more than 50 cents for an item. The gifts were usually slightly worn, even a little broken. (In fact, many times a perfect item would end up broken by the time she got it home. She was a little clumsy). But by the end of each shopping trip, she would arrive home with 10–20 items, that she would proudly display to my father. He, of course, would usually groan, because he always knew that she would be asking him to mend the broken pieces, or re-paint an old item. Needless to say, by the end of a year, my mother had managed to accumulate hundreds of 'special gifts', but had spent very little money doing so.

A few days before Christmas, it would then be my job to help her wrap all of these gifts. She generally bought as many Christmas bags as she could find (at garage sales of course), so the task was made somewhat simpler. All I had to do was throw the gift into the bag, and mark it with a recipient's name. How did I know who was to receive which gift? Well, Mom kept a running list throughout the year which identified which item was reserved for which member of the family. Of course, she often mis-labeled things, so the male members of our family occasionally received nice lingerie, while the female members would receive a new hunting cap!

But really, this was the point of the whole tradition. Our family has a wonderful sense of humor. Opening up 100's of crazy, ridiculous gifts each year was so much more fun than opening up one or two 'real' gifts. The standard question when one of us would open a gift would be, "Ummm...what is this???". There were many times when we never could figure out what the gift was supposed to be.

A favorite thing to do was to trade gifts. If I received an ugly, strange gift, I would barter with someone else for one of their strange gifts. The entire process of opening semi-broken, often useless, but almost always funny gifts, and then trading them back and forth, is a tradition that made our family close as we shared our laughter with one another. (And believe it or not, occasionally the gifts were actually useful and just what we needed!)

Mom has passed on now, but the memories of those wonderful garage sale Christmas's will always be our most treasured memories.

Create a unique Christmas tradition in your family, and the memories will last a lifetime.

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