

Selecting A Perfect Gift Requires Thought, Planning

Gift giving is a combination of art and science that requires careful thought and planning.

Searching for the perfect gift is fun for some, but for others it can be frustrating.

These tips will make your holiday gift giving more enjoyable and less of a chore:

- During the year, think about the types of gifts your family and friends want and need.

Keep a master shopping file or notebook as a resource for information on gift recipients, including clothing sizes, hobbies, personal tastes and preferences.

The earlier you shop, the better. When you see the perfect gift on sale, buy it on the spot.

If it's a bargain, it will most likely be gone. Sales also help you budget your money and keep down your credit card bills.

If you wait until the last minute, you'll have to settle for what's available.

Remember, the most popular products, sizes and colors often sell out.

- Maintain a gift closet to keep last-minute gifts and assorted greeting cards.

- Take advantage of services offered for free or for a nominal fee, like personalization, personal shoppers, gift certificates, gift registries and gift-wrapping.

- Sentimental and personal gifts are always special and will be cherished for years.

Write your family history or recipes in a decorative bound book, or restore old family photos and mementos and place them in frames or an album with dates and captions.

- Give a gift that gives back.

Shop in museum stores and from retailers who pledge a percentage of their profits to a charity.

You might also make a contribution to a nonprofit organization in someone's name.

- For a do-it-yourself touch, buy decorative baskets or tins and fill them with soaps, lotions, body gels, potpourri, candles, candy or homemade cookies. Make a specially prepared meal hosted at your home.

- In a small but visible way, something as simple and elegant as a person's name or initials sets them apart from everyone else and makes a statement about their individuality.

A personalized gift shows you took extra time and care in your choice.

There are personalized gifts to suit every personality, interest and

age. Personalization takes extra time, so shop early.

- If you are unsure what to buy, a gift certificate is always a practical choice.

Gift certificates can be purchased for stores, restaurants, movie theaters, malls, mail order catalogs and online retailers.

You can buy most gift certificates online to save time. Wrap them in a gift box so they will be even more of a surprise.

- Always check the retailer's return policy. Some offer an unconditional money-back guarantee with no time restriction — perfect if you shop far in advance.

After making your purchase, save your receipt, packaging and shipping box in case you have to return the gift.

- Wrap gifts as soon as you buy them. You'll wrap more carefully and have more time to enjoy the holiday.

Dress up your gift-wrapping with a personalized ornament, a candy cane, bells or holly berries. For a gift that won't fit under a tree, like a bicycle or an appliance, put a picture into a card or gift box.

Once you know how to plan and shop for gifts, you can put these skills to good use all year long!

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