



## **Make the Most of your Holiday Season**

Every year, as the holiday arrives, I remind myself that that I must make a conscious effort to avoid getting hyped up, stressed out and totally exhausted. December is a pressure filled month in our part of the world, with high expectations increased by intense marketing. According to the media, it seems everyone in America has a perfectly decorated home, unlimited income, and happy family gathered around the hearth in matching flannel pajamas. As a result, we often feel inadequate or guilty. I encourage you: don't believe the hype, and take back the holiday season for yourself and your family.

I say this as a prelude to this column on making the most of the holidays, because I don't want to contribute to the aforementioned mindset. In past years I have sent out hand-drawn cards, delivered homemade cookies, and decked the halls, and other years I chosen to keep the fuss to a minimum. The only thing that determines the success of your holiday season is how much you enjoy it, 'cause, as they say, "if mama ain't happy, nobody's happy".

Now, take a minute to ask yourself: what are my holiday traditions? What are some new things I might add this year? Who am I sharing this holiday with, and what do I want to do for them? Who do I want to make a point of connecting with? What do I need to do for myself?

The fact is, there will not be enough time to decorate the whole house, bake all the treats, send all the cards, buy all the gifts, make all the donations, and attend all the parties, so think about your priorities ahead of time, and consider letting some of your least favorite obligations go. Each year is different, so decide what you truly want to do this year, and next year the list may change. Sometimes it's hard to let go of traditions ("but we always bake twelve dozen cookies with all the cousins!"), but the relief comes later, when you shorten the to-do list, and have a wonderful holiday nonetheless.

As your family grows and changes, so will the traditions. When my children were small, for example, we always cut down our tree, decorated sugar cookies, and sent hand-drawn cards to friends and family. These were things that we could do together, and they were something we enjoyed. The past few years with teenagers, we have compromised on these things, as it is harder to get us all together for an entire afternoon. The first few years, I missed the long search for the perfect tree and the kids' company in the kitchen, until I realized that I now had more time to do other things, like visit with old friends, catch a holiday movie or spend the day with my husband. And it was a relief to realize

that the world continued to spin in spite of my reduced Christmas card list and cookie baking.

So, what will you choose to do to celebrate the holidays this year? In order to assist you in simplifying the process of preparing for the holidays, may I make a few suggestions:

Decorate quickly, easily and when the mood strikes. Bring down the boxes of decorations and tuck them into a corner of your home. Take things out when you have time, and do the most important areas first: the tree, the porch or the mantle, for example. If you get no further than that, put away the remaining boxes, and simply enjoy what you have.

Quick tips to add touches of seasonal cheer to your home include: fill a crystal bowl or glasses with glass ornaments. Tie any leftover tree branches together, accent with a bow, and hang as a holiday swag. Cut evergreens from the yard and dress the mantle. Fill a basket with pinecones and bits of berries or holly for the hearth. Use your wrapped presents as decorations, by grouping them by color in odd numbers. Display holiday cards clothes-pinned to a festive ribbon, or string lights around a window or plant for some evening sparkle.

Decorations can be grouped in a room by color or style. Use traditional green and red together, or blue with gold or silver. Instead of Santa and Christmas trees, themes can be inspired by snowflakes, Hanukah or Quaanza, snowmen, angels, or mountain accents, like wood, moose and pinecones.

This year, volunteer, make a donation, cut your shopping, baking or card list and take more time to simply enjoy the sights and the sounds of the holiday season. The point is to expand on your own personal values, traditions and beliefs and create a holiday that is unique to you, and those you hold dear.

.....



*A weekly columnist for the Calaveras Enterprise, Linda Lawrence is the owner of HouseCalls for Redesign, and was trained and certified by IRIS (Interior Redesign Industry Specialists). She has lived in Murphys for nearly 20 years and specializes in one-day home makeovers, using your existing furnishings, art and accessories. Contact her at [housecalls4redesign@comcast.net](mailto:housecalls4redesign@comcast.net) or at 728-2732, or visit her website at [housecalls4redesign.com](http://housecalls4redesign.com).*