

Save on Everything This Christmas

Find 40 creative ways to spend less without giving less

By [Denise Schipani](#) Posted November 25, 2008 from [Woman's Day](#)

Welcome to the spending season! If it seems like your only choices are pulling out the stops and dealing with the credit card consequences later, or cutting so far back it doesn't even feel like Christmas, then it's time to look at your third option: creative corner cutting. We've got 40 clever ways to save—and no one will even notice you spent less.

Shop Smart

Consolidate Driving from mall to mall is so last year. Check out [iStorez](#), a free online shopping site that helps you find the latest deals and store specials (free shipping, percentages off) from brands and stores you choose.

Give something you already have: you Instead of stressing about money for gifts, give your time or expertise, says Debbie Mandel, MA, author of *Addicted to Stress*. Promise to join your outdoorsy friend on a hike, or if you're an organizing maven, offer your sister a cleaned-out closet.

Buy Sets (and break them up) Pick up a set of eight dessert plates and coffee mugs, and split them into sets of two, for four total gifts. Fill a plate with homemade goodies and each cup with a plastic bag of cocoa mix, says Kimberly Danger, founder of [Mommysavers.com](#).

Think Theme! Scour sale racks to pull together gifts. Say you find a cozy bathrobe on clearance at T.J. Maxx. Complement it with a paperback and tea for a "relaxing night in" theme.

Reconsider Crafting Don't assume that something you make yourself is a thrifty gift—sometimes you actually end up spending more at the crafts store. "Before you start, evaluate the real cost of, say, homemade bath salts," says Ethan Ewing, president of [Bills.com](#). "Would buying them at a discount store and prettifying up the bottle with ribbon be cheaper?"

Wrap It!

Pick Plain Look for solid jewel-toned paper, which often sells for less than traditional patterned holiday paper, says Ewing.

Tone It Down Watch your newspaper for coupons from crafts stores like Michaels (or go to [michaels.com](#) and plug in your zip code to find current deals). Buy plain paper bags with handles, plus red and green tissue paper. Your gifts will look great for less.



Photo: © Comstock

Season's Greetings

Deliver by hand Save on postage and have a healthy family outing: Walk or bike around your neighborhood to hand-deliver cards to people on your list within a one- (or more!) mile range.

Save online You can do photo cards through sites like [Kodak Gallery](#), [Snapfish](#) and [Shutterfly](#). Sign up to receive e-mail notifications of sales, and check the sites periodically for other deals.

Decorate for Less

Host a Swap Balls and baubles getting tired? Instead of buying new, host a swap with friends, says Atlanta organizing expert Monica Ricci. "Everyone brings what she's tired of, and each person gets to pick from other people's items."

Lighten Up If you need new tree or outside lights, look for LED ones, which use 10 times less energy than incandescent mini-lights. They last more than 50,000 hours, according to the Alliance to Save Energy. At \$10 to \$20 a strand, they may be initially more pricey than ordinary mini-lights, but they'll last year after year. For even more savings, put lights on timers—say, from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Decorate with Nature "Create decorations from your backyard," says Jodi Helmer, author of *The Green Year: 365 Small Things You Can Do to Make a Big Difference*. "Fill vases with evergreen boughs or baskets with pinecones."

Keeping Company

Swap Services Got guests but no guest room? If you know a neighbor will be out of town, suggest a pet- or house-sitting arrangement—your guests stay in the neighbors' home and you offer a service in return, suggests Jodi R.R. Smith of Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting in Boston.

Rent an RV Seriously, says Janet Groene, author of *A Solo Woman's Guide to RVs*. "A rented or borrowed motorhome in your driveway lets you sleep another six or eight relatives. It's cheaper than a hotel, and it puts an extra kitchen and bath outside your door."

Hit the Road

Calculate Cost Visit AAA's [Fuel Cost Calculator](#), which tells you about how much your road trip will cost before you set out.

Fly for Less Air travel is getting more and more expensive, but there are still deals. [Your Amazing Personal Travel Assistant](#) lets you track fares for your preferred flights. You'll get e-mail alerts when the fare drops. What's more, it'll even keep checking after you buy—and if the price dips again, it'll let you know if you're eligible for a travel voucher from your airline, a little-known policy of many U.S. carriers.

Special Delivery

Get the code Use a site like [FreeShipping.org](#) to ferret out coupon codes for free shipping or money off your online order from major retailers. Sending gift cards to faraway relatives? Buy them online and have them shipped direct. (See sidebar for more coupon sites.)

Pick and Choose Post office? FedEx? UPS? If you're not sure where to take your box of goodies to ship cross-country, visit [ShipGooder](#). Enter your zip code, the recipient's zip code and the package weight, and get a price comparison chart for UPS, the U.S. Postal Service, FedEx and DHL .

Cook It Up!

Buy in Bulk If your cookie list is a mile long, head to a warehouse store and pick up supplies in bulk,

says Susanne Myers, the “[Hillbilly Housewife](#).” When you get home, repackage stuff in gallon ziptop bags. I buy flour, baking powder, baking soda, spices, vanilla and sugar in bulk, and it saves me a ton.”

Shop at Home First “We often overbuy during the holiday season, so before you head to the store, take stock of what you already have,” says Maggie Nemser, food editor of Yahoo! Shine. “Chances are you’ve got more than you think. Don’t be afraid to get creative and base your dishes on existing pantry items.” For example, if you find pasta, capers, anchovies and canned tomatoes, make a quick puttanesca sauce for a starter or main course.

Buy the Box (of wine) Boxed wines have come a long way—you can buy a decent one for about \$20 (Black Box and Hardys are good choices), and it contains the equivalent of four bottles of wine, says wine blogger Gretchen Roberts of [Everyday Wine](#).

Get “Special” Ingredients Early Plan ahead and list the spices, seasonings and other special ingredients you’ll need for your recipes, then look for good deals on them. “Last year I forgot to check my spice cabinet and ended up spending a small fortune on dried sage,” says Myers. “By the time I realized it, I could only find the expensive gourmet version; the store brand was sold out.”

Plan Around Sales Instead of getting your heart set on serving beef Wellington, browse the grocery store sale circulars starting now. If there’s a “please buy me now” sale on turkeys, pork roasts or other cuts of meat, grab one, freeze it and plan your meal around that.

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