

Crafted Celebrations

The 12 ways of Christmas

The heart of Christmas resides in us and the key to making the most of the season is to be kind to ourselves, to do only what's manageable and to make time for the things that matter the most

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Christmas is the season of joy, peace and goodwill to all – or that's how it's supposed to be. For many of us the lead-up to the holiday season is a marathon of end-of-year functions and endless to-do lists, with a sprint to the finish as we cram in all that extra cooking, shopping and wrapping.

There's more to a festive family Christmas than fine food and a stylishly decorated home. It should also be an opportunity to pause and reconnect with our loved ones, to celebrate family traditions, to create memories for our children with simple but thoughtful gifts, but above all to share some special times with friends and family.

Expert stylists as well as busy mothers, **Susan Elijas** and **Sarah James** (pictured right) share their simple 12-step guide for making your Christmas less plastic and your seasonal celebrations infinitely more memorable.



1 Celebrate family traditions or invent some new ones. Go for a walk to see local houses with fairy lights, attend a midnight service, ask everyone for their year's highs and lows, exchange silly stockings with stuffers like false eyelashes for Dad. Borrow a tradition from another culture: why not serve the Danish Christmas pudding of creamed almond rice? There's one whole almond in the bowl and whoever gets it receives an extra gift. Or there's the Polish tradition of setting an extra place at the table for the unexpected guest.

SIMPLE ENTERTAINING



2 Dress your table. Switch your home into festive mode by dressing your table. Create a decorative centrepiece and set the table a few hours in advance so you can enjoy it for longer. It'll also create a focal point where guests can gather to enjoy hospitality and conversation.

3 Think ahead and make a list. If it looks like too much – it probably is. Pare down the list to something more manageable. Don't try to do everything yourself. Which of your family or friends coming to your gathering might like to help? Is there an auntie or a sister who has attached themselves emotionally to making the Christmas pudding? Is there someone with a great garden who might bring the salads? Appoint masters of ceremonies before the big day – dads could organise a games tournament or the teenagers lay out a treasure hunt for the littlies. The celebrations will be all the more fun and relaxing if everyone helps.

4 Avoid going into debt for Christmas. Debt generated by gift-giving can cause major stress later. Resist the temptation to stick everything on the credit card and hope the New Year will never arrive. Instead, make a few gifts from the heart. Save yourself yet another trip to the mall and spend the evening making onion chutney or dipping strawberries in fair trade chocolate. See page 83 for the recipe to make a deliciously tangy chipotle relish.





5 Wrap it with love. The gift might be inexpensive, but a bit of effort can make it more meaningful. Get creative with wrapping – wallpaper, brown paper, fabric scraps or wallpaper samplers can all make for original-looking packages. Or wrap presents in reusable shopping bags or groovy store bags from an overseas trip. See page 104 for cards, a paper wreath and handmade tags to make.

6 Mix something old with something new. Christmas is the time to bring out your family heirlooms, but if you don't have the energy to polish the silver, just go with the rustic look. It doesn't matter if plates are chipped or you don't have a full cutlery set – enjoy mixing and matching. Use fun coloured paper or potato plates for the children so there's no stress about breakages.

**Where to find**

pg 40-43 Sarah's dress, *Honey I'm Home* from Starfish www.starfish.co.nz; earrings from Trade Aid www.tradeaid.co.nz; Cutlery, parfait glass bowl, sorbet bowl, etched bowl: French Country www.frenchcountry.co.nz; 1920's Luterma bistro chairs, silver food covers, F. Guillomet Paris cutlery, antique china from European Antiques www.europeanantiques.co.nz; Stuart crystal Art Deco glasses from Antiques of Epsom; Vintage tablecloth from Victorian Gilt; Cane bells from Macy Home; Bread and cheeses from Pyrenees, the French Deli; Taylors' 80 acres wine; Candles from Gilded Lily www.gildedlily.co.nz; Metal plates, bucket and napkins stylists' own

pg 44-45 Mirror, antique candlesticks from European Antiques; Silver votive, Silver lantern (used as vase), silver bauble, glass frame from French Country Collections; 'Jasmine' vase, glass candlestick and baubles from Gilded Lily, Red card (inside frame), white heart card, ceramic egg (joy), stationery from Trade Aid; Red silk notebook by Susan Elisas

pg 46-47 Sharpener desk tidy from Macy Home; Twig pencils and linen notebook from Trade Aid; Nuzilla kiwi, copper penny brooch, black swan wooded nikau brooch, Nuzma tui wooden bookmark from The Garden Party www.thegardenparty.co.nz; Vintage French Christmas postcard from European Antiques; Other props stylists' own



"The simplest gifts are often the most meaningful. Like how each year my mum gives her daughters one new special Christmas decoration."

SARAH JAMES

7 Set the scene. Give your home a quick spruce-up before adding a few special touches. Hang a festive wreath on the door or drape some solar fairy lights around the entrance. Conjure up instant seasonal atmosphere with special Christmas music. Indulge your senses with scented candles, fragrances, flowers, and some special fruit or baked treats.

8 Handcraft some simple textured decorations. Cut out large paper stars, weave garlands, sew quirky Christmas stockings, make Christmas crackers or tie branches together to make a novel tree.

9 Keep it simple. If time, money or energy is short then loading yourself with unrealistic expectations only adds to the stress. Identify and prioritise the activities that are going to give you the most satisfaction: make some gift cards, invite your closest friends over for a Christmas Eve brunch, or take the kids to see a Christmas tree display or to some carol singing. And you don't have to accept every invitation - it's okay to say no to some things and allow yourself some down time.

10 Take a fresh look at how you do Christmas. Does it involve a trek to the other end of the country or mad dashes across town to various engagements? Family life ebbs and flows as babies are born, children turn into teenagers, parents age and relationships wax and wane, so there's no need to stick to the same things year after year. Consider how best you might all celebrate the season. Talk to other family members about what they really want to do. A little planning and communication can go a long way to reducing Christmas stress.



“Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy”

ANNE FRANK

11 Say it like you mean it. It can be hard to put your feelings into words, but take a moment to write some sincere thoughts in a card. Family dynamics can be complicated, so thinking about the things you appreciate in your spouse, siblings or parents might help you see past their funny or annoying habits. Suggest to dads that they might try writing little notes to their children.

12 Mark the season. In the midst of all the work and bustle, pause and be thankful. When we’re stressed, it’s easy to overlook our many blessings. Take three deep breaths on Christmas morning and think, What are three things I can be thankful for?

Sarah James and Susan Elias run Gilded Lily style workshops specialising in fostering creativity, creating memorable events, living in more meaningful ways and turning homes into havens. See www.gildedlily.co.nz for more

