


8

DIY
Gift Ideas

From *Experience Life*




Thoughtful gift ideas
that don't add to life's clutter.

For most Americans, the holiday season involves a lot of family, food, and . . . gifts. So. Many. Gifts. For many people, in fact, the stress of frenzied holiday shopping undercuts what should be a joyous time of year.

So how can you step back from rampant holiday consumerism without curbing your generous nature? A growing number of people are opting to make their own gifts.

We've gathered eight DIY gift ideas — both crafting and cooking — to help you trade your gift-related anxiety for the true pleasure of generosity. Happy holidays!

1. Reed Diffuser

Certain aromas have powerful associations with the holidays. But many of the sugarplum scented candles and gingerbread air fresheners on the market contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals that can pose myriad health risks.

Swap the store-bought options for all-natural scents using this simple technique.

BONUS: We've even included some DIY essential-oil blends you can gift along with the reed diffuser!

Supplies

- 1 8-oz. glass jar with lid
- ¼ cup carrier oil (such as sweet-almond, olive, or fractionated coconut oil)
- 1 tbs. rubbing alcohol
- 20–30 drops essential oils
- 4–6 reed-diffuser sticks or bamboo skewers

Directions

1. Pour your carrier oil, rubbing alcohol, and essential oils into the glass jar. Stir or shake to combine.
2. If you're using bamboo skewers, trim the pointy ends. Place the diffuser sticks in your jar.
3. Turn the sticks over every few days to expose the ends that have been in the liquid to air. This will help refresh the scent.

Essential-Oil Blends for the Holidays

1. COZY AND SPICY: Mix 10 drops cinnamon, 10 drops sweet orange, and 4 drops clove-bud oil.
2. WOODSY: Mix 10 drops frankincense, 10 drops cedarwood, and 4 drops fir-needle oil.
3. PUMPKIN PIE: Mix 8 drops cardamom, 6 drops cinnamon, 4 drops clove bud, and 2 drops nutmeg oil.
4. WINTER HERBS: Mix 8 drops rosemary, 6 drops sage, 4 drops thyme, and 2 drops black pepper oil.
5. BRIGHT AND FRESH: Mix 10 drops peppermint, 10 drops bergamot, and 4 drops cypress oil.

2. Bath Salts

A good soak in a hot bath at the end of the day relaxes the body — and with the addition of aromatics and Epsom salts, soothes the senses. You could buy a variety of bath salts, but they are so easy and fun to make at home. Even better, you can customize your homemade versions with your favorite essential oils.

Follow these tips to make a batch and package it in a jar with a festive bow to give as a gift this holiday season.

Basic Recipe:

- 4 8-oz. jars for gift-giving
- 2½ cups Epsom salts, extra fine
- ¼ cup pink or white sea salt, medium grain (optional)
- ¼ cup pink or white sea salt, coarse grain (optional)

Add-ins for relaxation:

- 1–2 ml (about 20–40 drops) essential oil, such as lavender or rose
- 3 tbs. dried lavender
- 3 tbs. cornflower or rose petals or other dried flowers

Add-ins for energizing:

- 1–2 ml (about 20–40 drops) essential oil, such as grapefruit, orange, lemon, or peppermint
- Dried zest from one orange, grapefruit, or lemon
- 2 tbs. dried herbs, such as rosemary or mint

Mix salts together in a large bowl. Add oil, dried flowers or zest, and herbs, if using, and stir well. Store in glass jars. Your salts will keep indefinitely, but fragrances will begin to fade after six months. To use, place in a sachet to retain dried flowers and prevent clogged pipes.

3. Gluten-Free Sourdough Starter

If you have a loved one who is gluten-free — or just likes to bake — try whipping up this sourdough starter. With a few basic ingredients and a little patience, you can craft tasty and easily digestible baked goods.

Most types of flour will work with this method, but we like brown-rice flour because it's a gluten-free whole grain. The process is simple: All you need is some filtered water, flour, and time.

Directions

DAY 1: In a medium-size glass bowl, stir 4 ounces of brown-rice flour into 4 ounces of filtered water. Cover loosely with a dish towel and let sit at room temperature (about 68 degrees F) for 24 hours. If your home is cooler than that, your starter may grow more slowly; place the bowl in a warm spot (like on top of the refrigerator) to speed up the process.

DAYS 2–5: Feed your starter with 4 ounces each of flour and filtered water approximately every eight hours throughout this process. Stir thoroughly and cover after each feeding, keeping it at room temperature. Your starter will begin to smell pungent and sour; bubbles will begin to appear at the top and on the sides.

DAYS 6–7: Your starter will begin creating a dome. The surface will resemble cracked clay, and the material underneath will be aerated and bubbly. This means you're ready to start baking! Consider substituting 1 cup of your starter for ½ cup of flour and ½ cup of liquid in your favorite quick-bread recipes. At this point, you can also pour 1 cup of starter into a clean jar to gift to a friend.

MAINTENANCE: Once your starter has matured, you can refrigerate it to slow the fermentation process. Feed it once a week with 2 ounces each of flour and filtered water. To prep it for baking, store it at room temperature for at least 24 hours, then repeat the feeding schedule (as in Days 2–5 above) until the dome reappears.

4. Seasoning Blends

Spice blends are a great gift for a loved one who likes to cook. Store-bought versions, though, tend to be high in sodium, and many contain sweeteners or anticaking agents. You can avoid those additives by making a blend yourself, and you can tweak the ratios to suit your loved one's tastes.

Each of these recipes makes about 3 tablespoons — so you might want to double or triple them if you're giving as a gift. Simply whisk herbs and spices in a small bowl until combined. Each sealed jar lasts up to three months.

Garam Masala

- 1 tbs. ground cumin
- 2 tsp. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. ground cardamom
- ¾ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp. ground cloves
- ¼ tsp. ground nutmeg

Taco Seasoning

- 1 tbs. chili powder
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- ¾ tsp. onion powder
- ½ tsp. cayenne pepper
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Italian Seasoning

- 1 tbs. dried oregano
- 2 tsp. dried marjoram
- 2 tsp. dried thyme
- 1 ½ tsp. dried basil
- ¾ tsp. dried rosemary
- ¾ tsp. dried sage

Poultry Seasoning

- 1 tbs. dried sage
- 2 ½ tsp. dried thyme
- 1 ½ tsp. dried marjoram
- 1 tsp. dried rosemary
- ½ tsp. ground nutmeg
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

5. Beeswax Candles

Scented candles are a common holiday gift, but most emit a range of volatile organic compounds that can lead to headaches and respiratory problems. Avoid unknown fragrances and toxic ingredients by crafting your own candles.

Supplies

- Beeswax pastilles, about 1 lb. (or 1 ½ lb. for candles without add-ins)
- 4 wicks
- 4 mini tulip jelly jars (or any small jars)
- Lightweight sticks or pencils (for wick placement)

Optional

- Essential oils
- Coconut oil
- Dried herbs or pine twigs and twine or ribbon, for decoration

Directions

STEP 1: Melt beeswax in a double boiler or in a bowl set inside a saucepan or stockpot with a few inches of water. (Melted beeswax is tricky to clean, so use a dedicated glass or tin bowl.) Stir pastille mixture frequently to break up clumps of wax.

STEP 2: While the beeswax is melting, secure a wick to the bottom of each jar (wicks come preassembled from online retailers). Wrap the loose end around a pencil or stick until taut and straight; rest pencil or stick on jar so the wick is centered.

STEP 3: If desired, stir 1 to 2 tablespoons of your chosen essential oils into the melted beeswax. (Mixing in ½ cup coconut oil will help retain the scents.) Slowly pour the melted wax into the jars, leaving about ¼ inch of clearance at the top. Let cool overnight. Once the candle is solid, shorten the wick and decorate the jar by tying herbs or pine twigs with twine or ribbon to give as a gift.

6. Coconut Chocolate Truffles

A classic holiday gift, chocolate truffles are traditionally made with cream, butter, and egg yolks, but this simple — and vegan! — version uses coconut milk and coconut oil. Try different flavorings such as orange or lemon zest, cinnamon, cardamom, or even a pinch of cayenne pepper.

Makes 18–24 truffles
Prep time: 20 minutes, plus 2 hours cooling
Cook time: 5 minutes

Ingredients

- 5 oz. coconut milk
- 1 tbs. coconut oil
- 1-inch piece of vanilla bean, split
- 5 ½ ounces dark chocolate (70 to 80 percent cacao content), broken into small pieces
- Cocoa powder, shredded coconut, or chopped pistachios, for decorating

Directions

1. Simmer the coconut milk in a small saucepan with the coconut oil and vanilla bean for five minutes. Let cool for three to five minutes to allow the vanilla to flavor the milk.

2. Strain the milk.

3. Place the chocolate in a mixing bowl, and pour in the warm coconut milk. Stir constantly with a rubber spatula to melt and incorporate the chocolate evenly.

4. When the chocolate mixture is smooth, chill the mixture in the refrigerator until set, about two hours.

5. Scoop the chocolate into small balls, roll in cocoa powder, shredded coconut, or chopped pistachios, and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

7. Vanilla Macadamia-Oil Body Scrub

The idea of concocting your own skincare products might bring to mind a bunch of teenagers monkeying around with oats and avocados at a slumber party. But DIY skincare isn't just for kids anymore, especially now that health-savvy consumers are beginning to understand that what we put on our bodies affects our health as much as what we put in them.

This energizing scrub will help exfoliate and moisturize skin during dry winter months — and makes a great holiday gift! (Remember: Because DIY formulas don't contain preservatives, it's best to use most of them within a month.)

Ingredients

- 1 cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup macadamia oil (½ cup olive oil is also good)
- ¼ cup sweet-almond oil
- 2 tbs. raw honey
- 1 tbs. vanilla extract (if you'd prefer to customize the scent, use three to five drops of your favorite essential oil)

Directions

1. Gently mix all ingredients together in a sterilized 4-ounce dark glass jar.
2. To apply, start with about a tablespoon of the scrub and rub in small circles, beginning from hands or feet and working toward the chest and heart area. Leave on as a body mask for five minutes, then rinse clean. (Be careful in the shower — the macadamia oil can make the floor slick.)
3. Cover and store in a cool, dark location for up to two weeks.

Health Benefits

1. Brown sugar stimulates circulation and promotes lymphatic-system drainage.
2. Macadamia oil moisturizes and firms skin while discouraging wrinkle and stretch-mark formation.
3. Sweet-almond oil contains vitamin E, an antioxidant that helps fight free radicals.
4. Raw honey is moisturizing and antibacterial.

Looking for more clean, all-natural skincare products you can make at home? Check out our DIY beauty products article for these recipes:

- Cypress Firming Facial Oil
- Three-in-One Yogurt Facial
- Beet Red Lip Gloss
- Chocolate Facial Mask
- Breakout-Busting Soda Paste
- Simple DIY Detox Bath
- Herbal Spa Wrap

8. Nut or Seed Butter

You can skip the additives and preservatives — and save some money! — by whipping up your loved one's favorite nut or seed butter at home.

Think about this as a flexible formula rather than as a strict recipe. It's totally customizable: Once you've mastered the steps, you can get creative and add whatever mix-ins you'd like.

Ingredients

- 3 cups raw nuts or seeds (almonds, walnuts, pecans, pistachios, cashews, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, hemp seeds, or sunflower seeds)
- 1 tsp. sea salt

Mix-Ins (optional; pick one or more from the list below)

- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. almond extract
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 tbs. cocoa powder
- 2 tbs. honey
- 3–4 tbs. coconut oil (for a smoother nut butter)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Spread raw nuts or seeds on a large rimmed sheet pan and bake until fragrant and toasted, about 10 minutes, stirring halfway through. Allow nuts to cool for a few minutes.

2. Add roasted nuts to a food processor and process until creamy, about 10 to 15 minutes, pausing to scrape down the sides as necessary. Do this in stages, three to four minutes at a time with breaks in between, so your food processor doesn't overheat.

3. Add salt and any other mix-ins and process until combined. For a smoother, creamier result, add coconut oil and process once more.

4. Scoop nut or seed butter into a clean canning jar and store in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Bring to room temperature before serving.

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