

GIFT GIVING FROM THE HEART AND HANDS, INSTEAD OF THE WALLET

Last Christmas, I had enough of shopping. With five children in the family, even with buying only one present to each other, there would have been 49 gifts to shop, pay for and eventually add to the inevitable mound in the landfill. I announced to my family that we were going to make gifts to give to each other, rather than buy them. They all agreed (with twisted arms) and by December 20th, I was beginning to worry as there was absolutely no action occurring around the house, in this endeavor of mine. I had to get Dad's buy-in to help the smaller children with my presents and after a quick reminder to the older children, the house turned into a flurry of creative activity going on everywhere: planning, giggles, secrets, and shhhing was taking place behind closed doors. The kitchen, sewing room, and workshop were off-limits for various periods of time and the excitement of planning and creating helped contribute to the holiday suspense!

The payoff occurred on Christmas morning. For the first time ever, the school-aged children beamed with pride over the effort put into their gifts and the expectant joy when the receiver opened them. The emphasis was now on the making and giving rather than the receiving. It was the best Christmas ever, and the whole family agreed that it was much better than going to the shopping mall and handing over the credit card to the retailers in exchange for a gift card or items that no one needed or wanted.

Gift ideas for toddlers to make

- Buy blank cards and envelopes and have your toddler draw or paint on them. You can write a special holiday greeting inside.
- Toddlers can help you make play dough. You can cook the dough and they can "knead" it. (Recipe at www.professionalparenting.ca/articles.html) Wrap it in zip lock bags and then gift wrap.
- Plant seeds indoors in a clay pot that can be painted or colored, and the plant or flowers will bloom by Spring.
- Toddlers can put large beads on string to hang for tree ornaments or decorations.

Gift ideas for preschoolers to make

- Buy simple craft kits that they can handle pretty much on their own. Give the finished crafts as gifts.
- Baked goods such as cookies, cupcakes, and loafs are always welcome gifts.
- Buy small canvases and have them paint a picture with acrylics.
- Buy small glass cups and have them glue on beads, sparkles etc to make votive holders.
- Go to a ceramic studio and have them paint an item. The results are beautiful.
- Buy good quality wine, and have the children decorate the bottles.
- Have them help make a batch of cookie dough and give as a set, complete with cookie cutters oven mitts and pan.

- Make bath salts, bath bombs, and homemade soap.
- Beeswax candles are simple and easy for preschoolers.

Be sure to supervise most of the activities for the toddler/preschoolers and some of these activities such as sewing and woodworking for school-aged children.

Gift ideas for school-aged and teenagers to make

- Bake cookies, cakes or create oils, salts, antipasto, etc.
- Draw pictures and frame.
- Make and paint ceramics at a commercial studio.
- Sew reusable gift bags, or clothes.
- Knit, crochet, or embroider scarves, jeans and clothes.
- Saw wood toys, coasters or pot holders.
- Make coupons for doing chores or odd jobs.
- Record music on a CD or MP3 player. (Make sure it's legitimate copying!)
- Make beaded pieces of jewelry or decorations.
- Paint wood photo frames.
- Create a photo album at a commercial studio
- Write a poem.
- Paint a picture on canvas.
- Take a great photo and frame it.
- Sew a stuffy of the recipient's favorite cartoon or movie character.
- Make a scrapbook page.
- Make T-shirts of handprints or use fabric paint to apply a design or picture on tablecloths, sheets or placemats.
- Make candle holders from decorated glass, or clay.
- Put stickers and decorations on boxes of chocolate.
- Record a DVD of home movies to send to Grandparents.
- Consider finishing someone's unfinished project for them, or fix a dear treasure that has been sitting and waiting to be fixed for years. Guaranteed smiles.

Happy Holidays!

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