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Wellbeing Insights



The Gift of Connection: 6 Meaningful Ways to Deepen Relationships This Winter

When the days get shorter and the weather turns cold, it's easy to hibernate, both physically and emotionally. But winter is also the perfect time to slow down, reflect, and reconnect. During the holiday season, the most treasured gift we can give isn't found in a store, it's genuine connection. Whether for family, friends, or even yourself, here are six heartfelt ways to give the gift of deeper relationships this winter.

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The Gift of Connection: 6 Meaningful Ways to Deepen Relationships This Winter

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1. Share a Story With a Personal Heirloom

Instead of just gifting a keepsake, tell its story. Whether it's a recipe card in your grandmother's handwriting or a cozy scarf passed down from a loved one, pair the item with a handwritten letter that shares its meaning. In the quiet of winter, these stories bring warmth and continuity.

2. Create a Shared Winter Experience

Give an experiential gift such as tickets to a holiday concert, a candle-making class, a local play, or even just planning a snowy walk with hot chocolate after. These shared seasonal moments can spark deeper conversations and joyful memories.

3. Start a Living Family Tree

Cold evenings are perfect for curling up and reminiscing. Invite relatives to co-create a family tree, digitally or on paper, adding stories, traditions, and winter holiday memories. It becomes more than genealogy; it's a celebration of heritage and belonging.

4. Give the Gift of Conversation

Wrap up a card game or conversation deck designed to spark deeper dialogue around the fire or holiday table. Or create your own with winter-themed questions: "What's your favorite holiday memory?" or "What tradition would you love to start together?"

5. Volunteer Together This Season

The holidays are a time of giving — why not give time together? Whether it's serving meals, assembling care packages, or singing carols at a senior center, shared acts of kindness open hearts and create connection.

6. Launch a Winter Book or Movie Swap Club

Choose a book, podcast, or movie to swap with a friend each week or month — and pair it with a personalized message explaining why you picked it for them. Keep it low-pressure: one winter-themed short story, a favorite comfort film, or even a throwback from your shared teen years. Follow up with a call, walk, or coffee date to talk about it. The content is just a springboard — the real gift is the intentional time spent engaging together.



Winter Fun: DIY Feed Tree

Finding simple ways to get outside and connect with nature can be a welcome change of pace during the winter months. Try making a winter feed tree, a fun activity for the whole family that combines creativity, time outdoors, and a little seasonal cheer.

Decorate a live outdoor tree with biodegradable or edible ornaments that can provide food for local birds and other critters. Create garlands using bird-friendly treats, such as fresh berries, plain popcorn, apples, grapes, dried oranges, or other dried fruit. Add edible ornaments by covering pinecones in peanut butter and birdseed, or give this recipe a try.

Ingredients

- 2 cups mixed birdseed
- 2 packages powdered gelatin
- ½ cup water
- Cookie cutters of your choice
- Plastic straws, cut into 3" pieces
- Ribbon or twine for hanging

Directions

1. Bring ½ cup water to a boil on the stove and dissolve 2 packages of gelatin into it. Once dissolved, allow to cool for 2-3 minutes.
2. Add in 2 cups of birdseed and stir well to coat.
3. Place cookie cutters on parchment paper (optional to use non-stick spray) and scoop birdseed into the shapes, pressing into the cutter firmly with the back of a spoon.
4. Insert a piece of straw where you'd like the ribbon hole to be or use a thin wooden dowel or other object to create the hole.
5. Allow to cool and set for a couple of hours before pushing your ornaments out of the cookie cutters and adding ribbon.
6. Hang them on your tree and watch the birds enjoy!



ON THE MENU

Dates

Dates may look like dried fruit when you find them at the grocery store, but they begin as fresh fruit grown on date palm trees. Of the many varieties available, Medjool and Deglet Noor are two of the most common. Medjool dates are larger, softer, and have a rich, caramel-like flavor, while Deglet Noor dates are smaller, firmer, and more subtly sweet.

Thanks to their natural sweetness, dates can be used in a variety of ways. They can replace refined sugar in recipes such as sauces, baked goods, smoothies, and energy bites, or be enjoyed on their own. Try stuffing them with nuts, cheese, or nut butter, adding them to salads, or including them on a snack or charcuterie board.

Dates offer several nutrients that make them more than just a sweet snack:

- **Fiber:** A 50-gram serving of dates provides about 3 to 4 grams of fiber. Fiber supports digestive health and can also help slow the absorption of the fruit's naturally occurring sugars.
- **Potassium:** Dates are a source of potassium, an important mineral that helps support normal muscle and nerve function, fluid balance, and healthy blood pressure.
- **Antioxidants:** Dates contain several types of antioxidants, including flavonoids, carotenoids, and phenolic acids, which help protect cells from oxidative stress.

While dates provide valuable nutrients, they are also concentrated in natural sugars and calories. A little can go a long way, so enjoy them as part of a balanced diet.

Keep It Fresh

Dates have a relatively long shelf life. Store them in a cool, dry place and follow the storage and expiration guidance on the package. Refrigerating dates can help them stay fresh even longer after opening.

Dates may be sold either pitted or with the pits intact, so check the label before using them in a recipe or grabbing one for a quick snack.

Goat Cheese & Walnut Stuffed Dates

Ingredients

- 8 Medjool dates
- ¼ cup soft goat cheese
- 8 walnut halves

Directions

1. Slice each date lengthwise and remove the pit.
2. Fill each date with about 1½ teaspoons of goat cheese.
3. Top each date with a walnut half.
4. Serve immediately or refrigerate until ready to eat.

Nutrition Information	
Per Serving (2 dates)	
Calories	180
Total Fat	5g
Carbohydrates	23g
Sugar	19g
Fiber	2g
Protein	4g
Sodium	55mg



Merry Mocktails

Holiday parties can be notoriously boozy events. But what if you can't drink alcohol or choose not to? That doesn't need to stop you from enjoying a festive and delicious beverage this holiday season. With as much complexity as their spiked counterparts, mocktails are a great way to celebrate without the alcohol.

Mocktails are not just juice; they incorporate many of the same flavors as traditional cocktails, sometimes with even more imaginative outcomes. When crafting the perfect mocktail, remember that alcohol brings complexity to drinks that will need to be replaced. Consider herbs, vinegars, tonics, a variety of fruits or vegetables, and even alcohol-free spirits to create a flavorful, appealing drink.

So, whether you don't drink alcohol, are looking to cut back, or simply want a refreshing alternative to sugar-packed drinks, here are some delicious mocktails to try at your next soiree.

Holiday Lights Mocktail

4 servings

Ingredients

- 8 oz. cranberry juice
- 8 oz. iced tea
- 4 oz. dry kombucha
- 2 oz. lemon juice
- Orange slice & rosemary sprig for garnish

Directions

Shake cranberry juice, lemon juice, and tea with ice and strain into champagne flutes. Top with kombucha and garnish with an orange twist and rosemary sprig.

Mocktail Mule

2 servings

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups ginger kombucha (any flavor with ginger and fruit also works; e.g., ginger and berry)
- 2 oz. lime juice
- 1-2 Tbsp. jam of your choice (blackberry or strawberry work well)
- Mint, lime wedge, and fresh berries for garnish

Directions

Add lime juice, jam, and a few ice cubes to a mason jar or cocktail shaker and shake until mixed. Pour the mixture evenly between two glasses or copper mugs with a few ice cubes. Top each glass with ginger kombucha and garnishes.

Sparkling Chamomile Mocktail

Single serving

Ingredients

- 1 cup brewed chamomile tea (brought to room temp or refrigerated)
- 1 tsp. honey
- Tonic water

Directions

Pour tea into a glass with ice. Stir in honey. Top with 2-4 oz. tonic water.



FINANCIAL FOCUS

Celebrating Your Financial Achievements & Setting New Goals

As the year comes to a close, it's a great time to reflect on your finances and celebrate achievements from the past year. Reviewing your financial progress allows you to appreciate your hard work while providing valuable insights for planning your financial future. Here's a closer look at celebrating what you've accomplished and setting new goals.

Assess Your Financial Goals

The first step is to assess any financial objectives you set at the beginning of the year, even if they were not formally planned. Whether your objectives centered around saving for a specific purchase, paying off debt, investing or improving your financial habits, review what you aimed to achieve.

Celebrate Your Achievements

Celebrate all financial achievements, no matter how big or small. Did you track expenses, pay off a credit card, or set aside emergency funds? Perhaps you consistently contributed to your retirement account or started saving. These achievements deserve recognition! You may even consider treating yourself responsibly, which can help keep you motivated to work toward your goals and set new ones.

Reflect on Your Progress

With achievements celebrated, it's time to reflect on your journey. What strategies helped you reach your financial goals? What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them? Understanding what helped you succeed can inform decisions moving forward. If you didn't reach all your goals, consider what you could do differently or whether breaking them into smaller, specific steps could help.

Write Down New Goals

As your financial situation evolves, your goals should adapt accordingly. Perhaps you've achieved your initial goals and are ready for more ambitious targets, or you may need to revisit old goals. Set aside time to write down what you aim to improve or achieve. According to a study by Dr. Gail Matthews at Dominican University of California, you're 42% more likely to reach your goals if you write them down rather than just thinking about them or expressing them verbally. Keep your written goals and action steps visible to stay focused and accountable. After all, according to French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "a goal without a plan is just a wish."

Seek Help From a Professional

If you're unsure how to proceed on your financial journey, consider guidance from a financial professional. Check with your employer for employee assistance resources that may be available through your benefits package.

Reviewing and celebrating your financial goals is an important part of personal financial management. It allows you to acknowledge your accomplishments and gain insights for future planning. Reflecting on your journey and adjusting your goals can help set you up for financial success in the coming year and beyond.

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