

Kimberly Blaker
P.O. Box 5585
Plymouth, MI 48170
(734) 397-3510
info@KimberlyBlaker.com

Word Count 920
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"Holiday Traditions"

New customs for couples, families, and you

by Kimberly Blaker

Holiday traditions offer special memories for family and friends, customs to hand down to future generations, and something to look forward to year after year.

Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Eid al-Fitr, Bodhi Day, or the winter solstice, the traditions you choose are limited only by your imagination and the way you carry them out.

Customs for gatherings

Choose a theme such as ‘my most memorable holiday season’ or ‘the best thing that happened this year,’ and ask each person to share a memory. Record the storytelling on video or audiotape, and play it in following years as part of your memory sharing tradition.

Hold a holiday poetry reading. Ask each person to bring copies of favorite seasonal or holiday poems to pass out and to read to the group.

Instead of exchanging gifts or doing a drawing for a gift exchange, hold a ‘white elephant.’ Each person should bring a wrapped gift that anyone could use. Have guests

draw a slip of paper numbered from one up to the number of people that are participating. Each guest then chooses and opens a gift in numerical order. Guests can choose a wrapped gift or take an opened gift from another. If a player loses her gift, she can choose from another unwrapped gift or take a gift from someone else. For specific rules and variations, visit a ‘white elephant’ gift exchange website such as <http://www.santalady.com/xmasgame/whiteelephant.html>

For twosomes or the whole brood

Get away from it all. Choose accommodations that offer the warmth of home while enjoying a retreat from the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Try a cabin in the woods or other scenic setting. Then enjoy your togetherness near a roasting fire, flipping through family photo albums, enjoying holiday music, doing crafts, and other relaxing activities.

Start a holiday countdown. Take a 3” by 3’ strip of ribbon and cut 24-paired slits from top to bottom. Thread each pair with narrow ribbon and tie a sucker in each. Beginning December 1, remove a lollipop each day through Christmas Eve or the eve of the holiday that you’ll celebrate.

Couples often forget to take time for each other during the busy holiday season. Plan an evening for two and reserve a table near a fireplace or other romantic setting. When you return home, light some candles and your tree, listen to holiday or soft music, and exchange a special gift with each other. Then spend the evening reminiscing and sharing your dreams for the future.

Cut your own tree. Take the whole family to a tree farm and make a day of it. Look for the tree that compliments your home or fits your family’s taste.

Pick up a book on holiday customs around the world. Each year choose a different culture or nationality for your theme then decorate and try new customs accordingly.

Make a shopping date with your partner, and assist each other in selecting your holiday attire. Decide in advance on the formality so that you'll choose outfits that compliment each other and so that your evening together remains agreeable.

Just for you

Create a new tradition by scheduling time to pamper yourself. Decorate the bathroom in holiday candles, fragrances, and holly. Enjoy a long bubble bath while giving yourself a full salon treatment. Include a manicure, pedicure, deep hair conditioning, facial mask, and body buffing. Don't forget the holiday or other relaxing music.

Traditions for all

Fill stockings for your partner, parents, or grandparents to discover. Stuff them with treats, beauty products, postage stamps, lottery tickets and other inexpensive or usable items.

Help a needy family. Deliver a box of groceries or supply the family with gloves and hats. Ask your children to make room for their new gifts by donating good but unwanted toys. Offer the toys to the needy family to leave from Santa, or wrap them yourself and leave them on the doorstep.

Take a horse drawn carriage ride. Don't forget blankets and your favorite hot beverage for warming your lips and hands.

Purchase a new tree ornament each year that signifies something important such as your baby’s first Christmas or solstice. If it’s your first season in a new home, find an ornament that represents *it*.

Make your own wrapping paper. Cut holiday shapes out of sponges, dip in holiday colored paint, and stamp the shapes on brown Kraft paper. Use glitter and glue to add to the festive look.

Tradition Tips

Don’t continue holiday traditions that have lost their appeal and usefulness, or that create too much stress. Talk to your family or friends who normally share in the tradition, explain your feelings, and ask for input. They may feel the same. If not and the tradition is important to another, try to work out a compromise that meets everyone’s needs.

Don’t overdo it. It’s easy to get carried away with customs. Be selective and choose those that mean the most to you and your family. Most traditions require some investment of time, energy, or money. Taking on too many can cause stress and lead to traditions losing their appeal.

When you select traditions, divide the responsibilities. Women often take sole responsibility for holiday activities and become overwhelmed and then unable to enjoy the season. Try not to strive for perfection, and allow men and children to help in the preparation.

Keep these tips in mind, and enjoy your holiday traditions for years to come.

Pull Quote: Create a new tradition by scheduling time to pamper yourself.

Pull Quote: Be selective and choose those that mean the most to you and your family.

SIDEBAR IDEAS OR WAYS TO LOCALIZE: Give contact or other information for nearby tree farms, horse drawn carriage rides, cabin rentals, or craft supply stores. A sidebar listing a custom from several countries might also work well.

Kimberly Blaker of Michigan is an author and mother of two. Her syndicated articles have appeared in more than 100 parenting and women's magazines around the country.

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