

Simplify

your holiday season



MARCIA RAMSLAND

Turn Seasonal Stress into Holiday Success!



Insert this year's three Important Charts
to simplify your holiday season:

- The Holiday Season Calendar Plan
- My Personal Holiday Plan
- This Year's Master Gift List



Download these FREE charts annually after September 15 at
www.organizingpro.com/holidays



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MARCIA RAMSLAND

The Organizing Pro

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Simplify

Your Holiday Season



*S*implifying your holiday season is an opportunity to create positive memories for yourself and those in your life around the three most celebrated holidays at the end of the year — Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's.

Learn how to turn busy holiday stress into seasonal success. This is your year. You can do it!



Simplifying your holiday season is all about . . .



- ✓ Sharing a meaningful Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's with loved ones.
- ✓ Relieving pressure during a typically stressful time of year.
- ✓ Giving gifts from your heart and within your budget.
- ✓ Decorating with just the things you like.
- ✓ Sending cards because you want to, not because you have to.
- ✓ Watching people's faces light up as you deliver gifts or help at a charity.
- ✓ Entertaining to bring people together in an easy way.
- ✓ Participating in the season without feeling overcommitted or under prepared.
- ✓ Saving time, energy, and money.
- ✓ Deciding when enough is enough and stopping to enjoy the season.
- ✓ Finding successful and simple systems that work for you and your lifestyle.

With a little extra planning, the holiday season can become a time to look forward to — a time with family and friends, beautiful decorations, homemade cooking, special events and giving from your heart.

Books by Marcia Ramsland:

- *Simplify Your Life: Get Organized and Stay That Way!*
- *Simplify Your Time: Stop Running and Start Living!*
- *Simplify Your Space: Create Order and Reduce Stress!*
- *Ages and Stages of Getting Children Organized (Booklet)*
- *Simplify Your Holiday Season: Turn Seasonal Stress into Holiday Success!*
- *Simply December Devotions: 25 Days to Celebrate the Real Meaning of Christmas*

All books available with Free Tips and a DVD Series
“7 Weeks to a NEW Organized You!” at
www.OrganizingPro.com

Welcome!

Dear Friend,

Simplify Your Holiday Season is your opportunity to learn the secret of turning the usual seasonal stress into holiday success. You will learn an easy planning system no matter what day you start your holiday preparations. You will emerge knowing exactly what to do and when to do it.

The three major sections of the book are based on what you experience through the holiday season including: Things to Do, Places to Go, People to See. Read chapters as the season unfolds or review the whole book from beginning to end to take in the big picture.

Dynamic Features beyond the Book

Simplify Your Holiday Season is an annual resource you'll refer to every fall for inspiration and practical reminders. This book entitles you to renewable, bonus features to help you simplify every year, including:

- **The Front Book Pocket.** This is the perfect place to keep annual downloadable forms to keep you on track: The Current Year Holiday Season Calendar Plan, Your Personal Plan, and the Master Gift List form. These forms will keep you on schedule with dates and holiday prep activities to customize your own timeline.
- **Bonus Holiday Charts.** Online at www.OrganizingPro.com and at the back of the book are charts covering everything from menus, decorations, address lists, and year-end charitable donations for your personal notes and ideas. Save these to simplify next year even more!
- **Support Group Discussion Questions.** You can get a “Holiday Support Group” or Holiday Partner and go through the season together. Read the chapters, discuss the questions and support one another through the season.
- **Expert 10 Tips.** Every chapter features an expert with their 10 best tips for that topic. You will get to read their succinct tips and hear them personally in the holiday classes to learn even more from their expertise.
- **Online November and December Classes.** New online classes and webinars are offered annually at www.OrganizingPro.com that will inspire you for the current year with updates, new classes, support groups, and expert interviews.

The most important key to a calm season is... YOU! That's right. Once you feel in control, you can be the calm person you always dreamed of being, making the whole season enjoyable. My goal is to equip you with practical tools, new ideas, and a sense of anticipation. We can do that, and we will... together. Let's get started!

Warmly,

Marcia Ramsland

—The Organizing Pro and Holiday Coach

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A Word from the Author



I love holiday gatherings with family and friends. One stands out in particular. My friends Ken and Mary were hosting our neighborhood Christmas Party. Everyone was excited. As the party date approached Ken was busy adding holiday decorations outside to greet the party goers. As darkness descended on the night of the party, the house lit up in the most spectacular display from the rooftop eaves and windows, right down to moving lighted reindeer on the front lawn.

But as instantly as the light parade began, it suddenly went out! Ken quickly replaced the blown fuse and the light reappeared for about a minute — until it shut down again. The cycle repeated itself so many times we finally all went inside and started the party.



By the end of the evening, people were asking, “Where’s Ken?” As we left we thanked poor Ken still on the roof for the great party he had missed. My electrical engineer husband, who had been helping Ken, explained what happened and it sounded like a holiday tip. “The seven light strings were strung end to end and the high current raced through them all only to overload the outlets and blow a fuse. The solution is to connect each light to the source or only string three light sets together.”

I smiled as I realized that’s exactly what our problem is with the holidays. We function normally all year with “three strings of lights” in our usual lifestyle. Then the holidays arrive with four extra light sets to plug into our calendar — gift shopping, greeting cards, Christmas decorations, and double the number of social events. No wonder the holidays are stressful!

My question to you is, Are you strung too thin at the holidays? There are many reasons the season feels pressure-packed. But let’s set a goal to simplify each part and make it easier overall. Once you read this book, you’ll know how to overcome seasonal overload.

In this book you will find new ways to look at the season and turn seasonal stress into one of peace. If you are frazzled you will find immediate success this year. If you are ultra-organized, you will have flexible time to help others. Promise me you won’t get “strung out” anymore, ok? Let’s begin to simplify the season!

Warmly,
Marcia Ramsland
—*The Organizing Pro and Holiday Coach*

Simplify Your Holiday Season

SECTION 1

Things to Do



1. Get Started Right with 'The Holiday Plan'
2. Gift-Giving Master List and Ideas
3. Holiday Greetings — Your Style, Your Way
4. Holiday Decorations Up and Down Easily

Nothing is too hard in itself for the holidays. It's all the little things that add up to cause us stress. Spread them out to remain calm through the season. Your friends will wonder what you've been up to!

1

Get Started Right

Simplify the Season with “A Holiday Season Calendar Plan”



*Once you learn the secrets to manage the season successfully,
you'll look forward to the best time of the year,
every year instead of getting caught up in the busyness of the season.*

*P*lanning is powerful! And with a good plan and your eye on your calendar, you can simplify your holiday season each year. Instead of playing “catch-up” and feeling stressed, you will experience freedom and calm with the practical Holiday Season Calendar Plan. My motto as a seasoned Professional Organizer is:

*If you do anything more than once in life,
organize it and simplify it. That's especially true for the holidays
that come year after year like clockwork.*

This means looking for ways to improve anything that you're sure you'll be doing again. When that happens, you'll feel more confident the next time you approach the situation and better results are assured. Let me begin by sharing three tips you can immediately apply to overcome the usual seasonal stress.

A Dramatic Beginning

For many years I had no plan and was overwhelmed by the whole season. It put knots in my stomach and kept me awake at night. I was often stuck in the mall shopping for gifts at the last minute, standing in the rain looking for a “real” Christmas tree late in December, and staying up Christmas Eve wrapping presents... until I figured out a workable plan to manage all the pieces of the holiday puzzle.

With that level of frustration I actually sat down at the kitchen table after Christmas one day determined to get control of the season. I spread out calendars and gift lists from the past several years. My goal was to figure out why I was always feeling behind and change that. That year I had told myself to start early. I did shop earlier, but I had forgotten to wrap the presents. I was up wrapping on Christmas Eve — again. It was time to discover the solution to an annual stressful problem. And I did.

Discovery #1 — Pick the Best Start Date

As I compared the calendars from past years, it suddenly dawned on me—there was a pattern the way I was managing it all. I had been counting on getting through Thanksgiving before I started. And Thanksgiving was a floating holiday on a different date every year. That was my problem! Sometimes Thanksgiving was four and a half weeks before Christmas, and sometimes it was only three and a half weeks. That’s why people say, “Christmas came early this year.” Sometimes it does.



I realized many people, myself included, have used Thanksgiving to trigger serious action steps for the December holidays. It didn’t seem right to skip over Thanksgiving to get a jump-start on Christmas. On the other hand, if I waited to shop for Christmas until after Thanksgiving I’d be caught in the middle of a mall with throngs of shoppers.

The solution came clear when I noticed one particular holiday occurs exactly eight weeks before Christmas. Halloween is always on October 31 and is important to note because the next day—November 1 - you can kick off your holiday plan every year! I just created a plan by inputting all the holiday activities into those eight weeks. Suddenly the holidays were manageable when the plan was redesigned.



The key date—November 1—means you have eight weeks until December 25 to easily navigate the season. Even if you don’t begin on November 1, you have a calendar structure whenever you do begin. I have included an 8-Week, 4-Week Plan, 2-Week Plan and a 10-Day Countdown so you can be on track and calm whatever day you start.

Discovery #2 — Prepare for Stress in the Last Three Weeks

My second turning point came when I noticed on past calendars that the majority of holiday events landed in the three weeks right before Christmas. Children’s school parties, the neighborhood cookie exchange, civic symphony concerts, church events, friends’ Open Houses and an office luncheon the last day before vacation.



No wonder we get frazzled buying gifts and participating in the busiest social season of the year. All these things are good, but it’s plain stressful to be listening to the Hallelujah Chorus thinking about how many things you can pick up on the way home and still purchase online gifts with “expedite shipping” costs to save the day.

What’s the solution? Start all the gift shopping and card sending BEFORE you decorate and the holiday events begin. It is the easiest way to stay sane and not be frustrated with the whole process. (But we also have lots of tips if you’re a bit behind this year or dealing with an unexpected crisis.)

Discovery #3 — Simplify Decorations Early



My third discovery came when I was taking down my holiday decorations. I noticed some I'd never put up, and decided it was just too much work to deal with all of them each year. So I carefully selected items, keeping some and putting aside others to donate.

But alas, when I arrived at the charity, the man laughed and said, “We don’t have room to store old decorations until next year any more than you do. Donate them right after Thanksgiving.” That was a reality check. I was giving up valuable space at home to store these for eleven months of the year and complaining when I had to put them up (but always glad once they were). What’s the answer? Don’t wait for the weather to put you in the right mood. Just pick a date or weekend to put your decorations up and enjoy them the whole season. It will help you “feel” festive sooner.

Start the Season with “The Holiday Season Calendar Plan!”

Once you know you can organize your holidays whether you have eight weeks, four weeks or one week left before Christmas, it’s time to begin. Plan on paper, work your plan, and adjust when things get off course. It’s easier to get a little done each day, rather than under the pressure of the last minute. You save time and money while enjoying peace of mind with a plan in place.

If you improve something each year, you will find the holidays are more of a joy and less of a chore as time goes by. This year choose the Holiday Season Calendar Plan based on today’s date whether you are eight weeks, four weeks, or two weeks away from Christmas.

Picture yourself sitting down with a cup of coffee, enjoying a calm evening at home with your holiday decorations around you. Holiday music is softly playing and you have time to relax, read a magazine, play a game with your kids, or call a friend. This scenario is one of the many results of simplifying the holiday season.

The 2012 Holiday Season
8-Week Calendar Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8 Weeks 148 to 150 days to Christmas							
7 Weeks 139 to 141 days to Christmas							
6 Weeks 130 to 132 days to Christmas							
5 Weeks 121 to 123 days to Christmas							
4 Weeks 112 to 114 days to Christmas							
3 Weeks 103 to 105 days to Christmas							
2 Weeks 94 to 96 days to Christmas							
1 Week 85 to 87 days to Christmas							
Christmas December 25							
New Year January 1							

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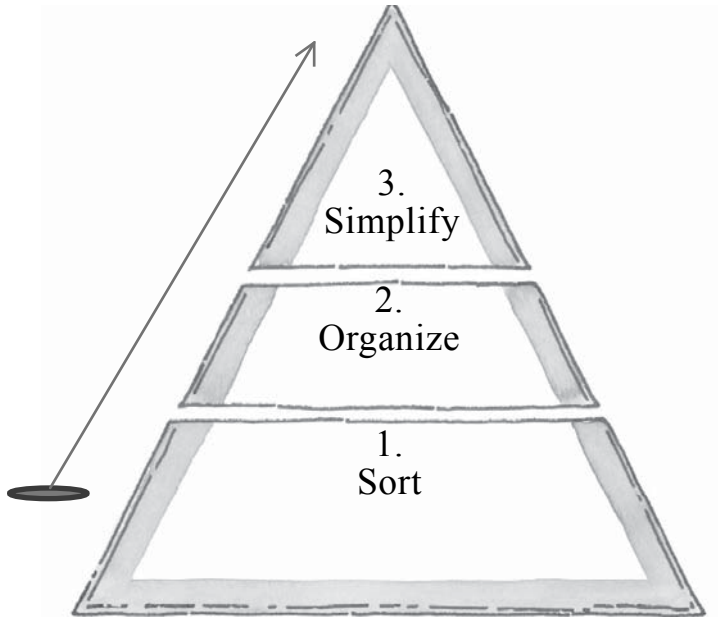
To simplify the holiday season is to transform something complicated into something easy. The holiday season from Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s qualifies as the busiest and most complicated time of the year — until you know the secrets to simplify it.

Each year I hear women say, “This system works! When is your new Holiday Season Calendar Plan coming out? I love how it shows me if I’m on track.” And at the end of the season, women have sailed through the holidays and actually enjoyed them.

But not just women. A couple wives reported their husbands said, “What weekend do we put up the decorations?” And *they* took on the task! Everyone likes to know what’s coming and the best benefit is that others contribute to make the season festive and memorable! Let me share with you all my secrets to make it a success.

Simplify Your Holiday Season with SOS Pyramid

To simplify anything in life follow these three steps in the SOS Pyramid I unveiled in my book, *Simplify Your Space*. For the holiday time pressures, it works the same way.



The SOS Pyramid

Aspire to move up the pyramid each year and the holidays will get easier!

Step 1: Sort Your Tasks and Assign Dates. Update your activities on one calendar, fill in your Master Gift List, plan a decorating weekend, and Christmas card list onto the holiday charts so you can see how complicated or reasonable your holidays actually are.

Step 2: Organize the Steps in Each Task. Arrange your calendar to balance the pressures of your current life by planning early how everything will fit. You can only do so much in a day or weekend so include just what is meaningful to you this season. Four nights away from home per week is the max we recommend to keep from stressing.

Step 3: Simplify Activities by Picking Your Priorities. Focus on what's meaningful by leaving out draining tasks and investing in those you enjoy. Fewer quality activities and tasks may be just what you need to keep your season on a manageable level.

Now You Are Ready! Let's Begin

The Holiday Plan is the view of the calendar and holiday activities planned out for you in order to sail smoothly through the season. It is a combination of both. It includes a time sequence to allow you to get things done without.

What is the Holiday Calendar Plan in a Nutshell?

Phase 1: Plan, Shop, Wrap

Phase 2: Decorate and Mail

Phase 3: Celebrations • Christmas Week • New Year's Week

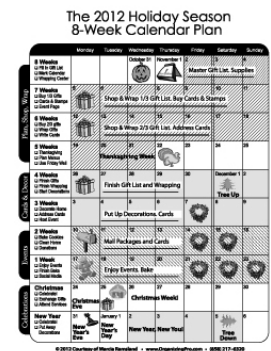
These are laid out on our Holiday Season Calendar Plan as a sample to follow. You can personalize it on Your Calendar Plan at www.OrganizingPro.com which has the dates for this year already printed. You can also customize it on your own monthly calendar.

Why Do I Need a New Holiday Calendar Each Year?

The calendar dates change every year for the major holidays. This can mess up your plan from one year to the next. We do promise to provide updated Holiday Calendar Plans that you can download yearly at <http://www.OrganizingPro.com>.

Which Holiday Season Calendar Plan Do I Use: 8-Week, 4-Week, or 2-Week?

That's easy. Find out what today's date is and pick the calendar that includes the date you plan to begin your preparations. That's the Holiday Season Calendar Plan you can post or put in the front pocket of this book.



How Can I Follow the Plan?

It's not hard. Just keep the current year plan in the front pocket of this book, on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or by your computer. If you get off track, rearrange your activities. If you see you can't do it all, simply cut back or ask for help.

How Do I Get Support to Keep Going?

The best way is to either join our Online Classes in November and December, get a group of friends to form a Holiday Support Group (either in person or by phone), or get a Holiday Buddy and check in with each other every week through the season.

What Do I Do First?

Download the actual Holiday Season Calendar Plan for this year from www.OrganizingPro.com and place it either in the front pocket of your book or post it where you will see it. Highlight calendar dates that you will have work or school vacations or guests.

Not Ready to Do That?

That's fine. Simply read the rest of the book and come back to download the Holiday Season Plan when you need it. The first step to simplifying anything is to plan it on your calendar.

The Holiday Season

8-Week Calendar Plan Checklist

Check off the items as you do them. Assign the tasks to days on your calendar.

8 Weeks Before

- Fill in this year's Gift List with names and gift ideas following last year's Gift List.
- Mark your personal calendar in an 8-week countdown like the sample page.
- Organize your Gift-Wrapping Center supplies. List what you need.

7 Weeks Before

- Shop for and wrap one-third of your gifts list.
- Gather Christmas cards, return address labels, and stamps.
- Start an Event Worksheet for any holiday event you are hosting.

6 Weeks Before

- Shop for and wrap an additional one-third of your gift list.
- Update your address list and write Christmas cards.
- Shop November sale days for bargains for people on your Gift list.

5 Weeks Before *(Change steps with Week 4 depending when Thanksgiving is.)*

- Focus on Thanksgiving preparations. Take a family photo for Christmas card.
- Plan the Bonus Thanksgiving Weekend—shop, decorate, or relax.
- Use the weekend to move toward Christmas preparations.

4 Weeks Before *(Change steps with Week 5 depending when Thanksgiving is.)*

- Shop for and wrap the final one-third of your total gifts.
- Purchase special baking ingredients you will need, such as nuts, almond paste, etc.
- Gather Thanksgiving centerpiece, menu, table settings, napkins, and place cards.

3 Weeks Before

- Sign and mail Christmas cards and holiday packages.
- Decorate your Christmas tree and home for the holidays.
- Begin reading your inspirational Christmas books and magazines.

2 Weeks Before

- Bake cookies and clean house.
- Join in a Christmas event for neighbors, coworkers, or charity.
- Deliver charity gifts and mail year-end contributions.

1 Week Before

- Bake your favorite traditional cookies and foods.
- Donate time to charities that need extra help.
- Deliver gifts to coworkers, neighbors, school, or others.












Celebrate Christmas ("The" Week)

- Celebrate with the gifts, food, and people you planned.
- Spend time reflecting on the meaning of Christmas and/or attend a service.
- Take pictures to capture the memories and place them in a holiday photo book.

New Year's Week- Bonus Week to Clean Up—New Year, New You!

- Write thank-you notes, and put away holiday decorations soon.
- Get your home, family, and office in order for the New Year.
- Fill in your journal "*The Best Things That Happened This Holiday Season.*"

The Holiday Season 8-Week Calendar Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
Plan, Shop, Wrap	8 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Fill in Gift List <input type="checkbox"/> Mark Calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Wrapping Center			October 31 	November 1 	2	3	4
	7 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Buy 1/3 Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Cards & Stamps <input type="checkbox"/> Event Page	5 	6	7	8	9	10	11
	6 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Buy 2/3 gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Wrap Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Write Cards	12 	13	14	15	16	17	18
Cards & Decor	5 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Thanksgiving <input type="checkbox"/> Plan Menus <input type="checkbox"/> Use Friday Well	19	20	21	22 	23	24	25
	4 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Finish Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Finish Wrapping <input type="checkbox"/> Start Decorations	26 	27	28	29	30	December 1	2
	3 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Decorate Home <input type="checkbox"/> Address Cards <input type="checkbox"/> Host Event	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Events	2 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Bake Cookies <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Home <input type="checkbox"/> Donations	10 	11	12	13	14	15	16
	1 Week <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy Events <input type="checkbox"/> Finish Bake <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media	17 	18	19	20	21	22	23
Celebrations	Christmas <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate! <input type="checkbox"/> Exchange Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Attend Services	24 Christmas Eve	25  Christmas Day	26	27	28	29	30
	New Year <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate! <input type="checkbox"/> Put Away Decorations	31  New Year's Eve	January 1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5  Tree Down	6

The Holiday Season

4-Week Calendar Plan Checklist

Check off the items as you do them. Fill in the blank 4-Week Plan with dates, and assign the tasks to specific days. More explanation for each task is found in the related section.

4 Weeks Before

- Review last year's Gift List. Then fill in this year's Gift List with names and any gift ideas.
- Stock your Gift-Wrapping Center with supplies, such as wrapping paper, bows, tags, gift boxes, and the like.
- Update your address list and write Christmas cards.

3 Weeks Before

- Sign, seal, and mail Christmas cards and holiday packages.
- Decorate your Christmas tree and home for the holidays.
- Shop for and wrap the first half of your total gifts.
- Begin reading your inspirational Christmas books and magazines.

2 Weeks Before









- Shop for and wrap the last half of your total gifts.
- Attend Christmas events for neighbors, coworkers, or charity.
- Mail year-end contributions.

1 Week Before

- Donate time to charities that need extra help.
- Deliver gifts to coworkers, neighbors, school, and others.
- Bake favorite cookies and clean house.

"The Holiday Season Calendar Plan" is your guide to turn the most stressful time of the year into seasonal success year after year. It is your answer to finding peace and calm when life is already busy and complicated in December. It's a way to fine tune on paper the many items you lay awake worrying about and trying to remember to do.

The Holiday Season 4-Week Calendar Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Plan, Shop, Wrap	4 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Fill in Gift List <input type="checkbox"/> Stock Gift-Wrapping Center <input type="checkbox"/> Start December 1-25 Reading			Nov 29 	30	Dec 1	2
					Shop & Wrap 1/2 List		
Mail & Decor	3 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Cards <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Cards & Packages <input type="checkbox"/> Tree Up & Decorate Inside			3 	4 	5	6
	Write Cards & Mail Packages			Decorate			
Mail & Decor	2 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Bake Cookies <input type="checkbox"/> Clean 1/2 Home <input type="checkbox"/> Host Own Event			10	11	12	13
	Shop & Wrap 1/2 Gift List. Mail. Donations				14 	15	16
Mail & Decor	1 Week <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy Events <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Other 1/2 Home			17	18	19	20
	Baking Week		Deliver Gifts		Charity Time		
Celebrations	Christmas <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate! <input type="checkbox"/> Exchange Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Attend Services			24	25  	26	27
	Celebrate			Relax and Send Thank You's			
Celebrations	New Year <input type="checkbox"/> Finish Notebook Pages <input type="checkbox"/> Put Away Decorations <input type="checkbox"/> Cleanup for New Year			31 	Jan 1	2	3
	Get Home & Office in Order. New Year, New You! Put Decorations Away			4	5 	6	
			Tree Down				

The Holiday Season

2-Week Calendar Plan Checklist

Check off the items as you do them. Fill in the blank 2-Week Plan with dates, and assign the tasks to specific days. More explanation for each task is found in the related section.

2 Weeks Before

- Shop for and wrap the first half of the gifts on your list.
- Attend holiday events for neighbors, coworkers, or charity.
- Decorate your Christmas tree and home for the holidays.

1 Week Before

- Shop for and wrap the last half of the gifts on your list.
- Bake a few favorite cookies and clean house.
- Donate time to charities that need extra help.

Celebrate Christmas (“The” Week)






- Celebrate with the gifts, food, and people you planned.
- Spend time reflecting on the real meaning of Christmas and/or attending a Christmas service.
- Take pictures to capture the memories and store in your holiday photo file.

Clean Up—New Year, New You! (Bonus Week)

- Clean up, write thank-you notes, and put away decorations.
- Fill in your journal page “The Best Things That Happened This Christmas.”
- Get your home and office in order for the New Year.

With the 8-Week, 4-Week, 2-Week or 10-Day Countdown Plan, you can stay ahead of the game and sail through the season. Whichever plan you choose, check it often to stay on track and minimize seasonal stress.

The Holiday Season 2-Week Calendar Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
Mail & Decor	2 Weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Buy 1/2 gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy Events <input type="checkbox"/> Decorate Home	10	11	12	13	14 	15	16
	Shop & Wrap 1/2 Gift List. Mail. Donations							
Mail & Decor	1 Week <input type="checkbox"/> Finish Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Bake Cookies <input type="checkbox"/> Clean Home	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	Baking Week		Deliver Gifts		Charity Time			
Celebrations	Christmas <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate! <input type="checkbox"/> Exchange Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Attend Services	24	25  	26	27	28	29	30
	Celebrate		Relax and Send Thank You's					
Celebrations	New Year <input type="checkbox"/> Finish Notebook Pages <input type="checkbox"/> Put Away Decorations <input type="checkbox"/> Cleanup for New Year	31 	Jan 1	2	3	4	5 	6
	Get Home & Office in Order. New Year, New You! Put Decorations Away							

The 10-Day Countdown Plan

It's not too late! You can still pull together a successful Christmas in a few days! (Check off the items as you do them. Fill in the blank 10-Day Countdown Plan with dates, and assign the tasks to specific days. More explanation for each task is found in the related section.)

- **10 Days**—Make your final gift list on the Master Gift List.
- **9 Days**—Finish shopping at one store or one online store.
- **8 Days**—Wrap remaining gifts and send out final Christmas cards.
- **7 Days**—Put up remaining decorations and enjoy a holiday movie.
- **6 Days**—Bake a favorite Christmas cookie or nutbread recipe.
- **5 Days**—Vacuum and give a quick cleaning to your home.
- **4 Days**—Plan your meals and bring in final groceries.
- **3 Days**—Confirm Christmas Day plans with others.
- **2 Days**—Read and reflect on the real meaning of Christmas and attend services.
- **1 Day**—Celebrate with Christmas gifts, family, and a time of thankfulness.

Comments from Holiday Class Participants

"I learned that the three weeks before Christmas are too busy. Start now!"
— Colleen P.

"The first thing I'm going to simplify my holidays is get a calendar and write events and plan gift gifting."
— Miriam W.

"I appreciated your helpfulness in getting more organized and simplifying things in order to enjoy the holidays."
— Patricia V.

"I decided to "enjoy" the holidays instead of just surviving."
— Linda S.

10 Relationship Tips for the Holidays

BY PAM FARREL, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND RELATIONSHIP EXPERT



While simplifying your holiday season, take time for relationships to thrive, not just survive. People are more important than things, especially at this time of year. Here are some principles to apply to your relationships during this festive season.

- 1 Center Your Heart.** Focus on the true, deeper meaning of the holiday celebrations of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's. This will help everyone become easier to get along with because the heart of the holiday will remain intact.
- 2 Hear What Your Friends and Family are Voicing as Their Stress.** Listen carefully to those around you — a gift that will lower their stress.
- 3 Reach Out as a Family to Help Others.** Keep the proper perspective of what is really important in life by looking for ways to help others. Everyone has something to give.
- 4 Invest in Memories, not Material Goods.** Make time for family baking, tree decorating, or board games..
- 5 Speak Your Love in Words.** The best gift you can give another person is personal words of praise, gratitude, and acknowledgment from your lips.
- 6 Take Time for Relationships.** The greatest gift you can give your spouse, children, and friends is harmony at home.
- 7 Take Time to Reach Out to Extended Family.** Visit or call grandparents, aunts, and uncles. If possible, use modern technology like Skype to connect.
- 8 Assume Nothing.** Ask those who are celebrating with you what their expectations are, and communicate the plan clearly so people feel informed..
- 9 Stay Flexible.** Don't be a Christmas Scrooge ordering family around. Instead slow the pace, gather consensus, and give options to create an environment of connecting and sharing.
- 10 Express Your Joy.** Make memories by making the most of all your relationships!

Pam Farrel is a relationship specialist, international speaker, and author of more than twenty-five books, including best-selling Men Are like Waffles, Women Are like Spaghetti, The Marriage Code, The 10 Best Decisions a Single Can Make. The Farrels' books have sold more than a half million copies. They are frequent guests on radio and TV. Visit love-wise.com



CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

Start Right with a Holiday Plan

1. Choose a main calendar (either ours or your monthly calendar) that you'll use as your main planning calendar and keep it in one location. Mark holiday events, vacations, and holiday prep activities on it. This is the key to simplifying the season.
2. Number the weeks in the margin of your monthly calendar like a countdown to Christmas week — 3, 2, 1, 0 (or should we say “Celebrate!”)
3. Refer to the Holiday Season Calendar Plan as you do the rest of the chapters in this book. Follow the overview of the season while learning ways to organize and simplify the details.

Personal Reflection

1. The holidays are best when I _____

2. What I like about the holiday season is _____

3. One thing I'd like to change about my holiday season _____

Holiday Support Group Discussion Questions

1. What's a favorite holiday memory you've had in recent years?
2. Share what you usually do for putting up holiday decorations for Christmas.
3. What do you usually do for Thanksgiving?
4. Who enjoys the holidays the most in your family?
5. When do you tend to start getting ready for the holidays?
6. If you could change one thing this year about the holidays, what would it be?
7. Something I'd really like to simplify about the holidays is _____

Remember it's not the things we do that make us tired. It's the things left undone that wear us out!

2

Gift Giving Success

Important Gift-Giving Strategies



A gift given is a double joy for two people: the receiver lights up with being remembered, and you, the giver, are rewarded for a kindness shared.

Gift giving can be one of the biggest stresses of the holidays, beginning with deciding what to buy, where to buy it, followed by time spent wrapping and delivering it. Not anymore! Once you have a gift list full of ideas, past lists for reference, and gift-wrapping supplies on hand, holiday shopping can begin to take shape. A pretty wrapping paper, sparkly bow, and signed card are our goal—and done long before Christmas Eve.

No more back-of-the-envelope planning as you head out to the mall. Keep your list on hand and simplify the abundance of choices by sticking to one or two stores or online businesses.

Organize Your Master Gift List

Begin by filling in the Gift Giving form, listing people to whom you plan to give a gift, ideas of what to get them, and a budget amount. (Yes, it's wise to think about money beforehand and shop creatively to stick to it). Use the same form from year to year, and you'll spend less time worrying about whether you remembered everyone. You'll find the more organized your records from last year are, the less trouble you will have thinking of new ideas this year.

Who do we put on the list? Start with the most important and closest family members: spouse, children, parents, siblings. Then add others as you have the time or energy. Use as many lines as you need for each person.

How many people can you handle buying gifts for each year? Somewhere between six to ten people may be comfortable for some of us. Others in the midst of raising children may give to immediate and extended family totaling twenty to thirty people. When your list of names is manageable, you will enjoy the season more. Stop whatever is frustrating!

For everyone there comes a time when you need to simplify and not feel guilty about doing it. For example, agree with your family that when your nieces and nephews graduate from high school (or turn sixteen years old), you stop buying gifts for him or her. Or when the extended

Gift giving is an inside-out feeling wrapped in a box.

family gathering becomes too large, you might start drawing names so each person brings a nice gift for only one other person. Or you might move to giving birthday gifts to minimize the holiday gift giving overload.

The important thing is to learn your limits, and writing the list on paper gives you the perfect overview. Fine-tune it each year until you are comfortable with it.

Who Should I Put On My Gift List?

The rule of thumb is to include closest family and those with whom you have a history of exchanging gifts. Don't make it complicated by adding more people. Often a Christmas card greeting is all that's needed. Above all, limit your list to a comfortable number of people.

Here is a list of memory jogger names. Put a check mark beside those you include in your gift list; put an X by those you do not.

✓	X		✓	X	
		Husband			Father-in-law
		Wife			Sister-in-law(s)
		Daughter(s)			Brother-in-law(s)
		Son(s)			Roommate(s)
		Mother			Boss(es)
		Father			Secretary
		Grandmother(s)			Coworkers
		Grandfather(s)			Teacher(s)
		Grandchildren			Baby Sitter
		Sister(s)			Neighbors
		Brother(s)			Friends
		Mother-in-law			Others

List the names in the same order each year so you can easily refer to what you did last year. That way you don't have to wonder, *What did I give them already?* Now you'll know!

Look for a gift with a surprise element. That means it is not expected and is a surprise in some way, but also something the receiver really likes or is passionately interested in. That's how you create the "magic" of gift-giving at Christmas.

Simplify with a Gift Theme

Simplify your gift shopping by visiting only certain types of stores for everyone on your list. Choose a giving “theme” for the year, but get a different gift in that theme for each person so it is personalized. For example, all the women get jewelry, spa baskets, gift certificates, or robes. Men get sporting event tickets, restaurant certificates, or tools. Sweaters, CDs, DVDs, or books all make great themes too.

A Dozen Gift Theme Ideas

1. Sweaters for everyone
2. Favorite restaurant or movie gift cards
3. Gloves and mittens
4. DVDs
5. CDs or books
6. Tickets to a play, musical, or retreat
7. Photo book or digital camera
8. A trip or the latest technology
9. Favorite magazine plus a year’s subscription
10. Chocolate, nuts, or gourmet food basket
11. Spa, massage, or bath items
12. Jewelry, purse, or accessories

For Men

(Practical is generally better than sentimental.)

- Tool kit
- Computer software
- Travel clock
- TV, radio, cell phone
- Favorite hobby gear
- Sporting event tickets
- Camping equipment
- Hunting or fishing gear

For Kids

(It’s best to ask for a prioritized list!)

- Age-appropriate toys
- Clothes
- Hobby or sports gear
- Book, CD, or DVD
- Adventure pass or certificate
- Computer games
- Movie tickets

For Women

(Personal is generally better than practical.)

- Spa basket or gift certificate
- Clothes
- Candles
- Cookbook
- Chocolate anything
- Jewelry

General

- Calendar
- Desk clock
- Paperweight
- Food basket
- Chocolate or other candy
- Book or audio book

Important Gift-Giving Strategies

*G*ift giving can either simplify or complicate your life. Keep it simple as you shop and make your plans. Take notes and you will get better each year. The sooner you get started the less stress you will encounter and the more likely you are to get a gift that is sure to make the receiver smile.

- 1. The Mall or Specialty Stores.** Shop where you get the best results. Keep track of where you buy most of your gifts from year to year and head there first. They will have new merchandise each year that will probably work well for you again.
- 2. Shopping Online.** Order your gifts online and use the “Ship Direct” option to send the gift to someone else in their household to wrap and hide for you. Offer to return the favor. Also keep a list of online shopping items, including expected arrival dates, order confirmation numbers, and shipping costs. Going online may allow you to have it bought and shipped in less time and money than physically going out to the store would do.
- 3. Gifts to Mail.** Order your gifts online and use the “Ship Direct” option to send them directly to the intended recipients. Be sure to purchase and ship gifts by the first week of December to ensure their arriving on time.
- 4. Practical vs. Sentimental Gifts.** Buy practical gifts for practical people and sentimental gifts for sentimental people. This makes your gift more likely to hit the mark. For clues about which is which, note what they give you. For instance, if you usually get kitchen gadgets from your mother, that tells you she likes practical gifts.
- 5. Children’s Gifts.** Shop for children first as their gift choices can run out of stock. Keep one gift slot for each child open until it’s nearly Christmas, because they often think of something new they want based on holiday advertisements. They will probably be the most delighted with their gifts, so try to think about what a child would most like to open.
- 6. Handmade Gifts.** Make a schedule by mapping out on your calendar how much you can realistically accomplish each week before Christmas—whether it’s a large project or a few small ornaments. Then schedule crafting times as appointments and stick to them. Major projects, such as a full-size quilt, should be started earlier in the year and, hopefully, completed by Halloween so you can avoid the stress of trying to complete them during the holiday rush.

Remember, a gift shows you had the person in your thoughts, and a note on your card tells them why you thought they’d like it. Gift giving is a skill to learn.

Master Gift List

(year)

Done X	#	Person	Gift Ideas	\$ Budget	Actual Gift and from Where	\$ Cost
	*					
	1					
	2					
	3					
	4					
	5					
	6					
	7					
	8					
	9					
	10					
	11					
	12					
			Total	\$		\$

The Master Gift List will save you time and money. Available at <http://www.OrganizingPro.com>

Supplies On Hand

Year _____

- Wrapping paper (___ rolls ___ squares)
- Bows (___ ribbons)
- Tissue paper (___ sheets)
- Gift tags (___ tags)
- Scotch tape
- Scissors
- A working pen

Ways I Simplified Wrapping...

Supplies I Need for Next Year...

Year _____

- Wrapping paper (___ rolls ___ squares)
- Bows (___ ribbons)
- Tissue paper (___ sheets)
- Gift tags (___ tags)
- Scotch tape
- Scissors
- A working pen

Ways I Simplified Wrapping...

Supplies I Need for Next Year...

Year _____

- Wrapping paper (___ rolls ___ squares)
- Bows (___ ribbons)
- Tissue paper (___ sheets)
- Gift tags (___ tags)
- Scotch tape
- Scissors
- A working pen

Ways I Simplified Wrapping...

Supplies I Need for Next Year...

A Gift-Wrapping Center

Create a gift-wrapping center to solve many of those late night wrapping dilemmas. Stock one wrapping box with supplies to store under your bed, in a hall closet, or an easily accessible place.

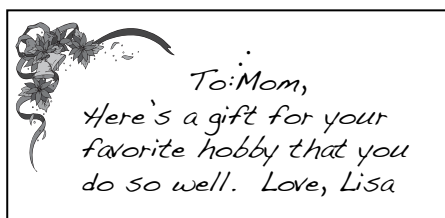
Simplify your holiday wrapping by using all rolls of paper, or all folded squares of paper to keep your wrapping center tidy. Buy a two- or three-color scheme of paper, perhaps using large print, small print, and solid-colored wrapping paper. Warehouse clubs and discount stores often sell wrapping paper bundled in coordinating colors and styles or large rolls of reversible paper.

Also bring home fresh tissue paper to perk up any reused box or gift bag, and remember to ask for a box when you purchase gifts. These are often free and will reduce your expenses.

Stock Your Gift-Wrapping Center

- Various size gift boxes and bags
- Wrapping paper (same size rolls or squares)
- Bows and ribbons
- Tissue paper
- Gift tags
- Scotch tape
- Scissors
- A working pen

Complete your package wrapping with a bow for packages you deliver in person, and ribbons for packages that must be mailed. Don't forget to purchase or make matching gift tags with room to write a sentence of warmth and love for the recipient. People often save the tags longer than the gifts!



Gift Tag Example:

Always keep a dedicated pen, scissors, and Scotch tape in the Gift-Wrap Center that you don't take to use anywhere else in the house! You don't want to lose time hunting for supplies when you start wrapping.

Once you have purchased a gift, be sure to get it wrapped soon to complete the process. Store the gifts under your Christmas tree, in a closet, or in a hiding place noted on your Master Gift List.

To keep things a further secret, put the number of the gift from your Master Gift List on the gift, and replace it with the actual tag the night before the gifts are opened.

Gifts will be more of a surprise if they are wrapped rather than discovered sitting out. They are easy to wrap if you have your supplies on hand and easily accessible.

Stay Organized with a Holiday Notebook

Keep all your plans, purchase receipts, and celebration ideas in one holiday notebook. A 3-ring notebook with a holiday picture (available at www.organizingpro.com) inserted into the front cover is your tool to stay organized year after year. The tabs can be purchased at an office supply store and listed as below. Keep the Holiday Notebook available in your kitchen or home office.

- 1 CALENDARS** Keep the current year's Holiday Season Calendar Plan in the front. Store your yearly Holiday Plans here so you can refer back to what weeks and weekends you did activities last year.
- 2 GIFTS** Keep your current Master Gift List at the front of this section so you can regularly list ideas and update purchases. Check off with a red pen if is wrapped and where it is stored (downstairs closet, under the stairway or what box in the garage).
- 3 CARDS** Keep your Christmas card address list here, either handwritten on our form or printed from your computer. Include regular mailed card address and email distribution lists. Be sure to put the year at the top of each page so it's easy to update.
- 4 DECORATIONS** Add your list and snapshots of decorations as you placed them in your home. This will be a time-saving reference for next year.
- 5 RECIPES** Food is another major item to consider during the holidays so keep your favorite recipes and menus in this section. It will be easy to get started baking your favorite Christmas cookies and nutbreads ahead of time. Include your holiday menus and make notes about what worked well. Next year will be a breeze.
- 6 THANKSGIVING** This tab with photos, notes, and menu will make next year easier, especially regarding what to do on the days before Thanksgiving Thursday. Include the time to start cooking the turkey and what time you served dinner. Listing specific details helps you simplify.
- 7 CHRISTMAS** Keep your Notes Page here as a memory jogger for next year. Include photos of family opening presents, eating together, and your journal page of "The Best Things that Happened This Christmas" year by year. You'll love the summary.
- 8 SPECIAL** Keep any special pages like Holiday Movie List, Charitable Donation List, Event Steps you planned or Goals for the New Year here. This is your section for those individual summary pages you don't know what to do with.

Keep all your holiday organizing and plans in one place so everything is centralized and not floating around on scraps of paper. Keep your notebook next to your calendar at home or someplace that curious children and family will not find it. This will be your personal resource to use year after year to simplify your life during the holidays.

Think of the possibilities for a calm season if you kept all your holiday ideas in one place, followed the Holiday Season Calendar Plan, and cleaned up your notes for next year. You really could be organized and less stressed for the holidays! Get a Notebook and start today.

10 Money-Saving Holiday Gift Tips

BY ELLIE KAY, AMERICA'S FAMILY FINANCIAL EXPERT™



The average family will create enough credit card debt at Christmas that it will take until the following May to pay it off! There is a less expensive way to survive.

- 1 Strategize.** Decide which gifts you want and match them with sale ads. Check off the items on your Master Gift List and note any special limitations (i.e. price only effective for three hours, limit two per person). Prioritize the stores where you'll shop according to limitations and values.
- 2 Shop for Comparisons.** Once you locate the make and model of a gift you want to purchase, do a search at Bing.com, Slickdeals.com, or Mysimon.com. When you find the best price, print it out and take it into your local store to see if the manager will match the price.
- 3 Save when Shopping Online.** For online coupons, codes for discounts and free shipping, go to RetailMeNot.com, Dealhunting.com or CouponCabin.com.
- 4 Split It.** Follow the divide-and-conquer rule by shopping with a friend or your spouse. If there are multiple purchase discounts, such as "buy two and get the second one at half-price" or a two-for-one special, you can go together and split the savings, thus taking advantage of the offer.
- 5 Save by Baking.** Early in the season, my kids help me make various sweetbreads to freeze. When it comes time to give gifts to teachers or friends, we tie the breads with raffia, cranberries and voila! These gifts taste great and save money.
- 6 Specify.** During the year, set aside a specific "cash" budget each month to use for Christmas. Don't use credit cards unless you know you can pay them at the end of the month.
- 7 Stick to Your Guns.** You may be tempted to keep buying even after you've conquered your list. You can go broke saving money, so stick to your budget.
- 8 Simplify.** When my hubby and I had five babies in the first seven years of marriage, we came up with the "three-gift rule." We modeled our gift-giving after the three gifts brought to the Christ child. We chose three simple, yet nice presents per child. It still works!
- 9 Supervise.** Take younger children to the local Dollar Store for their Christmas shopping for friends and family. Give them an appropriate budget and money, and then let them choose.
- 10 Steal It.** Set aside money for after-Christmas sales. You can oftentimes get nonperishable gifts from 50 to 75 percent off retail and save them for next year. That's practically a steal!

Ellie Kay is the best-selling author of fourteen books, including The Little Book of Big Savings and a frequent guest on ABC, CBS, CNBC, CNN, and Fox News. She has appeared on over 600 radio stations and presents to audiences as large as eight thousand from California to China. She and her husband, Bob, have seven children and live in Palmdale, California. Visit elliekay.com



CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY

Gift-Giving Success

1. Simplify your gift giving by starting with a Master Gift List. Print out ours or create your own. Keep it in one place that you—and no one else—can access easily. ☺
2. Simplify further with a category theme or the Three-Gift Rule Expert Ellie Kay mentioned in her 10 Money Saving Tips on Holiday Gifts.
3. Organize your Gift Wrap Center and wrap early.

Personal Reflection

1. My gift-giving works best when I _____

2. What I like about giving gifts is _____

3. What I'd like to improve about gift-giving is _____

Group Discussion Questions

1. Have you started shopping for gifts and when did you start?
2. Have you made out a Master Gift List?
3. Do you wrap presents as you get them or wait until you have a lot of them?
4. Who is your most difficult person to shop for?
5. Do you know how much you spend on gifts each year?
6. What is your best (or funniest) memory of someone opening your gift?
7. Something I'd really like to simplify about my gift-giving is _____

Wrap and label your gifts within a day or two of purchasing them. Picture yourself waking up rested for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Reward yourself when all your gifts are wrapped by going out for lunch with a friend or shopping for something for yourself.