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New Year's Day

Throughout the western world the traditional "New Year" is celebrated beginning on December 31 by partying until the wee hours of the morning usually ending with a countdown of the seconds until midnight, the magic hour, when the new year is officially ushered in.

A different twist on this traditional celebration might include creating one's own party favors i.e.: funny hats, noise makers and the like. Inspire your friends, family and guests to be creative by offering a special prize for the most original design. You can check out the local library or bookstore for books that will offer you how to ideas that are fun and inexpensive to make.

Another way to make your New Year's celebration unique and memorable is to surprise your friends, family and

guests with a special one of a kind gift to get their year started off right. A homemade gift basket for those special people in your life will be sure to be the kind of memory your loved ones will cherish the whole year through, day in and day out. A basket tailored made for that fisherman, artist, gourmet cook or college student filled with special gadgets suited especially for them will always be appreciated.

A creative idea that is sure to be a fun-activity for the entire family is to make a New Year's time capsule to be opened many years down the road. Each member of the family can fill a large container such as an extra large coffee can or a king-sized open mouthed jar, (try the local grocery or deli to find these). Everyone can decorate these items in their own special way and fill them with personal favorites such as photographs, newspaper articles, awards or a letter to the future describing life in the last half of the 20th century and maybe even include predictions of what life will be like in the year 2020!

A festive idea for the beginning of the new year is to have friends, family and neighbors over for an Open House New Year's Brunch. Use make ahead favorites such as Brunswick stew or Quiche Lorraine with an ambrosia salad and French bread. Keep it simple and enjoy spending quality time with your loved ones.

And last but not least, New Year's Resolutions!

Millions of people usually begin the new year with the best intentions - those resolutions we make to get better organized, lose weight or learn a foreign language. The little improvements that are meant to improve the quality of our lives and clean out those cobwebs are too often abandoned usually because we become too frustrated when we are unable to follow through on a goal that is too large or unrealistic. An alternative to this blueprint for failure is to make a plan to follow through by creating a monthly resolution for each of the next twelve months. How does one eat an elephant? One bite at a time, so the saying goes. Try focusing on how we might improve the lives of those around us. Volunteer to help a charity just one day out of the month or prepare a meal for friend or co-worker just because. You might find that these little "good deeds" might do more for your self-esteem than trying to make those same old resolutions you never keep.

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February

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See:

[St. Valentine's Day, February 14](#)

St. Valentine's Day, February 14

Valentine's Day has its origins dating back to the Roman Empire when a young Christian man was martyred for refusing to give up his faith. According to legend, before he died he wrote a farewell note to a young daughter of one of his jailer's, who had befriended him, and signed it "from your Valentine". Today, modern traditions include cards, flowers and candy as ways to say I love you. But if you are looking for something that will really say it in a BIG way try saying it with one of the following ideas. Grown-ups and children alike can create their own special I.O.U coupons that entitle the recipient with special meaningful gifts of time and effort such as breakfast served in bed, a picnic by candlelight or wash and wax the car for mom and dad. Don't forget the family pet! Fido just might enjoy an extra walk around the block or a trip to the park.

If you have a really special significant other or family members who live far away you can take some snapshots of yourself and or the kids and have a special calendar made. A great way to say I Love You all year long. Many photo development stores have the ability to produce this special one of a kind gift for very little money.

If making a calendar is a bit too ambitious for you try making a simple Valentine's card out of construction paper and paper doilies. Children and adults can participate in creating these charming expressions of love. Try using some of those school wallet sized photos to insert inside. Grandmother and grandfather will be delighted to receive such a special card.

Another fun way to celebrate the spirit of the day is just by performing random acts of kindness wherever you might find yourself. Take a few minutes to have tea and cookies with an elderly neighbor down the street or offer to let someone go ahead of you in line at the grocery store.

Bake some heart-shaped cookies and or a heart-shaped cake and take them into work and share the goodies with your co-workers. Or simply buy a bag of chocolate kisses to share with the gang down at the office.

A great idea for young adults or those without partners is to have a sleep-over party. The fun will really begin when everyone brings their favorite video of their favorite "romantic movie" such as Casablanca, Sleepless in Seattle or Ghost. The evening's entertainment is sure to inspire loads of giggles as well as a teardrop or two.

March

St. Patrick's Day, March 17

St. Patrick is the patron saint Ireland who spent his life converting the Irish to Christianity. March 17 commemorates the anniversary of his death in 461 A.D. Irish Americans celebrate by having parades and even those who are not of Irish descent get into the act. Wearing something green is one way that many show their solidarity. Shamrocks and leprechauns symbolize the folklore traditions of the old country.

One way to allow children to enjoy the spirit of the holiday is to play "Find the Hidden Treasure". According to legend Leprechauns, those tiny imaginary creatures akin to fairies, will try to buy their freedom if captured by offering to tell where a pot of gold is hidden. Simply hide the pot of gold (use the chocolate gold foil wrapped coins) and let the children rush to find the hidden gold treasure. A variation of "Warm, Hot & Cold" will be a helpful aid for younger children.

Another fun way to delight children is to surprise them with some green milk. A new way to get that milk down those youngsters! Before pouring the milk secretly add some green food coloring to the glass. Just a few drops should do. Won't they be surprised when the milk turns green when you pour that glass of milk.

And finally an activity that will teach children about horticulture. A week or two before St. Patrick's Day go to a landscape nursery and obtain some shamrock plantings. The children can plant them in pots and water them and watch them grow. Great idea to teach young people about how things grow.

March - April

Easter Sunday

Passover

Easter Sunday

Easter is a Christian holiday celebrating Christ's resurrection. It falls on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox. Easter bunnies, lilies and colored Easter eggs are a few of the traditional symbols of this holiday.

Easter egg tips include Never boil eggs. Boiling causes eggs to be tough with a greenish ring around the yolk. The best way to hard cook eggs is to place eggs in cold water and bring to a boil. Remove immediately from the heat, cover and let them stand for about 15 minutes for large eggs. Medium eggs take about 3 minutes less and extra large eggs for about 3 minutes longer. Remember to rinse the hard cooked eggs right away in cold water while they are still hot. The rinse in cold water will make the eggs easier to peel. Always keep the eggs refrigerated before and after coloring. Do not leave eggs out at room temperature for longer than a few hours because bacteria can cause harmful results.

A creative way to use up all those colored eggshells is to use them to make eggshell mosaic crosses. Use poster board as your canvas. Direct children to draw a cross in the center of the poster board the size will depend on personal choice. Take dried eggshells and place them in a plastic bag and crush them with a rolling pin. If the

children do this see that they do not get too carried away. Spread a thin layer of glue on the inside of the cross that has previously been drawn. Sprinkle eggshells over the wet glue. Turn over any pieces that are white. Take some more glue and outline the cross Then take some yarns strands and place around the outside edge of the cross on top of the glue. Older children can be more inventive and draw more complex drawings using the same concept.

Experiment!

Passover

This Hebrew festival is usually celebrated in late March or April. It usually lasts seven or eight days and commemorates when the angel of God "passed over" the houses of the Hebrews who sprinkled their doorposts with the blood of the pascal lamb. Exploring the traditions of Passover is an excellent opportunity for teaching children. The Passover festival, one that Jesus himself actively participated in, gives children a better understanding of the Christian faith as well as providing a deeper understanding of cross cultural beliefs. Check out books from the library and learn more about this important tradition. The main focal point of this holiday is observed by the family at home. The Seder, which involves a ritualistic meal also retells the story of the Exodus. The most common foods used during this ceremony are Karpas, a mild green vegetable, Maror, a bitter herb, Hazeret, another bitter herb, Haroset, a sweet spread made from fruit, nuts and wine. And then there is the Zeroah, which represents the pascal lamb, although this is not always used since the lamb cannot be actually be a sacrifice since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. In addition, there is Baytzah, a roasted egg and three types of matzot. All of these foods represent a vital element in the retelling of the story of the Exodus. Another idea is to ask a Jewish friend or rabbi to come and visit your school , scout group or Sunday school class and discuss the meanings of Hebrew traditions. You could arrange to have a few of the symbolic dishes made and let everyone have a little taste.

April

Earth Day, April 22

Arbor Day

Earth Day, April 22

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The first Earth Day was held in 1970. This holiday is intended to create an awareness of responsible stewardship of our fragile planet's resources.

Earth Day is a good time to make a donation or renew a membership to an environmental organization such as Defender's of Wildlife, Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy or the Sierra Club. There are numerous organizations to choose from but it is a good idea to check out the track record before you make a decision.

Another great idea to make a contribution to saving the planet is to write a letter to your congressional representative regarding some local environmental issue you would like to see solved.

Create a calendar that lists just one thing that can be done for each day of the year that will contribute to the preservation of the earth. That is 365 ideas. One a day. Give these away as gifts. Celebrate Planet Earth!

An educational and creative idea for children to build their awareness about protecting the earth's resources is to have them make a collage, drawing or poster about an endangered species they care about. Encourage the child to talk about this animal and maybe even help him or her to write to a agency in some other state or foreign country to find out what is being done to protect the animal and it's habitat. Some good examples include the panda, the manatee or the mountain gorilla. Where do these animals live and what can be done to save them from extinction?

Just think how thrilled your child will be when they receive a response in the mail. And it may even actually do some good for the animal.

Help with a petition drive, surf the Internet for information on how we can improve the quality of the air, water and lives of people and animals world-wide. Make a notebook and fill it with newspaper, magazine articles and notes regarding great ideas. Find out who in your area is a mover and a shaker in solving environmental problems. For instance, the Prairie Lady who lives near Milwaukee, Wisconsin was very influential in getting DDT banned. What did she do and how did she do it?

Invite an expert on the environment or endangered species to come and give a presentation to your club or church group and discuss how you can contribute to saving the planet.

Finally, one way to perhaps bring into focus the importance of being good stewards, is to just take the time to take a nature walk. Go out, take the kids, and stop, look and listen to the wonders of nature, even if it only takes you as far as your neighborhood park. Take the time to be intentional and teach your children about the choices you make. To do this will improve the chances for your children's children to enjoy what you may now take for granted.

For those who wish to learn more about this subject and what you can do to teach children more about environmental awareness there are two resources you can check out at the library or bookstore that are invaluable tools.

Arbor Day

Arbor Day is traditionally celebrated the last Friday in April. In many ways it involves many of the same ideals that are celebrated on Earth Day. J. Sterling Morton was successful in convincing state officials of Nebraska to plant trees because he noticed that there was significant soil erosion in his state. That was back in 1872! Because of his pioneering efforts he succeeded in getting more than ONE MILLION trees planted in that first year. Today Arbor Day is recognized all over the county and even in some other parts of the world.

The best way to celebrate Arbor Day is to plant a tree. But, before you start to dig one word of caution! It is important to know and understand where and what your are planting. It is best to consult a landscape architect or nursery before undertaking this project. Check and see if the local garden club or municipal park could use a donation for plantings. Sometimes it is possible to have trees planted in memory of a loved one. Well thought out planning is best for this project.

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July

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See:

[July 4, Independence Day](#)

July 4, Independence Day

Happy Birthday America! What are we really celebrating every July 4? For many this holiday has become just another three day week-end and a day for cookouts. It is on the 4th of July that we celebrate the day the American colonies declared their independence from England in the year 1776. Thomas Jefferson penned that famous document, the Declaration of Independence. It is a good idea that we refresh our memories at this special holiday of just what that document says. In Congress, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united State of America,
When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.-- We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,--

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness....

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

After reading the Declaration of Independence it might be fun to bring out the birthday cake - decorated in the fashion of the first American flag, red, white and blue. Use a regular 9" x 13" sheet cake and decorate using white icing, blueberry pie filling and strawberries. In Philadelphia at the second Continental Congress the 1st design for the American flag was adopted in 1777. It had thirteen stripes, alternating red and white, thirteen stars on a blue background which represented the thirteen colonies upon a blue background. The thirteen stars were arranged in a circle upon the blue field.

And finally another way to have fun and learn a little something at the same time is to make a trivia game up using facts about the fifty states such as state capitols, birds, flowers, trees, names of Presidents and so on. Use your imagination!

November

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See:

[Thanksgiving Day](#)

Thanksgiving Day

The idea of a Harvest Feast goes back to ancient times. The first American Thanksgiving was celebrated in 1621 at the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts. After the American Revolution President George Washington proclaimed November 26, 1789, Thanksgiving Day to honor the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and later in 1863 President Abraham Lincoln named the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day. It did not become an official national holiday until 1941 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt when Congress passed a special resolution declaring that Thanksgiving would be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November.

Today Thanksgiving has become a special family holiday when people come home to participate in the traditional Thanksgiving Day Dinner. It is a day for giving thanks for all our blessings and an excellent opportunity to share our bounty with others. Food donations are often stored up at this time for the needy and volunteers prepare holiday dinners for the homeless and less fortunate among us. Buy a few extra cans of food to donate to your local food bank when you do your grocery shopping this year.

Another way to share the spirit of the holiday is to invite a member of the Armed Forces who may be unable to go home and spend time with his or her family. Or if there is not a military base near your community you might think about paying a visit to a nursing home where there may be a few elderly patients without family nearby and share some of your time visiting these lonely folks. Holidays can be especially difficult for those without family members nearby.

Thanksgiving is also a time to remember the debt we owe native American Indians because without their unique knowledge of the environment and willingness to help those early European settlers things may have turned out many different. Teach children to respect the Indian traditions and discover what were some of the native American foodstuffs available to those early settlers. Include some of them in your own Thanksgiving dinner many of the traditional dishes we think of already represent some of them such as cranberries. Find out which others can be attributed to the Indians.

December

Hanukkah, A Festival of Light

December 25 Christmas Day

Kwanzaa December 26 through New Year's Day

Hanukkah, A Festival of Light

Hanukkah usually falls sometime during the month of December

Hanukkah, a Jewish festival, was first celebrated in the second century B.C.E. by Judah the Maccabee and his followers to mark the reconsecration of the Temple in Jerusalem after its recapture from the Syrian Greeks. This festival is held over eight days and nights to commemorate the miracle of the oil recorded in the Talmud regarding the rekindling of the Eternal Light in the temple. Jews celebrate by lighting candles each evening of the eight day festival beginning with one, then two and so on. The candles are arranged from right to left and a Menorah, a special candelabra, is used to hold the eight candles with an additional candle called the shamash. The eight candles represent faith, freedom, courage, love, charity, integrity, knowledge and peace.

This holiday provides an excellent opportunity to learn a few Hebrew phrases and learn a little Hebrew language. Make a game out of learning the meanings of the Hebrew alphabet.

The most popular Hanukkah game is known as the dreidel, which is a four sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side. Tradition says that when the Jews were forbidden to study the Torah under the Syrian Greek occupation the four-sided Greek top was used as decoy whenever the Syrian soldiers approached. It would appear that the gathering of the students was nothing more than a gathering over a game and not the studying the Torah.

December 25 Christmas Day

The traditional day to celebrate Christ's birth is December 25. It was not until after the 4th century A.D. that the tradition of celebrating Jesus' birth became associated with the winter solstice festivities. The Romans celebrated a feast dedicated to the Sun on December 25. The tradition of the 12 days of Christmas replaced the winter solstice celebrations that were observed between December 25 and January 6. Gift giving probably began sometime during the Middle Ages and was inspired by the account of the Magi who following the star to Bethlehem bearing gifts for the Christ child.

Every year it seems as though the Christmas rush begins earlier and becomes more frantic. If you would like to avoid the pitfalls of the last minute rush make a plan and stick to it. Instead of twelve shopping days of Christmas try adopting some less stressful and more meaningful traditions. Pick a special Christmas event such as attending a performance of Handel's "Messiah" or the Nutcracker Suite ballet by Tchaikovsky. Recycle old Christmas cards and wrapping paper and make your own Christmas tree decorations. Tape a homemade performance of the family singing Christmas carols and send it to friends and relatives instead of ringing up the balance on your credit cards.

Another way to remove the temptation of commercialism this year is to come up with a theme such as the Twelve Days of Christmas and a partridge in a pear tree and find ways of expressing the lyrics of the songs by creating gifts that symbolize a verse. Or if you are really brave tell your friends and family that you are planning to make a donation to a particular worthy cause in lieu of exchanging gifts this year. And give in their name. Sights, sound, smells and touch can provide a much more satisfying experience than another tie for Dad or another toy that will soon be forgotten. The true meaning of the season is love spread some around instead of rushing around.

Kwanzaa December 26 through New Year's Day

This is a cultural observance for black Americans or others of African descent. Mr. Maulana Karenga, a college professor, created the idea in the 1960's. Kwanzaa is Swahili and is translated to mean the first fruits of harvest. To celebrate Kwanzaa the family members gather together each day to discuss one of seven principles and for the lighting of a candle. A Kinara, which is a seven branched candleholder, symbolizes the continent and the peoples of Africa is used for this ceremony.

The seven principles which are the focus of this holiday are unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. These principles are elaborated by Mr. Karenga and are worthy ideals to practice not only for African Americans but people of all ethnic backgrounds. Simple observations of Kwanzaa include intimate family celebrations as well as community activities. The next to the last day of the holiday is marked by a feast, the Kwanzaa Karamu. This feast has a format of suggested activities including cultural expression through song, music, dance and unity circles and then moving into a more reflective stage referred to as Remembering. There is usually a guest speaker who makes a few remarks regarding reassessment and recommitment followed by a time of rejoicing. The festivities often continue late into the night.

A fun activity for young and old alike that can be used to celebrate Kuumba or creativity is to make some beads. Beads have long been a part of the African cultural heritage and their designs, patterns and colors often were expressions of a society's religion, social positions and politics. Beads are worn by a diverse spectrum of peoples throughout the African continent.

A simple mixture consisting of 2 cups flour, 1 cup of salt and 1 cup of water measure to make up the substance with which to form the beads. In addition you will need a large mixing bowl, measuring cup, toothpicks a cookie sheet and acrylic paints. You will also need shellac, paint brushes and string.

Primary colors as well as white brown and black will be a good start. To form the beads make small balls out of the flour and salt and water mixture and take a toothpick and pierce a hole through the center of the ball. The beads should be kept about 1/2" to 1" in diameter. Place beads on a cookie sheet and put into a 325 degree oven and bake until they are lightly brown. Remove from the oven and allow the beads to cool completely. Then paint them with the acrylic paints and let them dry overnight. Paint on shellac and allow to dry. The final step is to string the beads onto string thereby creating a necklace.

Acknowledgments

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Web Site

Please visit Cosmi's web site, www.cosmi.com for additional holiday activities which will be posted from time to time. As the purchaser of this program you are entitled to this update at no charge, except for Internet access charged by your Internet service provider. If you are not on the Internet please take a look at our special offer for Internet service.

