Thriving The Holidays

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE · 2026

THE HOST'S PLAYBOOK + PLANNER

Every Holiday, Handled



WELCOME

Hi, Friend. Let's Do This Right.

I cook it all myself. I have opinions. You're welcome.

I host. I cook the whole thing myself, turkey to pie, and I have done it with a newborn on my hip, a toddler under the table and a mother-in-law reading the stuffing recipe over my shoulder. Every tip in here was learned the hard way so you can learn it the easy way.

This is not a book of pretty blank pages. It's a playbook first and a planner second. Read the playbook pages in October, fill in the planner pages in November, and tape the run sheet inside a cabinet door on Thanksgiving morning.

How to use it

- **Shop smarter all year.** The calendar tells you what to buy when, so you stop paying full price in December for things that are half off in January.
- **Set the budget before the first click.** Then use the worksheet and gift tracker to keep it honest.
- **Buy decor once.** Investment pieces vs. fun accents, and how to store them so they survive to next year.
- **Host on a timeline.** One month out to the moment the gravy hits the boat.
- **Nail the turkey.** Thaw math, dry brine, the right temperatures and Martha's cheesecloth method.
- **Finish strong.** Pies that forgive you and viral recipes that earned the hype.

My three hosting laws

1. **Anything that can be made ahead, will be.** Day-of is for the turkey, the gravy and you.
2. **The oven is the bottleneck.** Plan it like an airport runway.
3. **Nobody remembers the napkin fold.** They remember that you were relaxed enough to sit down.

The real secret. Hosting isn't about doing everything perfectly. It's about doing the right things early, so you're relaxed when the doorbell rings.

A note on potluck. I cook the meal. If a guest begs to bring something, I hand them a side, a bottle or the rolls, and that's it. The menu planner has an optional spot for that.

What's inside

- Year-Round Shopping Calendar
- Sale Days Decoded
- The Budget That Actually Holds
- Budget Worksheet & Gift Tracker
- Decor That Doesn't Trend Out
- The Hosting Playbook
- Table Setting & the Drinks Station
- Oven & Stovetop Tetris
- The Fail-Safe Turkey (Parts 1 & 2)
- Martha's Tricks, Verified
- Foolproof Pies & Fall Desserts
- Viral Recipes Worth the Hype
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SECTION ONE · SHOP & BUDGET

Christmas Is a Twelve-Month Sport

When to buy what, how to read a sale, and a budget that holds when the cart gets heavy.

> *“ Not every red price tag is a deal. Some are just wearing lipstick.*

SHOP SMARTER

The Year-Round Shopping Calendar

Christmas is a twelve-month sport. Pace yourself.

MONTH	WHAT TO BUY, AND WHY NOW
January	After-Christmas clearance: wrapping paper, ribbon, tags, ornaments, lights, artificial greenery, storage bins. Linen and bedding sales often run this month too.
February–March	Quiet months. Inventory what broke, what you never used and what you ran out of. Write it on the Notes page now while you still remember.
April–May	Spring tableware and outdoor entertaining arrive. Good time for neutral platters, white serving bowls and glassware that work at every holiday.
June–July	Summer Prime Day (June 23–26 in 2026; it's been in July in past years) and the Christmas in July sales. Big-ticket gifts, kitchen appliances and the stocking-stuffer stockpile.
August	Back-to-school sales on electronics and organization. Buy the gift-wrap station bins and the label maker now.
September	Order personalized items (ornaments, stockings, monogrammed anything) before the queues get long. Start the gift list.
October	Prime Big Deal Days (October 6–7 in 2026). Early gifts, toys, decor and anything on your watch list. Order holiday cards.
November	Black Friday is November 27 and Cyber Monday is November 30, 2026. Electronics, toys, small appliances, beauty sets. Buy the turkey, and start the thaw on time.
December	Fill gaps, not carts. Watch carrier shipping cutoffs, shop local for last-minute gifts, and buy fresh greenery and flowers.

The stockpile shelf. Pick one closet shelf. Every on-sale gift, hostess gift and stocking stuffer goes there all year. In December you shop your own shelf first.

Christmas in July, decoded. Summer holiday promotions are a smart time for big gifts you already know they want, not for decor you haven't seen in person.

Keep these on the stockpile shelf all year

- Two or three hostess gifts (candles, pretty dish towels, good olive oil)
- Gift cards for teachers, coaches and the forgotten cousin
- Tape, tissue, tags and a neutral ribbon
- Batteries in every size
- Spare stocking stuffers: socks, lip balm, card games
- A few blank greeting cards and a nice pen

PRIME DAY · BLACK FRIDAY · CYBER MONDAY

Sale Days Decoded

Not every red price tag is a deal. Some are just wearing lipstick.

Summer Prime Day

In 2026 it ran June 23–26. Historically strong for Amazon's own devices, kitchen appliances, vacuums, and outdoor and patio. My move: the big-ticket gift I'd otherwise buy in November.

Prime Big Deal Days (October)

October 6–7 in 2026. The first real holiday-gift sale. Great for toys, beauty sets and early stocking stuffers, and for anything already on your watch list. Buy now and the item is crossed off before Thanksgiving.

Black Friday (Nov 27) & Cyber Monday (Nov 30)

Electronics, TVs, toys, small kitchen appliances and gift sets are where these days earn their reputation. Cyber Monday tends to lean online and toward tech and fashion. Holiday decor is often a better buy after December 25.

Worth buying on sale days

- Big-ticket gifts you've already researched
- Small appliances (stand mixer, air fryer, coffee maker)
- Toys on the kids' lists
- Beauty and grooming gift sets
- Storage and organization

Usually better another time

- Ornaments, wrap and ribbon: January clearance
- Fresh greenery: early December, locally
- Anything trendy you haven't seen in person
- Clothing that isn't on the list (it will be on sale again)

My Black Friday game plan

1. The week before: finalize the list, note each item's target price and check its price history.
2. Thanksgiving night: shop online from the couch in stretchy pants. No lines.
3. Friday morning: buy only what hits the target price, then close the app.
4. Cyber Monday: second chance for anything that didn't drop, especially tech.

Price-tracking like a pro

- **Add it to a list early.** Save items to an Amazon list so you can see when the price moves.
- **Check price history.** Free trackers such as camelcamelcamel and Keepa show past Amazon prices, so you know if a deal is actually low.
- **Screenshot the price** on the day you buy, in case the store offers a price adjustment. Policies vary, so read them.
- **Set a cap before the sale.** Write your target price on the gift tracker. If it isn't hit, you walk.
- **Watch the return window.** Holiday return windows are often extended. Know the date.

Sale-day rule of thumb. If it wasn't on your list on Monday, it isn't a deal on Friday. It's an impulse with a countdown clock.

BUDGET

The Budget That Actually Holds

A budget is just a gift list with boundaries.

Step 1: Set the number

Start with what you can pay off by January without flinching, not with what you spent last year. Write that number at the top of the worksheet before you open a single shopping app.

Step 2: Split it into categories

Gifts, Thanksgiving food, Christmas food, decor, wrap and cards, outfits, shipping, travel, and a small buffer. The buffer is not optional. Something always comes up: a surprise guest, a broken light string, a teacher you forgot.

Step 3: The envelope method

Give each category its own envelope, real or digital. Cash envelopes, a separate checking sub-account, or a gift card loaded with the gift budget all work. When the envelope is empty, that category is done. You may move money between envelopes once, on purpose, never by accident.

Step 4: Gift caps per person

Decide a cap for each person before you shop, and write it on the gift tracker. Kids can get one 'big' gift plus a handful of small ones. For big families, suggest a name draw or a family gift. Everyone secretly wants permission.

Step 5: Track as you go

Log every purchase the day you buy it, including shipping. The total climbs faster than you think, and the tracker keeps you from buying a third present for the person you already finished.

The family gift talk, scripted

- “This year we're doing a name draw so everyone gets one really good gift. Who's in?”
- “We're focusing on time together, so we're keeping gifts small.”
- “Kids only this year. Adults get my famous cookies.”

Ways to stretch it

- Shop the January clearance for next year's wrap and decor.
- Buy hostess and teacher gifts in multiples.
- Bake a gift: a loaf of cranberry bread in a pretty tin.
- Make one of the stockings a 'consumables only' stocking: favorite snacks, socks, batteries.
- Unsubscribe from store emails from December 1 to 26. Out of sight, out of cart.

Mom math. If you'd have to hide the receipt, it's not in the budget.

PLANNER

Holiday Budget Worksheet

Write it in pen. Pencil is how budgets escape.

TOTAL HOLIDAY BUDGET	TOTAL SPENT	LEFT OVER

CATEGORY	BUDGETED	SPENT	DIFFERENCE	ENVELOPE EMPTY?
Gifts				
Thanksgiving food & drinks				
Christmas food & drinks				
Decor & greenery				
Tableware & linens				
Wrapping & cards				
Outfits & pajamas				
Shipping				
Teacher & hostess gifts				
Travel				
Buffer				
Total				

PLANNER

Christmas Gift List Tracker

Know the person. Find the present. Hide it somewhere you will remember.

NAME	GIFT IDEA	CAP	TARGET PRICE	BOUGHT	WRAPPED



SECTION TWO · DECOR

Decor That Doesn't Trend Out

Invest in the classics, have fun with the accents, and store it all so it survives to next December.

> *“ Buy the bones once. Rent the trends from the clearance aisle.*

DECOR

Decor That Doesn't Trend Out to the Dumpster

Buy the bones once. Rent the trends from the clearance aisle.

Invest here (you'll use it for 20 years)

- **A good tree.** Real or artificial, choose the shape and height that fit your room. Pre-lit is convenient; unlit is easier to repair.
- **Classic ornaments.** Glass balls in a tight palette, heirloom-style pieces, and ones with meaning. Start with a few good ones and add each year.
- **Neutral serving pieces.** White platters, a large wood board, a cake stand, a gravy boat. They work at every holiday.
- **Real linens.** A tablecloth and cloth napkins in white, cream or a classic plaid.
- **Brass or silver candlesticks.** They never go out of style, and they get better with age.
- **Quality stockings and a tree skirt** that you'll keep for the kids' kids.

Have fun here (cheap, cheerful, swappable)

- Ribbon and bows in the color of the year
- Trendy ornaments in the 'it' shape or color
- Throw pillow covers (keep the inserts, swap the covers)
- Faux florals and picks for the centerpiece
- Paper goods, crackers and table favors

The 80/20 rule. Keep about 80% timeless and 20% trendy. The timeless part makes it look expensive. The trendy part makes it look current.

A palette that lasts

Pick two main colors and one metal and stick to them for the core pieces. Red, green and brass. Blue, white and silver. Cream, evergreen and gold. Your old pieces will always work with the new ones.

Storage that saves next year

- Label bins by room, not by holiday: *Mantel*, *Tree*, *Front Porch*, *Table*.
- Wrap glass ornaments in tissue and store them in divided ornament boxes or egg cartons.
- Wind lights around a piece of cardboard and test them before they go in the bin.
- Store wreaths in round wreath bags; hang garland in a hanging bag, not crushed in a tote.
- Take a photo of each finished setup and tape it inside the lid. Future you will cry with gratitude.
- Toss broken pieces now. Do not pack your problems for next year.

Buy it after Christmas. Lights, wrap, ribbon and many ornaments are deeply discounted after December 25. Shop with your photo and your palette in hand.



SECTION THREE · HOSTING

Host Like You've Done It for Twenty Years

Make-ahead timelines, a table guests can actually see across, a drinks station that runs itself, and an oven plan that holds up.

> *“ Day-of is for the turkey, the gravy and you. Everything else gets done early.*

HOSTING

The Hosting Playbook: Make-Ahead Timeline

Day-of is for the turkey, the gravy and you. Everything else gets done early.

1 month out

- [ ] Finalize guest count and menu.
- [ ] Order or reserve the turkey.
- [ ] Count chairs, plates, glasses and silverware. Borrow or buy now.
- [ ] Make and freeze pie dough and stock.
- [ ] Plan the oven schedule (page ahead).

2 weeks out

- [ ] Shop non-perishables, drinks and pantry staples.
- [ ] Make and freeze rolls or cookie dough.
- [ ] Clean out the fridge and freezer.
- [ ] Wash or press linens; polish candlesticks.
- [ ] Do a test run of any new recipe.

3 days out

- [ ] Fresh-produce shop.
- [ ] Dry-brine the turkey (thawed) and refrigerate uncovered.
- [ ] Make cranberry sauce; it keeps well in the fridge.
- [ ] Set the table and cover it with a clean sheet.
- [ ] Chill white wine and sparkling drinks.

Day before

- [ ] Bake pies.
- [ ] Assemble casseroles and mashed potatoes to reheat.
- [ ] Cube and dry bread for stuffing; chop vegetables.
- [ ] Set out serving dishes with sticky-note labels and serving spoons.
- [ ] Set up the drinks station.

Day of

- [ ] Turkey out of the fridge about an hour before roasting.
- [ ] Roast; rest at least 30 minutes while sides reheat.
- [ ] Make gravy from the drippings.
- [ ] Light candles 15 minutes before guests arrive.
- [ ] Sit down. Eat. Accept compliments.

The sticky-note trick. The day before, set out every serving dish with a sticky note naming what goes in it. You'll catch the missing platter on Wednesday, not at 4:55 on Thursday.

HOSTING

Setting the Table & the Drinks Station

Guests should see each other over the centerpiece. I will die on this hill.

The basic place setting

- Dinner plate in the center, napkin on the plate or to the left.
- Forks to the left, knife (blade facing the plate) and spoon to the right.
- Water glass above the knife; wine glass to its right.
- Dessert fork or spoon horizontally above the plate, if you're feeling fancy.
- Bread plate above the forks.

The centerpiece rules

- Keep it low: below eye level when seated.
- Greenery first, then candles, then accents like cranberries or small pumpkins.
- Flameless taper candles are a good choice near kids, sleeves and long reaches.
- Leave space for the platters if you serve family style.

Mix, don't match

Mismatched plates look collected when you repeat a color or a pattern family. Keep the napkins and glassware consistent and let the plates have fun.

The 10-second napkin

Fold the napkin in thirds lengthwise, lay it on the plate, tuck a sprig of rosemary or a name card under it. Done. Nobody has ever left a party talking about a swan.

Kids' table, done right

Kraft paper as a tablecloth, crayons in a jar, and real plates. They'll feel invited, not exiled.

The drinks station

Put it far from the kitchen. That keeps the traffic out of your way while you cook.

- [ ] Ice bucket and tongs (plus a backup bag of ice in the freezer)
- [ ] One batched cocktail or zero-proof spritz in a pitcher or dispenser
- [ ] Wine opener, a few wine choices, and sparkling water
- [ ] Glasses, napkins and a small trash bin nearby
- [ ] Garnish: orange slices, rosemary, sugared cranberries
- [ ] A sign or tag so people help themselves

Batch it. One batched drink means you're not playing bartender all night. Make the base the day before and add the sparkling part when guests arrive.

How much to have on hand

Plan generously on ice, water and non-alcoholic options. Running out of ice is the classic host fail.

HOSTING

Oven & Stovetop Tetris

One oven, eleven dishes and a turkey the size of a toddler. Let's plan.

- **The turkey owns the oven** until it comes out to rest. The 30+ minute rest is your window to reheat sides at a higher temperature.
- **Pick one reheat temperature** (about 350°F) and make your casseroles work at it.
- **Use the other appliances.** Slow cooker for mashed potatoes, stovetop for gravy and green beans, microwave for reheating, and a toaster oven for rolls.
- **Spatchcock if you have one oven.** A flattened bird cooks faster and frees the oven sooner (Martha recommends it for single-oven hosts).
- **Bake pies the day before.** Never compete with the turkey for oven space.
- **Serve some things at room temperature.** Cranberry sauce, salads, the butter board, rolls.

My oven & stovetop schedule

TIME	OVEN (TEMP)	STOVETOP	OTHER (SLOW COOKER, MICROWAVE)



SECTION FOUR · THE BIRD

The Fail-Safe Turkey

Thaw it on time, brine it dry, trust the thermometer and let it rest. That's the whole secret, and the next pages cover every step.

> *The turkey is never the problem. Forgetting to thaw it is.*

TURKEY

The Fail-Safe Turkey, Part 1: Thaw & Brine

The turkey is never the problem. Forgetting to thaw it is.

Thawing math (refrigerator)

Allow about **24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds** in a fridge at 40°F or below (USDA). Keep it in its wrapper on a rimmed tray on the bottom shelf. Never thaw on the counter.

TURKEY WEIGHT	FRIDGE THAW TIME	FOR THANKSGIVING NOV 26, 2026, START BY
4–12 lb	1 to 3 days	Friday, Nov 20
12–16 lb	3 to 4 days	Thursday, Nov 19
16–20 lb	4 to 5 days	Wednesday, Nov 18
20–24 lb	5 to 6 days	Tuesday, Nov 17

Start dates add a one-day cushion to the longest thaw time, plus two days to dry-brine after thawing.

Behind schedule? USDA's cold-water method: submerge the turkey in its wrapper in cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes, about 30 minutes per pound. Cook it right away after thawing.

How big a turkey?

USDA suggests about 1 pound of whole turkey per person. Go to about 1½ pounds per person if you want leftovers (you want leftovers). Over 20 pounds? Consider two smaller birds; they cook faster and more evenly.

Dry brine: the easiest upgrade

A dry brine is just salt (and seasonings) rubbed on the turkey and left to sit in the fridge. The salt draws out moisture, dissolves into it and is reabsorbed, seasoning the meat and helping the skin crisp. No bucket, no sloshing gallons of salt water.

- **When:** 1 to 3 days before roasting, once the turkey is fully thawed.
- **How much:** a common guideline is about 1 tablespoon of Diamond Crystal kosher salt per 5 pounds of turkey (use a bit less if your salt is Morton, which is saltier by volume).
- **Add-ins:** black pepper, dried thyme or sage, lemon zest. Keep sugar light, as it browns fast.
- **How:** pat dry, rub salt all over and under the breast skin, set on a rack over a tray, and refrigerate uncovered so the skin dries.
- **Don't rinse** before roasting; just pat dry. (Food-safety agencies advise against rinsing raw poultry.)

Don't double-salt. Pre-brined, kosher or 'enhanced' turkeys already contain salt. Skip the dry brine or go very light, and check the label.

TURKEY

The Fail-Safe Turkey, Part 2: Roast, Temp, Rest

A thermometer is cheaper than therapy. Buy one.

The only temperature that matters: 165°F

USDA says turkey is safe when a food thermometer reads **165°F** in the innermost part of the thigh, the innermost part of the wing, and the thickest part of the breast. If your turkey has a pop-up timer, still use an instant-read or leave-in probe thermometer and avoid touching bone.

- Check the breast and the thigh. The breast usually gets there first.
- Many cooks like the thigh a bit higher for tender dark meat; the breast is juiciest pulled right at 165°F.
- Stuffing cooked inside the bird must also reach 165°F. Baking it in a separate dish is easier and safer.

Resting

Rest the turkey at least 30 minutes, loosely tented with foil, before carving. Juices settle, carving gets easier, and you get a half hour of oven time for sides and a stovetop for gravy.

Martha Stewart's cheesecloth method

Martha's signature roast turkey is covered with cheesecloth soaked in melted butter and dry white wine. The cloth bastes the bird continuously, shields the breast from direct heat so it stays moist, and lets the skin brown beautifully.

1. Melt unsalted butter and combine with a dry white wine.
2. Fold cheesecloth into a four-layer square big enough to cover the breast and halfway down the sides. Soak it in the butter-wine mixture.
3. Rub the turkey with soft butter, season, and drape the soaked cloth over the breast.
4. Roast legs first at a high temperature (her classic recipe starts at 450°F) for 30 minutes, then reduce to 350°F.
5. Brush the cloth and exposed skin with the butter-wine every 30 minutes.
6. Remove the cloth for the last stretch so the skin turns deep golden, and keep basting with pan juices.
7. Check the temperature, rest at least 30 minutes, and carve.

No cheesecloth? Martha has said a clean cotton T-shirt works in a pinch, and buttered parchment is her other option. Take parchment off about 30 minutes before the turkey is done so the skin can crisp.

Gravy gold. Martha's tip: pour white wine or Champagne into the bottom of the roasting pan for the most delicious drippings.

MARTHA STEWART

Martha's Tricks, Verified

She's been teaching America to host since the '80s. I take notes.

Only the real ones, all from Martha Stewart herself on TODAY and MarthaStewart.com. No 'Martha probably said' nonsense.

1. **Cheesecloth or buttered parchment over the turkey**
   Keeps the meat moist while the skin browns. If you use parchment, remove it about 30 minutes before the bird is done so the skin can crisp.

2. **A clean cotton T-shirt subs for cheesecloth**
   Out of cheesecloth? She's said a clean cotton T-shirt works just fine.

3. **Foil on the drumsticks**
   If the legs start to brown too fast after about an hour, cover them with a little foil.

4. **Truss the bird**
   Tying the legs keeps everything together, so the legs don't spread out and overcook.

5. **Spatchcock when you have one oven**
   Removing the backbone flattens the bird, so it cooks faster and takes up less oven room, which matters when pies and sides need it too.

6. **Wine in the roasting pan for gravy**
   White wine or Champagne in the bottom of the pan makes the best drippings.

7. **Cold dough, hot oven for pie crust**
   Make the dough cold and bake it hot for her perfect pie crust.

8. **Parchment on the counter for raw turkey**
   Work on a sheet of parchment, then crumple it up and toss it with all the raw juices. Use a separate board for vegetables and bread.

9. **Paper towels, not cloth, for turkey juices**
   Wipe raw poultry juices with paper towels and toss them, so nothing spreads around the kitchen.

10. **Make scalloped potatoes the day before**
    Martha calls them one of her favorite Thanksgiving dishes, and says they can be made a day ahead.

11. **Pecan pie a few hours ahead**
    Pecan pie needs time to cool and set, so bake it several hours ahead (or the day before).

Where I part ways. Martha has said she still dips her turkey in a vinegar-water rinse, but food-safety agencies advise against rinsing raw poultry, and I follow them. Her classic recipe also takes the thigh to 180°F, while USDA's safe minimum is 165°F. Higher is fine for dark meat; just keep an eye on the breast.



SECTION FIVE · DESSERTS

Save Room for the Showstopper

Pies that can be made days ahead, crusts that behave, and a lattice that actually holds.

> *“ Dessert is a performance. Give it a stage, and give yourself a head start.*

DESSERTS

Foolproof Pies & Fall Desserts

Dessert is a performance. Give it a stage, and give yourself a head start.

Pumpkin pie

Why it's foolproof: it's a custard that sets as it cools, and canned pumpkin is consistent every time. Done when the edges are set and the center still jiggles slightly; it firms up as it cools. Make ahead: bake 1 day ahead and refrigerate. Cracks? Whipped cream was invented for this.

Pecan pie

Why it's foolproof: a simple filling, no fruit to weep, and very forgiving. It needs hours to cool and set, so it practically demands to be made early. Make ahead: bake the day before; store at room temperature or chilled. Tent the crust with foil if it browns too fast.

Apple crisp or crumble

Why it's foolproof: no crust to roll, crimp or shrink. Fruit on the bottom, buttery oat topping on top, bake until bubbly. Make ahead: assemble and refrigerate the day before, or freeze the topping weeks ahead. Reheat and serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

Cranberry curd tart

Why it's foolproof: a press-in crust and a stovetop curd. The color does all the showing off. Make ahead: the curd keeps a few days in the fridge; the tart is best made the day before and topped with whipped cream and sugared cranberries just before serving.

Slab pie

Why it's foolproof: baked in a sheet pan, it feeds a crowd and there's no fussy edge to perfect. Make ahead: bake the day before. Cut into squares at the table like a hero.

Cheesecake (pumpkin or classic)

Why it's foolproof: it must chill overnight, so it can only be made ahead. Make ahead: 1 to 2 days. A water bath and a slow cool-down in the turned-off oven help prevent cracks, and a topping covers any that happen.

Crust insurance

- Keep everything cold: butter, water, even the bowl. Cold dough, hot oven (thanks, Martha).
- Make dough ahead and freeze it, well wrapped. Thaw in the fridge overnight.
- Chill the shaped crust 30 minutes before baking to reduce shrinking.
- Blind-bake for custard pies to avoid a soggy bottom; use pie weights or dried beans.
- No shame in a good store-bought crust. Crimp it yourself and nobody will know.

Pie timeline. Two days before: crisp topping and curd. Day before: bake all pies and the cheesecake. Day of: whip the cream. That's it.

RECIPES

Viral Recipes Worth the Hype

I tested the internet so you don't have to. These four earned their views.

Tini's Mac and Cheese

Tineke "Tini" Younger (@tinekeyounger on TikTok)

Her holiday mac and cheese tutorial went viral in November 2023 and again in 2024, when her updated video passed 100 million views. Cavatappi, a roux with evaporated milk and heavy cream, Dijon, smoked paprika, and freshly shredded mozzarella, Colby Jack and sharp cheddar, layered and baked, then broiled.

Worth it? Yes. It's rich, creamy and crowd-proof. The catch: you shred all the cheese yourself, no negotiation. Do that the day before.

As featured by: Allrecipes; TODAY

The Butter Board

Justine Doiron (@justinesnacks), from an idea by chef Joshua McFadden

Softened butter swirled on a board, topped with flaky salt, lemon zest, herbs, honey and more, served with bread. It went viral in fall 2022. Doiron credits McFadden, whose cookbook *Six Seasons* featured the idea.

Worth it? Yes, as an appetizer that takes 10 minutes. Holiday version: honey, rosemary, flaky salt and chopped dried cranberries. Provide knives; not everyone wants to swipe.

As featured by: The Kitchn; The Pioneer Woman; Food Network

Ina Garten's Make-Ahead Roast Turkey and Gravy

Ina Garten (from *Make It Ahead*, 2014; in NYT Cooking)

Roast the turkey early in the day, carve it, arrange the slices on a layer of gravy on an oven-to-table platter, then reheat it all before dinner. No last-minute carving under pressure.

Worth it? Absolutely, for hosts who cook everything. Your oven is free when the sides need it, and the turkey stays moist in the gravy.

As featured by: NYT Cooking

Martha Stewart's Cheesecloth Turkey

Martha Stewart (MarthaStewart.com)

Her signature butter-and-wine-soaked cheesecloth turkey, a fixture of her Thanksgivings for years, and the subject of decades of TV demos.

Worth it? Yes, if you want a show-stopping, golden bird and don't mind basting every 30 minutes. See the turkey pages.

As featured by: MarthaStewart.com; TODAY

Viral-recipe rule. Test it once before the holiday. The internet is great at pretty and terrible at warning you it takes four hours.

PLANNER

Thanksgiving Menu Planner

My kitchen, my menu. Guests can bring their appetite.

DATE	DINNER TIME	HEADCOUNT	TURKEY WEIGHT

Starters & drinks

DISH	RECIPE SOURCE	MAKE-AHEAD DAY	OVEN TEMP / TIME	SERVING DISH

The turkey (and gravy)

DISH	RECIPE SOURCE	MAKE-AHEAD DAY	OVEN TEMP / TIME	SERVING DISH

Sides

DISH	RECIPE SOURCE	MAKE-AHEAD DAY	OVEN TEMP / TIME	SERVING DISH

Breads & condiments

DISH	RECIPE SOURCE	MAKE-AHEAD DAY	OVEN TEMP / TIME	SERVING DISH

Desserts

DISH	RECIPE SOURCE	MAKE-AHEAD DAY	OVEN TEMP / TIME	SERVING DISH

Optional: if a guest insists on bringing something (sides, rolls, wine, ice only)

PLANNER

Guest List & Seating

Seat the talkers next to the listeners. Seat the in-laws next to the wine.

GUEST	RSVP	DIETARY NOTES / ALLERGIES	SEAT	OPTIONAL: BRINGING

TOTAL ADULTS	TOTAL KIDS	CHAIRS NEEDED	KIDS' TABLE?

PLANNER

Thanksgiving Day Run Sheet

Tape this inside a cabinet door. Cross things off with a flourish.

TIME	OVEN	STOVETOP / PREP	ME (AND HELPERS)
8:00 a.m.			
9:00			
10:00			
11:00			
12:00 p.m.			
1:00			
2:00			
3:00			
4:00			
5:00			
6:00			
7:00			
After dinner			

- ☐ Thermometer clean and batteries checked
- ☐ Carving knife sharpened
- ☐ Ice in the freezer
- ☐ Dishwasher empty before guests arrive
- ☐ Leftover containers ready
- ☐ Candles and a lighter on the table

PLANNER

Christmas To-Do Checklist

Keep the magic. Lose the marathon.

Early December

- [ ] Choose this year's look (with your palette)
- [ ] Test lights before they go on the tree
- [ ] Order Christmas cards
- [ ] Book family photos
- [ ] Set up the wrap station
- [ ] Confirm the budget and gift caps

Mid December

- [ ] Mail cards
- [ ] Ship out-of-town gifts before carrier cutoffs
- [ ] Buy teacher and hostess gifts
- [ ] Plan the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day menus
- [ ] Make and freeze cookie dough
- [ ] Order the roast or ham

The final stretch

- [ ] Wrap everything (yes, tonight)
- [ ] Grocery shop for the big meal
- [ ] Lay out matching pajamas
- [ ] Charge the phone and camera
- [ ] Batteries for the toys
- [ ] Sit down. Have a cookie.

Christmas Eve menu

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

Christmas Day menu

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

My extras

- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

PLANNER

Notes for Next Year

Future you will thank present you. Write it down while it's fresh.

What worked beautifully this year

What I'll never do again

Recipes to keep (and where they came from)

Next year I'll buy in January

Who loved what (gifts, dishes, drinks)