

# Living Well in Bradford County

## Dear Extension Friend:

December 2007

The year is just about over, just one more month left. I want to take the opportunity to wish all of you a wonderful holiday season and a great new year. In this month's newsletter I will discuss the possible hidden dangers of holiday decorations in both the *Children* and *House & Home* sections. In my *Food Safety* section I give you tips on what to watch out for when purchasing mail order food gifts. *Money Matters* discusses the security of shopping online during the holiday season. Last, but certainly not least, I included an article on grieving

at the holidays. So many of us get caught up in the celebration and the parties we forget about those who may be grieving the loss of a loved one at this time of year. Holidays can become very depressing for some people. If you, or someone you love, are grieving this holiday season I hope you read the *Healthy Lifestyles* article on page 3 and are able to adapt one or more of the

tips on coping with the holidays. If you have any suggestions for future topics or questions for me please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Melanie Thomas  
FCS Agent  
Bradford County  
Phone: (904) 966-6224  
Email: mlthomas@ufl.edu



## Inside this issue:

## Children: Holiday Dangers

Holidays are a time of excitement for children. The anticipation of Santa coming and bringing all the gifts can be a little overwhelming for little Suzie. Instead of nestling snug in her bed, she may be bouncing off the walls. With any luck, she won't try and eat the mistletoe. When sharing family traditions, be alert to potential dangers and take steps to keep your children safe.

### Choking hazards

Seasonal decorations can pose a choking hazard. Many Christmas tree ornaments have parts of metal hooks, which can be broken off and swallowed. Instead of hooks, you may want to use short hangers. Extension cords and light strings can strangle children. Do your best to keep these out of their reach. Do not allow younger children to play with older children's

toys. Age recommendations are set for a reason. Be sure toys intended for infants and younger children do not have small parts that can be broken off and swallowed. When wrapping gifts for the younger ones avoid ribbon and small decorations. Holiday foods, like popcorn, nuts and candy canes also cause younger children to choke.

### Fire dangers

If you use candles in your holiday decorating please remember to keep them away from children and never leave the room unattended. Never leave matches or lighters where children can get to them.

### Potential poisonings

The biggest rule of thumb is to remember that unless an object is labeled as food or drink it should NOT be in a child's mouth. Plants often found at the holiday time that can cause dan-

ger to a child are: Christmas cactus, ivy, holly and mistletoe berries. Baking ingredients such as vanilla and almond extract, as well as the obvious alcoholic eggnog, can also poison children. During the holidays, many families have guests in their home. If your guests use medications, store pill containers out of children's reach. Also, when visiting others, remember their homes may not be "child proof" so make sure you watch what your child may or may not be getting into. For more information on keeping your children safe at the holidays contact the local Extension office at 904-966-6224.

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## Food Safety: Mail Order Foods

As many working American families are busier than ever, it is no wonder that many families are turning to food gift catalogs or Internet sites whether for perfect holiday treats or to mark a special occasion. While mail order operators have a good food safety record, the [USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service \(USDA/FSIS\)](#) offers food safety tips to help buyers and consumers determine if their perishable foods have been properly handled.

Be familiar with the temperature danger zone, which is between 40 and 140°F; in this temperature range, dangerous bacteria can grow fast and can cause foods to be unsafe to eat. Invest in a food ther-

момeter so that if you receive a perishable food you can check the temperature upon arrival.

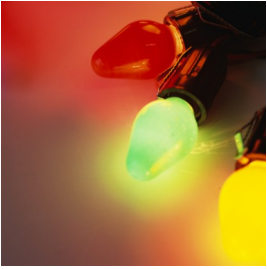
When you order or receive a perishable food package make sure that the company sends perishable items such as meat or poultry cold or frozen and packed with cooling materials. The package should be well insulated. Make sure that the perishable food is shipped fast (ideally overnight) and that it has proper labeling. "If you receive a package labeled as "Keep Refrigerated" you should open it right away, and check the temperature of the product. Frozen foods should arrive frozen or partially frozen with ice crystals still visible.

If a perishable product arrives in your home warm, notify the company. Do not consume the food or even taste suspect food. Taking these precautions can help you and your family enjoy the gift of food. For more information on food safety at the holidays contact the Extension office at 904-259-3520.

Source: *Simonne and Bobroff, University of Florida*



## House & Home: Holiday Decorating Safely



It's that time of year again to dress your home from top to bottom in festive holiday colors. Before you crawl up on the roof to string the Christmas lights, you need to know that every year hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,500 people for injuries related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees according to the U.S. Consumer

Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

Statistics show that Christmas trees alone are responsible for approximately 300 fires, 10 deaths and 30 injuries annually averaging \$10 million in property damage. In addition, holiday candles have been linked to 13,000 fires, resulting in 140 deaths and \$205 million in property damage and loss. The flickering lights can be beautiful to look at if done safely. The CPSC has compiled the following list of tips to help keep your holiday season safe and beautiful.

### Trees:

When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree is more resistant to burning.

When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and do not break when bent between your fingers. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.

When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways.

### Lights:

Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, such as UL or ETL. This indicates conformance with safety standards. Use only lights that have plugs containing fuses.

Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Throw out damaged sets. Always replace burned-out bulbs promptly with the same wattage bulbs.

If using an extension cord, make sure it is rated for the in-

tended use.

Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.

Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use.

Stay away from power or feeder lines leading from utility poles into older homes.

Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples (not nails or tacks) to hold strings in place. Or, run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores). Turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Use caution when removing outdoor holiday lights. Never pull or tug on lights – this could cause stress on the connections that could create a fire hazard.

Outdoor electric lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to protect against electric shock. Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold. GFCIs can also be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.

### Candles and Other Decorations:

Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.

Keep burning candles within sight.

Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens.

Always use non-flammable holders, and place candles out of reach of children and pets.

In homes with small children, take special care to avoid sharp or breakable decorations, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children who could swallow or inhale small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.

To avoid eye and skin irritation, wear gloves when decorating with spun glass "angel hair."

To avoid lung irritation, follow container directions carefully while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Source: [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)

## Healthy Lifestyles: Grieving At The Holidays

People usually think of the holiday season as festive and joyful, but if you or someone you know has lost a loved one, this time may be lonely and painful. Even memories of happy events—traditional dishes you always prepare for holiday meals, favorite movies you watch, decorating you usually do together—can remind you of your loved one and bring sadness and longing. You may feel out of sorts and alone while everyone else seems to be celebrating. Bereavement can be a roller coaster of emotions at any time, but these feelings may be intensified during the holiday season.

Several experts on bereavement offer guidelines for those who are grieving, to help them make it through the holidays.

1) Make choices about what you can do and want to do. Be with the people you want to be with, when you can. It may be helpful to remember the loved one in a special way, rather than trying to forget your times together. For instance, you can light a candle, prepare a favorite dish, or create a special memorial decoration or ornament. This not only honors the person you have lost but can “bring a positive focus to our grief” (Doka, 2006, p.1). However, if traditions are too painful, find other ways to celebrate. For example, instead of decorating a tree in-

doors, put out seed ornaments for birds (Harvard Women’s Health Watch, 2002). If it is too difficult to be at home, take a trip. Although these changes won’t do away with your grief, they may lessen the pain.



2) Communicate with others about what you want and need to do. Talk with family members about how to mark the holidays. Let others know that you might not be able to do what you usually do, and change your plans if you need to. Tell others if you need a shoulder to cry on or time alone. Accept your feelings. Cry if you need to and let others know that they can express their feelings and memories too (Harvard Women’s Health Watch, 2002).

3) Reach out to others and get the support you need. Sharing your grief may ease the pain. Many people find a support group helpful, or talk to someone they can trust. Appreciate your family members who are there for you and need you, too (Tatelbaum, 2006).

4) Take care of yourself. Eat healthy food, get the rest you need, and exercise. All these health promotion strategies will not only help you feel better but will also help you cope with stress.

5) Help someone else. Volunteer to help people in need—at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, in a school, or through your place of worship. Ask someone who is alone to join you for a meal or activity. If you have lost a loved one, the holidays may be difficult, perhaps the most painful period of your grieving. However, these days and nights will pass, and you can survive.

Source: Smith, University of Florida

## Events for December:



Did you know?

The abbreviation for Christmas is of Greek origin. The word for Christ in Greek is *Xristos*. During the 16th century, Europeans began using the first initial of Christ’s name, “X” in place of the word Christ in Christmas as a shorthand form of the word. Although the early Christians understood that X stood for Christ’s name, later Christians who did not understand the Greek language mistook “Xmas” as a sign of disrespect. The Greek letter “X” is the equivalent of CH and is also a symbol of Christ which explains the spelling “XMAS”.



Did you know?

Kwanzaa is a unique African American celebration with focus on the traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement. Kwanzaa is neither political nor religious and despite some misconceptions, is not a substitute for Christmas. It is simply a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors and culture. Kwanzaa, which means “first fruits of the harvest” in the African American language Kiswahili, has gained tremendous acceptance and is celebrated by an estimated 18 million worldwide.



Did you know?

One of the best known symbols of Hanukkah is the Dreidel. A dreidel is a four sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side. The four letters are SHIN, HEY, GIMEL and NUN. The letters mean “A Great Miracle Happened There.” In Israel the dreidel is a bit different in that the letters mean “A Miracle Happened HERE!” Players use pennies, nuts, raisins, or chocolate coins (gelt) as tokens or chips. The player spins the dreidel. When the dreidel stops, the letter that is facing up decides the fate. NUN—nothing happens, next player spins. GIMEL—player takes all tokens in the pot. HEY—player takes half the pot. SHIN— player must put one token into the pot.

**University of Florida  
Bradford County Extension Service  
2266 North Temple Avenue  
Starke, FL 32091**

Phone: (904) 966-6224  
Fax: (904) 964-9283  
Email: mlthomas@ufl.edu

## **ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

Extension programs are open to all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, handicap, or national origin. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person needing a special accommodation to participate in any activity, should contact the Bradford County Cooperative Extension Service at 2266 North Temple Avenue, Starke, FL 32091 or telephone (904) 966-6224 no later than seven (7) days prior to the event. Hearing impaired persons can access the foregoing telephone by contacting the Florida Relay Service at 1-800-955-8770 (voice) or 1-800-955-8771 (TDD).

## **Money Matters: Online Shopping Security**

Tis the season for holiday crowds and madness. Are you one of those who loves getting right in the middle of the craziness at the malls during this time of year? Believe it or not, many people love jumping into the holiday hustle and bustle, but many would rather run and hide when it comes to shopping at the holiday season. Experts are predicting that consumers will spend more money shopping online this season than ever before. However, if you're not careful the process can turn into a nightmare from beginning to end. Follow the tips below to help protect yourself from holiday hackers, identity thieves and spammers.

### **Check out the seller**

If it's your first time on an unfamiliar site, call the seller's phone number, so you know you can reach them. If you can't find a working phone number, take your business elsewhere. Read the site's privacy policy to learn how it uses and shares your personal information.

### **Read return policies**

Despite your best intentions, some gifts may need to be returned or exchanged. Before you buy, read the return policy. Some retailers give customers extra time so gifts can be returned or exchanged after the holidays; others give purchasers as little as a week — if they accept returns at all.

### **Know what you're getting**

Read the seller's product description closely. Name-brand items at greatly reduced prices could be counterfeit.

### **Don't fall for a false email or pop-up**

Legitimate companies don't send unsolicited email messages asking for your password or login name, or your financial in-

formation. But scammers do. In fact, crooks often send emails that look just like they're from legitimate companies — but direct you to click on a link, where they ask for your personal information. Delete these emails.

### **Look for signs a site is safe**

When you're ready to buy something from a seller you trust, look for signs that the site is secure, such as a closed padlock on the browser's status bar, before you enter your personal and financial information. When you're asked to provide payment information, the beginning of the Web site's URL address should change from http to https, indicating that the purchase is encrypted or secured.

### **Secure your computer**

At a minimum, your computer should have anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and a firewall. Security software must be updated regularly to help protect against the latest threats.

### **Consider how you'll pay**

Credit cards generally are a safe option because they allow buyers to seek a credit from the issuer if the product isn't delivered or isn't what was ordered. Also, if your credit card number is stolen, you generally won't be liable for more than \$50 in charges. Don't send cash or use a money-wiring service because you'll have no recourse if something goes wrong.

### **Keep a paper trail**

Print and save records of your online transactions, including the product description and price, the online receipt, and copies of any email you exchange with the seller. Read your credit card statements as soon as you get them to make sure there aren't any unauthorized charges.