

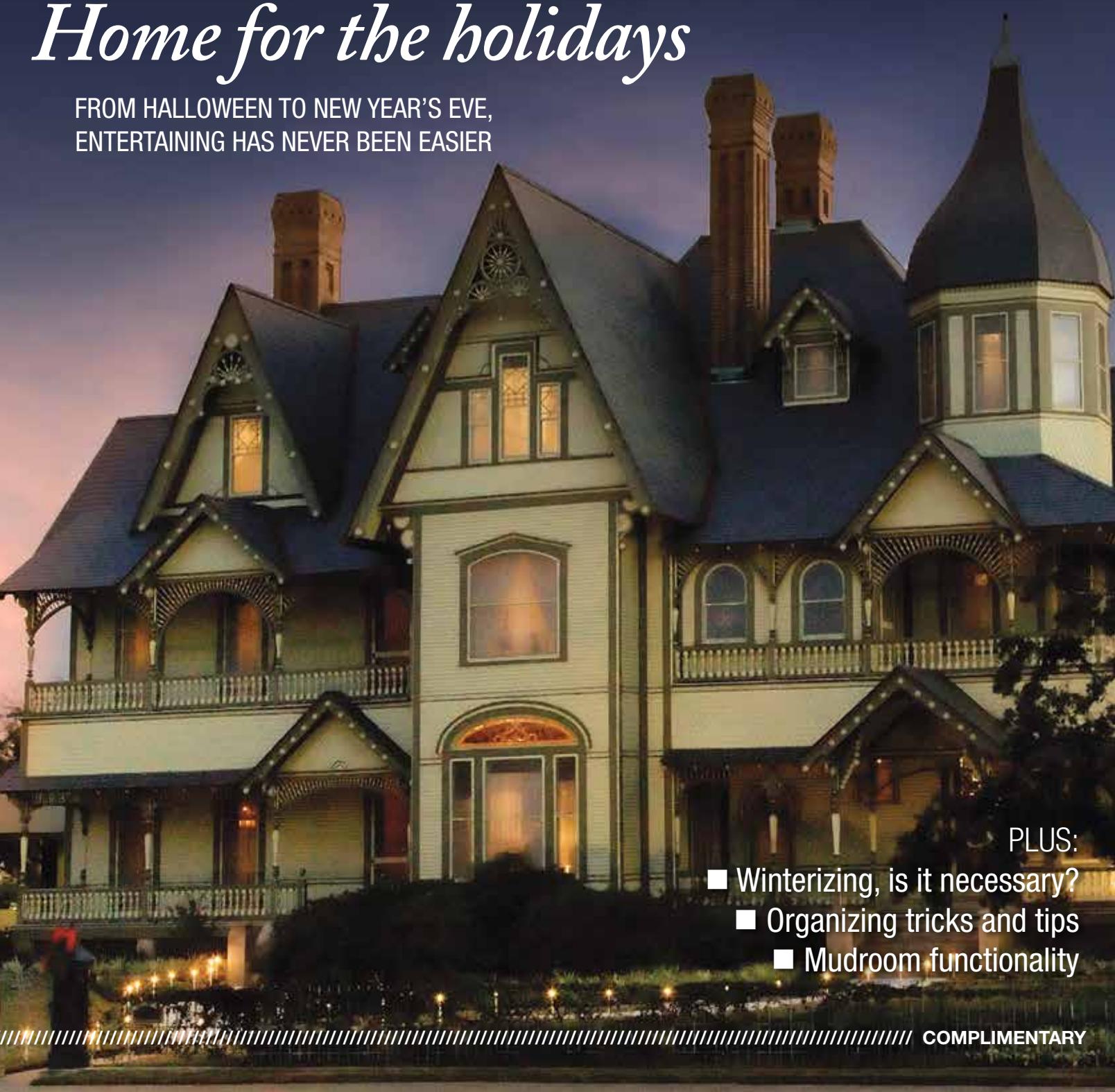
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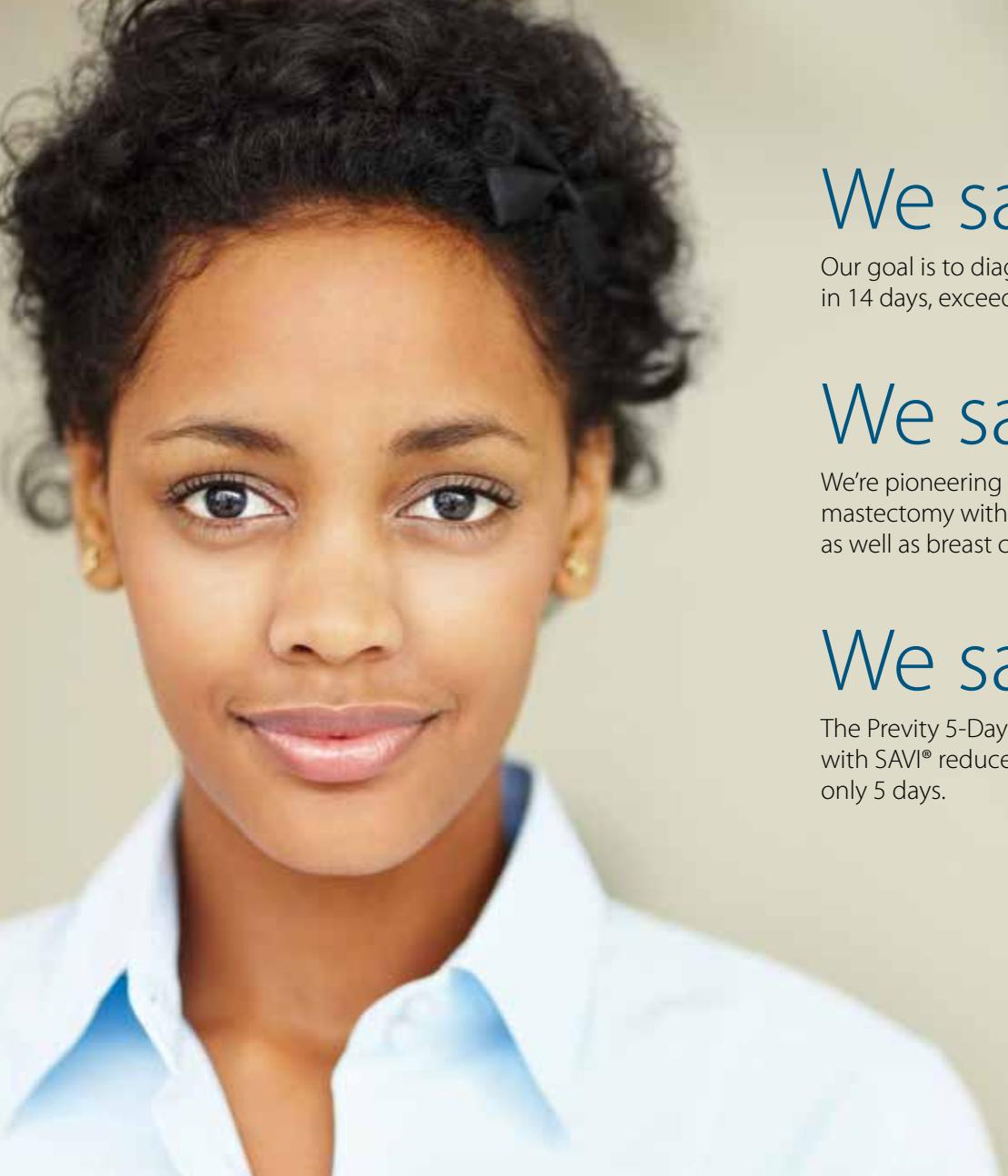
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## on the cover

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# Kitchen gadgets

These tools can help make meal prep more pleasant.

With the holidays around the corner, odds are good that many Beaumont-ites will spend more time in the kitchen. To help prep meals for the holidays and beyond, here's a sampling of a few handy kitchen items. The following are available at Bed, Bath & Beyond, 3975 Dowlen Road, in Beaumont.

#### **OXO Good Grips cherry and olive pitter**

Get rid of pits from cherries with this tool – there's even a splatter shield that protects the work area from juice. The nonslip soft grip handles absorb pressure while removing pits with ease. Works with olives, too – ideal for serving up martinis before a holiday meal. \$12.99



**Joseph Joseph Lotus non-scratch  
folding steamer basket**

This item features self-adjusting sides, allowing it to fit a variety of pans, and a silicone finger guard helps protect hands from being scalded when it's lifted. It has a large capacity when open, but folds neatly away for storage – and it's dishwasher safe. \$9.99



**OXO Good Grips strawberry huller**

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# A Clean Sweep

When it comes to saving time and backaches, cleaning companies can help homeowners clean up their act

The calendar might say September, but the end of the year is approaching faster than you think. For piece of mind, it's never too early to start thinking about the upcoming holidays. Many locals will have friends and family over for gathering from Thanksgiving dinners to festive New Year's Eve celebrations.

When that happens, you want the home to look its best, but you may not have the

time or the patience for a day of deep cleaning. That's where professional cleaning companies come in. The Beaumont area is home to several pro companies, such as Merry Maids and Towers Elite.

When hiring a cleaning company, it's important to use one that's bonded and insured. According to Merry Maids, which falls into this category, that coverage includes liability and workers' compensation. That way, if an incident occurs or a cleaner

becomes injured on the job, the homeowner is fully protected.

Hiring a cleaner can be a time-saver. According to Towers Elite's website, the top reason to hire a cleaner is to save time. On average, according to a Whirlpool Foundation study, house cleaning chores eat up 35 hours per week. Towers Elite's website states the pros can clean a home better than and in roughly 50 to 75 percent less time because they are professionally trained



and equipped to do so. "This means that you would likely save 1.2 to 1.5 hours of housework for every hour you paid a professional cleaning service," according to the site.

You may want to consider companies that clean green. For instance, Merry Maids' website claims its line of maintenance products, are Design for Environment approved, meaning they meet independent guidelines established by the Environmental Protection Agency. A DfE logo means each ingredient has been screened for potential human health and environmental effects and the product only contains ingredients that pose the least concern among chemicals in its class. In addition, companies such as Merry Maids use products that are shipped in concentrate form – lessening carbon emissions by not shipping water – the main ingredient in ready-to-use products, according to the company's website. Products are diluted locally and placed in reusable bottles, resulting in less plastic in landfills. ■

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

**Pineapple slicer and wedger**

This utensil works like a corkscrew, removing pineapple flesh in perfectly formed rings while leaving the core in the shell. Turn once for one slice, or keep turning to slice the entire fruit. Then use the separate included wedger to cut slices into equal sections. \$9.99

**Veggetti spiral vegetable cutter**

This vegetable cutter turns veggies into good-for-you spaghetti. It's great for zucchini, squash, carrots, potatoes and more, and can put a new twist on classic side dishes, especially for those with dietary restrictions. \$14.99

**Joseph Joseph Scoop colander in gray**

This simple kitchen utensil is ideal for deep-frying. It eliminates the need to drain hot liquids from heavy pans before removing food. \$6.99 ■

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# *Mirror, mirror*

Reflections on how to make small spaces look larger

**S**truggling with ways to make that too-tiny apartment, house or spare bedroom look a bit bigger? One easy way to do so is by adding a mirror. Mirrors can go a long way in helping a tiny room appear larger. Here are a few suggestions on achieving the tricks of the trade.

■ In tight spaces, use a big, floor-length mirror behind furniture. According to the website [www.apartmenttherapy.com](http://www.apartmenttherapy.com), mirrors that have the same width as your furniture make it look like the piece has purpose.

It adds prominence instead of making the item looked crammed into place. For instance, a large mirror positioned in a landing strip area allows you to get a final look at themselves before rushing out the door for work or a night on the town.

■ Hang a mirror behind a source of light. This light could come from a candle to a bedside lamp, Apartment Therapy suggests. No matter what it is, a mirror helps maximize the light's reach and creates a somewhat magical effect.

■ Place a mirror next to or across from a window. By doing so, suggests the website, the reflection maximizes both natural light, giving your room and airy feel, and views of the outdoors.

■ Mount a large mirror in a central spot in a small room. When big mirrors serve as the focal point of a room, they go a long way in helping make small areas look larger, according to [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com). Try placing a big mirror over a dining table or fireplace, or across from a prized piece of art – this will give the room both style and the illusion of added space.

Whatever placement you choose, be sure to pick a mirror that you love and can incorporate with the rest of your decor. ■



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# Stylish storage

Stay organized  
and reduce clutter

With summer in the rear-view, locals may find themselves at home more often this fall. And cleaning isn't just for spring. Consider adding some of the following products to your home to stay organized and reduce clutter. These items, and similar ones, are available at Bed, Bath & Beyond locations in Beaumont as well as on Amazon.com.



#### Lipper International wood drawer dividers (set of two)

These wood dividers are a great alternative to traditional drawer divider trays. They give homeowners the flexibility of creating compartments to a size they prefer. In addition, the dividers are spring-loaded to stay in place, so moving them is easy. \$19.99



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### Two-tier expandable under-the-sink shelf

Add more storage space under the sink with this expandable, two-tier shelf – it's even designed to allow room for drain pipes. The shelf features a heavy-duty expandable steel frame and includes eight snap-on panels and one snap-on basket to create a custom fit. As a bonus, assembly is minimal – all that's needed is a Phillips head screwdriver. \$29.99



### Arlington lift-top storage ottoman

An ottoman that doubles as a storage container is perfect for those who need a place to stash extra items and also want a table-top-style space for eating or working in front of the couch. The pop-up top means you won't have to lean over, either. This ottoman has a 300-pound total capacity when closed. \$149.99



### InterDesign Bronze York Lyra Cork Board Mail Center

#### Cork Board Mail Center

Keep mail and bills from piling by with this item. It allows storage of important notes, mail, envelopes – even keys. Place it near the entrance in the home to keep track of important papers and keys. \$19.99 ■

Photos courtesy of Amazon.com



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#### Wall-plate charger

A wall-plate charger fits onto any standard wall outlet and provides multiple sources of power in one. It includes one, three-prong outlet; one 2.4 amp USB port; and one, 1-amp USB port. Not only does it allow users to charge multiple devices, but it also features a stand for them to rest on to eliminate clutter. The 2.4-amp USB port is perfect for charging tablets, while the 1-amp USB port works for juicing up phones and other USB devices. \$19.99

#### SoundLogic Power Cell rechargeable portable power bank

Don't worry about running out of power for your cellphone if you have this 5200 mAh portable power bank on hand. This rechargeable battery backup connects to your iPhone, iPod, iPad, Android and other smartphones and devices. Its compact size makes it easy to take anywhere. Its battery pack comes with two output ports (1 A and 2.1 A,) giving users flexibility to charge most smartphones, tablets and other portable electronic devices. The device recharges via USB connection to your computer or other USB power source. USB charging cable included. \$29.99

#### Cord organizers

For those who hate the tangle of cords coming out of their computers, phones, tables and more, there are plenty of inexpensive organizers on the market that will wind phone earbuds in neat, pull-out and retractable ways like spools of thread (look for mini hubs or USB hubs online – users simply load their earbuds or USB cords in and press a button to pull them out. Cost ranges from \$16 to \$19.) There are also items such as CableDrop cable clips – small plastic discs that sit atop a table or desk and grip cables so they can be extended, but won't fall when you unplug your laptop. ■

# Tech tools

In today's tech-obsessed world, many people may find themselves overloaded with electronics – everything from the latest smartphone (iPhone 6, anyone?) or tablet to new computers or laptops or other tech devices. Unfortunately, these items come with coils of power cords and chargers that create tangles and unsightly clutter. Here are a few items that can help you streamline when it comes to charging and keeping your devices fully charged.

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holidays

# *Happy Holidays*

From Halloween to New Year's Eve:  
Our primer will guide you through planning  
(and enjoying!) a stress-free holiday season.

BY ERINN HUTKIN



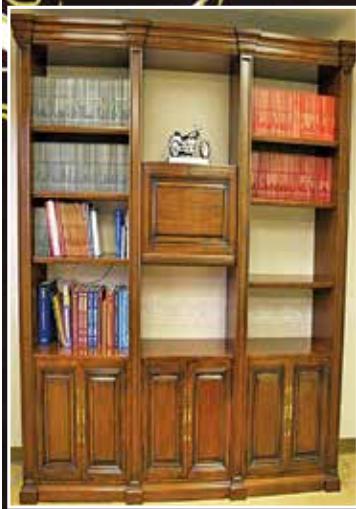
# Eek!

Decorations can make houses spooky yet safe on Halloween

**D**uring Halloween, there's no shortage of ways to make your house – both indoors and out – festive, freaky and creepy in the spirit of the season. But whatever spooky theme you choose, it's important that safety be considered, especially if you're hosting trick-or-treaters.



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If you like the look of a front walk or drive adorned with paperbag luminaries — with ghost and pumpkin designs, of course — opt for flameless tea lights instead of real candles. With little ones coming up the walk in potentially drapey costumes, real flames pose a serious risk, even on non-windy nights. Swap out real candles in jack-o'-lanterns as well, even if it's just for Halloween night.

With Halloween falling on a Friday this year, the stream of doorbell rings will likely have an uptick in traffic. Even if you're going for a dark, haunted look, make sure your stoop is well lit so that treaters don't trip or fall.

For other outdoor decor, look for specialty retailers, such as Spirit Halloween, to pop up in cities across the U.S. Just in time for the holiday. The retailer has more than 1,100 locations nationwide and across Canada, offering not only costumes and wigs, but makeup, decorations and a variety of interactive displays and decorations. The store's Beaumont location will open in the weeks leading up to Halloween.

The Beaumont store will feature items to complete your spooky home and lawn décor.



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Outdoor favorites include tombstones and zombies for the lawn, hanging creatures for your trees and mega spider webs engulfing your home.

Inside the house, decorations can range from classic to macabre. Some of Spirit's most popular items are for the indoor Halloween lover and include favorites like jumping spiders, haunted lamps and other evil toys. New for 2014, Spirit is launching two new offerings to its digital décor line, which features spooky characters that can be projected onto any surface, bringing a terrifying scene to life right in their homes. ■

#### TRICKS OR TREATS?

If you're expecting children, you can bet they're at your door for one thing only: candy. Because so many children have nut allergies, it's thoughtful to have a few types of candies available, however, if you opt to let children select their own pieces make sure you tell them how many pieces to take. Otherwise, you could find yourself candy-less only after a few visitors.

If you're traveling with a pack of children hunting for candy, the Beaumont Emergency Center says to make sure that those in dark costumes have reflective tape. Also plan to carry flashlights if you'll be out past dark and make sure that excited kids look both ways before crossing the street.



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# Surprise Pumpkin Treats

These pumpkin-shaped treats offer a new twist on traditional Rice Krispies treats, filling the inside with fun-sized candy, in this recipe, courtesy of Kellogg's.

## INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons butter or margarine  
One package (10 oz., about 40) Jet-Puffed Marshmallows or four cups Jet-Puffed Miniature Marshmallows  
Orange food coloring  
6 cups of Rice Krispies cereal  
12 Milky Way Minis or 3 Musketeers Minis or 6 fun-size bars (cut in two)  
Canned frosting (green)  
12 small, green gum drops

## DIRECTIONS

1. In a large saucepan, melt butter over low heat. Add marshmallows and stir until completely melted. Remove from heat. Tint with orange food coloring.
2. Add Rice Krispies cereal and stir until well-coated.
3. Using 1/2-cup measuring cup coated with cooking spray, divide warm cereal mixture into 12 portions. Using buttered hands, shape each portion into a pumpkin shape around one candy piece. Then, pipe frosting onto the top of each to look like vines, and attach a gumdrop for the stem.

The treats are best if served the same day. This recipe takes 40 minutes to prepare and yields 12 servings.



MICROWAVE DIRECTIONS: In a microwave-safe bowl, heat butter and marshmallows on high for three minutes, stirring after two minutes. Stir until smooth. Follow steps 2 and 3 above. Microwave cooking times may vary.

For more spooky treats, [www.ricekrispies.com/recipes/surprise-pumpkin-treats](http://www.ricekrispies.com/recipes/surprise-pumpkin-treats). ■

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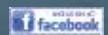
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# *Deep-fried paradise*

Fried turkey is a twist on tradition,  
but proceed dunking your bird with caution



**A**s one of the managers at DaddiO's, Jason Marshburn knows the benefits of frying a Thanksgiving turkey first-hand.

For 20 years, the Beaumont burger joint has taken pre-orders for fried turkeys that serve as the centerpieces of people's holiday meals.

In addition to a quicker cooking time – he said frying a turkey takes 3.5 minutes per pound, meaning the 12-14-pounders they cook are in-and-out of the fryer in less than a hour – this type of turkey has other benefits in terms of taste.

"It's way juicier," Marshburn said. "Once you eat it fried, you can't go back."

In order to prepare their turkeys, he said the

birds are thawed and injected with seasoning that includes a mixture of chicken broth, margarine and Worcestershire sauce. More seasoning is rubbed on the outside of the bird, the neck and giblets are removed and the turkey then gets bathed in the fryer.

DaddiO's has prepared up to 70 turkeys in a single year for locals' Thanksgiving feasts, and while the taste is unique, Marshburn said frying a turkey is not necessarily something he'd suggest folks try at home.

The dangers of this popular dish have been widely reported. That's mainly because turkey fryers combine gallons of boiling oil, propane fires and sometimes unstable frames.

The New York Times reported in 2008 that

the number of fires and burns even led national fire safety groups to urge people not to fry turkeys at home. Underwriters Laboratories, a nonprofit group that issues safety certifications for a variety of small appliances – everything from hair dryers to space heaters – even refused to put its safety stamp on any type of turkey deep fryer.

According to the newspaper, turkey fryers are, in essence, a large pot sitting atop a frame over an open propane flame. As a result, there are times where hot oil can spill over into the fire, creating what experts have likened to "a vertical flame thrower in your hands."

Novices who are not experienced in frying turkeys can misjudge the amount of oil that's

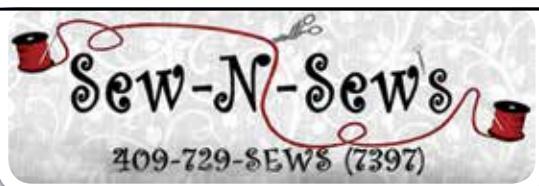
needed – not leaving enough room for the turkey to be placed inside. Still, even when the oil level is right, the Times reported, a turkey that's still partially frozen can also cause problems because there's still ice under the turkey skin.

That ice turns to water, then steam who's only escape route is by becoming a bubble in the hot oil, which can blow out of the fryer, taking hot oil with it, the Times reported. Often, the oil splashes into the fire below.

Still, fried turkey remains popular, and for those who opt to cook their own at home, there are plenty of resources and safety tips available online. Poultry producer Butterball, for instance, has devoted a section of its website to fried turkey with how-to instructions for preparing the birds both indoors and outdoors. Instructions can be found online at [www.butterball.com/how-tos/deep-fry-a-turkey](http://www.butterball.com/how-tos/deep-fry-a-turkey).

"Deep-frying a turkey has become more and more popular in recent years," the website states. "This method turns out an irresistibly tender and delicious turkey, and is a great alternative to traditional cooking methods. It is especially important, however, to follow instructions carefully and take precautions."

For those who want to try fried turkey but are hesitant to do so at home, Marshburn said DaddiO's begins taking orders in the weeks leading to Thanksgiving. The bird is often juicier than a traditional roast turkey, and Marshburn said the bonus is that many traditional sides still go well with the dish, including cornbread stuffing, sweet potatoes, hush puppies, dirty rice with pecans, and pie for dessert. ■



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# Tired of pumpkin pie?

Pick a less traditional slice for Thanksgiving dessert

When it comes to the perfect way to finish a Thanksgiving meal, many people picture pumpkin pie. But it's far from the only dessert around that goes well with a turkey dinner.

Whether you feel like getting out the rolling pin yourself, or calling a Beaumont area bakery and ordering, here are some alternatives to traditional pumpkin that put a new flavor on Thanksgiving dessert.

■ Pecan pie is a very popular Thanksgiving dessert. For something less sweet and sticky, try a maple pecan pie – it has maple syrup flavor and isn't as super sweet. Unlike traditional pecan pies, it typically doesn't call for corn syrup. Use roasted, salted pecans in the filling for a sweet and salty mix of flavor.

■ Apple is one of the most traditional fall pies around, and while a double crust pie is usually a crowd-pleaser, try an apple crumble pie. These are a little easier to make than double-crust pies. Serve with vanilla ice cream for a sweet ending to the meal.

■ Sweet potatoes topped with marshmallow are a popular side dish at Thanksgiving, and they also work well for dessert. This year, try whipping up a buttermilk sweet potato pie, which has sweet, creamy filling with a bite of tang from buttermilk. This pie is tasty with pastry crust, but graham cracker crust adds another layer of flavor.

■ Rich pies such as chocolate filled, peanut butter or, what else, chocolate peanut butter, make for a great ending to your fall meal. The sumptuous flavors pick up on the richness of the rest of the meal and are ideal for eating before – or after – your tryptophan-induced Thanksgiving nap. ■

*Find these recipes, and more, at FoodNetwork.com*



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# Choosing the right wine

There's lots of prep work that typically goes into the holiday meal, and one of the best ways to complement a dinner is with the perfect wine pairing.

However, with so many wines to choose from, it may be difficult to know which bottle to bring home.

When hosting a holiday dinner party, Terri Martinez, general manager of Specs

in Beumont, said the right wine depends on what's on the table. As a general rule, she said, riesling, rose and pinot noir are the most popular.

"As a rule of thumb, what you like to drink is right for your meal," she said. "You can spend on wine thinking it is going to be grand, but if you drink sweet you won't like the (expensive) wine. They are generally dry."

CONTINUE ON PAGE 34



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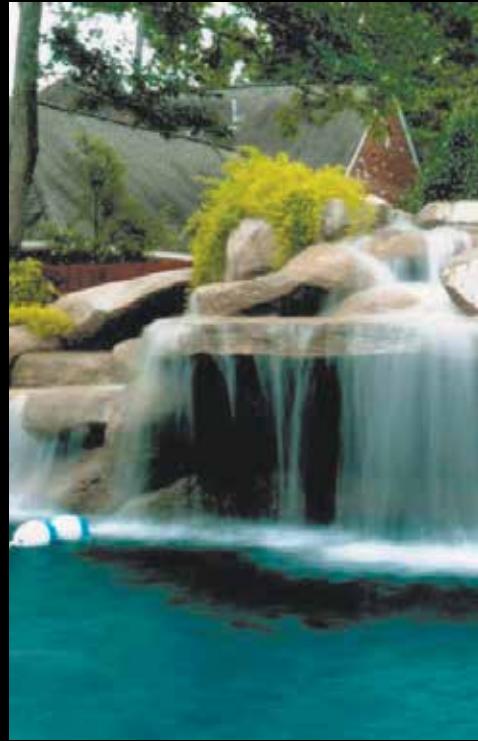
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#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

In general, she said white wines go with white meat such as chicken, seafood and pork. If the meal is fatty and full of heavy creams and cheeses, pick a wine with acidity to help cut through the fattiness and complement the food. She said the heavier and fattier the meat, the heavier the red wine.

When it comes to the spectrum of wines, pinot noir is generally the lightest, while cabernet sauvignon is usually the heaviest.

And when trying to narrow down the selection of bottles of bubbly for a New Year's Eve celebration, Martinez said, "spending a boatload of money on a bottle does not make it good."

While she said most people are





tempted to buy Dom Perignon to ring in the new year, it's a dry champagne and "not what most consumers think it is."

She said the levels of champagne – ranging from sweet to dry – are Demi Sec, Extra Dry, Sec or Brut, and are the most common labels found in the area. Meanwhile, she said, an Asti champagne from Italy is also sweet, but doesn't have any of those designations on the bottle.

"Picking a bottle all depends on their taste," she said. "I have stewards on the floor to narrow down the right champagne for that customer." ■



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# Host vs. guest

Being a gracious host and guest during the holidays comes with guidelines

For many Beaumont-ites, the holidays include hosting family and friends from out of town overnight, or playing the role of guest in someone else's home.

In order to make the time fun and festive for everyone, there are a few rules of etiquette that can be followed, according to GiGi Lewis, founding director at nearby Houston's Club Etiquette.

## Before guests arrive:

- Have guest toothbrushes ready in the bathroom, as well as a small basket of travel toiletries.
- Make sure the guest's room is clean, that all electronics are in working order and there's reading material.
- Be aware of noises that may keep guests awake if their bedtime is earlier than yours.

## Once guests arrive:

- Give guests a tour or their amenities and verbally encourage them to make themselves comfortable.
- Show them where to place their belongings and gifts.
- Explain how to use remote controls in their room.
- Restrain pets who are not etiquette-trained for guests.

## Keep guests busy:

- Give them an agenda of happenings in the community.
- Give them a heads-up of your agenda if you are going to be working or busy cooking, running errands or shopping so that they can adjust their schedules ahead of time.
- Invite them to join you with some of your errands so you can spend time together. Also give them the chance to opt out of joining you without guilt.

## When it comes to making sure guests leave before wearing out their welcome, avoid any awkwardness through these means:

- Make clear boundaries about when your guest room is available, and when it is not.
- The best surprises are no surprises.

## And when it comes to being a gracious overnight guest in someone else's home, Lewis suggests the following:

- Leave each room as clean and tidy – or more so – than it was when you arrived.
- Respect your hosts' schedules.
- Don't rummage through any of their cabinets, drawers or rooms without permission. Respect their privacy.
- Don't use their computer without asking first.
- Dress modestly. Remember to cover up.
- Ask before helping yourself to snacks or food.
- Observe your hosts' unique habits and try to fit in an easy, comfortable way.
- Don't allow them to foot the bill for everything. For example, if you go out to dinner, offer to pay for the entire dinner at least once – and offer to pick up the cost of your own meal each time. ■

# Hostess gifts

Full on thought, lighter on the wallet

The weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's are a time when many folks find themselves flooded with invites for dinners, parties and out-of-town stays. When you are going to a friend's or relative's house for the holidays, many guests often bring a gift for the hosts to show appreciation. According to GiGi Lewis, founding director at Houston's Club Etiquette, a hostess gift isn't mandatory and sometimes, a handwritten thank you note after-the-fact works just as well. But, for those considering showing up with gift in hand, here are some guidelines.

For a dinner or a party, Lewis suggests bringing flowers, a bottle of wine or pretty napkins. Bringing food is discouraged, Lewis said, because the hosts likely have a preplanned menu.

Meanwhile, for an overnight stay, consider



getting the hosts guest hand towels, a bottle of wine, a gift certificate to their favorite restaurant or a movie theater, a favorite treat or an

item from where you traveled from.

The key, she said, is that it should be something they like.

"It doesn't have to be expensive," shes said. "Just thoughtful."

Even if the guests doesn't know their hosts well and are unsure of their tastes, Lewis said fresh flowers or cocktail napkins with preprinted monogram initials often "garner brownie points."

For those stressing about how much to spend on a hostess gift, Lewis said to keep in mind the dollar amount isn't as important as how the gift makes the recipient feel.

"Don't spend more than makes you comfortable," she said. "On the other hand, don't spend so much that there is any chance that it would make the recipient uncomfortable." ■

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# The perfect tree

Picking the right live tree requires planning, but can add to the Christmas spirit



For Texans who are planning to buy a live tree this Christmas, Donny Schroeder — owner of Beaumont's Schroeder Christmas Tree Farm, said there's no set of rules when it comes to picking out the right tree to take home.

"It's all personal; it's what you like when you get there," he said. "There are different shapes, different sizes."

Across the area, there are plenty of farms where locals can find and cut their own tree for the holidays. While Beaver's Christmas Tree Farm in Nome may be among the area's most popular, Schroeder said he started growing trees a few years ago and hopes to begin selling next Christmas.

For those who opt for a live tree, there are tips to follow. The main one, Schroeder said, is making sure you don't end up with a tree that's too big. He said folks tend to take home eight-foot trees, but by the time they place them in a stand and add a star on an ornament on top, the tree is often bending over at the ceiling.

"If the room (at home) is kind of small," you don't want a tree bigger than you are," he said.

Here are some other suggestions for picking

out a live tree from the National Christmas Tree Association.

**Measure your space.** Before you go, know the height of the ceiling in the room where the tree will stand. In the field, trees look small when the sky is the ceiling. Also measure the width of the area of the room where the tree will be displayed.

**Ask questions.** For those getting trees at a lot, don't be afraid to find out when they got the trees. Find out if they are delivered one time at the start of the season, or if they receive several shipments. Also, ask which tree species works best in your climate — some last longer and remain fresher depending on the climate.

**Test branches and needles for freshness.** At the tree lot, run a branch through your enclosed hand and make sure the needles don't come off easily. Bend the outer branches — if they are brittle and snap easily, the tree is too dry.

Look for other indicators of dryness or deterioration. This includes excessive needle loss, discolored foliage, a musty odor and wrinkled bark. If you're in doubt about a tree's freshness, take home another one. If none of the trees look fresh, simply visit another lot.

**Recycling.** Ask the retailer about where you can recycle the tree once the holiday is over.

**Dress appropriately.** When visiting a farm where you choose your own tree to cut, go prepared for a day in the country. Wear comfortable shoes and old clothes. While most tree farms are well-groomed, don't forget there could be fire-ant mounds, tree stumps, uneven ground and sharp saws. Also, the person cutting down and loading the tree in and out of the car should have gloves. And while it's great to take a camera, it's probably best to leave the family dog at home. If the dog is there, keep him or her on a leash and don't let him or her "mark" other people's trees.

**Cutting your tree.** Those who get their trees from a farm should keep in mind that it's usually a two-person job. The person cutting usually lies on the ground, while the helper holds up the bottom limbs. Once the tree is cut, staff at the farm should have a shaking or blowing service to get rid of old needles that trees shed as part of their normal life cycle. This service allows folks to leave with a perfectly clean tree. Many also offer netting, which makes transporting and handling the tree much easier. ■



# Sweet ideas

Getting the whole family involved in holiday baking

Holiday treats are one of the best parts for the season between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The holidays are a time for whipping up treats at home or enjoying some of what local bakeries such as Rao's Bakery and Nans Cakes & Creations have to offer.

During this time of year, many kids

enjoy getting a taste of holiday goodies, so why not get them involved in the kitchen and help Mom and Dad with the baking? Here are a few ways to get them involved from SheKnows.com.

■ **Put safety first.** Young kids shouldn't be allowed to use knives. Even if they are older, children should be supervised and taught to use them properly. Designate a work area for the kids where

they are given tools they need. Make sure they know to ask if they think they need something else.

■ **Choose your favorites.** Using a familiar recipe makes it easier for parents to assign tasks and pay more attention to the kids rather than having to stop and check the recipe over and over. Once you've mastered the standards, you can have your kids select something they'd

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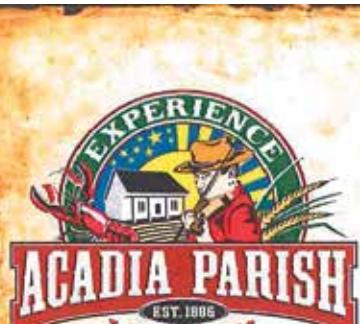
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like to try by finding recipes with you on Pinterest or FoodNetwork.com.

■ **Divide the work.** Younger kids can sort candy by colors while the older ones can measure ingredients. Make sure each task sounds equally important.

■ **Beat boredom.** Have other activities planned while your creation is baking. Since cleaning is part of cooking, have the little ones help with dishes or kitchen cleanup while they wait.

■ **Hands-on decorating.** When baking cookies or cupcakes, let the kids decorate some of their own. This should be done over a hard-surfaced floor that's easy to sweep. Cover the table or counter with newspaper or trash bags so you can wrap up the mess at the end.

And, if you spot a budding pastry chef in your brood, cooking classes could make for an excellent holiday gift. ■



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# Exterior illumination

Hiring pros to hang lights for the holidays can be a bright idea

**M**ost of the year, James Hayhurst spends his time working on jobs that involve cleaning and maintaining roofs on homes and businesses as owner of Beaumont's Sparkling Roof. But during the holidays, his business grows to include another task – installing, taking down and maintaining Christmas lights on local homes.

It's a service he began offering roughly a dozen years ago, but really took off in the last two years – growing to 75 homes across the area last holiday season.

Hayhurst and his staff will install festive lights atop a home of any size, large or small. Their price – which is based on how many lights a homeowner wants per square foot – includes installation, take down and fixing any issues with lighting along the way, even if there's a glitch in the system on Christmas Eve.

"The more lights they want, the more it costs," he said. "Some want the bare minimum, some want to go all out."

He said his company and others that offer professional installation can do the job safer and faster than many homeowners, but when locals come to him, they must abide by certain rules.

For instance, he said he only works with commercial-grade lighting – no icicle lights, no boxed strands from department or home-improvement stores. The reason, he said, is because commercial-grade lights don't pose a fire hazard to the roof and unlike many lights found in stores, an owner can expect seven to 10 years of use. Clients who come to him can either get lights online or purchase them from him, which will ensure the right number of lights are purchased. Hayhurst gives homeowners a price break if

they opt for lights that are LED.

Either way, the lights are the customer's to keep. He's a critic of renting lights, he said, because repeat customers pay for the same lights over and over each year, adding up to "a thousand-percent markup over time," he said.

In addition to hanging the lights, Hayhurst also puts them on a timer so they don't have to be turned on and off each day. And should a wind storm disrupt the display or bulbs break, Sparkling Roof staff will return to correct the issue for free. And at the end of the season, after taking the lights down, he also packs them away for storage until next Christmas.

"We're going to do it faster and better because we're more experienced," he said. "What takes (homeowners) two days, we can do in two hours." ■





# Party planning

Hosting a new year's bash doesn't have to involve stress

**W**hen it comes to how to celebrate when the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, there are plenty of ways to celebrate. And keep in mind that not every new year's bash has to be big, over-the-top and expensive.

## Quiet night with friends

Here are some tips on how to host a NYE party that's fun but low-key.

- Let guests know to dress casually, but it's OK if they want to wear something fancy.
- It's a rough night to find a sitter, so include kids in your invites. They can have their own party in another room with movies or games.
- Don't stress about decorations.

About.com suggests using décor from Christmas, and a few candles should suffice.

■ You don't need to offer a sit-down meal – snacks and desserts are always popular and work for this night. Think about big, pre-made fruit or veggie trays from a store such as Sam's or Costco. Catering is also an option. In the Beaumont area, there are several options for caterers such as Katharine & Co. or Courville's. Many local restaurants cater or offer

party-sized food platters. Look online at sites such as Yelp.com to get ideas of places that cater and read reviews from across the city.

- Feel free to show off your cocktail shaking skills, but if you don't want to stock a full bar it's OK to limit alcoholic offerings to wine and beer. Keep water, soda and a few non-alcoholic drinks on hand for kids and your designated drivers. Don't forget a little champagne or sparkling wine to sip at midnight.
- Purchase paper plates and napkins and plastic cups and silverware to make for easier cleanup.

## Ringing in the New Year

On the other hand, if your New Year's plans call for throwing a big blowout, there are ways to plan ahead and make sure everything gets done properly so both you – and your guests – can enjoy the night.

■ First send your invitations well in advance.

By spreading the word early about your party, friends can be sure to book it in their calendars. Instead of sending traditional paper invites, consider creating an event on Facebook or send email invites from sites such as Evite.com. Not only can guests accept or decline online, but you and your guests can post messages about what – or who – they are bringing. You as the host can track who viewed your invitation, and guests will be emailed a reminder about your bash a few days in advance.

■ Spread the work around. Trying to do everything on your own usually just leads to stress.

Accept offers – or simply ask – if friends and guests want to bring food or a bottle of wine or offer to help decorate or clean after-the-fact.

■ When it comes to music, don't spend the night playing DJ. Keep it constantly playing in



the background on a commercial-free satellite radio station. There's also plenty of good party or NYE-themed music to download from sites such as iTunes.com. You can create a playlist that guests can listen to during your party.

■ Be aware of the time. In the minutes leading to midnight, turn on the TV – if it's not on already – so guests can watch the midnight countdown from Times Square. Before the party, be sure to stock up on items such as hats, noise-makers and confetti so everyone can celebrate at midnight. Be sure to pass around glasses of

bubbly shortly before midnight so guests can toast the new year.

■ Expect an overnight guest or two. Odds are good that some of your friends may have too many drinks or have a long trip home. If you have a guest room, make sure it's stocked with clean bedding before the party, or have extra pillows, blankets or an air mattress on hand. Don't send a friend who's been drinking on the road, where there may be irresponsible drivers. Keep your friends and loved ones safe and start your new year right. ■



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# Home-grown bartender

The key to mixing great drinks is to have ingredients at the ready

**W**hen it comes to the holidays, plenty of people are eager to have parties, but not everyone may be an expert in what to serve guests when it comes to cocktails.

For those looking for ideas on creative holiday cocktails to serve at a festive dinner or get-together, Terri Martinez, general manager at Spec's in Beaumont, said the online site Pinterest is one of the best sources for drink recipes.

In addition, she said, the store also has plenty of books available on-site for customers to look through or purchase. The store's website also has a drink locator with recipes.

When it comes to deciding which liquors to have on hand for cocktails, Martinez said vodka is the most neutral grain spirit out for a common starter. In addition, she said, rums tend to be sweeter and also make good starter liquors

For those who want to make sure they have a well-stocked home bar for a party or holiday get-together, she said there are many variables of what to have on-hand such the level of entertaining one plans to do at home, what they like and whether they are a collector.

Staples include the following:

Liquors including bourbon, whiskey, vodka, rum, tequila, gin

Common mixers, including: cranberry juice, orange juice, pineapple juice, tonic, cola, lemon-lime soda, sweet and sour mix

In addition, a well-stocked home bar should have the following accessories:

A jigger, a long spoon, a shaker, a strainer

The correct glassware (which includes highball, hurricane, martini and margarita glasses) ■



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# When it's Cold outside

Even in southeast Texas, homeowners must take steps to prep for chilly temperatures



**A**lthough southeast Texas isn't known for having the same harsh wind- and snow-filled winters as some of areas of the Midwest or New England, there are steps that homeowners can take as the weather cools to protect their homes and swimming pools.

According to the 2015 Old Farmer's Almanac, southeast Texas will see winter temperatures, precipitation and snowfall below normal. "The coldest periods will be in mid- and late December, early January, and mid- to late January, while the snowiest periods across the north will occur in mid- to late December and early to mid-January," the long-range forecast reports.

Beaumont's Alisa Manuel Insurance Agency and the Texas Department of Public Safety have provided tips for homeowners to consider when winterizing.

- Have your furnace inspected by a professional and replace filters.

## Happy Holidays!

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- Invest in a programmable thermostat.
- Caulk or repair and replace any siding that's failing.
- Seal cracks in windows, doors, foundations and ducts.
- Replace batteries in smoke detectors.
- Clean gutters for proper drainage.
- Check for leaks in gutters, windows and the roof.

Alisa Manuel Insurance Agency also recommends treating recreation vehicles with the same care. The agency also suggests having an emergency kit ready, useful in all seasons, with water, flashlights and batteries, a first-aid kit, basic tools, a manual can opener along with a small supply of food, a radio, candles and/or a lighter, blankets and rope.

Meanwhile, Elite Pools & Spas in Dickinson



suggests homeowners check weather early and often to be sure to leave themselves enough time to close the pool before temperatures dip below freezing, its website says.

■ For those who aren't sure whether to drain the pool, the site suggests that when in doubt, keep

the pool full. Draining without taking the right precautions can lead to buildup of hydrostatic pressure, which can destroy in-ground concrete pools.

- On the day you close the pool, vacuum all areas of the pool. Check the pool filter and see if it has a "waste" indicator." If not, keep the vacuum on the "filter" position. From there, you need to treat the water, which means balancing pH levels, calcium hardness and total alkalinity.
- Depending on the type of cover you plan to place on your pool, lower the water level as follows:

**Vinyl-lined covers:** One inch below the skimmer mouth (or more if you're in an area where there is heavy snow or rain during the colder months).

**Painted/natural finish solid material cover:** Six inches below the skimmer mouth.

**Plaster finish solid material cover:** One to six inches below either the tile line or the skimmer mouth (depending on which is lower).

**Automatic cover:** Keep a water level that's roughly the same level as the bottom of the skimmer mouth. ■

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# Mudrooms

Where design creates order

**W**ith its collection of coats, boot mats, laundry and more, the mudroom in your home can quickly become a cluttered mess. But just because this is the spot in the house where children and others tend to drop their jackets and shoes, that doesn't mean there aren't ways to keep the room organized. Here are a few suggestions. Also, locals who are

looking for ways to revamp their mudroom can seek help from a Beaumont-area designers such as Alyson Jon Interiors or Interiors By Jacqueline.

**Keep children in mind.** Sites such as [www.hgtv.com](http://www.hgtv.com) suggest keeping the room kid-friendly. Many parents report that the little ones are more likely to hang their coat on a hook than to open a closet, grab a hanger and place



their coat inside. Keep kids in mind by installing low-hanging row of hooks where they can leave their coats and bags after school and place their shoes down below.

**Add a bench.** The majority of mudrooms are narrow paths off the kitchen or laundry room. But, if you have a little room to play with, think about adding a bench or some form of seating. This will help kids and adults alike when stripping off boots and give people a place to set down a purse, briefcase or backpack. HGTV's website recommends seating that allows people to sit down and place their shoes underneath.

**Create cubbies for storage.** Members of a family use a mudroom to store coats, shoes, bags, sports equipment and more. The website reminds people to keep the needs of a busy family in

mind by including lots of storage space, which can be achieved with cubbies and cube-shaped shelving filled with bins to hold small items and places for shoe storage.

**Add outlets.** Looking for ways to declutter the kitchen? Consider adding outlets in the mudroom for members of the family to charge their phones, laptops and tablets. This will save space on kitchen countertops and hopefully make it easier for children and others to find their phones when they need them.

**Stack up, not out.** Because mudrooms are typically small, homeowners can make the most of the space by going vertical, according to HGTV's website. Shelving that holds bins and baskets can be stacked toward the ceiling. Smaller items such as hats and gloves and kids' shoes can be placed inside bins. ■



# Give Your Body What It Knows: BioTE

## Hormone Pellet Therapy Benefits

Hormones rejuvenate, regenerate and restore. They serve as powerful chemical messengers sent to specific cells throughout your body to orchestrate many of your body's internal functions and how your organs behave. Even a small fluctuation in levels can cause big changes in cells or even disrupt the balance throughout your entire body. Too much or too little of a hormone can have serious consequences.

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## Symptoms of Low Testosterone in Women and Men

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