

The Plan

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

Holiday Planning Simplified

With a little extra planning, the holiday season can become a time to look forward to good music, memorable gatherings of friends and family, beautiful decorations, special programs, and giving from your heart.

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

For many years I had no plan and was stressed out and overwhelmed by the whole season year after year. It put knots in my stomach and kept me awake at night . . . until I figured out "The Plan" by looking at my calendar. Now it has been time-tested and proven valuable not only for me but for hundreds of people just like you.

How Many Weeks until Christmas?

Many people, including me, have used Thanksgiving to trigger serious action steps for Christmas. It just didn't seem right to commercialize Christmas by purchasing gifts before Thanksgiving. But that's exactly the problem, isn't it? Waiting until after Thanksgiving does commercialize the holidays by putting us smack dab in the middle of a chaotic mall with throngs of frenzied shoppers.

I also discovered that Thanksgiving is a "floating holiday." Some years it falls four-and-a-half weeks before Christmas, and other years it comes as late as three-and-a-half weeks before Christmas. That's why you hear people say, "It seems like Christmas came early this year." Sometimes it does, since Thanksgiving is a floating holiday.

Discovery #1: The Best Date to Start

My personal turning point came when I stumbled onto a valuable insight. Every year, one particular event occurs exactly eight weeks before Christmas—it's Halloween. If you kick off your holiday plan the next day, on November 1, every year you will have eight weeks from

October 31 until December 25 as a structure in which to easily organize and plan your preparations. Even if you don't begin exactly on November 1, you have a calendar structure in which to note where you are whenever you do begin.



Discovery #2: Stress in the Last Three Weeks

My second turning point came when I noticed that most holiday events come in the last three weeks before Christmas. Children's school parties, the neighborhood cookie exchange, church events, civic symphony concerts, friends' open houses, and an office potluck luncheon the last day before vacation. They all typically fall into those last three frantic weeks before Christmas!

No wonder we're stressed out trying to buy gifts and participate in the busiest social season of the year. All these things are good, but it's really stressful to be listening to the "Hallelujah!" chorus while thinking about how many things you can pick up on the way home and still get online to purchase gifts with "expedited shipping" costs.

What's the solution? Start all the gift shopping and card sending *before* the holiday events begin. It's the easiest way to stay sane and not be frustrated with the whole process. (But we also have a few tips to help in case you're a bit behind this year.)

Discovery #3: Only One Time to Simplify Decorations

My third discovery came when I tried to simplify my holiday decorations after the holidays. *It's just too much to put up*, I mused.

But alas, I found even charities would not accept holiday decorations after December 25. They had nowhere to store them until next year. That was the next discovery—if I store holiday decorations for eleven months of the year, then why do I hesitate about putting them up?

A recent poll showed that most people take down their holiday decorations the weekend after New Year's Day. Since that's the case, when do we need to put them up in order to enjoy them for at least four to six weeks, especially when they are taking up valuable space for eleven months of the year?

The answer? Pick a date (or weekend) to put up your decorations early in December so they can be enjoyed longer. Don't wait until the last minute; you'll be happy to have them done sooner.

Solution? Banish Procrastination

Once you know that you can organize your holidays whether you have eight weeks, four weeks, or one week left before Christmas, it's time to start. Plan on paper, work your plan, and adjust when things get off course. It's easier to get things done a little each day, rather than under the pressure of the last minute. You save money, you save time, and you enjoy peace of mind with a plan in place. Merry Christmas to one and all who take the challenge to turn seasonal stress into regular success!

By the way, can you get *too* organized for the holidays? I doubt it, but let me know if you do! I'd love to hear your suggestions and ideas about getting organized or about celebrating Christmas. Just visit me at www.OrganizingPro.com.

The Holiday Plan at a Glance

Phase I: Gift Shopping and Wrapping

Eight weeks before Christmas: Shop and wrap one-third of your gifts.

Seven weeks before Christmas: Shop and wrap another one-third of your gifts.

Six weeks before Christmas: Finish shopping and wrapping gifts.

Five weeks before Christmas: Finish planning for Thanksgiving and vacation.

Phase II: Decorations, Cards, and Mailings

Four weeks before Christmas: Put up outdoor decorations and write Christmas cards.

Three weeks before Christmas: Set up Christmas tree and put up indoor decorations.

Mail gifts and cards.

Phase III: Celebrations, Cooking, and Cleaning

Two weeks before Christmas: Attend and host parties. Bake and clean.

One week before Christmas: Grocery shop for Christmas meals and make final preparations.

Christmas Week: Celebrate Christmas and Enjoy!

- Spend time with your family and friends.
- You also deserve a little down time, so take advantage of it.



The 8-Week Sample Plan

8 Weeks — Fill in Gift List. Fill in Gift-Wrapping Center.

7 Weeks — Shop/wrap one-third gifts. Buy Christmas cards.

6 Weeks — Shop/wrap another one-third gifts. Address cards.

5 Weeks — Shop/wrap final one-third gifts. Review recipes.

4 Weeks — Thanksgiving! Shop, decorate, relax.

3 Weeks — Mail packages and cards. Decorate home.

2 Weeks — Host your holiday event. Bake cookies.

1 Week — Bake, clean, and donate to charities.

What do the Symbols Mean?

Symbols give us a quick at-a-glance view of the holidays. You may make your own symbol or use a sticker on your calendar. The first five are floating symbols that you may place anywhere in your schedule. The last group are holidays you may or may not celebrate but need to note when they occur.



The Wreath is a symbol for a holiday event, such as a concert, school party, church event, community play, PTA party, or neighborhood cookie exchange. The wreath is important to indicate how busy you will be in December!



The Christmas Tree indicates when you will put up your tree and indoor decorations.



A Christmas Tree Sideways represents when you will take down your decorations and Christmas tree.



The String of Lights is a symbol for when (and if) you will put up outdoor holiday decorations.



The Mailbox shows when you will address your Christmas cards. A second placement is for when you will mail them.



The Pumpkin stands for Halloween and is a reminder to begin your holiday celebrations the next day, November 1.



The Turkey is a symbol of the American Thanksgiving Day.



The Present means opening Christmas presents, probably on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.



The Nativity reminds us of Christmas Day and the true focus of the holidays.



The Party Hat is for New Year's Eve, signaling the end of the current year and time to begin the new. Holiday decorations usually come down the weekend after that.


The 8-Week Plan

For those who begin November 1 (or any day in November)
and want to see all eight weeks on one page.

(Year)



8-Week Plan (sample)

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Plan, Shop, Wrap	8 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Fill in Gift List <input type="checkbox"/> Mark calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Wrapping Center				Oct. 31 	Nov. 1 BEGIN! Gift List & Gift Supplies	2
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	'Shop & Wrap' 1/3 Gift List. Gather Cards.						
Mail & Decor	10	11	12	13	14	15 	16
	'Shop & Wrap' 2/3 Gift List. Buy & Address Cards.						
	6 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Buy 2/3 gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Wrap gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Write cards						
Celebrations	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	'Shop & Wrap' All of Gift List.						
	5 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Finish gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Plan menus and Thanksgiving						
Mail & Decor	24	25	26	27 	28 Shop, Relax, or Decorate	29 	30
	Thanksgiving Preparations						
	4 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Thanksgiving <input type="checkbox"/> Start decorations <input type="checkbox"/> Use Friday well						
Celebrations	Dec. 1 	2	3	4 	5	6 	7
	Mail Packages and Cards. Decorate Home.						
	3 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Mail cards and packages <input type="checkbox"/> Start December 1-25 reading						
Celebrations	8	9	10 	11	12	13	14 
	Host Event. Bake Cookies. Clean Home.						
	2 weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Bake cookies <input type="checkbox"/> Clean home <input type="checkbox"/> Host event						
Celebrations	15	16	17	18 	19	20 	21
	Plan Recipes & Finish. Deliver Gifts.						
	1 week <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy events <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning pickup						
Celebrations	22	23 	24 	25 	26	27	28
	Celebrate. Relax. Send Thank-Yous.						
	Christmas <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate! <input type="checkbox"/> Exchange gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Attend services						
Celebrations	29	30	31 	Jan. 1	2	3 	4
	Get Home & Office in Order. New Year, New You! Decorations Away.						
	New Year <input type="checkbox"/> Finish notebook <input type="checkbox"/> Put away decorations						