

Spruce your home for Christmas

Review special ad-feature

Getting tidy and trim for season's fun

CHRISTMAS is about to arrive with remarkable speed and it is by no means too soon to begin preparations.

You can divide Christmas preparations into five areas: home decor,

food, decorations, gifts and parties.

Let's start with the home first of all, because you won't want to be doing this sort of thing once things start to go with a swing.

Many people start thinking about a spot of

re-decoration for Christmas. It may be just a paint job. It may be you want a new carpet, three-piece suite or just new curtains.

Well start looking around for bargains. Why wait till the last minute and pay full price if, with a little foraging around, you can come up with what you want at a fraction of the price?

If your refurbishment involves structural alterations and you need professional help, say for that new kitchen or bathroom, get onto the builders now before they too become involved in a pre-Christmas rush.

There are however al-

terations you can install without too much trouble. Need more space, another room? Why not consider a conservatory. If it's well designed, properly constructed, erected and heated, it will provide an enormously useful extra space for all that Christmas entertaining. Think about it.

And whether or not you are contemplating big changes, a good spring clean will set the scene for a wonderful home Christmas.

FOOD: There are some very important food items that can be prepared or planned right now.

The Christmas cake may be made now, kept in an airtight tin and fed from time to time with port or sherry. By the time December arrives it will be ready for you to begin icing and decorating it.

The Christmas puddings may also be made now, placed in their basins, sealed and

Most recipes will show you how to keep them. Like the cake, Christmas puddings mature; like wine, improve with keeping so the earlier you make them the more delicious they will be.

Home-made mince-meat is probably the best of all and by making it now, it too will improve over the coming months. So get out those recipe books and get started. Your reward will not only be scrumptious Christmas foods, you will also save a great deal of money.

DECORATIONS: Christmas decorations can be expensive to buy. The fresh greenery and flowers of course cannot be provided for in advance but the non-perishable ones can. Now is the time to start looking around for ideas and materials.

On those autumn outings with the children look for fallen pine cones, ripe teasels and bull rushes. Broken

rather than having to buy, you can save yet more money. All these can be dried properly and then painted.

Making Christmas decorations is an ideal job for bored children so look around and see what's available in art shops and stationers. You might be surprised at what some ribbon, glue, silver foil, coloured tissue, sprinkled glitter and those natural finds can be made into with imagination and time.

Time is what you won't have nearer Christmas so start planning now and get the children on the case. There may even be some sales on so you might be able to pick up all sorts of things with potential for Christmas decorations.

GIFTS: These always provide problems for even the best organized of folk. Now is not too early to make out those gift lists and start buying. Sale time apart, now is not too early to

away on holiday, you will have even more scope for finding those unique and original gifts that give so much pleasure. Just think, come December when the weather will be far from its best, if you have only a quarter of your gift buying done, you will still have saved a great deal of valuable time, not to mention money.

Christmas shopping should be fun, not the frenzied rush it usually is as you search frantically for the things your gift targets really want. And that's another reason for thinking about gifts right now. You can start delicately making enquiries about what your targets really want. They won't even realise why you are asking.

PARTIES: If you have not thrown a Christmas party before because of lack of time, now is the time to change all that.

With some forward planning you can get your rave organized nicely before all the rest of the Christmas hassle gets to you. If you are planning a celebration meal out for your family, friends or work colleagues, get in touch now with your favourite

hotel, pub, club or restaurant.

They will have their Christmas party plans finalised and they will be happy to take provisional bookings which you can confirm or not as soon as you know what's on. This is the very best way to ensure you get the dates that are best for you and the rest of the guests. If they won't take a provisional booking they will send you menus, programme of events and other relevant information as soon, so as soon as you are organised, you can make your booking.

Spread over the next month or so, none of this will get in the way of your other activities.

You will be able to spread the work and the money over a reasonable space of time so that when Christmas really gets close, you will have halved the work and left yourself time to enjoy the sights and sounds of the season without neglecting any of the preparations. Obviously though this is in an ideal world!

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