

## Holiday Budgeting Hacks

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The holiday season is here, and many are starting to plan their holiday spending. Here are some pro tips to help you navigate your holiday budget so you can enter the new year with your finances intact.

### **Start Early**

Go into the holiday season with a clear idea of your priorities. For example, spending time with family and building relationships might be my top priority. To meet that need, I don't have to organize a perfectly coordinated gathering with all the trimmings. As you make your holiday plans—and especially your budget—identify the most important aspects of the season and ensure your plans and budget reflect them. A good question to ask yourself is, “Do I NEED it or do I just WANT it?” This will help you set your expectations for the holidays, guiding your spending decisions.

### **Make a Plan**

Once you've set your holiday expectations, determine how much money you'll need for your spending plan. Start setting aside money as early as possible for the items you've prioritized. It's also helpful to review your schedule and income to plan when you'll make these purchases. The key is to get this done early to maximize your chances of success.

### **Shop Deals and Sales**

With your plan in place, you'll be ready to take advantage of deals and sales as they arise. Don't hesitate to spend some time shopping around to ensure you're getting the best value for your money.

### **Consider DIY Gifts**

Even if you're not the crafty type, there are still affordable gifts you can create at home. Consider making scrapbook pages with family photos for grandparents or other relatives, using your children's artwork to decorate cards, creating a wall calendar with family photos, or compiling a book of your family's favorite recipes. Baking a loaf of homemade bread or other treats is always a great option. If you're looking for inspiration, Utah's online public library offers a free resource called Creative Bug, accessible to anyone with a library card. You can check it out at [onlinelibrary.utah.gov](https://onlinelibrary.utah.gov) for ideas and tutorials on creative homemade gifts.

Another low-cost gift idea from Michigan State University Extension is to assemble kits. These gifts can spark curiosity and imagination, especially for children, and typically cost less than big-ticket items. For an art enthusiast, consider putting together an art kit with a sketch pad and pencils. If you know someone who loves to cook, create a kit with your favorite recipe and the non-perishable ingredients needed. Michigan State suggests other kits, such as an outdoor kit with a field guide and binoculars, or a beauty kit with soap and lip balm. One advantage of gifts like these is that they encourage the recipient to pursue their interests.

### **Give Your Time and Attention**

A particularly meaningful gift idea is to create gift certificates that entitle the recipient to services or quality time with you. For example, you could offer a child a night off from chores or a one-on-one activity with a parent. The possibilities are endless, and these gifts are completely free yet incredibly meaningful.

### **Track Your Spending**

Finally, keep track of how much you've spent and maintain awareness of what you have left to purchase. One of the quickest ways for holiday spending to spiral out of control is by forgetting to track your expenses, leading to an unexpected budget overage.

By following these tips, you can maintain your finances and your sanity this holiday season. For more tips and ideas, visit [extension.usu.edu/finance](http://extension.usu.edu/finance).