

# *Living a Simple Life* with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

## **Episode 18- Planning Ahead for Christmas**

*Welcome to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. Thanks for stopping by! Grab a glass of Lemonade, pull up a rocker and join me for conversations about living the Simple Life. Go ahead. Get comfortable and settle in for a good visit. It's time to relax and enjoy!*

The last thing you probably want to think about in the heat of the summer is planning for Christmas. But right now is actually the best time to do just that.

Planning ahead for Christmas can be economical. It seems the cost of living is rising, but incomes aren't. By having a holiday plan in place, you will know what you want and need to do and then be able to start shopping early.

This gives you a chance to shop sales, thrift shops, and other places for the items you will need at a reduced price. And by having it all planned out early, that means you can settle in to enjoy the holidays, instead of running ragged trying to get all those last-minute things finished.

As a person with a creative nature, I love making handmade gifts. Some of them are bigger gifts, and some are small. One gift I enjoy giving are theme-based Gift baskets, such as one filled with Kitchen items. I add knitted dishcloths, crochet pot scrubbers and Wooden Spoon butter, as well as spices, and goodies I canned over the summer. But that means I have to make the items that go in it.

To keep me ahead of the game with the holidays, I always keep my Go Bag handy. While I sit in a waiting room, I work on a gift. Usually it is something small, like the pot scrubbers, or I work on a pin loom weaving project. This helps me to finish at least the gift basket items and stocking stuffers. In turn, it frees up time at home to work on the larger projects.

I love seeing how something so simple can bring a smile to someone's eyes and delight on their faces. And that is the magic of creating handmade gifts.

My goal is to keep that same magic woven through the Christmas holidays. But, for me to truly have a Merry, Simple Christmas, handmade gifts are only a portion of it. There is also planning for the holidays. It's during the heat of summer I get most of my planning done.

There is nothing worse than rushing around at the last minute, fighting crowds, and spending hours in the kitchen trying to do all the cooking and baking that will need to be done for the holidays.

I know you think I have lost my mind. But hear me out. There are benefits in the act of planning ahead, one of which is by doing things now, you save time later. Here are just a few things you can do:

- Any handmade items can keep you busy, while still staying cool
- Cookie dough can be whipped up and put in the freezer
- Casseroles can be made and frozen without heating up the oven
- Lists can be made
- Planning can be done

When all these things are completed, a big chunk of the holiday work will be finished. That means you can settle in and spend time making some great holiday memories! Let's use this list to give you a better idea of why planning ahead for Christmas is a good thing, and how to do it.

Let's go back to those handmade gifts. There are two sides to this coin. The first side is for the one creating the gift. According to Healthline.com, being engaged in creative endeavors has been said to lower the levels of mental distress, decrease anxiety and stress, and also shows the benefits of higher levels of mental function, life satisfaction and it improves your quality of life.

For the one receiving the gift, it means they are getting a unique item made especially for them. It says they are loved, appreciated, and enjoyed as a person.

Creating handmade gifts also has the benefit of no longer having to go to multiple stores or online shops to find the perfect gift in the perfect size, perfect color, with the perfect price tag. It helps to reduce your own crafting stash, has better quality, and it helps to keep that particular crafting tradition alive. It also helps you to find something productive to do when trying to escape the heat of the summer.

In my case, I start researching handmade gifts in January. Creating handmade items takes time, and in some cases cost money for the supplies. It also takes planning. My first step is to spend my Afternoon Tea looking through books and magazines for ideas.

Once I have a direction, I search my craft room for supplies I already have on hand. From there, I make a list of things I will need, then start watching the sales, thrift stores, and other places to begin my shopping.

When the heat of the summer hits, I can spend my afternoons and evenings working on a project. I am able to stay out of the heat, but also feel as if I am accomplishing something worthwhile, rather than just sitting on the couch, eating bon bons and watching television.

The next item on the list involves the food side of the holidays. Since we are trying to avoid adding even more heat to the house and causing our air conditioners to beg for mercy, you can do a few simple things and rarely, if ever, turn on the oven.

Start with cookie dough. Each year for Christmas, we make a Cookie Tray to give to friends and neighbors. This means baking at least five different cookies, as well as mini-bread loaves, fudge, peanut brittle, and other goodies.

When we first started doing this, we would spend two to three days in the kitchen before our planned delivery date. Between baking and cleaning, those were some long, exhausting days. Then we got wise.

We started making and freezing cookie dough a few months ahead. Once the dough was finished, we rolled it into balls, placed them in plastic containers, and then stuck them in the freezer. The weekend before the delivery date meant just taking them back out of the freezer and baking.

When it comes to cooking meals for the holidays, there is more to it than just the main Christmas dinner. For the weeks leading up to the holiday, we have a lot going on – but we still need to feed our family. That's when having a stash of already made casseroles in the freezer comes in handy.

If you take one out in the morning and place it in the refrigerator, it will be thawed out enough to bake by dinner time. And it doesn't just have to be a casserole. Enchiladas are easy to make and freeze. Add a bag of chips and some salsa, and you have a full meal. Consider making a Breakfast Casserole. These are great for breakfast and dinner.

You can also can or freeze soups and stews. These are perfect meals for the cold days of winter. Frozen spaghetti sauce can be heated back up on the stove, and it only takes a few minutes to boil the pasta.

Think about things your family loves to eat. When you cook a meal, double up and put half of it in the freezer. When you are scrambling to feed your family before rushing out the door to attend a party, activity or do holiday shopping, you will be so glad you did.

The next two items on the list – lists and planning – are all about getting organized for the holidays. This is the time of year your list making can double or triple. There are Christmas card lists, gift lists, menus, guest lists, activity lists, and more lists, lists, lists. Everything that needs to be done can be overwhelming.

While you are trying to avoid the heat outside, settle into a comfortable place with a glass of ice-cold lemonade. Get a notebook, pen, and your thinking cap. First, think about all you will need to do. Then one by one, start making the individual lists.

You can begin with your baking list. Create holiday meal plans for both weekly meals and those for the main holiday. Be sure to include any gift items, such as those cookie trays we make.

The next list you can make is a gift list. Who do you plan on giving to this year? Write down their name and any potential handmade gift you can create just for them. If you are like me, during canning season I think ahead to the holidays and create a few home-canned gift items. Think about how you can use these in a gift basket.

Once you have your lists in place, it's time to start doing a little planning. Make notes on where you want to spend the holidays – at home, or will you be traveling to a family member's home? If you are traveling, what do you need to prepare ahead of time? You can also start budgeting for the travel costs.

And speaking of budgets, this is something else you can start working on. This will help keep you from overspending and reduce the stress of all those bills coming due the first of the year.

If you are hosting Christmas this year, you will need to create a few menus. The first one to be created is the main meal. You need to decide if you are providing it all yourself, or if you can delegate a few items to other family members. If this is the case, having a list on hand of who will bring what can be handy to have.

But there are more meals to plan than just the main dinner. You still need to consider at the very least breakfast on Christmas morning. This can be a sit-down meal, or something as simple as a buffet that consists of muffins, sweet rolls, fruit, and yogurt.

Another part of Christmas fun are the activities. There are church functions, plays, parties for adults, school functions for kids, and some people just have a family night to drive around looking at Christmas lights.

All of this needs to be scheduled. It isn't any fun to realize a party you have waited for all year overlaps with something else. Knowing ahead of time what you are going to be doing will make the holidays even more fun, and less stressful.

Now the question becomes, just exactly how do you do all this? When you plan ahead for Christmas, you want to be as productive as possible. First, take a look at your calendar and find an hour or two a week where you can relax, be relatively undisturbed, and plan to plan. One of the best times to do this is during your Afternoon Tea.

The next thing is to get a notebook and organize your planning sessions. Having a notebook that is quickly accessible can make your life easier. Each time you have a chance to sit down and work on your plans, grab your notebook, flip to the section you are working on, and move forward.

Are you ready to start your holiday planning? Then August really is the best time to do it. It's too hot to do much outside, and most of our housework is done in the cooler hours of the morning. If you planned for a cool meal for dinner, then hopefully you can find a bit of quiet time to get your planning started.

To help you with your holiday planning, check out my *Have a Merry, Simple Christmas* eBook. It is filled to overflowing with lists, checklists, meal plans, DIY gifts, recipes, and more. It can be the perfect start for your holiday planning notebook.

Just print it out, use dividers for each section, and move forward with your holiday planning. With the worksheets, you can make copies and keep the originals in a separate section. After all, we probably will have to make a few changes to our plans.

Getting your copy of *Have a Merry, Simple, Christmas* now will not only help you get organized early for the holidays but will also allow you to free up even more time to enjoy them.

Are you ready to have that Merry, Simple, Christmas you have always dreamed of? Then use the summer heat to your advantage. Find a cozy place and settle in with an ice-cold glass of lemonade or iced tea, your notebooks, pens, and ideas – and start your holiday planning now. Come December, you will be glad you did!

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand, or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at [www.thefarmwife.com/podcast](http://www.thefarmwife.com/podcast). That is the Resource page for this podcast and I have it set up by episodes to make things easier to find. To help you out, this is Episode 18.

While you are there, you can find more ideas on planning for Christmas, gifts to make, easy meal plan ideas, and more.

Be sure to rate, review, and leave a comment on the Podcast – whether you listen to it on Buzzsprout, Apple, Spotify, or any other podcast app. This helps me to know how well you are enjoying your visit!

If you have questions or need some help with planning for your Christmas holidays, you can stop by for an email visit at [thevirtualporch@gmail.com](mailto:thevirtualporch@gmail.com). I am happy to help in any way I can.

And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

*julie*

#### **Resources for this Podcast:**

[The Surprising Mental Health Benefits of DIY Gifts \(healthline.com\)](https://www.healthline.com/health/diy-gifts-mental-health-benefits)