

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 69- Handmade Christmas Gifts

Welcome back to the porch! It's great to see you again! As you can see, I'm working ahead of the game on Christmas gifts.

To me, there is nothing better than unwrapping a gift and finding something that was made just for me. It tells me the one who gave it put a lot of thought and effort into it, which means I was on their mind and in their heart while they worked.

And that's the beauty of a handmade gift. They are very personal, both for the one who makes it and the one who receives it. I like to think of them as prayer gifts. As I work on a gift for someone, I usually pray for them with each step of the process. That way, when they get the actual gift, they are also getting days and weeks of prayers that are sewn, knitted, or woven right into the project.

Some of these handmade gifts stand the test of time. I still have a few that were given to me years ago. My mom found several quilt tops that were pieced together by her grandmother. Aunt Emily offered to quilt them so mom could give them to each of us girls for Christmas. And my dad made some beautiful pieces of furniture, some of which have already been handed down to my children.

I'm not sure you could say the same about some of the store-bought items that are available today. No – in today's society, it's more about quantity and price than it is about quality. Most things you buy only last a year or two – not long enough to hand down to a future generation.

You know, I've noticed something. For years, gifts were all about what was the newest, latest, greatest thing on the store shelves. Well, there is still a lot of that, but lately it seems like gift requests are becoming more about what can be made by hand. Take quilts for instance. Everyone loves a handmade quilt. They can wrap up in it and it feels like they are getting a big hug from the one who made it.

Now, I'm not a quilter, but I do make what I call a Psalm 91 throw. It's a simple sewn project made up of 10" squares with a fleece back. In the bottom corner, I do a simple embroidery of the words Psalm 91, with a little feather I drew myself.

Overall, the biggest one I make is just 50" by 60", just enough to curl up under and watch a movie or read a good book. The best part about it is I can make them smaller or larger, as a gift for a newborn, a young child, a teenager, an adult, or even for a pet. All I have to do is choose my fabric and colors to fit the person I'm giving it to, and then sew it together.

But that's not all you can make as Christmas gifts. There are so many things you can do, whether it's made by sewing, knitting, crochet, weaving, wood working, or any other crafting medium you enjoy doing.

Let's explore a few of the things you can make by hand. And just so you know – you can find out how to make some of these gifts on my website. Just go to www.thefarmwife.com/podcast to access the links to the individual posts.

First, let's talk about sewing. As we already talked about, a Psalm 91 throw is easy to make. If you already love to sew, there is a good chance you have plenty of fabric on hand to make these.

Another sewing project you can create is embellished bath towels. For Christmas one year, Aunt Emily bought a set of inexpensive towels. She then took them and embellished them with a coordinating strip of fabric and pieces of lace for the trim.

In addition to them being just as beautiful as those premade, they were also custom designed with the colors of my bathroom, they fit my style of decorating, and it saved her money as well. She made these for me over 30 years ago, and I still use one of the towels, a washcloth, and a hand towel.

If you are looking for smaller items to be used as stocking stuffers, consider making Rice Bags or pincushions. For that matter, many ornaments for your tree can be sewn.

One drawback to sewing, especially for those who are new to the craft, can be the price of fabric. It's getting pretty expensive these days. If you already do a lot of sewing, you may already have scraps of fabric you can use for some of these projects. But you might also want to consider using clothing, blankets, vintage tablecloths, and other fabric items that are no longer viable for their intended purpose.

Many quilters have discovered the beauty of making 'Memory' quilts out of clothing. Stuffed animals can be made out of shirts, aprons out of vintage tablecloths, and blankets can be used for soft toys and as backing for a quilt or throw.

If sewing isn't your thing, but you love to knit or crochet, your gifts are limited only by your creativity, skill level, and the yarn available. You can create scarves, blankets, throws, sweaters, tablecloths, and even book covers and ornaments with just a hook or two needles, a skein of yarn, and a pair of scissors.

And for some stocking stuffer projects, you don't need yarn. Pot scrubbers are made with tulle – which is basically netting, and coasters can be made with fabric.

While we're talking about needle art, embroidery is a great way to embellish ordinary items. Cotton dishtowels can be purchased inexpensively, and you can embroider fun images in the corners. You can also embroider the edges of pillowcases and a top sheet to add fun to bed linens. Embroidery can be done on clothing, tablecloths, handmade napkins, and to liven up even the simplest gift.

Is there a gardener on your list? If you enjoy making simple projects with wood, consider making plant or row markers or trellises for vining plants. These are simple to make and can add fun and whimsy to any garden. If the recipient wants to learn how to save seeds or already does, you can make seed packets out of decorative paper. These can be embellished with stickers, stamps, or even painting your own design.

Handmade gifts can also come straight from the kitchen. Baked goods are always a fun gift to receive. You can bake cookies, pies, cakes, and even bread. A fun way to give these items as a gift is to make it a 'Gift of the Month'. With this type of gift, you will give the first month's offering for Christmas. Then each month for the next year, give them another one. This gift can be a different type of cookie, cake, or pie, or you can create a Sweet of the Month and make a different type of dessert each month. Bread can be done the same way. And for a busy person, consider a Meal of the Month.

You can also create spice mixes, baking mixes, bags of homemade pasta, or home canned jams, jellies, and more.

Gift baskets are another fun way to get creative. Think about what the person you are giving a gift to truly loves. Crafters love getting baskets of supplies. If they knit or crochet, fill the basket with yarn, row markers, and other supplies. If they love to cook or bake, consider a theme basket, such as Italian, and fill it with homemade pasta sauce, pastas, a jar of Italian spice blends, and maybe even a ravioli mold.

Gardeners would love a basket filled with seeds, plant markers, gardening gloves, and other tools of the hobby.

If you have someone who loves to read on your list, consider a Cozy Basket. This is filled with hot chocolate mixes, hot tea, coasters, bookmarks, and a book in their favorite genre. You can also bake a few cookies or make handmade candies to go with it.

Baskets are one of the most versatile gifts you can create. They are perfect for any age, any passion, and can be filled with handmade gifts, purchased items, or a combination of both.

If you do choose to create baskets, think outside the box when it comes to containers. It doesn't have to be a basket per se. It can be a strainer or baking pan for a cook, a crate for a book lover, or a tote bag for the crafter. Think about the type of basket you will be making and look around for a creative container you can use. But if you are a basket weaver, by all means create a handmade basket as a special part of the gift!

You can also go a step further and create gift tags and cording to make the gift wrapping a bit more special as well. By using a simple friendship bracelet loom, you can create lengths of colorful 'ribbon'. And you can transform a scrap of an old tattered quilt into a keepsake nametag.

I do know from firsthand experience that creating gifts by hand can get expensive. But there are ways around that. Before you head to a craft store, think about shopping at thrift stores and garage sales. And don't just look in the craft section.

If you need fabric, look through the racks of clothing. You would be surprised at some of the things people donate. It may mean having a regular 'date day' once a month or so to shop this way but be patient. Eventually, you will find exactly what you need to create that special handmade gift. And if you still can't find your supplies that way, watch for sales at the craft stores.

Handmade gifts are one of the most thoughtful gifts you can give. It tells the recipient you care enough about them to take the time and make the effort to create something especially for them. Each gift can be designed according to the recipient's personality and style in mind.

Another benefit of handmade gifts is that they are one of a kind. You won't be limited by size, exact color, or design. There won't be that lightweight summer scarf decorated with beaded fringe that you hand knitted or crocheted in any store. Instead, it will be created using your own design in the perfect color.

And by being creative with your handmade gifts, they can also save you money. By searching through your yarn stash, repurposing clothing, and using the stack of vintage tablecloths that have small holes in them, by gathering ingredients from your pantry, or finally finding a use for those wood scraps you've been saving, you can create more unique and meaningful gifts for those on your list this year.

With handmade gifts, not only can you make your Christmas more meaningful for your friends and family, but you may just be giving a gift that is handed down for generations to come. Just think – your new handmade gift today may become an antique heirloom for another future family member to cherish.

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand just visit my website at www.thefarmwife.com/.

If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. 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 and enjoy!