



Extension News Column

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The presents are bought and wrapped. Now they are sitting under the tree waiting while you get ready to send them to their final destination. But the cost of shipping them is holding you back. If you are like me, you spend a chunk of change sending those packages to your family in the lower 48. So where are the bargains here?

Getting a bargain starts with selecting that present. If you are ordering a present, see if it can be shipped directly to the person you are buying it for. You still pay shipping, but you only pay for it once. Many companies are set up to ship gifts, so the invoices aren't included—nothing so tacky as someone to know how big a bargain their present was!

Also, many websites are offering free shipping this time of year. Check your favorites and see if that is a possibility. You might want to check www.freeshipping.org for deals on shipping. This website has lists of who is offering free shipping and what restrictions are on that shipping right now.

If you are shopping locally, good for you! Many of our local businesses have the flat rate shipping boxes right in the stores. Ask when you purchase that gift.

I'm also selecting presents based on how big they are. Maybe that doesn't allow for picking the perfect gift, but if you have two options, pick the smaller one.

Careful management of the present giving can also save you money. I ship presents to my sister for her grandkids who will be at her house during Christmas. It may mean a larger package, but it will save me from mailing to four different addresses.

Consider buying one present for the whole family, that will also cut down on both the cost of the gift and may save you in the shipping department. One present rather than four will cut down on the volume, if you are careful in selecting.

Now that all these steps have been considered, what about the actual shipping? One of the best bargains that has come down the pike in several years is the flat rate shipping boxes provided by the US post office. They come in two sizes, a box that ships for \$9.80 and a larger one for \$12.95. I've found these to be invaluable as I've shipped "care packages" to my kids that are going to school out of state. The biggest bargain is that you don't have to purchase boxes to ship in, they come with the rate!

These boxes are in high demand this time of year, so you may have some challenges finding them. I went to my post office and they say that they are often in short supply. You can go online and have them sent to you, but it takes some time. So be prepared to search for them and be patient.

Make practical decision to ensure that your holiday shipping doesn't break the bank.