



# Extension News Column

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By now, most of us are neck deep in the Christmas shopping season. Or maybe you are like me and have been shopping all year. I'd like to pat myself on the back for having the perfect gifts ready to go, but every year I find myself fine tuning my gift shopping. Organization of those gifts is a challenge.

Stockpiling gifts throughout the year is a great way to be prepared for the holidays, but only if you can find your stockpile when the time comes.

As you are doing your shopping throughout the year, make sure you choose one place to put all those presents. There's nothing more frustrating than either realizing when you are opening presents on Christmas morning that items are missing, or running across those same hidden gifts in June—of the next year. Designate one and only one place for all those presents.

Sometimes when I look into my stash, I've found that I had purchased too much for one kid and virtually nothing for another. Keep a list of those things that you have purchased and the planned recipient. I use an index card for each member of my immediate family to jot down what I've purchased, with a single card for the rest of my list. As each of those presents is purchased, I note what I've bought. Then I don't overbuy.

Buy a large plastic container to hold gifts or use plastic garbage bags to keep them hidden from prying eyes. I've even been known to use one bag or box per person. Just by looking at the size of the bag I can tell whom I still need to shop for.

Put the index cards in a safe place so you will remember next year what you purchased. This is one part I'm still working to perfect. I'm the one that gave my daughter the same pair of earrings two years in a row (but they were perfect for her). So I'm working on doing better on this one. This is particularly important when you are following a theme or a series. Books, charm bracelets, doll or toy accessories, books, computer games, and movies are examples of presents that are easy to duplicate from one year to the next. Write down what you purchased and file it so there are no duplicates. This will save you or someone else from spending time on returns after the holiday season.

The fastest and most cost efficient way to purchase gifts is to stock up on presents that work for men or women. Consider buying bottles of wine, dark colored cashmere or wool scarves, fine writing pens, journals, or books. Then you'll have a stockpile for whenever you need a present. Shop for winter accessories when they go on sale in the spring and you'll save even more money.

You may not be able to cut down on the number of names on your list, but you can reduce your shopping trips. Think about buying gifts in a theme for everyone on the list; consider buying books, clothes, or movies. Shopping requires going to one store and one aisle, but there are still lots of choices. I remember my mother bought everyone on her list gloves one year, and followed the next year by buying colorful socks. She had lots of fun buying for everyone on her extensive list and still kept the budget down.

A little organization now will save you time and frustration as you enter the gift giving season.