



## Prepare ahead for Christmas

OK, this *isn't* a guide to putting the finishing touches to the perfect home-made Christmas pudding with four stress-free weeks to go, or making jars of your own organic mincemeat. If you were that organised you wouldn't be reading this! No, this is about helping you get through the coming season with your smile and your bank account still intact.

1. Book your Christmas Eve supermarket delivery slot – there were complaints last year that it was difficult to book a delivery after mid-December. Your Christmas grocery bills will be lower if you shop cannily online, and you will avoid the crowds.
2. Now is the time to sweat the small stuff. Fill an under-bed storage box with all the tools you'll need for quick wrapping: sharp scissors, Sellotape wrist dispenser, silver or gold paper, brown recycled wrapping (beautiful with blue and coffee coloured polkadot ribbon) or pink pages of the Financial Times, which look stylish tied up with black grosgrain ribbon.
3. Book beauty and hair appointments well in advance.
4. Give your home an instant beauty boost: new Febreze Light & Refresh candles come in a choice of fresh, subtle aromas, and each candle has a unique core which releases powerful odour eliminators as it burns. The candle will zap bad smells, and fill the room with light, refreshing scent for up to 30 hours. Try the deliciously festive new Apple Spice fragrance.
5. Freshen your fridge and freezer with a solution of bicarbonate of soda. Stock up on Tupperware for storing Christmas goodies. Buy bin bags, toilet roll and extra washing-up supplies.
6. Make quick Mediterranean-style preserves to serve on canapés – prepare now and the flavours will be ready by Christmas. Chop feta cheese and mix with fresh rosemary and slivers of garlic. Pack into a sterilised jar and top up with olive oil. Store until you're ready to serve on toasted slices of ciabatta.
7. With three weeks to go to Christmas Day you can cook and freeze bread sauce, braised red cabbage and parboiled parsnips tossed in wholegrain mustard. You can prepare and freeze stuffing, sausages wrapped in bacon and cheese straws (all uncooked).
8. Set your Christmas budget well in advance. Allow for going out, presents and groceries. NB If you find your budget won't cover everything, be e3ou and 3 your presentr January.

9. At work, pencil in a day's holiday to do last-minute December shopping mid-week. Don't forget to buy and wrap a couple of emergency gifts.
10. Take party clothes to be dry-cleaned.
11. At the end of a day when you feel over-stretched slip into a bath with two heaped table-spoons of ground ginger and two of baking soda.
12. It's a great time for good will. Smile at strangers and give more compliments to people you know. Get in touch with an old friend who you have lost touch with. Spreading upbeat vibes will make you feel more positive and in shape for the Christmas marathon ahead. Good luck!