

Thrifty Christmas Ideas from 9 Real Homemakers.

I gave 9 homemakers the following interview questions and they had the option of answering 1 or all of them.

1. What is your favorite candy recipe?
2. What is your favorite cookie recipe?
3. How do you save money on Christmas dinner?
4. Family traditions you have?
5. What is your favorite Christmas craft to do with the kids?
6. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased?
7. What is your favorite Christmas decoration?
8. Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this?
9. What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip?
10. Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself?

I thought this would be a great way to share real ideas that are thrifty and that can be used this year and in following years. I hope you enjoy them.

Here are the ladies helping out with this project and their interview:

Robin Mureiko

Jan Drexler

Catherine Seiberling Pond

Angela Billings

Sheri Graham

Candy Foote

Deanna Smith

Angie Hodes and Charmbury Homeschool

Mary Joy Pershing

Please subscribe to our [free weekly newsletter](#) where I share recipes, tips and any deals that come along for homemakers.

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Homemaker - Robin Mureiko

Our first interview is from Robin Mureiko and you can [visit her blog here](#).

What is your favorite candy recipe? Our favorite candy is called Haystacks. We use a package of butterscotch morsels which I usually find on sale and freeze until needed. Included is a half cup of peanut butter and a six ounce package of chow mein noodles. Melt the morsels and peanut butter, stir in the noodles and drop onto wax paper. My children and husband can't wait to get these.

What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip? We have our Christmas on the weekend after Thanksgiving. We decided when our first son got married that we would like to celebrate on a different weekend so they wouldn't have an additional house to come to with six other visits! Anyway, this forces us to make purchases earlier and I have had the advantage of numerous sales through the year as a result. It has freed us up to do more for others during a very busy season!

Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself ? We love Ruth Bell Graham's One Wintry Night and First Christmas According to Luke picture book.

Family traditions you have? Instead of stockings which never hold everything and seem to fall apart after time, we use feed buckets from Tractor Supply. They may not be cheap, but they last forever and are really cute and hold a ton of goodies!

Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this? A friend of mine inspired our thrifty countdown. Using a long piece of felt for each child, at regular intervals attach 25 short lengths of ribbon. Tie small candy canes onto the felt with the ribbon. Each child gets a small candy cane each day as you countdown the days. Very frugal and yummy!

What is your favorite Christmas decoration? Our favorite decorations are the old ones that I have inherited from both my husband's and my aunts. They each had a few ornaments that have come to mean so much as the years have past. It would be nice to have a special ornament from each of our beloved family members. Neat idea, huh?

What is your favorite cookie recipe? Our favorite cookie recipe is the traditional sugar cookie with frosting and sprinkles! Delicious and a fun activity.

How do you save money on Christmas dinner? Sharing the responsibility of different portions of the Christmas dinner is how we also share the expense.

What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? I am already planning on making some winter scarves for each family member for next year using charm packs that I have purchased on sale and lining them with flannel!

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Homemaker - Jan Drexler

Today's Thrifty Christmas Ideas interview is with Jan Drexler and you can [visit her blog here](#).

1. What is your favorite candy recipe?

Anything chocolate....

My special weakness are these things my Mom called “**Heavenly Sweets**”. I think she got the original recipe from a magazine, but over the years we’ve tweaked it to this:

1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips (I use Ghiradelli!)
2 T. butter
1 egg
2 cups powdered sugar
2 cups miniature marshmallows
1 cup flaked coconut

Melt chocolate chips and butter over low heat in a medium saucepan. Remove from heat. Add egg, beating in with a spoon. Return to medium-low heat and add miniature marshmallows, stirring constantly until marshmallows are melted and mixture is smooth. Remove from heat.

Add powdered sugar, one cup at a time, stirring (actually beating with a spoon) until smooth after each addition. Stir occasionally until mixture cools enough to handle.

Drop by teaspoonful into coconut and roll until covered. Place balls on wax paper and cool in refrigerator until set.

2. What is your favorite cookie recipe?

I love this recipe because it’s so easy to do and makes dozens of small cookies! It’s another one from my Mom – she got it from a woman in the church my Dad pastored from 1957 to 1963, so you know it’s been around awhile. The name of the cookies is “**Sand Tarts**”, and you can use the dough in a cookie press, or roll it out and use cookie cutters. I like to use tiny cookie cutters and sprinkle the cookies with red or green sprinkles before baking.

1 cup butter
3 eggs
2 cups sugar
3 ½ - 4 cups flour (start with the lesser amount and add more if needed to make the dough workable)
1 t. salt
2 t. baking powder
1 t. vanilla

Cream the butter and sugar together, and then add the eggs and vanilla. Beat until fluffy. Mix the dry ingredients together in a small bowl, and then add to the butter mixture. Divide the dough into thirds to add food coloring: add green to one-third, red to one-third and leave one plain. Refrigerate for at least one hour.

Roll out very thin (or use cookie press). Bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the edges are barely brown.

3. How do you save money on Christmas dinner?

I make everything from scratch – after all, it tastes better that way, doesn't it?

Our menu is fairly traditional – we have either turkey, ham or roast beef, depending on what is on sale. With the meat we have mashed potatoes, a vegetable, a salad of some kind – usually fruit, and homemade dinner rolls.

For dessert we have pie. Pumpkin, pumpkin and apple. Sometimes the apple varies, but I always make at least two pumpkin pies!

4. Family traditions you have?

Between moving too often and our children spaced out (4 children in 10 years), it's been hard to have traditions that have lasted all thirty years of our marriage.

The few that have lasted, though, are very special. We always decorate for Christmas on the Saturday before Advent starts, and then get a Christmas tree a week or two later.

We also have an Advent devotion every evening, lighting the candles as we go. We use the book "Christ in Christmas: a family Advent celebration" for our devotions.

Music is a big part of our Christmas traditions. We have favorite CD's that we play every year, and usually add at least one new CD.

There are special Christmas movies that we watch, too. "A Christmas Carol" is one of our favorite stories, and we love watching different movie versions of it.

5. What is your favorite Christmas craft to do with the kids?

With almost 10 years between our oldest child and our youngest, doing crafts together was almost non-existent as they were growing up! But decorating Christmas cookies is one "craft" that we could all do together.

6. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased?

One year I made neck warmers for all of our siblings – I used flannel to make oblong pillows that I filled with rice. Easy-peasy! When you put the rice pillows in the microwave, it warms them up to make a cozy neck warmer on a cold winter night.

7. What is your favorite Christmas decoration?

Oh, this is a hard question! I'd have to say the nativity figures that were in my husband's family as he was growing up. They're old, and a bit worn...but they're also almost 65 years old! They've been part of our Christmas decorations since the first year we were married.

Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this?

We've done a lot of different things. One of the children's favorites was to make a paper chain with twenty-five links. Each day from December 1st to the 25th they'd remove one – a very visual countdown for little ones!

My favorite has always been an Advent Calendar. I love my collection of Tasha Tudor calendars and I reuse them year after year.

8. What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip?

Don't get caught up in the buy, buy, buy mentality! Choose what you want to give before you go to the store, and stick to your list. If you can't find what you're looking for, don't buy a substitute right then – go home and DECIDE what you're going to substitute.

9. Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself?

I love books. I'm a confirmed bibliophile. Just ask the poor guys who have moved us from house to house!

My favorites are the classics – for adults it has to be “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens. What a story of redemption!

For children – it isn't really a Christmas story – “The Tale of the Three Trees”. The one tree who wanted to be a treasure box and ended up holding the treasure of the whole world...if you haven't read it, do!

Homemaker - Catherine Seiberling Pond

Today Catherine Seiberling Pond will let us now how she has a Thrifty Christmas. You can find her latest blog post which is full of great ideas for having a [less is more holiday here](#).

1. What is your favorite candy recipe? I think I've found the go-to recipe for the holidays, at last (we often buy it from a local Amish store) for [Cashew Brittle](#)! It's in the current issue of "KENTUCKY LIVING" Magazine and I can't wait to try it out. It's basically butter, sugar, a bit of corn syrup, and cashews. What could be better or easier? You can also dip it in chocolate once it's broken up. I'm going to make some for my husband, who loves it and is impossible to buy for any way. The recipe is in the Kentucky LIVING Magazine (our electric company's publication) [and here's the link](#).

2. What is your favorite cookie recipe? My favorite cookie recipe is an old German ginger cookie that passed down in my family through several generations. It is made with lard, it is quite strong but snaps (it's a roll out), and so very peppery and spicy. I know it's in my office somewhere as years ago I used to make it every Christmas for my father and ship them to him back in Ohio. It was transcribed from my grandmother's cookbook. It's one of the hardest cookies I've ever made but also one of the best!

Oh, but here's an easy, old favorite for "[Christmas Crescents](#)" (similar to Mexican Wedding Cookies and so easy for anyone, even children)

3. How do you save money on Christmas dinner? Every year, or two, we buy a large Delmonico roast either at our local grocer or large wholesaler. If we see the per pound price is on sale, we grab one any time of year. We then have the butcher cut it in half so we have one for Christmas and one for another time of year (like a special birthday or possibly even next Christmas! We wrap them solidly and carefully before freezing). This is a treat but on sale, quite affordable. Our Christmas dinner is the same every year! Roast beef, roast potatoes, creamed spinach and Yorkshire pudding! [Here is the recipe for the Roast Beef and Yorkshire pudding](#).

4. Family traditions you have? Our favorite Christmas tradition is a big breakfast in the morning (usually a breakfast casserole, prepared the night before, and a special coffee cake with a fruit salad), pajamas all day, and an early evening dinner of roast beef! We haven't entertained on Christmas Day for years so it has become special, quiet, family time! Christmas Eve is usually an easy appetizer meal of everyone's favorite dips and a New England fish or oyster stew! Our big holiday splurge is on New England seafood that we get up in Lexington: otherwise it's all about simplicity (and good baking/food/friends).

As the holiday season can be so stressful, we always stretch out the holiday into the 12 Days of Christmas. I have a firm rule in my house: NO TAKING DOWN THE TREE or ANY CHRISTMAS decoration until AFTER January 6, the Feast of Epiphany! Then we can enjoy the magic a bit longer. I think anyone who takes down their Christmas decor the day afterwards to "declutter" is a Grinch!

5. What is your favorite Christmas craft to do with the kids? My youngest son likes to make paper chains and decorate everywhere with them. Fun and easy to do. I'm not the craftiest mother in the bunch but I do like to bake with my children. This year we'll do some favorite cookies (I had planned a swap, but alas! Maybe next year) and I'm hoping, when completely organized and they're on vacation, some gingerbread houses!

6. Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself? As for books, we have an extensive children's Christmas library that I've collected over the years. My favorite books are my Christmas cookbooks and probably my biggest go-to are Susan Branch's Christmas books. Full of ideas, inspiration and recipes that I use again and again.

7. What is your favorite Christmas decoration? Oh and I don't have a favorite Christmas decoration because each one has a special memory associated with it: I have a collection of felt ornaments made by a friend's mother in my childhood (she made one for each of us!) and I also have many vintage Christmas decorations that I've collected here and there each year. But perhaps my most prized Christmas decorations are the ornaments and items that my children have made over the years. PRICELESS! Merry Christmas to you!

Catherine has authored a book, [THE PANTRY-ITS HISTORY and MODERN USES](#), it is an affordable gift for any foodie, food historian or kitchen maven! Filled with much nostalgia for kitchens past, too, and beautiful photographs. Only \$16.90, including postage, and she will be happy to sign or inscribe--and ship--to anyone on the list.

Homemaker - Angela Billings

My name is Angela Billings and my blog is [Thrifty Homemaker](#)

What is your favorite candy recipe? I really like this recipe for **Cornflake Candy**.

1 cup sugar

1 cup white corn syrup

4 cups cornflakes

1 1/2 cups peanut butter (I like creamy but you could use crunchy)

Boil sugar and syrup until it reaches a full rolling boil. Mix in peanut butter and then the cornflakes. get them coated well and pour into pan and cut into squares. I also like them just dropped from a spoon on wax paper and let cool and eat.

What is your favorite cookie recipe? My favorite cookie recipe is the [Sugar cookies that I shared here](#). They taste good and are easy to make.

How do you save money on Christmas dinner? We have each family bring something to the dinner, that saves both money and work. Also buy on sale and use coupons for the things on the Christmas dinner menu. Grocery stores have sales on most baking items this time of year so it is a good time to stock up on these items for the weeks ahead.

Family traditions you have? We have several little traditions. I had read the book Little House on the Prairie Christmas to my children and it talks about what they got in their stocking and one thing was a penny so I put a penny in the toe of each stocking and that Christmas and they just loved that and we have done it every year since.

What is your favorite Christmas craft to do with the kids? We do lots of crafting but our favorite is the Gingerbread House. I had been trying for years to make a gingerbread house that would stand up and hold together and never could get it right, so it started out as a stressful time but we tried each year and thankfully they came out with the ones already constructed and we just decorate them. I buy them on sale after Christmas and store it in the freezer. They are usually \$2.00 each or less. This year we bought extra candy to decorate with and eat while we decorate.

What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? I buy the majority of the smaller gifts after Christmas and save a lot of money.

What is your favorite Christmas decoration? My favorite decorations are the ones my kids have made.

Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this? I have big plans each year to do so many that I find online but that usually never works out. This year we are doing [Characteristics of Jesus](#) I didn't put ours on a wreath but in a jar and we pick out the correct one each day, and a gluing on of cotton balls to a printed out Santa face and I bought a little countdown calendar at The Dollar Tree that has a piece of chocolate in it for each day. It cost \$1.00.

What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip? All we put in the Christmas stockings are an orange, apple, banana, candy cane, sometimes nuts and the penny. This saves on money and stress.

Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself? We have a few favorite books such as The Crippled Lamb and Cranberry Christmas (I paid 1.00 for mine at a yard sale) and How the Grinch Stole Christmas as for me I like anything Gooseberry Patch and this year I found this book and really like it. We have been reading the little Christmas stories in it each night.

Homemaker - Sheri Graham

Sheri Graham and you can [visit her blog here](#). Be sure to sign up for her newsletter also while you are there for extra goodies.

1. What is your favorite candy recipe? I just made my favorite candy tonight...Peanut Butter Bon Bons. Here is the [link to the recipe](#).

2. What is your favorite cookie recipe? My favorite holiday cookie is one that my grandparents made every Christmas. They are called [Peppernuts](#), but they are not the small crunchy peppernuts that people are used to. These are soft cookies cut with a donut hole cutter...and are SO good!

3. What is your favorite Christmas craft to do with the kids? One year we enjoyed making [edible nativity scenes](#). It was so much fun! We enjoyed them as a decoration on the table, then the kids got to eat them.

4. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? This Christmas I made a couple crocheted scarfs for a couple of gifts. It is pretty easy to make. Here is the [link to the pattern](#) I am also doing a "Homemade for the Holidays" series on my blog with tons of great ideas for homemade gifts. Here is the [link to that series](#).

5. Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this? I have done different things over the years, but this year I created a free Countdown to Christmas printable that we are using. Read about it and [download it for free here](#).

6. Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself? I have quite a few favorite Christmas books that I enjoy reading aloud to the kids. Here is a [list of them](#).

Here are some Freebies Sheri has to offer you:

[Free Countdown to Christmas printable](#)

This post includes some great links to [free lessons, printables, and crafts](#)

[Free Christmas Cookie Plates labels](#) to print.

Homemaker -Candy Foote

Candy Foote is a Christian, wife to one, momma to 12, grandmother to 3, (so far), and strategic shopper! Be sure to check out all of her thrifty ideas at <http://strategicshopping.blogspot.com/>.

1. How do you save money on Christmas dinner? I save money on Christmas dinner by being prepared ahead of time. I like to have my menu and list prepared at the same time I'm preparing my Thanksgiving menu and list. I start picking up a few things off from my list every time I go out shopping. I am sure to watch for sales and match up my coupons in order to get the ultimate prices. Shopping early gives me plenty of time to get the best deals.

2. Family traditions you have? Every Christmas Eve, all twelve of our children, and now our three grandchildren, gather up a bunch of stuffed animals, and head to the nursing homes. We walk around handing out the stuffed animals, smiling, talking, and even singing to the residents. It's our favorite time!

3. What is your favorite Christmas craft to do with the kids? Our Christmas decorations are made by the kids. I love our homemade Christmases! Snowflakes have to be my favorite. The kids use white paper, and cut out their own special designs. We hang them from the ceiling, and it's always a conversation piece when company arrives. (Coffee filters make great material for making snowflakes!)

4. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? Almost all of my gifts are thrifty gifts. I actually prepare for Christmas all year round. This enables me to spend very little on Christmas without it appearing to be a cheap Christmas. I shop the thrift stores. You may be shocked at how many items I get there that are brand new! One of my daughters' favorite gifts are fancy tea cups and hot cocoa mugs (purchased at thrift shops) with hot cocoa and assorted teas to match up with them. Put them into a (thrift shop) basket, add some ribbons (also from a thrift shop) and you will have a very elegant looking gift!

5. What is your favorite Christmas decoration? My children make my Christmas decorations every year. I have always told them that when they grow up, they had better have their children come down at Christmas time or I wouldn't have anyone to make me decorations! I love the paper snowflakes, paper chains, popcorn and cranberry strings, mini marshmallow strings, playdough decorations, popcorn balls wrapped in saran wrap and hung on the tree with pretty string, and on and on

6. Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this? My children count down to every upcoming events! Give them a marker and a piece of paper and they come up with their own count downs! Paper chains work well for this; you simply rip off a chain a day!

7. What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip? I hate to spend a lot of money on wrapping paper! Since I buy two Sunday papers every week for the coupons, I simply save the comics. By the time Christmas time arrives, I have a big stack of 'wrapping paper'!

Another thrifty wrapping paper is aluminum foil. It looks so festive with the Christmas tree lights shine off from it. You don't need tape. Plus, if you run out of 'regular' wrapping paper, then you probably have some tin foil just sitting in your kitchen cupboard!

8. Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself? [The Bible](#) can't be beat for a Christmas book! Be sure and read [Luke 2](#) with your family this season!

Homemaker - Deanna Smith

You can find her blog [Plain Homesteading here](#) and links to her homeschooling and kitchen blog as well.

I hope you all are enjoying these posts as much as I am and have found a few ideas to use.

1. What is your favorite cookie recipe? Our favorite cookies I can do...we make an Amish Sugar Cutouts:

1/2 c butter, softened
1/2 c shortening
8 oz cream cheese, softened
1 1/3 c sugar
1 egg
1/2 tsp vanilla
4 c flour
1 tsp baking powder
1/4 tsp nutmeg

Cream butter, shortening and cream cheese together. Add in egg and vanilla. Blend together dry ingredients and stir into wet mix. Wrap dough and chill a couple hours, then using small amounts at a time, roll on lightly floured board or between waxed sheets. Roll out thin, cut and bake...375 for 7-9 minutes. Watch carefully...you want just the beginnings of brown around the edges. Cool on racks and frost...these are pretty bland and really need icing. However, they freeze great and don't harden in the freezer...a perfect summer treat!

Our icing:

1 c powdered sugar
1 Tbs light corn syrup
2 Tbs milk coloring of choice
This icing spreads very smooth and hardens to a glossy finish.

2. How do you save money on Christmas dinner? Christmas dinners used to be really big, we would have breakfast and go to my Mom's to meet with the rest of the aunts, cousins, etc. But being out of state now, it's just the children. We have a breakfast casserole in the morning and slow cook a turkey or ham now for just us. There are always left-overs that go into pot pies, soups, and casseroles. The larger turkey the better...if it's going to take up the oven or smoker, I want enough left-overs to spread out that work.

3. Family traditions you have? Every year one of my aunts makes ornaments for the children. Painted wooden shapes with their names, bells and ribbons, etc. It's become a tradition to get them. Among the children themselves they give each other 'gifts'...they scour the closets, craft goodies, fabric stash and so forth and put together 'new' gifts for each other. The olders put together doll outfits, accessories and such for the younger ones. They make drawings and other crafts to wrap for each other, or share something special of their own. They have always been more tickled with handmade than store-bought.

4. Favorite craft...my children love paper, glue and glitter..all cheap crafting items to have on hand. We spend days making paper snowflakes, cutting out stocking shapes, stars, snowmen, etc.

5. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? We make up several kinds of

cookies every year between Thanksgiving and mid December and put together cookie plates for folks we know...mail driver, garbage man, a few neighbors, the ladies at our small bank...we buy tissue paper and small gift bags from the dollar store, wrap the cookies in Saran and tissue and ribbon up the bags to give out.

6. What is your favorite Christmas decoration? We have several acres of woods, so many of our around-the-house decorations come from nature...branches to hang our paper crafts from, lots of pine cones in baskets and hanging from ribbons from the ceilings. We also love candles.

7. What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip? Favorite thrifty tip...don't stress the gifts! Children love crafting and they love sharing those crafts with others. A bundle of drawings is a great Grandparent gift...helping them learn to sew, crochet, knit, loom knit...they can share wonderful handmade items with family and everyone I know appreciates the thought and the effort behind a special handmade gift!

Homemakers - Angie Hodes and Charmbury Homeschool

Thrifty Christmas Ideas from 2 homemakers answering some of the interview questions.

First is Angie Hodes of The American Homemaker and you can find [her blog here](#).

She is sharing a thrifty gift she is making this year for Christmas. This would be a great idea for birthdays as well.

1. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? This year I'm making homemade sugar scrubs for my friends for Christmas. Sugar scrubs are easy and inexpensive to make from regular kitchen ingredients.

Sugar Vanilla Scrub

- 1 ½ c. sugar
- 1/4-1/2 c. olive, sunflower or canola oil
- 1 tsp vanilla

Feel free to play around with the recipe! You can also use brown sugar and pumpkin pie spice for a festive scent!

Mix all ingredients together adjusting measurements as desired for texture/consistency. Attach a label & a spoon to the jar... check out thrift stores for inexpensive canning jars, soup spoons, ice tea spoons or vintage silver tea spoons. I find small pretty canning jars at thrift stores and yard sales for .05-.25 a piece, spoons usually cost .25 or less and I always have ribbon on hand so giving a nice spa-like gift costs very little!

To use: Massage the scrub to slightly damp hands or body in a circular motion. Rinse.

Next we have **Charmbury Homeschool** and [she blogs here](#). She answered the following:

- 1. What is Your Favorite Candy recipe?** Peanut brittle and she gets the nuts from Costco.
- 2. What is your favorite cookie recipe?** Oatmeal raisin or chocolate chip cookies
- 3. How do you save money on Christmas dinner?** Buy ingredients/food on sale-shop for sales

Homemaker - Mary Joy Pershing

Mary Joy Pershing of [Unwrapping His Grace](#) is our Thrifty Homemaker interview for today.

1. What is your favorite cookie recipe? What a great question! At our house, I blessed to have the challenge of finding ways to make our favorite cookies in ways that are as Diabetic friendly as I can. My husband and I work as a team to manage his Type 2 Diabetes. We are still considered newlyweds, married in April of 2010...so I am still pretty new at transforming favorite recipes to a more healthy version. So far, I would have to say that my favorite cookie recipe, that is now a family favorite, would have to be Oatmeal Cookies. I don't just make one version though! We have tried many versions over these past few years...we have made them as oatmeal chocolate chip. We have made them as oatmeal raisin. We have even made them as oatmeal with apple chunks! I would love for you to check out my versatile [oatmeal cookie recipe](#) at A healthier version of oatmeal cookies and Blessing others at Christmas time.

2. How do you save money on Christmas dinner? Great question! Actually, at my house we will have a Christmas dinner that is a bit different than most families. I am going to make a special meal that is relaxed and not complicated and high lights foods that are in season! We want to spend Christmas Day relaxing and enjoying time together this year without having me all stressed about what I am cooking. We are going to keep it simple with a crock pot of chili on all day for folks to munch on as they get hungry and then in the evening, my daughter, Annie and I will make a baked chicken (instead of turkey), baked fresh sweet potatoes (which were on sale this week), steamed zucchini, yellow squash and onions, cranberry sauce...yes the jelly kind from a can...what can I say our boys love it! LOL.

And then dessert will be a very [low sugar devil's food chocolate cake cupcakes](#) topped with low fat whipped topping Birthday Cake for Jesus. Yum!!!

3. Family traditions you have? Our family enjoys celebrating the season of Advent, the weeks of preparation leading up to Christmas day, with the [Jesse Tree Devotions](#).

So what is a Jesse Tree? It's really special! The tradition of the Jesse Tree comes from the beautiful tradition of the Jewish people who love to go back through their faith history and share the amazing stories of God interacting and stepping into their lives. Each day, beginning with the Sunday following Thanksgiving and ending with Christmas Eve, we take a passage from Scripture that takes the amazing testimony of the stories of Scripture that tell of the coming of Christ...beginning back in Genesis and end with the birth of our Savior. It's really awesome. Here's where the tree comes in...the "root of Jesse" is the family tree of Jesse from whence Jesus came. So we use a tree as part of the celebration. Our ornaments were made out of paper and other ornaments we already have in our Christmas ornament collection that applied to some of the Scripture verses.

4. What is a thrifty gift you give that you make or have purchased? I love creating special Christmas gifts using things we find around our house. Last year, I made stuffed animal friends for our boys using old clothes and fabric from my fabric collection. We call them their 'Nuggle Buddies because our youngest says 'nuggle instead of Snuggle and it sounds so cute! I made a Ducky for our youngest son- age 2 at the time, and a Turtle for our older son who was 7 at the time. They weren't very hard to make and I enjoyed sewing them up and stuffing them knowing they would be special friends for our boys since we weren't able to afford pillow pets for them last year. They were a big hit!

This year I am excited about several of the thrifty gifts we are making. Will and I have both gotten the thrifty gifts from the heart bug this year! And our kids seems to have caught it right along with us! In fact, most of the gifts being given from Will, my husband and I to our children as well as gift to grandparents, aunts, nephews, and our niece are these special kinds of gifts! I wrote a post about it just the other day...[Inspiration for fun, frugal gifts from the Heart!](#)

Here is the general list...if you want the details and pictures of these gifts I encourage you to check it out.

Gifts for our Eight year old son include:

Recyclable Construction Set...including a great book filled with 60 creative activities and things to construct out of recyclable things from around the house...and I filled a box with some for him to get started with! Found the book at our favorite used bookstore for just \$2.00 and the "building blocks" were easy...just things from around our house! He will love it! And it only cost me about \$4.00 out of pocket for all of the supplies!

We are making another special gift for Josh this year. It is actually my husband's idea! He found his old portable CD player and thought it would be the perfect way to start teaching him to take care of CDs (he hasn't been very good at this part in the past! LOL). So we are cleaning up the CD Player and pairing it with a new head set (cost about \$6.00 on sale at Walmart). And Will is going to burn some of the free downloads from Adventures in Odyssey onto CDs for him to listen to. We will also burn copies of some of the children's worship music CDs that we own so he can practice taking care of those and have them to listen to as well. This is his first electronic music type of gift and he will be SO surprised and really enjoy it. And again...we already have the blank CDs and CD player so the total cost is \$6.00 for the headphones.

I am making gift certificate booklets filled with gift certificates for things like..."Mom or Dad will do your chores today" certificates, "You pick the DVD we watch tonight" certificates, "A trip to McDonald's for a treat for a mommy/son or daddy/son date" certificates.

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For Annie, age 16... I am making a teenager version of the gift certificate booklets! Hers will be filled with monthly gift certificates she can turn in for \$10 in gas money (she bought a car in October and LOVES gas gift cards!). We can't afford to buy a gift card for \$120 in free gas cards but we can send her \$10 a month in cash in a special greeting card as a gift that gives all year long! She will also get gift certificates for Daddy/Daughter Dates for coffee and Mary Joy/Daughter gift certificates for girl time window shopping and a soda. You get the idea!

For Michael, our three year old, I am working with Josh to make him a special Christmas gift this year too. It is a personalized matching game using index cards with pictures of our family members and special things around our house. We have lots of index cards on hand and we will print the pictures off of my computer album so there is no cost to this fun gift! You have got to stop by and see the picture to get the full idea!

I am also making Michael a homemade bean bag toss game using leftover fabric from my fabric stash and beans from my pantry. We will also make him a bean sorting game using a recycled egg carton and beans from a bag of 15 bean soup mix that I have in the pantry. We will decorate the egg carton to

make it look fun.

[We are also making special, handmade gifts from the heart for the kids' grandparents this year. My parents loved theirs when we gave it to them at our early Christmas on the first weekend of December when they came for their visit.](#)

When it comes to grandparents...we are having a great time creating their gifts as a family! My parents loved theirs when we gave it to them when they came for an early Christmas the first weekend of December! It is a simple binder made into a simple scrapbook of pictures of us and our children since we were married in April 2010. We even included pictures from our wedding day! They are not fancy...just card stock (which we had on hand), with pictures we printed off of our computer, and a pack of scrap colored papers from Big Lots for \$2.50 and a 1 inch binder for each set of grandparents. They kids and I are having fun putting them all together. We put each page in a page protector. It is a gift that keeps on giving...throughout the year, we will make more pages with new pictures and memories from the kids written on the pages and we will send them to the grandparents on Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, and other holidays throughout the year! They just add the pages to the binders they will receive for Christmas!

Will and I decided to make most of the gifts we give each other gifts from the heart as well.

Will has special computer talents and he is "making" a special gift for me!!!! I am SOOO excited about it! He is giving my blog a makeover!!! He is doing the makeover the week after Christmas and I will be introducing a new blog name at that time...Learning to Live a Surrendered Life will become "[Unwrapping His Grace](#)"! So exciting!!

One of my gifts for Will is to take him on a special Christmas date while our daughter is visiting the week after Christmas, she will babysit her brothers while we have a special date to see Christmas lights and out for hot cocoa for me and coffee for him afterward. I love experience gifts how about you? And the neat thing is that her brothers will see this as a gift for them as they LOVE spending time alone with their big sister!

Annie found gifts for her brothers at a yard sale last summer! She found four DVDs in great condition of some of their favorite movies and only paid \$1.00 for each of them!

Josh, our eight year old, is learning to sew at my side as together we make his big sister a fun throw pillow for her bed.

5. What is your favorite Christmas decoration? My favorite Christmas Decoration has to be our Nativity Set. The "stable" was passed down to me from my parents. It is the stable that we used when I was a little girl growing up and holds very special memories for me. Just like my parents did with my brothers and me, I set it up with them at the beginning of Advent and tell the story of the Christmas story using the Luke 1 Gospel account. We leave Jesus out of the scene then. We wait until Christmas eve for a special time of unwrapping a special gift that has the baby Jesus inside of it as Will shares the Christmas story from his favorite Gospel account for the year.

6. Many people do Christmas Countdowns if you do one what is a thrifty way your family does this? This year our countdown wasn't fancy. We used a red and green construction paper chain. One for

each of our young sons. We have a devotion at the beginning of our home school day and talk about how this helps us to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth which we celebrate at Christmas. Then we go over to the bulletin board when the countdown chains are pinned...count the rings and they pull off one ring! Easy, not fancy, but they love it!

7. What have you found to be your favorite thrifty Christmas tip? I think it is important to be open to finding gifts in unexpected places. I have come a long way in this area! There was a time in my life when I would not have considered a box of recyclables along with a used book on how to make recycled creations! Gifts from the heart are so special. Sometimes they take a little time and preparation...but they don't have to be fancy or challenging to make. Just be yourself! Your family will love it!

8. Do you have a favorite Christmas book for children or for yourself? We love SO many! I wanted to have enough Christmas books on hand to be able to read them a different Christmas book every day of December leading up to Christmas. A great way to enjoy creating special memories reading together and as a special way to countdown to Christmas. Well...we don't own that many Christmas books that would work for both of our boys. So I decided to make my own version of this popular book countdown to Christmas! I found enough Christmas books, some with short stories that would make the book last more than one day, for two weeks and then returned those and checked out enough to make it through the rest of the days until Christmas. I didn't choose to wrap them, to save on wrapping paper costs...instead I checked them out from the library secretly and then put them in a special Christmas book bag that is hidden from our boys. Then everyday before nap time, I took out a new book! They loved it! Once the book had been read to them by me at nap time, they were free to read it anytime they wanted over and over. It was a hit! Lots of fun and totally free!

In the meantime...I am collecting Christmas books from our favorite used bookstore in hopes of collecting enough (using our in store credit from trading books) to have our own collection someday. But in the meantime, our collection of library books works very well.

I hope you enjoyed these interviews with real homemakers and I hope you found something that you could use during your Christmas holiday. I wanted to do this so people would see that you don't have to spend a lot of money to have a Merry Christmas!

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The Hillbilly Housewife Club is a paid membership but, more than that it's a place to find like-minded friends that share the same goals & values of frugal and simple living. "Low Cost Cooking From Scratch" is more than just a slogan. Susanne's heart-felt mission is to share the nutritious, low cost recipes as well as money & time saving tips.

If you've ever wanted a place to go where you could find caring women on the same road as you and get step-by-step action plans, each month, that will help you toward your goals, then you owe it to yourself to take a look at the [Hillbilly Housewife Club](http://HillbillyHousewifeClub.com) and sign up today.

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