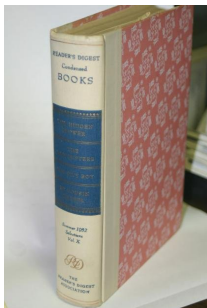


11 INEXPENSIVE HANDMADE HOLIDAY GIFTS by Denise Cassino

Every Christmas as I compile my gift list, I happen upon a craft idea that serves as my inspiration for handmade gifts for those people I want to remember, but can't spend a lot of money on.



1. One year, I made a decorative item from used books, ribbon and pine cones. I found a cache of Reader's Digest Condensed Versions of novels at a used bookstore. When the dust jackets were removed, the books were quite attractive with a solid color spine and a patterned cover with gold leaf on the edges of the pages.

I stacked two books together, tied them with a two-inch wide, wired Christmas ribbon. I made a big double bow and clipped the ends of the ribbons in a V. Then, using a hot glue gun, I attached plastic or real pine clippings, small colored ornaments, pine cones, nuts, small wooden toys and any of the myriad of Christmas decorations available at any craft store. The result was a beautiful, long-lasting table decoration, which only cost a few dollars. I made 15-20 of these gifts and gave them to the management people at my office building, casual acquaintances who had done a kindness for me during the year and friends who joined our family for Christmas Eve, but for whom I couldn't afford a more expensive gift. The response was overwhelming with people mentioning their beauty several years later.

2. At the right is a basket that shows the general idea, but it's not mine – but you get the idea. I added more things. I purchased red and green produce baskets, which I lined with plastic and a second liner of red/green tissue paper placed at angles so the points stood up nicely. I filled the baskets with small 2" pots with live plants and one 4" potted poinsettia, all of which I purchased cheaply at a garden center. I stuffed Spanish moss between and around the pots for stability and to hide the plastic pots and topped it off with a big wired ribbon on the handle. Add a string of twinkly lights, and you've got a



dramatic centerpiece. This gift got rave reviews and cost under \$12.00. One person told me it was the most beautiful Christmas arrangement she had ever seen.



3. Another year, I cut armloads of dried tall grass and weeds that had flowered (like wheat tops). You can find them along the side of the road in places! I stuck them upright in some florist's foam, sprayed them gold, put them in a decorated basket stuffed with Spanish moss around the edges and topped them off with a big ribbon – huge hit!

4. Fruit, gourds, nuts and squash sprayed with silver, gold and bronze



metallic paint are beautiful! Wash them thoroughly so the paint will adhere, spray with paint and allow to dry. Place them in a similarly painted basket and adorn with a wired ribbon, twinkly lights and shiny metallic ornaments and you have a rich, expensive-looking centerpiece. These

shown are larger than I used, but similar and give you the idea of what you're shooting for.

5. Rusty or brightly painted tin cans are also a fun project. Use the sharp end of an old-fashioned “church key” or bottle opener to cut a row of triangle-shaped holes along the top and bottom edges. Stencil the front of the can with a graphic and place a votive candle holder and candle inside and watch it flicker. These make an unusual table setting or mantle piece.



6. Old wine or fancy liquor bottles make great gifts, too, when stuffed with dried chili peppers and orange slices. First, soak off the labels and wash the bottles thoroughly. Stuff with assorted fruit, veggies and herbs. Citrus fruit is nice, too! Top off the bottles with white vinegar and a tablespoon of peppercorns. Reinsert the cork. If the corks are missing, hardware stores carry a supply of corks that work beautifully. Tie a one-inch wired ribbon around the necks and add gift tags and you have some festive hostess gift.

7. Another great thing to do with old bottles is cut a hole in the bottom or side of the bottle with a circular glass cutting bit on a drill. Stuff a full strand of little twinkly lights into the hole, tie a wired ribbon around the neck, cork it and plug in the lights – fabulous!

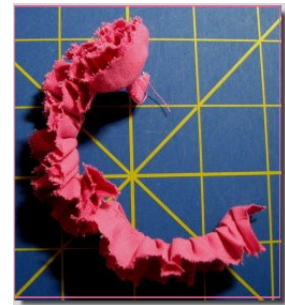




8. Create little snowmen families with socks. Stuff old white socks with fiberfill, tie them with yarn into 2 or 3 sections (head, torso, bottom). Cut off the remainder of the sock and sew up the bottom so it sits flat. Decorate them with little scarves, knitted or made of ribbon, hats made of felt or the bands of the socks and beads for the eyes and mouth.

Orange felt can make a carrot nose. Put little caroling books in their hands (just hot glue the items on, make the hands from felt, too, and glue them to the body).

9. Another great gift for women and girls is a boa that involves silk, nylon or taffeta remnants. The fabric is soft and flowing, so it makes a good choice. The image at the right gives you the idea. I couldn't find anything to better illustrate, but I think this does the job. Buy at least one 16- inch wide remnant. (You might buy two or three in complimentary colors and/or patterns and use several). Cut lengthwise down the middle so you have two (or even three) 8" wide strips. Sew them together lengthwise down the middle with two rows of basting stitch. Pull gently on one of the threads for each row of stitching and gather the fabric. Spread the two strips apart so they fan out. Fray the edges by removing about 1/2 inch of strands so you have only fringe remaining. It makes a lovely boa!



Another version is to lay the pieces vertically and make 2" horizontal cuts every inch along the fabric strips on both sides, leaving two inches in the center uncut for stitching. Do all of the above and you'll have a very funky, raggedy look! Great over a sexy cocktail dress or a plain coat.



10. Go to a cigar store and ask to see their empty boxes. You can find the prettiest boxes both cardboard and wooden. See if they'll offer them for free, but if not, they're cheap – a buck or so. Turn them into purses with handles. Look online or in a craft or fabric stores for the handles – use beads, cord or pre-made handles. You can also decorate these for men for their little personal stashes of things – jewelry, coins, etc.. The boxes can be painted or decouped, lined with colorful paper or fabric attached with glue – felt works nicely. They can also be used for cute flower arrangements, etc.

11. A great idea for a wine chiller is a 20" plastic garden pot on a pedestal (without a hole in the bottom). These are usually plastic or resin. Clean and dry it well, spray it with gold enamel paint and allow to dry. When you entertain, fill it with ice and champagne or wine bottles. Very elegant!



Keeping an eye open throughout the year when shopping, visiting thrift and craft stores or perusing magazines provides a plethora of creative and cost effective ideas, which will take the stress off those last minute Christmas gifts that come your way. You'll be remembered for your creativity and keep your budget intact at the same time!