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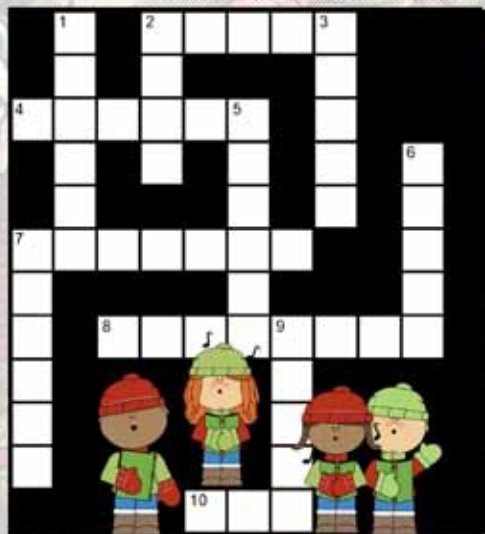
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Kids' Page

CHRISTMAS CAROL CROSSWORD



Across

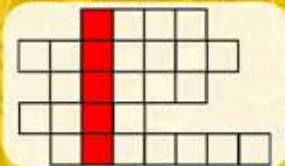
- 2 O Holy _____ (5)
 4 Hark! The Herald _____ Sing. (6)
 7 Little _____ Boy (7)
 8 O Come All Ye _____ (8)
 10 _____ to the World (3)

Down

- 1 Away in a _____ (6)
 2 The First _____ (4)
 3 We _____ Kings (5)
 5 _____ Night (6)
 6 Once in _____ David's City (5)
 7 Little _____ (6)
 9 The _____ and the Ivy (5)

Christmas Word Grid

Solve the Christmas Clues to fill the grid. The shaded row spells the name of a welcome festive visitor.



- The three wise men followed one.
- Pull one to make a BANG!
- The _____ Gabriel.
- You might receive one at Christmas
- We hang them on the tree.



Q: In what year does New Year's Day come before Christmas?
 A: EVERY year!

Hidden word - SANTA

BAUBLES
 GIFT
 ANGEL
 CRACKER
 STAR

Christmas Word Grid Solution



Christmas Carol Crossword

WORD

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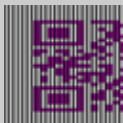
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Welcome to the December update from Warfield Parish Council

Binfield, Warfield & Winkfield Arts Week

The 2021 Arts Week organised jointly by Binfield, Warfield and Winkfield Parish Councils took place over the autumn half term and has been another huge success with many free events covering creative arts, craft, music, theatre, talks and workshops enjoyed by local residents. The week culminated with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition with many original exhibits.

For more pictures from this year's events visit the Arts Week website www.arts-week.org and if you would like to take part in next year's Arts Week with ideas for a new workshop, event or performance then please get in touch.

Christmas Tree Lighting & Carols

Please join us from 5.45pm on Friday 3 December for refreshments, carol singing and the lighting of the Warfield Christmas tree at the Whitegrove Community Centre near Warfield Tesco. The lighting of the tree will take place at 6pm.

COVID-19 Booster Jabs

This winter, those eligible are being urged to book their COVID-19 booster along with their annual flu jab to protect themselves, their loved ones and the NHS. To book your flu jab you will need to contact your GP or your local pharmacy. Six months after your second COVID-19 vaccination, those eligible will be contacted to book their booster appointment. If you have not received an invite after six months, you can book on the NHS website.

Warfield Walks

It's that time of year when we are blessed with some beautiful winter days to go for a walk around our parish. If you would enjoy getting out into the great outdoors and need inspiration, we have walking guides on our website or feel free to visit the office to pick up a leaflet. We are open Monday – Friday from 9:30 a.m. until midday.

**The Councillors and Staff of Warfield Parish Council wish you a very merry Christmas
and a happy new year!**





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Warfield Environment Group

We would like to start by wishing you all a very merry Christmas, and a happy, healthy and peaceful New Year!



2021

At the start of the year the Group felt unable to plan a full programme of events due to Covid but, happily, we have achieved more than we expected:

- Bird nest boxes – essential maintenance plus one new box
- Litter picks – in Gough's Barn Lane and Cabbage Hill Lane (over the border into Binfield!), Great British Spring Cleans at various locations in Warfield and further afield, and events with Meadowbrook Montessori School and the 2nd Bracknell Beavers. Total of 21 sacks of rubbish and 10 of recyclables collected
- Surveys – hedge (Quelm Lane), and for bats, newts and wildflowers
- Verge management for wildlife – at 3 locations in Whitegrove
- Walks – annual bat walk and the Great WEG Wander



Looking forward to 2022

We are planning to offer a full programme of events next year, including celebrations for our 20th birthday! Many events will be linked to the Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership's Year of the Green Corridor, and details will be published on our website at **warfieldenvgroup.wordpress.com** soon. We do hope you will be able to join us!



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Join our mailing list for the latest information on upcoming events

Garden View

This month - Simple winter tasks



This year's festive season (at least at time of writing), is shaping up to be a little more 'normal', whatever that term now means. While most of us are looking forward to more

socialising and togetherness, I'm betting a fair few might think back fondly to last year's smaller, quieter Christmas. And this is where the garden comes into its own. There are always things to do out there, even in December. A few simple gardening tasks offer some pockets of calm and relief amid the busyness of the festive season. They are also a wonderful way to get some fresh air and exercise to burn off those Christmas calories and winter gloominess!

First, take a look at your winter containers. If you have a particularly wet spell, make sure they don't get flooded. If it's dry, then plants will still need water regularly, just give the compost a chance to dry out each time. Pick off any leaves that look yellowed or diseased.

Do you like garlic? I love it. Now is the perfect time to start your own garlic crop, especially if like mine your soil is free-draining. Plant individual cloves of garlic. 'Solent Wight' is a great variety for our greyer British climate and forms large plump bulbs. If you have a sheltered warmer spot try 'Lautrec Wight,' which as its name suggests originates from the town of Lautrec in France. It produces particularly handsome pink/purple cloves

and is widely regarded in France as the best garlic. Snip off any wispy ends or the birds will pull cloves from the soil (I learned that one from experience!). The bulbs will be ready to harvest when the leaves start to die off and turn yellow, which is usually around June or July.

Tidy established perennials by cutting back those that have become pulpy. Simply cut back the decaying material, chop it up and add it to the compost heap.

If you have an unheated greenhouse, a summer house or conservatory you can sow some sweet peas and leave them to germinate. Sow the seeds in deep pots or root-trainers filled with multi-purpose compost then keep the pots in a propagator or cover them with a transparent plastic bag. Once seeds have germinated, remove the covering.

If the soil isn't frozen, you can plant bare-root fruit bushes such as gooseberries, raspberries, and blackberries. Make sure you dig a hole that can take the plant's roots comfortably without squashing them. Then label them clearly because it's easy to forget which varieties you're growing!

Finally, if you're looking for the perfect gift for the gardener in your life please can I recommend Gold Leaf Winter Touch gloves. They have a Thinsulate™ thermal lining which keeps hands toasty warm even in the coldest weather, AND an additional Ski-Dri™ waterproof, breathable lining so your hands remain dry even when used in the wet! I also love the reinforced palm because it's great for spade work. As you can tell, I love mine, and I am neither sponsored by nor connected with the company in any way; mine were a recent gift and I've been raving about them to anyone who will listen ever since!

Happy Gardening,

By Rachael Leverton

The Art of Scepticism

How to think critically

Over a year after the losing the US presidential election Donald Trump still maintains he won - by a 'landslide'. Even after multiple recounts, audits and 'forensic' testing all proved him wrong. But why do tens of millions of Americans still think he's telling the truth?

Critical thinking and scepticism are dying skills. You read a post on Twitter and because other people agree with it you assume it's true. We don't ask the important questions. Who made the initial post? What expertise do they have? What facts do they have to back up their claims? Where do those facts come from? Can they be trusted? Do they have something to gain?

Without applying some critical thought, we end up falling down the rabbit hole and starting to believe all sorts of nonsensical conspiracy theories from the Earth being flat (yes, there is a growing Flat Earth movement), all the way up to the world being run by an elite race of child eating vampires (the basic QAnon premise!!).

So how do you combat the deluge of misinformation, misunderstanding and barefaced lies surrounding us in today's permanently connected life?

Use Carl Sagan's Baloney Detector.

Carl Sagan was a leading scientist, philosopher and astronomer who saw how society was losing touch with reality in the 80's and 90's. He predicted our current situation and tried hard to combat the rejection of facts and truths.

The baloney (or BS) detector is a set of rules you should follow to validate any argument people present to you. There are a number of steps, but I'll take you through the main ones you should apply to claims you hear.

- Check the facts There must be facts to back up the claim. These must be independently confirmed

by a trusted source.

- Don't trust someone just because they are in authority.
- Explore other explanations. Can you disprove them? Explanations that survive disproof stand a better chance of being correct.
- Don't believe something just because you like the sound of it.
- If something can be measured, measure it, or get reliable data from an expert source.
- If one argument relies on another and another, they all must work or the whole chain fails.
- Occam's Razor - if two arguments work, the simplest is usually the best.
- Can you falsify the argument? If there's no possible way you can test an argument to see if it's true, it's not a good argument.

So, when you next read about aliens from Jupiter replacing members of the Government with robot clones, think to yourself. Is this true? How many have been replaced? Can we test this theory? Who is saying this? Can they be trusted? Is this the likeliest explanation?

I'll leave you to ponder that one!



By James Bates

What is the Winter Solstice?



In the Northern Hemisphere, the Winter Solstice occurs when the 'top half' of the Earth tilts away from the Sun at its most extreme angle. This gives us the longest night and shortest day of the year. It normally falls on 21 December, and from this point on, the days will begin to lengthen until the Summer Solstice on 21 June.

The word 'solstice' comes from the Latin phrase for 'sun stands still'. This is because the sun appears to rise and set in the same two places for several days in a row.

Cultures through the ages have marked the Solstice and celebrated the triumph of light over dark.

Massive prehistoric monuments such as Stonehenge were built to align with the Winter Solstice sunrise.

The ancient Romans had a seven-day festival called Saturnalia, when everything would be reversed – men would dress as women and masters dressed as servants. People decorated their houses with greenery, lit candles and gave presents.

Celtic druids gave pieces of mistletoe as a blessing. They also began the tradition of the Yule log, which was burned to conquer the darkness and bring luck for the year ahead.

Many people celebrate the Solstice today, and it's interesting to see how many of the customs have become part of our Christmas festivities.

By Alex Albrighton

BOARD GAMES OR BORED GAMES?



There are two types of families; those that love a game of

Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit or Scrabble, and families like mine.

Our little festive hearts sink when guests suggest breaking out the Cluedo. We always thought we were odd until a few years ago when we befriended new neighbours. They invited us round for festive drinks and about halfway through the evening they suggested we play some games. They must have seen our collective look of horror. Oh no, they laughed, not BORED games...and with that they whipped out *Dobble*, *Q-Bitz* and *Genius Square*. These were games I had never heard of, although admittedly I hadn't really researched the subject. What ensued were a couple of fast-paced fun-filled hours, which resulted in us buying the same games and few more besides.

That evening our neighbours showed us that we didn't hate board games, we'd just been playing the wrong ones. My family is very kinaesthetic. We like to touch and manipulate things. We have a dozen different Rubik cubes and enjoy solving

them. Traditional board games just aren't engaging enough for us.

Dobble is a 'spot-it' style game. There is a deck of circular cards covered in images and each card shares just one image in common with each other card. The idea is to spot the match quicker than your neighbour in a series of lightning rounds. Like snap but way more challenging and far more entertaining.

Q-Bitz is a match-it game, where you race against other players to reproduce the pattern on a card, using sixteen cubes, which all have different pattern-parts on each face. There are speed and memory variations, and children tend to be better than adults...at least in our house.

If you love Tetris you'll probably like **Genius Square**. The blocks are the same shapes and colours, and by throwing special dice you block out various co-ordinates on your square, then race to fit all the blocks into the remaining spaces.

These three games have become our family staples and we've discovered that lots of our friends prefer them to traditional board games too.

So, if you're 'bored with board games' try these and see if they convert you.

By Sarah Davey

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Sudoku

				1				5
4	9				2	1		
	6	1		7	9		2	
7		8	3	9				
2	4							
	1				7			8
					3			1
			1			5		9
							3	6

How to Play

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9, **with no repetition!**

That's all there is to it.

You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic - there's no maths involved and no adding up.

It's fun. It's challenging. It's addictive!

(solution on page 18)

What to Buy a Vegan

How do you know whether someone is a vegan?

Don't worry...they'll tell you!

I've heard that joke many times because I'm a vegan. Oops did I just tell you that? I'm such a cliché!

But joking aside, people often ask me what gifts might be suitable for a vegan. Vegans don't eat any food derived from animals and typically don't use other animal products either. As well as avoiding meat, I also don't eat dairy-based cheese, or eggs, and I don't wear leather or silk. So, what can you buy for the vegan in your life?

For the style conscious vegan – Vegan leather bags have come of age. From the designer end Fraenk label (£200+) to the more modestly priced but extremely cute Fenella Smith bags (approx. £50-£70). The recipient will love looking stylish and fun while showing the world they care about animal welfare. And when you see how beautiful these bags are you might even be tempted yourself.



For the creative vegan – Cosy Owl Soy Wax Christmas (£18.99) Spice Candle Making kit is great for the creative vegan in your life. Scented with spicy notes of bergamot, ginger, orange zest and eucalyptus, blended with smooth undertones of clove bud, cardamom, cinnamon and vanilla, this kit is also

sustainably sourced, and free from CMR and Phthalates.

For the foodie vegan – The Big Vegan Cheese Making Kit (£27.50) contains everything needed to make six varieties of fresh dairy free cheeses! It includes herbs, instructions, and recipes to make vegan Mozzarella, Ricotta, Mascarpone, Halloumi, Feta and Parmesan. You just need to add nuts and almond milk!

Contrary to popular belief, vegans have a sense of humour. My favourite T shirt was a Christmas gift from my brother. The slogan reads, 'Have I mentioned I'm a vegan?'

By Heather Smith

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Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!

A white Christmas is something many of us dream of, but how much do we know about snow?

Snow is made of a bizarre and complex substance which we take completely for granted – water!

Water is a liquid at room temperature, unlike other substances with similar-sized molecules, such as ammonia or methane – these are gases. Water requires more energy to boil it than other liquids and unlike most substances which shrink as they freeze, water expands as it turns to ice. As it turns out this is rather important. Ice is less dense than water so it floats. If it became more dense like most substances lakes would freeze from the bottom up and aquatic life would die. But because water freezes from the top down, the floating ice forms a layer on the surface which insulates the water beneath allowing it to stay liquid and all the swimming creatures to survive.

Few people know that for snow to fall at temperatures higher than -40C a special particle called an ice nucleus is required. Snow seeds as they are known include fine particles of soil, dust, and volcanic ash. These 'seeds' pass through the clouds of water vapour in the upper atmospheres and it is on their surface that ice crystals form which become snow. Snowflakes are all different because of the way they attract new water to their 'corners'. As the crystals fall through the atmosphere they pass through different layers of temperature and humidity, and get tossed around by the wind. The interplay between the snow seeds, random water droplets and their need to grow in a hexagonal fashion means that each snowflake grows rapidly in a unique way until they are large enough to fall as snowflakes.

The perfect snowflakes that we see on Christmas cards are actually quite idealised. Most snowflakes are imperfect, but they do have an underlying symmetry which has been noticed by humans for thousands of years. Most flakes are 1cm or less across but occasionally atmospheric conditions conspire to form giant snowflakes. In 1915 snowflakes 10cm across fell in Berlin, and in Montana in 1887 flakes 38cm (15 inches) across were recorded.

But if snow is made of ice (which is clear or possibly slightly blue), why is snow dazzling white? Well the reason is because of the complex structure of snowflake crystals. Light rays bounce around from one crystal of ice to another, randomly until they find their way out. Because of the very short distances between the reflective surfaces the light rays are efficiently scattered and none are absorbed, and if no light is absorbed then a substance appears white.

If we do have a few flakes this Christmas then you can amaze your friends with how much you now know about snow!

All together now... 'I'm dreaming of a white Christmas...'



By Monica Cox

A Good Read

Christmas is a wonderful time to curl up with a book. The shelves are full of this year's new and shiny celebrity offerings. But Christmas is surely a time for nostalgia. So, pour yourself a glass of eggnog or mulled wine and let's visit Christmas Past...

For Grown-Ups

For a real nostalgia-fest and a lyrical description of times gone by, when *'December was as white as Lapland though there were no reindeers'*? dig out **'A Child's Christmas in Wales'** by Dylan Thomas, preferably with Edward Ardizzone's illustrations. Short, simple, and beautiful, it sums up Christmas with the Uncles, snow on the ground and the myriad delights for a small boy on the best day of the year.

If, however, you are feeling slightly less full of cheer and goodwill, **Jilly Cooper** might be more to your taste. The Christmas scene in *'Appassionata'* is one of my favourite depictions of the holiday, and every December I find myself turning first to *'How to Survive Christmas'* – bleak, witty and sometimes crushingly accurate, it is Cooper's account of how to get through a typical festive season.

Another excellent book with a brief but memorable Christmas sequence, is *'Angels and Men'* by Catherine Fox. It is hard to get hold of, but I promise you, Mara's Christmas with her grandmother is not one you will forget – and the rest of the book is beautifully written, too.

Finally, from the realms of fantasy, why not try Christmas Discworld style in *'Hogfather'* by Terry Pratchett? Was there ever a writer with a sharper wit? As you might expect, his Santa is quite different – for a start, those are pigs, not reindeer pulling his sleigh. And he seems a little on the bony side. What does Death have to do with Christmas? More than you might think....



For Kids

For many people, *'The Snowman'* by **Raymond Briggs** is their Christmas classic of choice. I actually prefer his *'Father Christmas'*. Less saccharine and eloquently told with pictures and few words, it follows a curmudgeonly Santa on his journey around the globe, dropping off presents, struggling down chimneys, trudging upstairs, through all kinds of weather...Merry Bloomin' Christmas!

Another favourite is *'Dear Father Christmas'* by **Jeanne Willis and Rosie Reeve**. This picture book follows Mary as she writes her Christmas letter. Her wishes are different, as she doesn't need any more toys – but an everlasting hamster and self-tying shoelaces would come in rather handy. Of course, there is a twist in the tale, but we don't see it coming, and my kids read it over and over again – even at the height of summer.

If you like the Jolly Postman, then you will love *'The Jolly Christmas Postman'* by **Janet and Allan Ahlberg**. As you might expect, there are a range of letters to open, with cards, games and even a jigsaw puzzle for the lucky nursery rhyme characters on his rounds. An absolute delight.

And finally...

How could we look at Christmas without mentioning the two biggest Christmas classics ever? I mean of course, *'A Christmas Carol'* by **Charles Dickens** and *'The Night Before Christmas'* by **Clement C Moore**. I know you have seen a million and one adaptations of the former (The Muppets do it best!), but the book really is worth a read. Be honest, when else are you going to curl up by the fire with a Dickens novel if not during a long snowy holiday? Try it. As for the former, we read it aloud every Christmas Eve, just before the lights go out. I stole this tradition from a friend, and I am passing it on to you.

Merry Christmas!

By Kath Bennett

Drying to be Environmentally Friendly

Which tumble drier should you choose?

I try to be eco-friendly. I make only intentional purchases, recycle, repurpose, and use a washing line rather than a tumble dryer as much as possible. But when it's drizzling and cold outside and there are two loads of washing to dry, a tumble dryer is sometimes the only reasonable option.



Our ancient tumble dryer died recently. It was fifteen years old so lasted way beyond our expectations, but now we were in the market for a new one. Eco-friendliness was top of the agenda. No tumble drier is actually eco-friendly, but I wanted one that at least wasn't openly hostile for the days when line-drying wasn't an option.

There are two types of tumble dryer: condenser and vented. Condensers work by separating moisture from the air and storing it in a water container. The container needs to be emptied after each cycle. Vented models have a large hose designed to transfer the moist air outside. While this saves you emptying a container, it may require some installation if you want to vent it through a wall.

Bigger drums provide more room for clothes to tumble, allowing for thorough drying and fewer creases. Drum capacity is measured in kilograms. If you want to dry substantial amounts of clothes, look at models above 9kg.

Tumble dryers with sensors work out the ideal drying time for clothes. They remove the guesswork by automatically assessing the weight and moisture levels in the clothes. The machine then calculates how long the cycle should be, saving energy and money. And, because it knows when to stop, it prevents damage to clothes caused by over-drying.

Tumble dryer energy ratings range from

A+++ which is super-efficient, to D which... erm... isn't. Even current models are not always terribly environmentally friendly. The most energy efficient models use a heat pump.

A heat pump tumble dryer absorbs the water

from the wet laundry by passing hot air through the drum. This air is then passed through an evaporator which removes the water and stores it in the tumble dryers' reservoir. The air is then reheated and sent back through the drum multiple times until your laundry is dry.

This is different to normal vented and condenser tumble dryers, as neither of those models take advantage of the air they have already warmed. So, heat pump tumble dryers use up to 50% less energy as they are reheating the air which is already warm from the previous cycle. This means they are better for the environment. Also, because heat pump tumble dryers operate at a lower temperature, clothes last longer, which is also an eco-win.

The two disadvantages are price, and a longer running time. Costs have fallen recently but they are still more expensive than conventional driers. The longer running time is because of the lower running temperatures.

We thought about it carefully and on balance felt that with energy prices set to keep rising, it was better to invest a little extra cash up front when buying our new tumble dryer rather than paying extra to use it over the long term.

If you don't have to replace your drier immediately it might be worth waiting a little longer to see whether prices drop any more as heat pump models become more the norm.

By Kate McCarthy

Partying in a Pandemic

I love to throw a party. Every year I'd host a festive bash for our friends. Then last year COVID happened. This year I've been looking forwards to throwing my party again but actually the virus is still rife in the community. The kids and staff at my son's senior school are dropping like flies, and I realised that it simply wouldn't be sensible to gather 15-20 people I care about in a confined space.

I felt a bit deflated until one of my friends asked, 'Are you going to do your outdoor thing again? It was so much fun last year.'

I was a little taken aback, then I realised that I'd been so focussed on getting back to 'normal' I'd completely forgotten that amid all the darkness last year we'd actually had some great times, and one of them was my Christmas Party in the Yard. Back in 2020 when I'd realised we couldn't host our friends in the usual way I decided to get creative. "I need to think outside the box," I'd said to my husband..." In fact, I need to think 'outside.'" He looked horrified, "You can't host a Christmas party outside in the UK in December!" he said.

Well, I couldn't host a conventional party sure, but they were unconventional times. I canvassed my friends, and they were on board. We decided that we would meet up in the afternoon to go for a lovely walk, then come back and hang out on my friend's allotment because we'd already be dressed for the weather and allotment gatherings of more than three households were actually allowed!

I decided if we were going to do it, it would have to be full on magical. So, we hung outdoor fairy lights all-round the plot for a Winter Wonderland feel. We begged and borrowed outdoor lanterns and placed candles in jars on the table. We made garlands of pinecones, spruce clippings, eucalyptus, and ivy. My husband had the brilliant idea of tying star anise and

cinnamon sticks to the garlands to make a really Christmassy smell, and he dragged out the summer gazebo

We fired up BBQs, Patio heaters and a firepit and put all the garden chairs in the warmest area. And we made festive sausages with apple sauce and cranberry sauce instead of ketchup. There were mince pies and popcorn and we even roasted chestnuts and toasted marshmallows.

For drinks we made spiced apple cider, hot chocolate with chocolate liqueur and squirty cream and mulled wine.

And there were blankets, rugs, and fleecy throws. We played music on an old battery operated CD player and laughed and talked until late.

My mistake was to think of this as a poor substitute for my usual Christmas party. My friends on the other hand thought of it as something quite lovely in its own right and were keen for a repeat in 2021, only hopefully in my garden this time, with easy access to posher plumbing when nature calls!

So, this year, we're not risking an indoor party again yet, we're going to repeat the outdoor get together, and it will be exactly what we make it, a wonderful celebration of friendship and joy, exactly as Christmas should be.



By Debbie James

Useful Numbers

Crimestoppers 0800 555 111
(Anonymous freephone number)
Thames Valley Police 101
(Non-emergency number)
Emergency 999

Gas Emergency 0800 111999
Electricity Emergency 0800 404090
Power Cut Helpline 105
Water Emergency 0333 0000365

Bracknell Forest Council 01344 352000
(Customer Services)
Bracknell Town Council 01344 420079
Binfield Parish Council 01344 454602
Warfield Parish Council 01344 457777
Winkfield Parish Council 01344 885110

ChildLine 0800 1111
Samaritans 116 123
DrinkLine 0300 1231110

National Rail Enquiries 03457 484950
Gatwick Airport 0844 8920322
Heathrow Airport 0844 3351801

NHS help & advice 111
Heatherwood Hospital 01344 623333
Royal Berkshire Hospital 0118 3225111
Wexham Park Hospital 01753 633000
Frimley Park Hospital 01276 604604

South Hill Park 01344 484123
Bracknell Leisure Centre 01344 454203
The Look Out 01344 354400

Sudoku Solution

3	2	7	4	1	8	9	6	5
4	9	5	6	3	2	1	8	7
8	6	1	5	7	9	3	2	4
7	5	8	3	9	6	4	1	2
2	4	6	8	5	1	7	9	3
9	1	3	2	4	7	6	5	8
5	8	9	7	6	3	2	4	1
6	3	2	1	8	4	5	7	9
1	7	4	9	2	5	8	3	6

Wrap it Up



Are you one of those people who leave all their wrapping until Christmas Eve and end up using a bit of birthday paper because you run out of Christmas wrapping?

Why not plan ahead and take a little more time this year. It can be really satisfying to see all your gifts looking beautiful under the tree and receive lots of compliments when you hand them out.

There are lots of different types of wrapping available including paper, bags, huge sacks, tubs and boxes. You can also get lots of accessories from craft shops to add a unique twist. Here are some tips and suggestions to help:-

If using wrapping paper, measure it first and trim off the excess. Decide how much you need by wrapping a ribbon around the gift and then laying the ribbon on the paper and cutting it to that size. Alternatively, use a tape or ruler.

If you have trouble cutting gift wrap in a straight line, look for brands that have grid lines on the reverse. If you can't get these, mark the paper where you need to cut it

and then fold it and cut along the crease.

Keep any off cuts as these may fit smaller gifts. This will also help avoid waste.

If your gift consists of a number of boxes try making a tower and wrapping ribbon round the whole. Even if your gifts don't come in boxes, you could put them in some to make wrapping easier. This is also the art of disguise and can create an element of fun. Even those who think they know what you are buying them

will start to wonder.

When wrapping something soft like a scarf or a jumper, lay the item on a piece of cardboard. This will give you a firm base and mean that you can create clean corners and crisp edges.

For oddly shaped presents, you can create a better effect by padding out unusual angles with tissue paper or using a gift bag.

Try creating a cracker shape for tubular gifts.

If your present has a circular bottom, pleat the paper to get a neat finish.

To avoid getting in a tangle, buy tape which is on a dispenser and use double sided tape where it will help.

Create a wow factor by colour coordinating your wrapping or using the same design for all of a persons presents. You could also use plain wrapping and be creative with patterned tape, add homemade gift tags or create a pocket effect in which you insert a card or other decoration

By Susan Brookes-Morris

Last Minute Christmas Cake

Traditionally Christmas cakes are made well in advance but if you haven't had time try our last-minute version. Because it makes two you can also give one away as a gift, and solve two problems with one recipe!

Makes 2 cakes, each serving 8

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1-1¼ hours depending on oven.

Ingredients

600g good-quality mixed dried fruits
150ml whisky, warmed
150g stem ginger, drained, plus
8 tbsp ginger syrup from the jar
200g butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
300g plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
2 tsp mixed spice
200g soft light brown sugar
4 large free-range eggs
2 tbsp milk
Finely grated zest of 2 small oranges and 2 lemons
50g ground almonds
150g whole glacé cherries

Method

Put the dried fruits in a bowl and pour over the whisky. Set aside for 30 minutes to allow the fruit to plump up.

Briefly blend the ginger and its syrup in a mini food processor until finely chopped. Preheat the oven to 160°C/fan140°C/gas 3. Grease and line a 20cm square cake tin.

Sift the flour, baking powder and mixed spice into a large bowl and add the rest of the ingredients except the

cherries. Beat with a hand-held electric whisk for 2 minutes until pale and fluffy. Fold in the soaked dried fruits and any whisky, the blitzed ginger and the cherries.

Spoon into the baking tin and level off. Bake for 1-1¼ hours (this depends very much on your oven. My fan oven is super-quick whereas my mother's aga is slower). If you're unsure I recommend you check after an hour then every fifteen minutes after that, until the cake is firm and golden brown. To check, insert a skewer into the centre of the cake. If it comes out clean the cake is cooked. You can cover it loosely with foil after 1 hour if the centre needs more time. This prevents the surface darkening too much. Leave in the tin for 10 minutes, and then remove to a wire rack to cool.

Remove a thin slice from all sides of the cake and discard. Cut the cake in half to make 2 rectangles.

Top with marzipan and white fondant icing and decorate with a sprig of holly.





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