

Defeat Debt

Credit Advisors Foundation

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The Real Story— Your Budget Friendly, Money Saving Holiday Ideas

We asked, you answered. Last month, we asked our readers to share their budget friendly, money saving holiday ideas. We were excited by the many great responses we received, encouraged by your efforts to stick to your budgets (even during the holidays), tickled by your creativity and heartened by your expressions of care, concern and love for your families, friends and neighbors.



Re-'chargeable' gift cards can make gift giving easier on the budget.

From all of your responses, we chose to share those we thought were the most innovative and functional. For the December issue of Defeat Debt's The Real Story here are your responses.

Presented first: our judges' favorite.

Dear Michaela - I am on a very tight budget like many others. I decided to buy gift cards that are rechargeable from a well-known store. I started out with putting \$10 and will add as much as I can till Christmas. My son lives in another state and when I send him the card he will keep it. I have the number so I can put more money on for his birthday. This way I don't have postage to send him gifts and if he moves he can use it at any store. You just have to scratch off so you can write down the numbers only if you will be recharging without the card. The store can manually put in the numbers if you don't have the card. No more spending more than you should. No more paying postage. No more returned gifts. A picture and/or letter from the heart is more important than the gift, the gift is just an extra. Submitted by Cindy A. from Nebraska.

Dear Cindy – This is such a fabulous idea on so many fronts – ease of use, ability to stretch it out over time and work it into a budget, no ongoing postage expense, can be used at any location (including a web site in this day), and no worries about fit or color matches. (I might suggest, instead of scratching off to see the card number, ask store personnel for the card number at the time it is charged so you can have it for later – better yet, tell them what you are doing and go by the store recommendation.) Most importantly, your last line is what people seem to forget. How many of us would love to have that letter from those closest to us, letting us know what is in their hearts? Thank you so much for your reply. I'm certain your holiday season will bring you happiness and not stress due to your planning in advance and creative use of your re-

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Inside Story Headline

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sources.

Michaela Harper, Program Director.

Other ideas received from Defeat Debt readers and Credit Advisors Foundation staff:

1. Visit thrift stores like the Salvation Army. Find fun, wild dresses, uniforms, hats and jewelry. Put these treasures in a box (decorated or wrapped) and give as 'dress up' supplies to a young one on your list.

2. Draw or prepare a 'coupon' for an activity you will do with your children after Christmas - skating, sledding, hiking, catch or a game of tag. Wrap it up and put under tree. (What kid wouldn't like to get a coupon with a one time free room

cleaning by you?)

3. Make a Joy Journal - Buy an attractive blank book (on sale). Have group write some of their favorite memories with the recipient in the book as a gift - Grandma, Aunt Sue, or Dad. No need to fill in all the pages - this leaves opportunity for future additions. You may be surprised by what some consider "the great memories" - especially the kids.

4. Buy an inexpensive clay pot. Paint with primer - then add your children's handprints in bright colors. Fill at least half way with play sand. Add a bright, pretty candle (from a dollar store) and decorate sand with pine-



Dress up 'supplies' are a fun gift for a youngster on your list.

cones or holly berries (inexpensive at craft shop). Great gift for grandmas, godparents and others, plus, easy enough for kids to do and costs probably less than \$5.00.

5. Save the holiday cards you receive this year and use for gift tags next year.

6. Buy gift-wrap and accessories at after holiday sales for next year.

7. Instead of buying individual gifts buy family gifts - games, skating or movie tickets and such that they can use together.

Great ideas!

Give them a try for a budget friendly, money saving holiday!

Holiday Spending Review

You can find many tips and ideas about saving money during the holidays and avoiding big holiday debt problems come January. But are you paying attention? What are the experts estimating we'll spend this year? On average estimates have increased to \$702.03 *per consumer* (not just households) this holiday season. Of that, 58 percent will be spent on family, 10 percent on friends, 6 percent on service providers, 3 percent on co-workers, and how could we resist, 13 percent on ourselves.

First and foremost in saving money during the holidays, understand what you believe and the way you think about money:

1. Know the difference between wants and needs
2. Money does NOT equal love
3. Real meaning of success - financial fitness
4. Increase your awareness, know how you spend your money - recognize your Budget Black Holes

Other Ideas?

To Do:

Priorities— What is your purpose or goal? Is the holiday about family and friends or giving gifts? Make a priority list for what *must* be accomplished, and what is

optional.

Budget - total and per gifting (don't forget food, donations, travel, entertainment, holiday cards, postage, gift wrap, and decorations. Consider if you really need new party clothes or if home made gifts could take the edge off your holiday budget - like baking goodies)

Comparison shop - make non-spending comparison trips, or use the Internet or circular ads to compare prices.

Shop all at once at purchase time - use your budgeted list and stick to it (if your list is too big to do all at once - see 'avoid overdoing it' below - break it into chunks or groupings to be completed at once).

To Avoid:

Last minute shopping - results in pressured decisions and increases the likelihood of over-spending

Over doing it - avoid shopping when stores are most crowded, shop without your kids but go with another adult if necessary, one who is as serious as you about sticking to the list, to help keep you on track. Remember, if you're cranky and tired your choices will reflect that - take a break or rest as often as needed.

Above all avoid **using credit** - there *will* be consequences. For example, using your credit card while you're in a DMP could

mean creditors drop you from the program and eliminate your benefits. Never be afraid to **explore your creativity** during the holidays. Some families give gifts on New Year's or later to take advantage of better retail prices and keep the holiday focus off of the gifts themselves.

Exploring your creative ideas for the holidays may also call for a reality check. Are the things you are doing truly meaningful traditions or simply just the way you've always done it? Are there alternatives that could lower the costs without losing the fun and memories created?

Regardless, you can have a holiday filled with the best of the season and still avoid big holiday debt.



Experts estimate holiday spending at over \$700 per consumer this year.

Word Search

The list of words below, taken from this month's Defeat Debt articles, are hidden in the Word Search matrix. See how many you can find.

BILL

BUDGET

CONSUMER

CREATIVE

CREDIT

DECEMBER

FAMILY

FRIENDS

FUNCTION

GIFTS

HOLIDAY

INTEREST

MONEY

PECANS

TIPS

S	D	N	E	I	R	F	A	M	I	L	Y
A	G	I	F	T	S	G	M	B	N	I	F
F	L	C	I	N	E	Z	U	N	T	V	U
R	P	M	A	J	R	O	D	S	E	C	N
E	K	C	O	N	S	U	M	E	R	F	C
J	E	R	R	N	B	U	D	G	E	T	T
P	V	E	Y	E	E	C	K	Y	S	L	I
W	Z	A	H	B	D	Y	G	U	T	A	O
M	S	T	I	P	S	I	O	F	L	Q	N
D	N	I	X	T	F	X	T	L	P	D	A
B	W	V	E	H	O	L	I	D	A	Y	L
T	D	E	C	E	M	B	E	R	H	Q	A



A Credit Card Broke My Heart

I first saw him when I was in college. We met through one of those on-line services. I was told he was generous, and would focus on *my* needs. The type who would be there whenever I needed him. He was very bright and a real card. At first spending time with him always made me feel great but my friends warned me he was nothing but plastic. Nevertheless, we began to go everywhere together...C.C. bought me dinners, jewelry, expensive clothes – almost anything I desired! He told me I was priceless and deserved only the very best.

A month later, I met Bill. He was waiting for me when I went to pick up my mail. He too, seemed nice at first, and

for a while he said he was only interested in my happiness. Soon it seemed he knew everything C.C. and I did and when I asked him what his interests were, he said 20.02%...It was pretty clear that all he was after was my money. To make matters worse, Bill said C.C. would never go anywhere with me again if I didn't pay – those two had their little game planned all along. It seems I never really knew C.C. at all...Which brings me to why I won't be sending you a gift this year...Happy Holidays anyway.

Adapted from: American Greetings.



To Our **Clients**

To Our **Friends**

Our entire organization
joins
in sending
Holiday Greetings,
with every good wish for
the New Year.



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Get out of debt, with no regret!

The Kitchen on a Dime—Gifts to Make and Give

Homemade Gifts to Give

As we have been reminded in this issue of Defeat Debt, holiday gifts don't have to cost a fortune to be meaningful. A little creativity and using our special talents can go a long way when giving gifts *anytime* during the year.

This month in The Kitchen on a Dime we present two easy recipes that, when prepared, can make very special gifts that are yummy, too.

Spiced Pecans

Ingredients:
3 Tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

dash of Tabasco sauce

1 ¾ cup pecan halves

To Make:

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Melt butter in heavy saucepan. Mix in cayenne pepper, salt, cinnamon, and Tabasco. Place pecan halves in a medium bowl. Pour butter mixture over nuts and toss to coat. Spread out nuts on a large baking sheet. Bake until crisp, about 15 minutes. Cool completely. Store in decorative airtight container. Can be prepared 1 week ahead.

Café Viennese

Ingredients:
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup sugar
¼ cup powdered non-dairy instant



Gifts from the kitchen are always appreciated.

creamer

¼ cup instant coffee granules

To Make:

Combine ingredients, mix well. Store in decorative airtight container. Use by tablespoonfuls according to taste. Simply, spoon into cup and add boiling water.