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Thoughtful Valentine's gifts

Valentine's Day brightens up the bleakness of the shortest and most wintry month of the year for the northern part of the globe. Businesses and homes are awash in pink and red each February, with heart-shaped decorations and boxes filling up store aisles. Sending heartfelt sentiments is a large part of celebrating Valentine's Day, and most people cherish the day for the opportunity to bestow gifts on the ones they love.

The National Retail Fed-

eration says more than half of all consumers typically plan to celebrate Valentine's Day. In 2025, \$27.5 billion was spent on the holiday, with consumers continuing to prioritize gifting those closest to them. The NRF reports the top gift categories for Valentine's Day are candy, flowers, greeting cards, an evening out, and jewelry. Here's how to make these gifts more thoughtful and endearing.

Candy

Gift givers can select candy that is preferable to their loved one instead of choosing the first box of chocolate they find at the store. Perhaps the person you love likes confections from a boutique candy shop a few towns over or has a hankering for candy from overseas? Mexico, for example, is known for its Dulce de Leche, while Halva is a dense, sweet treat from the Middle East. Choosing a special candy really sets the gift apart.

Flowers

Flowers are special gifts. Too often, people feel pressured to buy roses on Valentine's Day, even if this might not be a special someone's preferred flower. Choose, instead, a flower that has particular meaning to the person or one that is known to be a favorite. Aster and Baby's Breath are two blooms

known for being symbols of love, according to The Old Farmer's Almanac.

Greeting cards

A handmade card may express warmer sentiments than one picked up at the store, particularly since the former can be customized to the recipient. Include personalized sentiments, inside jokes or memories of time spent together. Craft and hobby stores offer plenty of supplies for paper crafting, so it's possible to create a lovely greeting card with minimal effort.

A night out

A night out can be tailored to the interests of the couple celebrating. Book a dinner at a restaurant that was the scene of your first date; otherwise, stay in and watch a movie you each love.

Jewelry

Jewelry is a very personal gift. While it may seem like a great idea to surprise a special someone with a bracelet or earrings, if the style is off or the color wrong, the piece may not be worn. Rather, the surprise can be a trip to the jewelry store together to pick out something recipients wear all the time.

Gifts that fit the interests, personality and memories of a couple can be especially meaningful on Valentine's Day.

Choosing the best foods for backyard birds

Feeding wild birds can be a popular and rewarding hobby. Such a hobby facilitates a connection with nature and helps to ensure local wildlife gets the sustenance it needs to survive.

According to estimates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, around 50 million Americans engage in bird feeding each year. When feeding birds, it's important to choose quality foods to ensure health and survival, particularly during months when the weather is harsh. Here are some factors to consider when setting out food for birds.

Choose wisely

When selecting bird feed, homeowners should look for feed that is high in fat and protein. Black oil sunflower seeds (BOSS) are a popular choice because they offer high caloric value and are easily opened by the greatest variety of species. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology reports that BOSS, which are small, thin-shelled seeds, attract more than 40 types of North American birds, making it the most universally accepted food.

For smaller birds, like goldfinches and pine siskins, nyjer (thistle) seed is an ideal choice.

Offer essential fats

It's key for birds in colder climates to maintain significant fat reserves to achieve the correct body temperature. Suet cakes, which are rendered beef fat mixed with seeds or fruit, can be the meal birds need. Suet provides essential calories for birds like woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees when insects are scarce. Homeowners should choose



commercially produced suet cakes or raw suet, as homemade varieties made from cooking grease might melt and mat birds' feathers, affecting their insulation.

Shelled peanuts and crushed nut meats, which are the kernel of nuts, can offer high-energy fats for titmice and jays.

Avoid certain foods

Although we've all seen people casting bread out to wild birds, bread products are particularly discouraged as bird food. They fill birds' stomachs without providing necessary nutrients. Table scraps containing excessive salt or sugar also should be avoided.

Maintain avian hygiene

Bird feeders can concentrate flocks, which can be fun to watch. But it also increases the risk of disease transmission among birds. The Audubon Society and similar conservation groups emphasize that studies show poor feeder hygiene can increase rates of disease

like salmonellosis. Feeders should be cleaned weekly with a mild bleach solution (one part bleach to nine parts water) and completely dried before refilling. Hosing off the area to wash away bird droppings also can keep feeders and surrounding areas sanitary.

Choosing nutrient-dense,

high-quality seeds and fats and maintaining a clean feeding station can ensure that a backyard remains a haven for wild birds. Those with additional questions about what to feed birds should consult with a wild bird food retailer.



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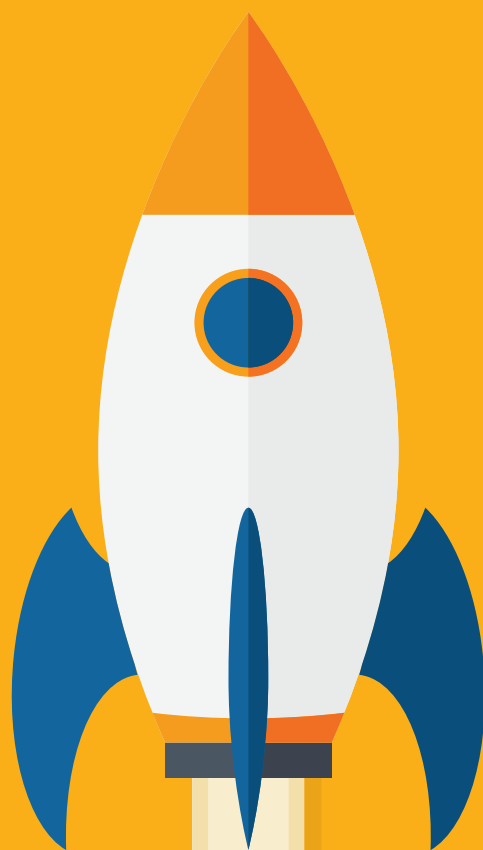
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Put some spring in your cleaning step

Spring is the season of nature's rebirth. Trees and flowers begin to bloom anew each spring, and young animals can be seen frolicking with their parents. During a time when it seems like the entire planet gets a refresh, many homeowners turn their thoughts to refreshing their homes as well.

As the days lengthen and the weather warms, spring cleaning takes center stage. Spring cleaning is more extensive than simply washing away grime, as cleaning a home often offers a psychological reset for the coming

months. A clear strategy can make the task of spring cleaning feel less daunting, and these tips can help cut down on clutter and other interior annoyances that have arisen after months spent indoors.

Declutter before cleaning

The rule of thumb when starting on spring cleaning is to combat clutter before cleaning. Trying to clean around clutter is inefficient and may result in throwing in the towel prematurely. It is important to remove as much as possible from each room before you begin clean-

ing. As homeowners move through each room, they can assess whether they've used items in the last year or whether they serve any functional or aesthetic purposes. If not, they can be trashed or donated.

Move top to bottom

It's important to follow the rules of science when spring cleaning. That means that dust and debris will be affected by gravity. Engaging in a top-down approach will help make cleaning more efficient. Beginning at the ceiling and working down towards the floors will help

people avoid having to clean the same surface twice.

Using a duster or a micro-fiber cloth, individuals can clear cobwebs from corners and dust from crown molding. Fingerprints will accumulate near light switches and door handles, so those areas should be wiped down, too.

Homeowners can conduct a thorough cleaning of heating and cooling output and intake vents as they likely have gathered dust over the winter. A down of floor moldings can get to any area near the floor or under furni-

ture that doesn't get frequent cleaning.

Do a kitchen reset

Focusing attention on the kitchen, which tends to be the busiest room in the house, is a wise idea for spring cleaning plans. This is the time for individuals to pull everything out of the refrigerator and pantry and check for expiration dates. Wiping down the shelves means cleaning away any accumulated food drips or spills. Additional areas to consider include behind the refrigerator, inside the dishwasher filter and inside the

microwave.

Focus on air quality

It's key to replace the HVAC system filters come springtime, as well as any air purifiers in the home. This will help reduce allergens and ensure that the cooling system will run efficiently when it's time to turn it on.

Spring cleaning takes place each year. Prioritizing decluttering and following a systematic path through the home helps people eliminate stress and mess at the same time.



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FAQ about taxes as the filing deadline nears

Some people look forward to filing their tax returns, while others recoil at the thought of paying what they owe. Regardless of which camp taxpayers are in, come April most people have a question or two related to their returns.

As the deadline to file tax returns draws closer, taxpayers hoping to make the process as smooth as possible can consider these frequently asked questions and answers, courtesy of the Internal Revenue Service.

When is deadline day?

Though taxpayers periodically get an extra day

or two to file their returns when April 15 coincides with a holiday or lands on a weekend, there's no such reprieve in 2025. This year all taxpayers who are not requesting an extension must file their income tax returns by April 15, 2025.

What if my address has changed?

The IRS urges all taxpayers to use their new address when filing their returns. Additional ways taxpayers can update their address with the IRS is through the filing of Form 8822, Change of Address or Form 8822-B, Change of Address or Re-

sponsible Party-Business. Written statements or oral notifications are additional ways to notify the IRS of an address change, and these methods must include personal information, including the old and new address as well as the taxpayer's Social Security number, Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) or Employer Identification Number (EIN).

Is there an age limit on claiming my child as a dependent?

A child must meet either the qualifying child test or the qualifying relative test in order to be claimed as a dependent. To meet the qualifying child test, your child must be younger than you or your spouse if filing jointly and either younger than 19-years-old or be a "student" younger than 24-years-old as of the end of the calendar year.

There is no age limit to claim a child as a dependent if a child is "permanently and totally disabled" or meets the qualifying relative test.

In addition to meeting the qualifying child or qualifying relative test, you can claim that person as a dependent only if these three tests are met:

1. Dependent taxpayer test
2. Citizen or resident test, and
3. Joint return test

Taxpayers who remain uncertain about their eligibility to claim a child as a dependent are urged to contact the IRS or a tax preparation professional for clarification before filing their returns.

What should I do if my W-2 is incorrect?

Employers must provide employees with a W-2 by January 31. If the W-2 is incorrect and has not been fixed by the end of February, taxpayers can contact the IRS and request to initiate a Form W-2 complaint. When such a request is initiated, the IRS sends a letter to the employer and requests that they furnish a corrected W-2 within 10 days. The IRS also sends a letter to the taxpayer with instructions and Form 4852, which can be used to file a return if a corrected W-2 is not provided before the filing deadline.

How can I file for an extension?

There are three ways to request an automatic extension of time to file an income tax return.

1. You can pay all or part of your estimated income tax due and indicate that the payment is for an extension using your bank account; a digital wallet such as Click to Pay, PayPal, and Venmo; cash; or a credit or debit card.

2. You can file Form 4868 electronically by accessing IRS e-file using your tax software or by using a tax professional who uses e-file.

3. You can file a paper Form 4868 and enclose payment of your estimate of tax due (optional).

Tax day arrives on April 15. Taxpayers who have lingering questions about their returns are urged to contact the IRS via irs.gov or work with a certified tax professional.

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Six tips to calm interview nerves

Interviews are a key part of the hiring process. According to Zippia, the average corporate job opening receives 250 resumes, with only four to six candidates typically selected for interviews.

With such competition, landing an interview is a chance to shine. Nerves, fueled by the body's "fight or flight" response, can make even well-prepared candidates stumble. The following tips can help anyone stay

calm and confident.

1. Laugh out loud

Humor can ease nervous energy. Watch a funny movie or listen to stand-up comedy to lighten your mood before the interview.

2. Leave plenty of travel time

Anxiety spikes when you're running late. Arrive early for in-person interviews to avoid rushing. For

virtual interviews, check links and software beforehand.

3. Be prepared

Practice common and job-specific questions with a friend or family member. Preparation builds confidence and reduces anxiety.

4. Clear your mind

Use relaxation techniques that work for you, such as walking, deep breath-

ing, meditation or exercise. Schedule these on interview day to stay centered.

5. Change your perception

Treat interviews as a conversation, not an interrogation. Remember, the company also needs to sell itself to you. This mindset can make the process feel less intimidating.

6. Make small talk

Chat with receptionists or other employees while waiting. Small interactions can redirect focus from internal worries to your surroundings.

Job interviews can trigger nerves, but employing these strategies can help candidates remain composed and present their best selves.



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Many adults nearing retirement look forward to leaving the daily grind behind for more time to travel, pursue hobbies or relax.

But full freedom isn't always ideal. Rising costs and inflation can make a comfortable retirement more expensive than expected. Others miss the social interactions and mental stimulation work provides. For those who want to stay active without returning full-

time, part-time jobs can be a great solution.

Retail sales associate

Retail jobs offer varied responsibilities, including greeting customers, making sales, stocking inventory and assisting shoppers. Strong customer service skills are key, and many stores offer flexible hours.

Consultant

Retirees who want to leverage their expertise without a full-time commitment can work as consultants.

Many earn more per hour than they did in full-time roles.

Customer service representative

These positions involve helping customers solve problems and ensuring satisfaction. Work may be in an office, store, or from home.

School positions

Seniors can work as school bus drivers, lunch aides, crossing guards, substitute teachers or paraprofessionals. Hours are often

limited, with holidays and summers off.

Receptionist

Receptionists welcome visitors, answer phones and handle light clerical work. Opportunities exist in offices, hospitals or nursing facilities, with options for nights and weekends.

Retirees interested in part-time work have a wide range of options to stay active, earn extra income and maintain social connections.

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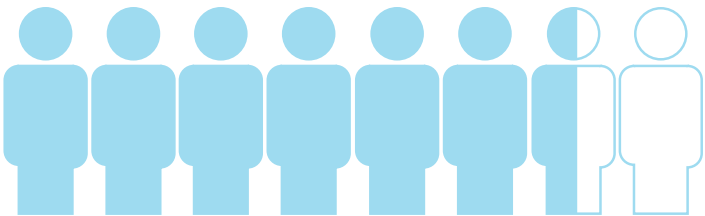


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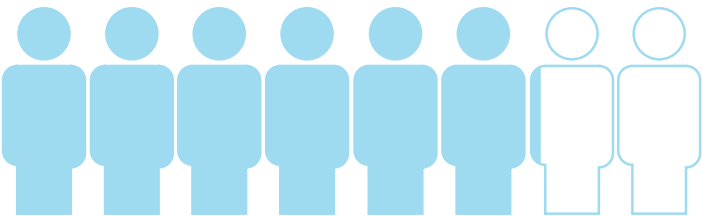


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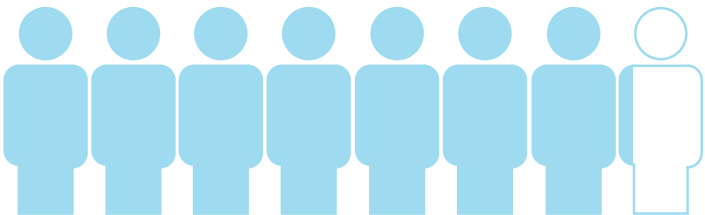
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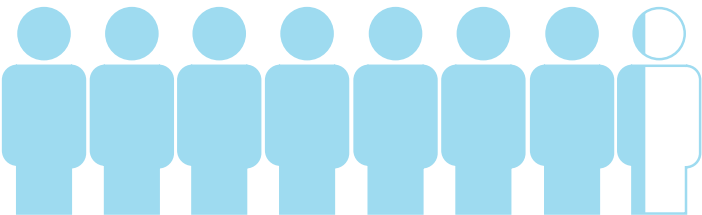
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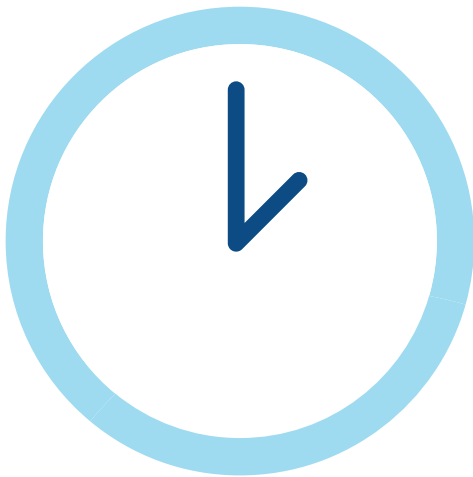
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