



SIMPLE SOLUTION

Need to completely remove sodium from your diet, but have a typical water softener that uses salt? Consider switching to potassium chloride – no change to your equipment is needed. You can simply buy the alternative pellets and refill your softener's tank as normal. However, potassium chloride pellets generally cost about three times as much as salt and may be a little harder to find, but major hardware stores typically carry them.



TREE TRICK

Congrats! You chose the perfect real tree for the holidays! Now what? In addition to watering and keeping it away from heat sources, consider this trick: If you have a humidifier in your house, relocate it to the tree room. It will help keep the needles fresher, as well as further reduce the risk of fire.

CALM OR CRAZY?

Parties. Guests. Buying presents. More parties. Baking. Wrapping presents. In this busy season, remember that you don't have to do it all yourself. Consider hiring someone to help you tackle the numerous tasks that December delivers. Search "errands" or "personal concierge" at angieslist.com to find the help you need.



BRANDON SMITH/ANGIE'S LIST; ISTOCK



IN THE WEEKLY

This time of year is insane enough. Let Angie's List Weekly help you simplify your life with some great hacks. Download our interactive magazine designed for your mobile devices today at iTunes or Google Play.

UNIQUE DONATIONS

There's something about the holidays that gets us in a charitable mood. You know where to take old clothes and how to help out local food banks, but it can be trickier for other items collecting dust around the house. Check out these ideas from Expert Contributor Laura McHolm of NorthStar Moving in Los Angeles:

Old smartphone?

After you clear all the data, don't just toss it. Check out organizations such as cellphonesforsoldiers.com or 911cellphonebank.org, where you can donate that smartphone to someone who could really use it.

Last year's gift cards?

If you received cards to stores you don't shop at, you could donate that card to your favorite local charity or you might be able to turn that merchant gift card into a donation for a charity of your choice by visiting a site like charitygiftcertificates.org.



Gifts to DIY for

Sure, you could give gift cards ... again. Or you could go the DIY route and surprise the loved ones in your life with unique, heartfelt gifts. Check out these tried and true projects from our Angie's List bloggers:

CREATE A TERRARIUM

You don't have to possess major gardening skills to create one of these indoor beauties. Your friends and family will appreciate some greenery during these chilly months. Plus, terrariums can be low maintenance if you plant cacti and succulents. This project from Green with Decor only takes about 30 to 45 minutes.



PURR-FECT TOYS

Have cat-lovers in your circle? Prodigal Pieces shares an idea for creating natural toys that are free of any potentially harmful materials. This great gift takes less than a half hour to craft.

WOW WITH WOOD

Are you artistic yourself? This idea from Design, Dining and Diapers puts your creative juices to work with a wooden sign that matches your gift recipients' style. Once you get the base built, you can stain it, paint it, draw on it, stencil it, personalize it, etc. The possibilities are endless!

@ Ready to tackle one of these projects? Get the details at angie.li/gifts-diy

About our bloggers

The Angie's List Blogger Program aims to inspire and empower homeowners to get their DIY on by showcasing tutorials and decorating ideas from influential home and DIY bloggers. For more info, visit angie.li/blogger-program



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEG HEMMELGARN (TOP), LARISSA HAYNES (MIDDLE), TARYN WHITEAKER (BOTTOM)

WELCOME, Y'ALL

Want to make a guest feel at home over the holidays? No matter where you live, give them a dose of Southern hospitality, which simply means: You're the guest, so you're fed, fussed over and made to feel like family. Check out these BrightNest tips from a native Southerner:



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Anticipate needs

Try to make it to where guests will not need to ask for anything. So, prepare a few days in advance by stocking the guest bathroom with all the essentials and maybe leave the Wi-Fi password on a nightstand. Stock up on their favorite foods and beverages, and make sure they're easily accessible.

Nail the details

Before they arrive, add some personal touches to the guest bedroom to make them feel special. Lay out some magazines or books of interest. Make the room as comfortable as possible and lay a throw blanket on the foot of the bed.

Buy a pineapple

According to Southern tradition, a pineapple symbolizes hospitality. Place it by the front door or as the centerpiece at the dinner table to visually welcome the guests. Fun fact: According to Southern custom, the host would simply take the pineapple away when a guest had worn out their welcome. Subtlety has been served!

Bottom line

Whether you live in New York or Nashville, go the extra mile to make your visitors feel special with ample fixins of food, fondness and fellowship. If you treat your company as a pleasure, not as a burden, they'll notice! Y'all come back now.