

# Ask America's Ultimate Experts

Got a question? *Woman's World* will get the answer for you—from the expert you only dreamed you could ask!

**Q** "I just can't afford to buy a lot of gifts this year!"



Expert advice from . . . gift guru **Robyn Spizman**, author of *The Giftionary*, ([www.robynspizman.com](http://www.robynspizman.com))

Use your talents to make personalized gifts that show your love without spending a lot! Here are a few ideas:

- **Create your own cookbooks** of your loved ones' favorite recipes. Print the recipes and put them in scrapbooks you decorate.
- **Start a collection.** Got a collection your loved ones admire? Give them one item with a note saying you're helping to jumpstart their own collections.

**Did you know?**

Only 45% of people who rack up credit card debt during the holidays manage to pay it off within six months.

- **For a friend who loves to read**, recycle a favorite book, and inscribe it with a message like, "The only thing I love more than this book is you!"



**Q** What can I use in place of tinsel that's pet-safe?

**A** Try tying big bows on the tree or using organic garland, like strands of colored plants strung together—but definitely not holly, mistletoe or poinsettias, as they're poisonous to cats and dogs. Avoid strings of popcorn: Pets could topple the tree trying to nibble on them.



**Q** "How can I make my old holiday decorations feel new again?"



Expert advice from . . . decorator **Paul Brummer**, the decorator who makes New York's posh restaurant Tavern on the Green sparkle every year

- 1 Replace an old wreath bow with a colorful scarf. Hang mittens on a string.
- 2 Instead of traditional garland, use Styrofoam® packing peanuts sprayed with gold paint. String them and entwine the strand through your usual garland so it looks like a golden braid.
- 3 Tie tree ornaments with a bright red yarn bow or ribbon instead of hooks.
- 4 Add a garland of braided red yarn decorated with red candy canes.
- 5 If you have several glass tree-toppers (like angels or stars), display them on your mantle or sofa table.
- 6 Jazz up faded ornaments with gold or silver leaf, or make small star stencils and spray on glitter.
- 7 Make stars from cinnamon sticks and a glue gun.

**Q** "My 14-year-old daughter says she's ready to date. Is she?"



Expert advice from . . . psychologist **Michael Riera**, author of *Staying Connected to Your Teenager*

In a word, no. Letting a 14-year-old girl date could be setting her up for trouble—especially if she'd be going out with the boy alone. She's too young to know how to handle herself. Ask her why she wants to date. Is it because everyone else is or because *she* wants to? Tell her that you love her and trust her, but that she's just not ready yet.

Then, opt for a middle ground: Suggest that she go out

in groups with other teens. Or tell her that you want to meet the boy and will chaperone them on a date, like taking them to the movies (you sit in a different row).

Girls shouldn't go out on dates alone until at least age 16, once they've developed their sense of self. If she starts dating before that, there's a danger that she may always need to have a boyfriend to feel good about herself.



**Q** When's the best time to go to the post office at Christmas?

**A** The U.S. Postal Service says it's after 10 a.m. or around 2:30 p.m. Early mornings, lunch hours and the 45 minutes before closing tend to be the busiest times. And avoid Mondays, when post offices are typically crowded with shoppers mailing weekend purchases.

—compiled by Jeryl Brunner, Lisa Liebman and Jo Anna Zulli