

November, 2009 Get Ready, Get Set... Hibernate!

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I am writing this actually at the end of my article. It's 3:15 on a Tuesday. I am chatting with my 5 year, waiting for my older boys to get home from school and baking sweet potatoes and ham for dinner. I am writing this newsletter, scanning my notes for a presentation this evening, and flipping through my latest Catholic New World newspaper from the Archdiocese of Chicago. This is actually a typical and calm day, believe it or not. A column headline leaps off the page and smacks me in the forehead. "There is always time to slow down, relax and recharge" says Christina Capecchi in her Twenty-Something column. She references a wild rice harvest, the best in years, after letting the field rest for a year. To quote Ms. Capecchi, "Rest ensures a more fruitful harvest." So remember to be thankful this month, and to Rest. I'm going to go play with my kids, which, for me, is resting and recharging.

Historically, November is the time to get your home ready for your own hibernation. First we remove the old and the extra, because we would not put the new Harvest in on top of old items. Then, we clean our home from top to bottom, to prepare to put our Harvest up for the winter. Then we lay in our Harvest, all our good things, and give thanks for the bounty. Finally, we prepare our homes for the winter holidays and beyond.

Week 1: Clearing Out

1. De-decorate from Halloween and take a break from decorations in November. Pack them up and put them away. For the record, per an appointment yesterday, you have to put the foam headstones back in the box before the foam body parts (right Carol?). Every day brings a new adventure when you are an organizer!
2. Take advantage of things already slated to leave your home. Put that old couch or baby gear on FreeCycle, drop off the books to the Library, deliver those clothing items to your friend who needs them more than you.
3. Pick your battles wisely. If you are having holiday events or company, now is not the time to tackle non-guest spaces for major organizing projects. Focus inside and on the rooms that will be used most.
4. As things leave, make your list of things that need to be replaced (throwing away that old rug in the entry way is great, but you may need to replace it).
5. The quickest way to make room and clean out a closet is to pack up the seasonal stuff. Grab a couple of 18 gallon lidded bins, label them "summer" and stash the summer clothes and shoes from your bedroom closet, summer weight jackets and warm weather sporting equipment from the coat or hall closet.
6. Pantry-shop this week. Decide not to shop this week, except for milk and produce, and use what you have on hand. Saves money and makes space.
7. Donate good but unwanted food. That 2nd can of cherry pie filling your family did not like or the Smoked almonds you bought by mistake (hear the voice of experience!) can be added to a bag of items for the local food pantry. Teach your kids generosity, and show community concern and clear out your pantry, too.

Week 2: Cleaning Up

1. Dedicate a day to changing and freshening all the bedding and towels. (Purge the towels you would be embarrassed to have someone use – again, the voice of experience here!).
2. Clean the windows and blind guests may see, wash the curtains or take the drapes to the cleaners.
3. Spend an hour, wipe down your walls for fingerprints (I have 3 sons, we have lots of grubby door sills!) and dust the corners. I wash the walls and my oldest son uses a telescoping feather duster for the corners.
4. Dust the light fixtures, and wash or wipe down the light globes and ceiling fan blades.
5. Mop or wax the tile floors now, while you have more time, and spot clean floors through the holidays.
6. Clean off table tops by grouping and hanging framed photos on the walls.
7. Don't wait until last minute to tackle the big projects. Try to deep clean a room a week with your regular cleaning.

Week 3: Stocking Up

1. Work on your Thanksgiving menu, if you are hosting, or locate the recipes for dishes you were assigned to bring to Dinner. If possible, shop early. And I don't mean 6 am, I mean the week before the holiday, on a week day in the morning. No one is at Jewel at 9 am on a Tuesday. Love it!
2. Stock up on items with a long shelf life for your seasonal events. Liquor and wine, paper goods, plastic cups and utensils, canned goods and baking ingredients.
3. From Women's Day, 11/17/2009, Get your groceries for next to nothing: Check your local sales flyers and grab your coupons. Traditional foods will be at the lowest prices of the year (like broths, cranberries, vegetables), stock up on baking supplies and butter or margarine (these freeze well, we do it all the time!).
4. Go to Costco or your other big box stores now, and not the week of the holiday. Yikes!
- 5-6-7 See Below for my two favorite November Recipes. Both are fabulous, and both can be made a day or two ahead for your celebration. Both are dedicated to the Great Grandmas, Peggy and June, God Bless them.

Week 4: Settling In

1. Set up a Holiday Play list on your I-Pod now and get a jump on the holiday spirit. If you don't have holiday music, get some! Head to I-Tunes or your local library for some CDs. Without hanging a light or unloading one box of decorations, your home already feels more festive.
2. As the days get darker earlier, lights make an even greater impact. Indirect lighting from lamps (instead of glaring overheads) and candlelight is soothing, special and welcoming. It is also flattering to home and people, and eco-friendly. Win-win!
3. Less is more when it comes to decorating in November. Until mid-December, we enjoy an autumn wreath on the door and scented candles on the table, period.
4. Be thankful for your 4 walls and ceiling. My furnace is old and noisy and needs to be replaced one of these days. I have to admit that hearing it rumble to life makes me happy, though, because I know we are warm and safe.
5. Winterize your space – get out the throws and flannel sheets, the heavier curtains, the waterproof door mats.
6. It's cold outside! So carve out some exercise space inside your home, to ensure you still get your workouts.
7. Where does it say in the Holiday rule book (is there really one of these?) that you can't have folks over the weekend after Thanksgiving? A brunch or maybe coffee and dessert would be a great way to connect with friends in a relaxed, pre-December get-together.