

For most people, the thought of holiday shopping brings about stress, panic and severe anxiety. We worry about how to satisfy the hard to please and tend to always go over budget. But all is not lost. Strategic shopping tips can help eliminate stress, save money and break the Holiday Gift-Giving Syndrome!

## Gifts on a Budget - Making a Dollar Go a Long Way

You always hear the stories of receiving gifts that were quite sweet in gesture, but really don't fit into your lifestyle or tastes. This ranges from the Christmas tree sweater that glows in the dark to the poofy pink taffeta dress you might have worn when you were 7, but not at the age of 27. With every gift, you can always find something worthy to dwell on, even if it is a bit of humor wrapped with a bow.

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My father often jokes with me about my affection towards a gift that comes from the Dollar Store. I must admit you can find various quirky additions to any holiday at this inexpensive chain of stores. When money was tight, it was this store that provided the decorations for my entire house and Christmas tree without giving a hint to the amount of money spent. It's truly amazing what you will find at the Dollar Store, from cleaning supplies to candles to inexpensive alternatives for movie theater treats. Anyhow, for about five years running, my father would question where some of his gifts came from, making references to one of the cheapest places around promising the purchase of almost anything.

This has been a long running joke within my immediate family because I have a history of creating decorative, Dollar Store-themed baskets for the holidays. One year, for my brother, I stuffed his basket with anything to do with his cell phone. He was always losing his adapter to charge his phone, so I bought him two of them. I also included a set of earphones for the car, an extra cell phone case, even an extra battery. All of



Before you start your holiday shopping, always keep in mind three strategic shopping tips: you should set a budget; purchase items with cash not credit cards; and shop online to avoid crowds, rising gas prices and traffic and parking lot horrors.

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these items cost a dollar; all of which were used.

As for my father, he has received Dollar Store baskets pertaining to some of the items he often uses. One year, the theme was garden tools. He found delight in telling me how quickly the stem cutters broke when he went to trim a rose bush. The

**Over The Hill  
Bouquet**



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next year, he received a basket filled with cleaning and maintenance supplies for the car. You can never have too much oil, carburetor fluid or car wash supplies. The year after that, I packed a basket full of various tools, such as wrenches, screwdrivers and pliers. I don't feel bad about these gifts because I know they will eventually get used. For my mother, a basket filled with scented lotions and soaps has brought a smile to her face. I really lucked out when a supply of Oil of Olay eye creams found their way to the Dollar Store.

I have always taken pride in never failing to give a gift on special occasions. It didn't matter if I had to make a present with my own two hands, but I made sure my loved ones would be opening someone from me on their special day. Over the years, my budget has improved to the point where I no longer have to depend on the Dollar Store for the bulk of my gifts. What started as a way to cope with dreary financial circumstances has now become a welcomed family tradition.