

Ready, Set, Craft!

Create Memories and Mementos

By Charlene Pierce

If you have ever snuggled up under the quilt your great-grandmother made, you understand the appeal of handmade gifts. A personal connection is created in handmade gifts because they are unique and are made only for you. Handmade gifts are made with care and love, and this creates special meaning for both the giver and the recipient.

When we create handmade items, we pour ourselves into them. Making anything by hand requires focus and attention to detail. During this time of concentration, we can block out the pressures of daily life, work, and other stressors while we focus on making something beautiful. Crafting reduces stress, heightens mental agility, improves self-confidence, and bolsters our mood.

Many crafts are seeing a resurgence, especially those that involve nature and focus on personal well-being. Drive through just about any neighborhood in town, and you will see painted wooden door hangers welcoming you or beckoning the coming season. These are often hand-painted!

Like the popular paint-and-sip events, there are shops in town where you can choose a craft to make or paint some pottery or a welcome sign with a group of friends or family.

Many locally owned craft stores and sewing centers offer classes where you can develop your skills. These classes also provide an opportunity to meet people with similar interests and develop new relationships. Crafting with others, especially children, can be a bonding experience—one that creates memories to last a lifetime.

Many children enjoy crafting activities. They develop fine motor skills as they work and create with their hands. Crafting stimulates critical and creative thinking and builds resilience and patience. Crafting instills a sense of accomplishment and ownership from creating something tangible, which is especially valuable for children who struggle to achieve in other areas of their lives. These are important skills for children of all ages, from preschool through their teenage years.

If you don't think you are a crafty person, it could be because you haven't tried the right craft yet. We tend to assume crafting is for the "creatives," as if there is something in our DNA that makes us successful with creating something from scratch. Not so! There are plenty of crafting options for those who identify as analytical. From gardening to fine art, there is a craft for every personality type.

Gardening might be your ideal craft if you are inspired by nature and enjoy working outdoors. If you are a foodie who appreciates a well-made dinner or dessert, your calling could be in cooking or baking. Try a class to learn some basic skills and then put them to work in your own kitchen. You might even get your family involved!

Those who enjoy solitude and have a fine attention to detail may find embroidery, cross-stitching, or jewelry-making to be soothing. Those who prefer to think in big-picture terms might enjoy woodworking, sculpting, or painting with watercolors. The pieces you produce in any of these crafting activities would make great gifts and may someday become family heirlooms.

Beginner's kits are available in just about any craft, so it is easy to try something new. Remember the paint-by-numbers from your childhood? Adult versions are available, with gorgeous landscapes, fun animals, and many other designs worthy of displaying on your wall. Acrylic pouring is a new painting trend that requires mixing paint and pouring it out on a surface. This is as fun to watch as it is to make! It creates an organic look similar to marble.

The macrame from the 1970s is back on trend in a modernized version of

plant hangers and jewelry. Yarn weaving is also re-emerging in colorful wall art and cozy blankets. Knitting and crocheting have always enjoyed popularity amongst crafters. Since they don't require a lot of equipment, they can be done as a group, which can enhance your social skills as well as your fine motor skills...and your popularity as a gift-giver. If you have an old sewing machine that needs repair or that you don't know how to use, inquire at a local craft store or fabric store; they often fix machines and offer classes in both basic and advanced techniques.

With the holiday season around the corner, it's a great time to explore different crafts. You can make personalized gifts or buy a kit for a loved one to try something new. Having new crafting activities for the kids during the school break can create happy times and fun memories for the whole family. If you haven't been to your local craft store lately, drop by. You might be surprised by the fun you can find inside. **WE**

Sources for this article included: uaex.uada.edu, scholastic.com, and thecrazycraftlady.com.

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