



ALL I WANT FOR
Christmas
GIFT GUIDE 2025

▪ **28 PAGES** full of great Christmas Gift Ideas
▪ Ray White Colouring Competition **INSIDE**

PUBLISHED BY
The Guardian Times





Supporting our local businesses

CHRISTMAS brings with it a special opportunity to honour the spirit of community and uplift the local businesses that make our region thrive.

When you choose to shop local this Christmas, you're not just purchasing a gift – you're investing in the future of your town.

Each dollar spent in a local business keeps money circulating in the region.

Studies have shown when you shop with online giants or large national chains, as little as 15 cents is contributed to the local economy.

When you decide to shop with local businesses, around 70 cents of each dollar you spend stays in town – and your dollar does more.

That money goes towards employing local staff, sourcing goods from local suppliers, supporting sponsorships for local events, and paying rates that help fund services like roads, libraries and facilities.

By shopping locally, you're not just buying a product or service – you're investing in the

future of the region.

Stephen Colombo of Swan Hill Incorporated said it was important to support local businesses.

"When we talk about the value of shopping locally, there is that immediate transaction – but then it's what that business does with the money they redeem," he said.

"Whether that's through wages, purchasing stock, it stretches further than that one transaction."

"We know the local offering here in Swan Hill is of an extremely high standard," he said.

"The businesses are well presented, hospitable, and they genuinely care about the customer."

"A great product, great service in a clean environment with friendly faces: when you're trading, that's the winning formula."

This Christmas, let's come together as a community and show our support for the local businesses that make the region the place we're so proud to call home.

When you shop local, you're not just buying a gift – you're contributing to the rich tapestry of our community, ensuring that the beating heart of the Mallee continues to thrive for generations to come.

Retailer Bec Hewitt urges locals to support local businesses this festive season.

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Ray White Swan Hill staff Kellie Keighran, Taree Smits, Mick Wright, Tori Antipatico and Sienna Dunn urge the community to help those less fortunate this Christmas. Picture: Sam James



Spreading festive cheer

RAY White Swan Hill has kicked off the Christmas season by launching their official Little Ray of Giving Christmas Appeal.

Agent principal Cameron Smits said the Ray White appeal was a nation-wide initiative but all gifts collected locally remained local.

"The Ray of Giving gift appeal is something we are always pleased to be a part of because it is a way to support the community that supports us," Mr Smits said.

"The gifts we collect are passed on to

Mallee Family Care who then disperse them to people who might be doing it tough at Christmas or perhaps they're going to spend the day on their own.

"It's about making sure everyone feels connected at Christmas, to reduce the feelings of loneliness and isolation a little."

Mr Smits requested that donation gifts not be wrapped so that MFC staff can best match gift choices to recipients.

"We are more than happy to receive gifts

suited to all ages including adults, but we do often find there is a shortage of gifts appropriate for teenagers.

"If anyone is stuck for an idea, something for the ages of 12-17 would be appreciated."

Mr Smits also said his team was more than happy to purchase gifts on the donor's behalf.

"We are able to select something and place it under the tree and send a photo to show what was purchased on their behalf,"

he said.

"Often people are busy with harvest at this time of year so we're more than happy to help out where we can."

Those wishing to donate a pre-purchased gift can drop it in to Ray White Real Estate in Swan Hill at 199 Campbell Street.

Other businesses who would like to donate gifts to the appeal will receive a wreath decal to thank them for supporting the community.

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Christmas magic returns to the Swan Hill Town Hall

Peter Bannan

THE elves are back at work and the Swan Hill Town Hall is again being transformed into a sparkling Christmas Wonderland.

After the late nights and long days that went into last year's spectacular display, the creative team behind the much-loved attraction promises something even more enchanting for 2025.

Marketing officer Sharon Brinkman said visitors could expect plenty of surprises when the doors open on 3 December.

"We've really upped our game this year," she said.

"There'll be some new themes downstairs, including an elf land and a gingerbread land, and a few others we're keeping secret so people can have that little moment of surprise."

Upstairs, the nostalgic toy display that moved some visitors to tears will make a return.

"Last year one gentleman was sitting in the toy room crying," Ms Brinkman said.

"He told us it brought back beautiful memories of his childhood, which was really special.

"That's what this is all about - creating a bit of joy and connection."

This will be the fourth year that Ms Brinkman and fellow organiser Deb Holland have poured their hearts into the display.

The pair spend months gathering decorations, props and treasures from garage sales and op shops, restoring and repainting them to create the magical scenes that fill the hall.



The elves are back at work and the Swan Hill Town Hall is once again being transformed into a sparkling Christmas Wonderland. Pictures: Supplied

"We start planning on Boxing Day," Ms Brinkman said.

"Every year we say we're too tired to do it again, but then the ideas start coming and we can't help ourselves."

The Christmas Wonderland has become a highlight of the local festive calendar, attracting about 1700 visitors last year - including school groups, families, and tourists from as far away as Mildura and Deniliquin.

There won't be a Santa this year, but visitors

are encouraged to bring family and friends to take their own festive photos among the colourful displays.

Many local businesses have already booked sessions for group photos, making it a fun and spontaneous experience for all ages.

Entry is by gold coin donation, with proceeds supporting Food for All Swan Hill Region and helping to provide Christmas food hampers for local families in need.

"It's lovely knowing that while people are

enjoying the display, they're also helping others," Ms Brinkman said.

The Swan Hill Town Hall Christmas Wonderland runs from Wednesday, 3 December to Friday, 19 December, with extended hours on some evenings.

Bookings aren't required, but schools and large groups are asked to contact the Town Hall bookings office in advance.

Opening hours and more information is available on the town hall website.

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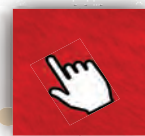
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SHOP LOCAL & UNWRAP THE REWARDS





Last year Kerang's carols saw around 400 attendees. Pictures: File

Carols cheer spreads

CHRISTMAS spirit will be on full display across the region in the coming weeks, with Kerang, Cohuna and Swan Hill each set to host their annual community carols.

There are few Christmas fixtures as beloved as carols, with hundreds turning out to events last year, with strong numbers expected to return.

The Kerang Combined Churches Community Christmas Carols will take place on Saturday, 6 December from 5pm at Atkinson Park.

The evening will see four schools perform a number of carols, bringing families together for an evening of sing-alongs, children's activities

and food vendors.

Last year around 400 people attended the event, and organiser Tim Nitschke said each year the atmosphere became more vibrant.

"Hopefully we'll get a few more people again this year, the crowds seem to be building," he said.

"With Christmas carols, we're spreading the hope and love that's part of our faith, and it gives people a bit of a boost to hear about the real meaning of Christmas."

Mr Nitschke said everybody and anybody was encouraged to attend the event, which fundamentally aimed to spread a message of

hope.

"Jesus is a symbol of hope - his birth gives everyone hope. If you have a relationship with Jesus, you have meaning, purpose and hope," he said.

"Society tends to water down the true meaning of Christmas, and while that isn't necessarily bad, it's important to remember its origins and why we should be thankful.

"This is a time of the year where we can really be unified in our faith and share fellowship with each other, at the end of the day we're all the body of Christ.

"Religion has been dividing insofar as

history is concerned, but faith brings people together."

Cohuna will also celebrate with its traditional Combined Churches Carols in the Park on 13 December, hosted by the Gateway to Gannawarra Visitor Information Centre.

Entertainment begins at 7pm, with families encouraged to bring chairs and picnic rugs for a relaxed night by the water.

Swan Hill's Carols by Candlelight will follow on Sunday, 14 December at Riverside Park from around 6pm, offering a free sausage sizzle, fireworks, food vans and a lively family-friendly atmosphere.

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Christmas cookie gift jars

FOR a Christmas gift that's full of fun and handmade, this Christmas cookie jar recipe from Dairy Australia makes a great present for teachers, neighbours, friends and family. They're simple to create, visually impressive, and perfect for keeping the kids entertained and creatively engaged for an entire afternoon, especially if you're making a big batch in one go.

To begin, decide how many jars you'll be preparing and ensure they're the right size to hold all your ingredients - a one-litre jar with a secure lid and seal works perfectly. Don't forget to add a personal touch with gift tags attached to the side. These are ideal for including simple cooking instructions and a heartfelt festive message to make your homemade gift even more special.

INGREDIENTS:

For gift jar

340g self raising flour, sifted
pinch salt
160g brown sugar
65g dried cranberries
75g dried apricots, roughly chopped
80g white chocolate, roughly chopped
80g dark chocolate, roughly chopped

For baking

125g butter, melted
2 extra-large eggs, lightly beaten



METHOD:

Starting with the flour, evenly layer the flour, salt, sugar, cranberries, apricot, white chocolate and dark chocolate firmly in a one litre jar with lid and seal.

Using a ribbon, tie on a gift tag with the following directions: Just mix in 125g melted butter and 2 extra-large eggs. Roll into balls and place on lined baking trays 4cm apart. Flatten slightly and bake at 170°C for 16 to 20 mins. Cool on wire racks.

Crunchy lemon and polenta shortbread

INGREDIENTS:

250g butter, softened
1/2 cup caster sugar
1 1/4 teaspoons finely grated lemon rind
1 1/2 cups plain flour
1 cup rice flour
1 cup fine (instant) polenta
Silver cachous, to decorate

METHOD:

Cream butter, sugar and zest with an electric mixer until light and fluffy.

Turn the beater to low speed and add the combined flours and polenta gradually. Mix until combined. Turn mixture onto a clean surface and knead dough until smooth.

Divide dough in half and using one piece at a time, roll between sheets of baking paper to a thickness of about 5mm. Cut into shapes with a 10cm cutter. Re-roll dough as necessary.

Carefully lift shapes onto baking paper lined oven trays. Using a small cutter of the same design, cut out the centre from each shape. Lightly press cachous into shortbread. Bake at 180°C (160°C fan-forced) for 8-10 minutes, until cooked through and just starting to colour.

Cool on trays for 10 minutes, then cool completely on wire racks, before storing in an airtight container.

TIP: If dough becomes slightly warm and difficult to handle, roll out and place in the fridge, still between baking paper, for 10-15 minutes to firm slightly. A palate knife or thin egg lifter makes it easy to lift shapes to oven trays. Try threading ribbon around the shortbread shapes and hang off small branches in a vase, for a gorgeous edible table centre piece.

Recipe courtesy of Dairy Australia.



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Bohdi Roberts, Jack Pretty and Jayden and Jacob Roberts lit up the night with their glow sticks and festive treats, adding extra sparkle to the celebrations at the Nyah District event. Pictures: Supplied



Families enjoy a joyful festive picnic on the grass, soaking up the holiday spirit at the Nyah District Christmas Carnival.

A beloved community tradition

FOR more than six decades, the Nyah District Christmas Carnival has stood as one of the region's most cherished annual traditions.

The festive celebration brings families, neighbours and visitors together at the start of the holiday season.

What began as a modest company picnic in Nyah West has grown into a major community event, now held at the Nyah Recreation Reserve.

The shift to the larger location reflects both the carnival's popularity and the organisers' commitment to safety, especially during the busy harvest period when heavy vehicles regularly move through the district.

The reserve's expansive grounds, easier parking and safer layout has allowed the event to evolve, while keeping its community spirit intact.

At the heart of the carnival is a volunteer committee operating as a sub-branch of the

Nyah District Action Group.

NDAG secretary Vicki Allen, who has been part of the organising team for more than a decade, said the event's success could be attributed to its strong local support and its focus on being accessible to all.

"The carnival is run by our community for our community," she said.

"Our goal has always been to keep it affordable, enjoyable and family-friendly.

"People really appreciate being able to come together without feeling like it's going to break the bank."

Each year, the program blends long-standing favourites with fresh attractions.

Families typically enjoy the Kerang Rotary Train, a fixture for around 50 years, along with Billabong Ranch's camel rides, horse rides and baby animal nursery.

Jumping castles, Santa appearance, market stalls, food trucks and live music from

crowd-pleasers like Drowning Sorrows add to the festive atmosphere.

Native wildlife shows, cultural craft stalls and community group displays, round out a lineup designed to appeal to all ages.

The carnival also provides an important platform for local clubs and organisations, including the Lions Club, Nykora CWA, Nyah West Fire Brigade and various sporting groups, many of which use the event to fund-raise and engage with the community.

Their continued involvement is one of the reasons the carnival maintains its strong grassroots character.

A highlight of the evening is always the fireworks display, staged once the sun dips behind the river gums.

The combination of the open reserve setting and the quieter backdrop of the small town makes the fireworks particularly striking, with the echoes rolling along the Murray River.

While it has grown and changed over the decades, the essence of the carnival remains the same: a welcoming, family-oriented celebration that captures the spirit of the season.

Generations of locals recall meeting friends, enjoying the rides, or simply soaking up the atmosphere on picnic rugs.

Ms Allen said the event continued because of what it means to people.

"So many families talk about the memories they've made here," she said.

"And the memories their parents made here before them."

"It's good for the heart to create something the whole community can share."

The Nyah District Christmas Carnival stands not just as an event, but as a symbol of the district's resilience, pride and togetherness, tradition treasured by the generations who have built it and those still to come.

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Four classic salads to see you through the summer

THE festive season is all about celebration, color, and variety - and what better way to reflect that on your table than with an array of vibrant salads.

This time of year brings together family, friends, and flavors, making it the perfect opportunity to experiment with fresh ingredients, bold dressings, and creative combinations.

Christmas falls in the heart of summer, making fresh, crisp, and colorful salads the perfect addition to your festive spread.

They bring a refreshing balance to the rich holiday dishes, while showcasing seasonal produce at its best.

From crisp greens to hearty grains, tangy fruits to crunchy nuts, salads can be as indulgent or as light as you want them to be.

They're not just side dishes - they can steal the spotlight and add a refreshing balance to the rich festive spread.

CAPRESE SALAD:

Ingredients:

Fresh tomatoes, mozzarella cheese, fresh basil leaves, extra virgin olive oil, balsamic glaze, salt, and pepper.

Description:

Originating from Italy, the Caprese salad is a celebration of simple, high-quality ingredients. Sliced tomatoes and mozzarella are arranged alternately on a plate, interspersed with fresh basil leaves. Drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic glaze,



A classic, refreshing Greek salad.

this salad is a burst of flavours and colours, capturing the essence of summer.

GREEK SALAD:

Ingredients: Tomatoes, cucumbers, red onion, Kalamata olives, feta cheese, extra virgin olive oil, red wine vinegar, oregano, salt, and pepper.

Description:

A staple of Greek cuisine, the Greek salad is a medley of crisp vegetables and tangy flavours. Tomatoes, cucumbers, red onion, and Kalamata olives are combined with chunks of feta cheese. The salad is dressed with a mixture of extra virgin olive oil, red wine vinegar, oregano, salt, and pepper, creating a refreshing and satisfying dish.

CAESAR SALAD:

Ingredients:

Romaine lettuce, croutons, Parmesan cheese, Caesar dressing (made with anchovies, garlic, Dijon mustard, egg yolks, olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper).

Description:

The Caesar salad is a classic that never goes out of style. Crisp Romaine lettuce is tossed with crunchy croutons, Parmesan cheese, and a rich Caesar dressing. The

combination of textures and flavours, along with the savoury dressing, makes this salad a popular choice for a light and flavorful summer meal.

WATERMELON AND FETA SALAD:

Ingredients:

Cubed watermelon, feta cheese, fresh mint leaves, extra virgin olive oil, balsamic glaze, salt, and pepper.

Description:

This sweet and savoury salad is a delightful way to embrace the summer season. Juicy cubes of watermelon are paired with creamy feta cheese and fresh mint leaves. Drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic glaze, this unique combination of flavours provides a cooling and refreshing experience on a hot summer day.

These four salads are renowned for their deliciousness and are emblematic of summer dining.

They showcase the abundance of fresh, seasonal ingredients and offer a variety of tastes and textures that are perfect for warm-weather enjoyment.

Whether you're hosting a barbecue, picnic, or simply looking for a light and satisfying meal, these salads are sure to be a hit during the summer months.



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Express delivery to the North Pole



THE North Pole has opened a postbox with express shipping to Mrs Claus at Dandy Lion Studio in Swan Hill.

Children can bring their own letter to mail or craft one in the studio, with all the materials provided, to receive a hand-written letter in return.

Postal supervisor Nina McNamara said Mrs Claus could sense the excitement through the letters she has received so far.

"Santa has visited us at Dandy Lion Studio the past two years and the postbox is a wonderful opportunity to make even more Christmas magic," she said.

"Many of the letter writers are sending their first ever letter to the North Pole, which is really special.

"The postbox is already brimming and Mrs Claus is excited to see all of the wonderful designs, read them all and respond to each individually."

Santa will still make time to stop into the studio to receive letters in person and take a photo in the first weekend of December and again on 14 December.

"He stopped by during the Christmas Tree Lighting event and the children's excitement was so beautiful," Ms McNamara said.

The Claus family will donate the \$3 stamp fee to the Food Hub to share the Christmas cheer.

The postbox is open during Dandy Lion Studio's regular trading hours.

Letters need to be posted by 15 December to make the North Pole reply cutoff.



Sisters Grace and Matilda just mailed their very first letter to Santa, brimming with excitement as they eagerly await a reply from Mrs Claus. Picture: Sam James

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Inclusive spirit at the Kerang family day out

THE spirit of Christmas will shine bright in Kerang on 14 December as the community comes together for the second annual Tinsel and Tongs, promising a day full of fun, food, and festive cheer.

The event will be held from 10am to 1pm at Kerang Primary School grounds, with organisers again ensuring that every child who attends receives a special gift from Santa.

Building on the success of last year's inaugural celebration - which attracted more than 400 people despite soaring 42-degree heat - the event is returning even bigger and better.

Families can look forward to a packed morning of entertainment, including a giant jumping castle, climbing wall, face painting, candy floss and popcorn, along with the much-loved Rotary train rides.

The Kerang Lions Club will be manning the barbecue, with all food and activities provided free of charge.

Organised by Kerang Neighbourhood House, manager Claire Fry said the event was created to bring the community together at a time when many families were feeling the strain of rising costs.

"A lot of people can't afford Christmas this year," she said.

"With the cost of living and power bills going up, people are having to cut down.

"This is a way for everyone to come together and celebrate without worrying about money.



Last year's event was attended by about 400 people despite scorching heat. Picture: Supplied

"You don't need to bring your wallet - just come along, let the kids have fun, grab a bite to eat, and enjoy the day."

Support from local businesses has helped make the event possible again this year.

Organisers are also inviting local stallholders

to take part, offering a space for small businesses and community groups to connect with families during the day.

All activities run by the event are completely free, while stallholders can set their own prices for any goods they sell.

"It's all about the community," Ms Fry said. "Last year was such a success because everyone came together.

"We just want people to come along, forget their worries for a few hours, and have a great time."



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Bang for your festive buck

IT'S one of the most beloved Christmas traditions: pulling a cracker with a loved one and seeing who ends up with the funny hat and silliest joke.

However, Christmas crackers are often the last thing on the shopping list and after buying the presents, trimmings and food, pockets feel a little less than flush.

Why not try making your own? It's easy and economical, using everyday items you probably have at home already. Best of all, you can fill them with trinkets that mean something to your guests, rather than plastic tidbits that are likely to go in the bin at the end of the meal - now that's bang for your buck.

HERE'S HOW TO PUT THEM TOGETHER

1. First, purchase some cracker snaps from your local craft store. That will give you the authentic bon bon bang.
2. Next, place a cracker snap in a cardboard tube, say a toilet roll tube or a paper towel tube cut in half. If you don't have any tubes handy, you can find these at craft shops, or cut pieces of flexible cardboard into rectangles and roll into cylinders. Secure the snap with a piece of tape or glue.
3. Then, choose your paper wrapping. You can wrap your bon bons in colourful tissue paper to match your table setting, Christmas wrapping paper, or even light fabric that can be washed and reused again next year. Cut it to fit the tube, with enough overhang to cover the ends of the snap. Roll around the tube and stick down with tape. Pinch one end and tie it down with a ribbon of your choice.
4. Fill the other end of the tube with your trinkets and fillings (see right for some ideas on what fillings to use) then tie the last end shut.
5. For a personal touch, add a name tag and use each bon bon as a place setting for the table.



You can customise your crackers to suit your Christmas table settings.

IDEAS FOR ENTERTAINING CRACKER FILLINGS

- If your guests have a bit of a sweet tooth, buy a box of chocolates and divvy them up amongst the crackers. For the adults in the room, you can purchase liqueur-flavoured chocolates to match guests' favourite tipples - or perhaps even mini bottles of their favourite spirits.
- Instead of the cheesy jokes we've all heard a thousand times before, write some positive affirmations or messages for the New Year and slip those inside. People love to know they are cared for.
- Are you a romantic at heart? If your beloved loves Christmas as much as you do, a cracker might be the place to hide the ring. Just make sure they get the right bon bon to pull or things could get awkward.
- For the kids, include something they'll actually use. Colourful hair ties or clips, badges or stickers make cute gifts for the little ones.

All I want for Christmas



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Plan the pawfect day

WITH Christmas approaching and holiday plans underway, Swan Hill Rural City Council is reminding residents to consider the safety and wellbeing of their pets during the festive season.

Council director of development and planning Michelle Grainger said the holiday period often brought challenges for pet owners, particularly an increase in surrendered animals and ongoing welfare concerns.

"We don't typically see a rise in lost pets, but the number of unwanted pets surrendered to council does increase," Ms Grainger said.

"Many people underestimate the responsibility, time, and care involved in looking after a pet, which can lead to welfare problems or pets escaping."

Ms Grainger said the chance of pets wandering off increased during the holidays, with families on the move and a change in routine, especially if animals were left unsupervised.

"Gates can be left open and animals can escape," she said.

To help avoid such issues, Ms Grainger encouraged pet owners to take simple precautions.

"We're constantly educating the community about responsible pet ownership," she said.

"Pet owners can use boarding facilities or arrange for a responsible person to supervise their animals.

"Keeping gates and fences closed and well maintained also helps."

Ms Grainger also advised families considering a new pet at Christmas to think carefully before making a decision.

"Bringing a pet into the family is a lifelong

Council is reminding residents to keep pets safe and cared for this holiday season.

Picture: File



commitment," she said. "Pets are family members and should be treated as such."

"Taking on a new pet is for life, and the decision should involve everyone in the family, not just the new owner."

Those interested in adoption are encour-

aged to check the council's lost animals page.

"If anyone is considering adopting a pet from our pound, they can visit our website and let us know which animal they are interested in," Ms Grainger said.

After the statutory eight-day holding peri-

od, adopters must cover costs for microchipping, desexing, and vaccinations.

Registration is free for the first year, with annual renewals due by April.

With careful planning, the festive season can be enjoyed by all members of the family, on two legs or four.

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Competition set to sparkle

THE festive season is about to shine even brighter across Swan Hill, with locals encouraged to enter *The Guardian's* annual Christmas Lights Competition.

The much-loved event has become a highlight of the holiday calendar, bringing together families, businesses, and entire neighbourhoods in a celebration of creativity and community spirit.

This year's competition promises plenty of sparkle, with fantastic prizes on offer across three categories: Best Business Christmas Window Display, People's Choice Best Residence, and Best Inflatable Display.

Whether it's a shopfront transformed into a winter wonderland, a home glowing with thou-

sands of twinkling lights, or a quirky inflatable character bringing cheer to the street, there's a category for everyone to showcase their festive flair.

Organisers are encouraging residents to get involved, noting that every year participants go to extraordinary lengths to design and build their displays.

From carefully strung fairy lights to hand-crafted decorations, the effort is all about spreading joy and lighting up the region.

The competition isn't just about winning prizes, it's about creating moments of delight.

Children's faces light up as they pass by glowing homes, families take evening drives to admire the displays, and businesses enjoy the

buzz of shoppers drawn to festive shopfronts.

The event has become a tradition that brings people together, reminding the community of the magic of Christmas.

So whether you're a seasoned decorator or trying your hand for the first time, now is the time to dust off the lights, inflate the Santas, and join in the fun.

With *The Guardian* Christmas Lights Competition underway, Swan Hill is set to sparkle once again.

Entries can be submitted via *The Guardian* website, with the deadline set for 12 December.



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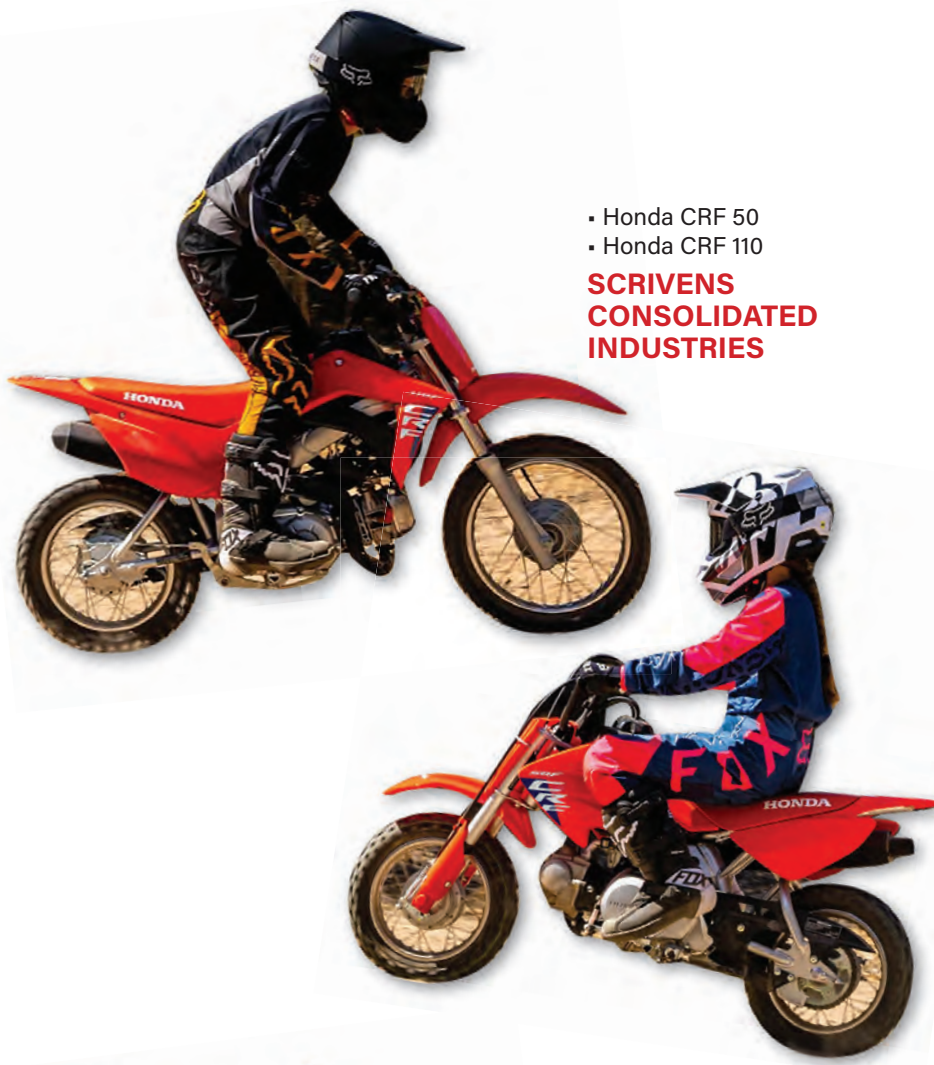
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Best Brownies Ever

Brownies are a treat that never goes out of season, and spending an afternoon in the kitchen baking them is the perfect way to enjoy the school holidays. Try this easy recipe for irresistibly delicious results.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips (optional, but recommended)
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts (walnuts or pecans work well) (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 175°C. Grease a 23x33cm baking pan or line it with baking paper, leaving some overhang on the sides for easy removal.
- In a microwave-safe bowl or on the stovetop, melt the butter. Allow it to cool slightly.
- In a large mixing bowl, combine the melted butter and granulated sugar. Stir until well combined.
- Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Stir in the vanilla extract.
- In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, and salt.
- Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients, stirring until just combined. Be careful not to overmix.



- If desired, fold in the chocolate chips and chopped nuts until evenly distributed in the batter.
- Pour the brownie batter into the prepared baking pan and spread it out evenly.
- Bake in the preheated oven for about 25 to 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the centre comes out with a few moist crumbs. Be careful not to overbake as it can result in dry brownies.
- Remove the brownies from the oven and let them cool completely in the pan on a wire rack.
- Once cooled, use a sharp knife to cut the brownies into squares.

Raspberries and Cream Christmas Tarts



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 sheets shortcrust pastry
- 125g cream cheese, cut into 18 cubes, softened
- 3/4 cup raspberry jam
- 3/4 cup slivered almonds
- Icing sugar, for dusting

METHOD:

- Using a 7cm diameter round cutter, cut 18 rounds from the pastry sheets. Press pastry into a greased patty pan or mini tart tins.
- Squash 1 square of cream cheese in each tart case and spoon over a teaspoonful of jam, sprinkle with almonds.
- Bake at 180°C for 10-12 minutes until pastry and almonds are golden. Cool for at least 15 minutes before dusting with icing sugar and serving warm or at room temperature.

COOKING TIP: Tarts are best served the day they are made, but can be kept refrigerated for two days.

Recipe courtesy of Dairy Australia.

Q: What do you love most about Christmas?



Lenny: I like getting presents and seeing my cousins.



Matilda: I like going to see my family for breakfast on Christmas.



Archie: I like playing with my truck toys and spending time with my family.



Armani: I like it when my cousins come over because we do lots of playing.



Chet: I like celebrating with my family.



Aria: I like making and eating cupcakes with Grandma.



Vy: I like painting with my Aunty Rose and eating chocolate cake.



Oscar: I like putting up decorations and going for a drive to see Christmas lights with my dad.



Van: My favourite thing about Christmas is getting presents and spending time with my family. I hope to get an electric guitar this year.



Elizabeth: My favourite thing about Christmas is opening presents. I got my favourite present last year. It was fine.



Avah: I like putting out cookies and milk for Santa. I'm hoping to get an electric guitar.



Eleni: I like going out, having tea, and having sleeps at our family friends' houses. This Christmas, we're going to Uncle Warwick's. I like opening presents with my friends. I'm hoping to get gymnastics equipment because I love gymnastics. My dad and pop used to do it, they could do the splits. I can touch the ground.



Spencer: I'm looking forward to opening presents, spending time with my family, and going on holidays, sometimes to Queensland, Adelaide, Melbourne, or just to my Nan and Pop's house. We have dinner with our families.



Paige: I like spending time with my family and opening presents. We invite people over for a special dinner, have some desserts, put out carrots for the reindeers, and cookies for Santa. I'm hoping to get a spy case.



Sophia: I like spending time with my family, opening presents, and eating gingerbread houses, I make it with my mum. I'm hoping to get a spy kit.



Billie: What I like about Christmas is that last year, someone actually ate the carrot we left out for the reindeers, usually, my mum or I won't eat the back of the carrot. We also leave out milk, and last year, the milk was all gone and mum couldn't drink it. We always put it on a plate that says Merry Christmas.



Angela: Opening presents, spending time with family, when Santa comes, and going to Christmas shop with my mum. I have two sisters and one brother, and I'm going to buy them presents. I'm also looking forward to going on holidays.



Wishing tree brings festive cheer

THE Kmart and Salvation Army Wishing Tree Appeal has officially launched in Swan Hill, inviting residents to embrace the spirit of giving this Christmas.

Now in its 38th year, the initiative continues to unite the community through the spirit of giving during the festive season.

As Christmas approaches, locals are encouraged to show support by donating gifts or essential items at their local Kmart or online.

Salvation Army senior soldier Kendall Russell said the main focus was on supporting families in need during a particularly challenging time.

"Given the rising costs of living, this can be a really difficult time of year for people," she said.

"Our community is here to help ease some of that pressure, especially during Christmas.

"Whether through church or local support services, we're always happy to chat and find the best way to offer support.

"Every effort, big or small, goes directly to helping people in our local area."



The Kmart Swan Hill team and the Salvation Army's Kendall Russell celebrated the launch of this year's Kmart Wishing Tree Appeal.

Picture: Patrick Tucker

Ms Russell said the Wishing Tree campaign was designed to make participation easy for everyone.

"If people haven't donated before, or don't have a lot to give, we encourage them to come talk to us," she said.

"Even a \$2 donation or a tag on the Wishing Tree can make a real difference.

"It's about coming together as a community to make a positive impact."

Kmart employee Jessica Parker encouraged donations for all ages, "including gifts for older children and teenagers, who were often overlooked during holiday giving," she said.

Suggested donations include toys,

sporting equipment, camping gear, makeup kits, and back-to-school supplies, as well as general household items and essentials like towels, bedding, kitchenware, and personal care products.

Both in-store and online donations are welcome, with every contribution staying within the local community.

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