

Fun inexpensive gift ideas

Inexpensive gift ideas, an article with tips on making quality, personal gifts at home. Some suggestions include a hand-bound journal, beaded jewelry, and photo frames.

How easy is it to walk into a department store, pick up an impersonal gift, wrap it, and give it? Well, it can be just as easy and sometimes less expensive to give a gift from the heart. Do you know what your gift recipient likes? With the aid of a computer and/or the local arts & crafts store, it's simple to create gifts that are appreciated for their individuality. A one-of-a-kind gift can mean so much more than something store-bought can. So here are some ideas for creating gifts your family and friends will be proud to show off.

For the Writer in Your Life

Do you know someone who likes to write? A hand-bound journal is a gift well appreciated by the scribes of the world. To make a simple journal, start with 5 sheets of standard paper. You can use regular copy paper or a fancier linen type, but make sure to use a light, solid color so it's easy to read when written on. Cut the paper in half so you have 10 sheets of 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" paper. Fold these inside each other, then use a push pin to punch two holes in the fold to create the book. Cut a strong piece of art paper (available at most craft stores) that's 1/4" longer than your "book" to use as the cover. Place the cover around the pages and use a needle to pull a piece of ribbon through the holes. Tie them on the outside of the cover and you have a simple journal. Visit your local library for books on bookbinding to make fancier books. One of my favorite reference books is *Cover to Cover: Creative Techniques for Making Beautiful Books, Journals, & Albums* by Shereen Laplantz.

NOTE: A nice accompaniment to a hand-made journal is a selection of pens and pencils or a fine writing instrument.

For the Beach Lover

Is there someone in your life who loves the beach, but can't get there often? Give them a piece of it! You can get supplies at the craft store for a beach terrarium. Buy a small glass fishbowl with fluted edges, fill it partway with sand and seashells. Fit a styrofoam stopper into the top of the bowl, and glue more shells to the styrofoam. This is a simple and decorative gift. You can also wrap a ribbon around the neck of the bowl in a color that coordinates with the recipient's décor. These also make lovely centerpieces for a beach-themed party.

For the Photographer

Have a friend who's a shutterbug? Make her a collection of creative photo frames to show off her work! All this takes is some strong cardboard and heavyweight decorative papers. Fashion a frame back from the cardboard, cutting a support and gluing it down to the backing. Use the decorative papers to cut a frame shape, then attach three sides to the cardboard, leaving an opening to insert a photo on the fourth side (ideally the top). You can cut the opening in a square the size of a photo, or you can get creative with the shape. You can tailor the paper for the frame to your friend's own unique style.

Using your Computer to Your Advantage

With all the new papers, stickers, magnet sheets, and Iron-on transfers available now for inkjet printers, you can custom-design a T-shirt, magnet, or sticker for just about anyone. Use a scan of a favorite family pet to make a T-shirt for your child, or make a set of magnets for your neighbor's refrigerator using clip art of their favorite animals or places. Do you write poetry on the side? Celebrate an anniversary by giving the happy couple a poem you wrote just for them. Print it on fancy paper in a script font, put it in a nice frame, and you have a gift only you can give.

Handy with a Needle?

Making custom wall hangings, pillows, and clothing shows you really care. Taking some time out of your busy day to work on a needlepoint, latch-hook, or cross-stitch project can be relaxing, too. There are many patterns available, and if you can't find what you want, there are software programs that create custom patterns as well. Use the Internet to search for these. Be aware, however, that custom framing can be expensive! Most kits come with instructions for framing the finished project on your own. If you are handy, I would suggest doing that. A \$20 needlepoint project can cost upwards of \$200 to frame professionally - and that defeats the purpose of inexpensive gift giving.

Like to Work with Beads?

Custom-made jewelry can make your little girl the talk of the town! Craft stores carry everything you need to make pins, barrettes, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and keychains, and making your own beaded jewelry is a sight cheaper than buying it in upscale department stores. Visit the bead aisle in your local craft store to see the wide variety of beads available. There are different strings, wires, and filaments used for stringing beads as well to give different effects. Visit the library or the craft store for books on the subject, or simply be creative! Get a collection of beads and filaments and experiment.

These are only a few suggestions. Expand your creativity and you will easily come up with many other original ideas. If you are artistically inclined, for example, you can make a sculpture or paint a still life. If you're a photographer, you could design a gift certificate for a portrait sitting. Use your skills and take advantage of your talents. A gift from the heart shows you took the time to consider what the recipient would like, and that you gave of yourself to do it - not just of your wallet. Good luck!