



Submitted photos

Symbols of the season includes glowing lights and shining ornaments.

## CELEBRATING THE LIGHT

BY LAURA HUNT ANGEL

This week, I learned an amazing fact about a subject that, on the surface, has nothing to do with the season at hand. It's the subject of magnets. Believe it or not, the joy of Christmas has a whole lot to do with the magnets stuck on your fridge.

Back in grade school, I remember quite clearly the day when our teacher, Mrs. Wisely, introduced us to the mysterious world of magnetism. She gave each of us a set of two small bar magnets. Then she stood at the front of the room and showed us that each of the bars had a north and south pole, just like the earth. We watched as Mrs. Wisely placed the magnets end to end and they tightly stuck together. Then she pulled them apart, switched the ends and they magically pushed one another apart.

As we sat at our desks and played with the magnets, Mrs. Wisely explained that magnetism affects everything in the universe. Without magnetism we could have no electricity, and even more importantly, without magnetism our hearts would not even be able to beat.

Mrs. Wisely let us keep the magnets, and as I rode home on the bus I played with them. That evening, I sat at the supper table and showed Mama and Daddy how, no matter how hard I tried, the magnets would always repel each other if the wrong ends were placed near each other. For days afterward, I tested the magnets on jar lids, pennies and any other metallic object I could find.

Although I found the subject quite interesting, I never really understood what it was that made the magnets work. And I certainly never thought that magnets could have anything to do with Christmas. That changed this week, when I learned that the power of magnets lies in a specific particle that is celebrated around the world at this time of the year. It is light.

Though they look dark, magnets shed photons, which are a particle of light. These exact same particles give us sunlight — and Christmas lights. Outside of Harry Potter, photons are as close to real magic as it gets. Light, in the form of magnetism, holds the universe, and everything in it, together,



Bright red peppers filled with sausage and cheese make any meal festive.

including the very cells that make up the human body. When the good Lord said, "Let there be light," it wasn't just so that He could see what he was doing. It was a necessity.

## YULE

The cyclical nature of sunlight has been revered for thousands of years, even before its importance was fully understood. Long before the first Christmas, pagans in Scandinavia chose the longest night of the year to celebrate the sun. They knew that after the winter solstice on Dec. 21, the sun would begin to shine just a little bit longer each day. The holiday, known as Yule, was a time for feasting and lighting fires that symbolized the hope of life in the returning sunlight. Each family would place a log large enough to last through the night on their hearth. They were called Yule logs, and, in much of Europe, peasants saved the ashes from Yule logs to spread on the fields as a blessing for the next year's crops.

In ancient Rome, the celebration was called Saturnalia and extended for a full week. Businesses closed, banquets were held and during wartime, temporary truces were put in place. Quarrels and debts were forgiven. In a unique reversal of roles, slaves were allowed to rest in comfort while their masters waited on them.

## FESTIVALS OF LIGHT

Celebrating the power of light to overcome the darkness

is not restricted to the Western world. In India, the festival of Diwali has been celebrated for centuries by the Hindu people. It takes place annually in October or November, after the final harvest of the season has been gathered. During Diwali, clay lamps are arranged to decorate houses and walkways. Other forms of light, such as fireworks, bonfires and strings of electric lights are employed as well. As with Christmas, sweet treats are shared, too.

Diwali is a time of prayer for financial success in the year to come. Many also believe that the Hindu god, Lakshmi, walks the earth in search of welcoming homes. Eventually, Indians of all faiths and philosophies came to embrace the festival, and now many Indian gods are included, depending on the particular faith of the observer.

Perhaps the best known festival of light began as the result of a Hebrew victory in battle. In 168 B.C.E., Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes declared the temple in Jerusalem be renamed in honor of the pagan god, Zeus. In response, a Jewish priest named Judas Maccabee led a revolt that succeeded in breaking the Syrian tyranny. After the Jews re-established the second temple, they declared a special celebration because during the Syrian takeover they had missed the eight day Feast of Booths, or Sukkot. During the new celebration, the temple ran out of the oil that kept the holy

lamps lit. However, a miracle occurred and the lamps stayed lit anyway. To this day, the remembrance of the event is marked with the Jewish Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah.

## LIGHTING THE SOUL

Have you ever watched someone take a bite of something that was unexpectedly spicy? We're not talking ghost chili hot, but just enough to give the eater a little jolt. After the initial "ahh" of surprise, the person usually begins to laugh. There's a good reason for that.

When we eat something spicy, it triggers a pain response in the brain that causes the rush of tiny neurotransmitters known as endorphins. These and other "feel good" chemicals are also released when we exercise, eat chocolate or laugh. Foods high in antioxidants such as fresh vegetables and fruit can boost endorphin levels, too.

Whether we're aware of it or not, humans naturally seek out bright lights, happy music and specific foods to lift our spirits when the need arises. Like the pagans of old, we celebrate the hope of light coming into the world during the darkest time of the year.

## THE RECIPES

Filled with color and flavor, here is a trio of recipes for a complete casual meal that will lighten the hearts of family and friends. In return, their praise will lift the spirits of weary cooks, too.

## SAUSAGE AND CHEESE STUFFED RED PEPPERS

I used long sweet Italian peppers for this recipe, but regular sweet peppers will work just as well. For colorful party appetizers, stuff the filling into assorted sweet mini bell peppers.

**1 lb bulk sweet Italian sausage**  
**1 cup ricotta cheese**  
**¾ cup shredded mozzarella, divided**  
**½ teaspoon dried basil**  
**3 tablespoons olive oil**  
**3 large red peppers, halved and seeded**  
**¼ cup flat leaf (Italian) parsley, chopped**

**Preheat oven to 375 degrees F; lightly spray a 9" x 13" pan with non-stick spray.**

Brown the sausage in a skillet. Remove from skillet, drain and let cool slightly. In a large bowl, mix together the sausage with the ricotta, ½ cup of the mozzarella and the basil. Fill each pepper half with the mixture and place in the prepared pan. Top with remaining mozzarella and drizzle with olive oil. Bake for 30 minutes or until nicely browned. Top with the chopped parsley, and serve immediately. Serves six.

## ROASTED BROCCOLI WITH CLEMENTINE ORANGE AND GARLIC

After several unsatisfactory attempts at roasted broccoli, I threw all of the recipes out the window and crafted this one myself. The sweetness of the Clementine juice and zest blends perfectly with garlic and red pepper. To serve alongside the stuffed red peppers, above, pop the broccoli into the oven after the peppers have baked for about 10 minutes.

**8 cups fresh broccoli florets (about 1 large head)**  
**¼ cup olive oil**  
**2 large cloves garlic, chopped (2 rounded teaspoons)**  
**½ teaspoon crushed red pepper**  
**½ teaspoon salt (or to taste)**  
**Black pepper to taste**  
**Juice from 1 Clementine orange**  
**1 tablespoon fresh Clementine zest**

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F; lightly spray a large sheet pan with non-stick spray.

In a large bowl, toss together the broccoli, olive oil, garlic, red pepper, salt and pepper. Spread the broccoli in a single layer on the prepared pan. Bake in the lower half of the oven for 20-25 minutes, or until slightly charred, stirring once halfway through. (Keep an eye on it for the last 10 minutes of cooking to brown it to your liking.) When done, toss the broccoli with the Clementine juice, place in a serving dish and top with the zest. Serves four to six.

# Saddle up in style on new rocking horses

BY KIM COOK  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The rocking horse, offspring of the hobby horse, seems to have appeared first in the early 17th century. Not much more than a log with board sides, it may have been inspired by the cradle, according to Alec Kinane of Legends Rocking Horses in Buckinghamshire, England.

"The horse on bow rockers that we know and love today was a product of 18th century England," Kinane says. "It was popular with the wealthy, and it is said they were used to help develop children's balance for riding real horses."

Kinane and his wife, Beverley, have been hand-carving and restoring rocking horses for 30 years. Their finely finished steeds, crafted from hardwoods like oak and cherry, with real horse hair manes and tails and leather saddles, sell for thousands of pounds.

It may have been Queen Victoria's love of the rocking horse that led to its becoming a children's favorite.

Maggi Batch is a collector and dealer in antique rocking horses, in Norfolk England.

"When I was a child, because we came from a poor background, a rocking horse was just something we saw if we visited a stately home," she says. "When I had children, they did eventually get a rocking horse — a fiberglass replica which was for its time a lovely item."

"I soon found that the antique ones, when restored with their patina, were addictively collectible, and so it went on." (www.rockinghorseheaven.com)

There are less elaborate wooden rocking horses, like KidKraft's Derby horse. More of a horse-shaped rocking bench with yarn mane and tail, it's nonetheless a sturdy-looking steed. (www.wayfair.com)

Land of Nod's sleek, minimalist black stallion, crafted of birch and alderwood, would blend in well with contemporary decor. (www.landofnod.com)

But for those who want a rocking toy they can put their arms around, consider the cuddlier versions that dominate the market now.

Charm Company's Hercules is a regal creature made of soft chestnut plush on a wooden frame; squeeze his ear and his mouth and tail move. Trademark Games' Happy Trails rocking horse is a cowgirl-friendly pink confection, complete with silvery ears and a battery-operated neigh. (www.toysrus.com)

Designers are experimenting with rocking toys beyond the horse, as well. Woes and Pia Weinberg of the Netherlands use Kvadrat wool and French oak to create three style-savvy rocking toys in shapes that surprise: a gray cloud, a jaunty bowler hat and a slice of watermelon.

In collaboration with fashion designer Monique Lhuillier, Pottery Barn Kids has created a diminutive ride-on elephant. In shell-pink polyester velvet with dove-gray wooden handles and runners, it would appeal to the tiniest ones and their style-savvy parents alike. There's a creamy white horse in the collection, too. (www.potterybarnkids.com)

Rockabye's Lambkin and Owliver rocking toys are low enough to the ground for the tiniest riders. Four buttons play songs about shapes, colors and ABC's. (www.allmodern.com)

Finally, future sailors might like the Maine Dory rocking boat. Crafted from salvaged Maine lumber, using the same joinery as full-size models, the toy comes in three color variations and can be personalized. (www.bellalunatoys.com)



A rocking horse is shown that was made by the British family firm, G & J Lines, which was started in the middle of the 19th century and was England's biggest rocking horse manufacturer during the Victorian era.



The Lambkin rocker, has four buttons on the back of the head that play songs which teach about ABCs, shapes, etc.



Dutch designers Pia and Woes Weinberg's whimsical collection of rocking toys include unexpected shapes like a watermelon slice, cloud and bowler hat.

## Five organizing tasks to calm to your life

BY NICOLE ANZIA  
WASHINGTON POST

In the weeks leading up to the election, I certainly wasn't thinking about how the outcome might influence perceptions about organizing. But since Nov. 9, clients have mentioned feeling especially stressed, in part because Election Day was a stark reminder that some things are unexpected and just plain out of their control.

In an effort to restore a sense of order and calm to their lives, people have told me they feel compelled to get organized and create structure where possible.

It's true that there are many things in life that you can't control. Here are five things that you can.

### YOUR CLOSET

If you have to scramble to put together an outfit in the morning or can't easily locate what you want to wear, you're adding unnecessary stress to your daily routine. Fortunately, you have full control over what is in your closet and how it is organized. If your closet is a mess, you can make it significantly better in just 30 minutes. First, make sure your clothing is categorized by type. Bottoms should be with other bottoms, shirts should be hanging together and all in one direction, and sweaters and shoes should be neatly arranged. Anything on the floor should either be put in a hamper or be hung up. And if you see something you no longer want, start a donation bag.

### TIME SPENT ONLINE

Some people try to distract themselves from their anxiety by reading news articles, shopping for themselves or for others, planning vacations, or just endlessly scanning their social-media accounts. But spending too much time online is neither healthy nor helpful. Try to limit the time you spend scrolling through websites when you're at home. Instead, make plans to get dinner with friends, see a movie or go shopping in a real store. Taking the initiative

to make plans, following through with them and doing something fun will give you a sense of purpose and control.

### CLUTTER

Studies have shown a correlation between clutter and stress. The good news: Containing clutter is within your control. The bad news: It requires work and consistent attention. Make sure you have a specific place to put things that pile up quickly — school papers and projects, bills, magazines, office supplies, books. Spend 15 minutes every day putting things where they belong and tossing papers you don't need. Finish household tasks such as laundry when possible. And spend a few minutes before you go to bed straightening up any mess left in your kitchen or living room. If you do these few things consistently, you'll reduce both clutter and stress.

### YOUR SOCIAL CALENDAR

Instead of waiting to be invited to friends' houses, plan a gathering at your own house. You do not have to plan a huge party, but just invite a couple of friends or neighbors over for a casual meal. Having friends or family over has the dual stress-reducing benefits of connecting with people in person and getting organized. There is nothing like a deadline for getting your home cleaned up and organized. Tasks that have gone undone for months have a way of finally getting completed when you know people are coming.

### YOUR OUTLOOK

You know that organizing project that has been hanging over your head for several months, if not years? Stop letting it stress you out. Whether it's finally putting together that baby book for your second child or looking through an old box of papers or photos that you've been ignoring, simply starting a project can lift some of that weight off your shoulders. You'll also probably find that it's not as daunting as you imagined.



FRESH BROCCOLI PUNCTUATED BY CLEMENTINE, GARLIC AND RED PEPPER

## LIGHT

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### BERRIES WITH CRÈME ANGLAISE AND CHOCOLATE

Crème Anglaise is pretty much the same thing as old-fashioned vanilla sauce, and it makes a lovely topping for antioxidant-rich berries. If you have a family recipe for vanilla sauce it will work fine here. Otherwise, I've provided an easy recipe. For busy weeknights or to lighten this dessert, you could replace the crème Anglaise with vanilla flavored Greek yogurt.

4 egg yolks, beaten  
1/3 cup sugar  
1 cup heavy cream  
2 teaspoons vanilla  
2 pints raspberries, blackberries or a combination  
4 squares bittersweet baking chocolate, at room temperature

Prepare the crème Anglaise by beating the egg yolks and sugar together in a medium sized bowl until thick and creamy; set aside. Combine the heavy cream with the vanilla in a heavy-bottomed saucepan and cook over medium heat until the cream barely bubbles around the edge of the saucepan. Whisking constantly, pour about 1/3 cup of the hot cream into the beaten eggs in a thin stream. Add the egg-cream

mixture to the remaining cream in the saucepan and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Let the sauce cool to room temperature or chill it if you wish.

Divide the berries between six dessert glasses or cups. Spoon the crème Anglaise over the berries, then use a vegetable peeler to shave the chocolate over the sauce. Serves six.

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