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# NEBRASKA

December 2024

Magazine



## CARHENGE

**How Carhenge  
Became Nebraska's  
Must-See Roadside  
Attraction**

**Mutual Aid in  
Action**

**Smart Insight About  
Buying Smart Appliances**

**Simple Ways to  
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*Carhenge, a unique roadside attraction in Alliance, Neb., features vintage cars arranged in a formation reminiscent of England's Stonehenge. See the related article on Page 6. Photograph by Wayne Price*



Wayne Price

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## **Empowering Rural Nebraska: Nebraska's Bold Step into Clean Energy**

The recent award from the USDA's Empowering Rural America (New ERA) program to the Nebraska Electric Generation and Transmission Cooperative, Inc. (NEGT) is a monumental win for Nebraska's rural communities, bringing both economic opportunity and environmental progress. In a fiercely competitive selection process, NEGT emerged as a winner, recognized for its commitment to driving Nebraska into a sustainable future, one that merges the state's agricultural heritage with a dedication to clean energy.

This funding is an investment in Nebraska's rural families, low-income residents, and disadvantaged communities, including tribal lands. With the New ERA initiative, over 170,000 homes in Butler, Burt, and Custer counties will benefit from access to 725 megawatts of clean, renewable energy from wind and solar sources. This project is not just a commitment to greener energy—it represents a pathway to cleaner air and healthier communities by cutting carbon emissions by over 2.2 million tons annually.

The Nebraska BioEconomy Initiative, powered by Global Sustainability Developers, LLC (GSD), highlights the potential for family farms and rural areas to profit from the energy transition. This initiative promises not only sustainable power but also a sustainable economy, with new revenue channels and added value to agricultural products. As Julie Bushnell, president of GSD, stated, Nebraska's future is bright, but it's also well-earned. The state's dedication to partnerships and innovation has paved the way for this historic step forward.

The NEGT, led by General Manager Darin Bloomquist, understands that economic growth and environmental responsibility are not mutually exclusive. Bloomquist's vision aligns perfectly with Nebraska's identity as "the good life," a place where public power serves the public good. This award will reinforce Nebraska's unique position as the only all-public-power state, ensuring that Nebraskans reap the benefits of this resource for generations to come.

Founded in 1956 as a not-for-profit cooperative, NEGT has been a supporter of Nebraska's rural public power utilities. Today, it shines as an example of what's achievable when visionary leadership and federal support unite to tackle the critical challenges of sustainability and economic equity. This New ERA investment is a declaration of Nebraska's commitment to a prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive future.



Chance Briscoe

Chance Briscoe is the General Manager of Northwest Rural Public Power District, headquartered in Hay Springs, Neb.

## Mutual Aid in Action: The Lifeline for Rural Utilities During Disasters

Rural electric utilities, such as Public Power Districts and Electric Cooperatives, serve communities spread across vast, sparsely populated regions here in Nebraska and across the country. We face the challenge of maintaining thousands of miles of power lines that stretch through difficult-to-reach areas often without roads or even a trail to reach them. When natural disasters like hurricanes, ice storms, tornadoes, or floods strike, the damage to these electrical systems can be extensive, resulting in prolonged outages. However, through a process known as Mutual Aid, rural electric utilities are able to come together, sharing resources and manpower to restore power more quickly and efficiently.

### What is Mutual Aid?

Mutual aid is a collaborative agreement between utilities to provide assistance to each other during times of need, especially in the wake of natural disasters. It is essentially a formalized system of cooperation where utilities share their workers, equipment, and expertise to help restore power when one or many utilities are overwhelmed. Here in Nebraska all rural PPD's and electric cooperatives are signatories to a statewide Mutual Aid Agreement coordinated by the Nebraska Rural Electric Association (NREA). Nationally, we are also signatories to a mutual aid agreement coordinated by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

Mutual aid agreements are typically activated when the magnitude of damage from a storm or natural disaster surpasses the capacity of a single utility to restore power on its own. These events can cause widespread outages, break off poles, snap lines, and destroy transformers.

### The Role of Mutual Aid in Disaster Recovery

Power restoration is one of the critical needs in the wake of disasters. We have all seen this as the reports of wreckage have come out from hurricane Helene in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. As of writing this article, rural electric utilities in Nebraska have linemen helping that restoration effort and are preparing another round of crews to help after Milton hits Florida once again.

Last April we saw mutual aid at both ends of our state. In early April, multiple utilities in the Panhandle were hit with a terrible blizzard that knocked down over 2,000 poles and left some customers without power for over a week. Then a few weeks later on the other side of the state we saw the damaging tornadoes that struck around the Omaha area. In both instances, power outages

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# CARHENGE

## How Carhenge Became Nebraska's Must-See Roadside Attraction

by Nick Thomas



Burying some two dozen vintage American automobiles from the 50s, 60s, and 70s on a remote patch of Nebraskan farmland might be an act that could provoke a visit from the ‘men in white coats’ squad. But for Jim Reinders (1927-2021), his creation of Carhenge in 1987 would eventually draw thousands of visitors – and their tourist dollars – to the nearby town of Alliance in Box Butte County every year. Initially, however, the odd roadside attraction failed to impress local residents.

“Most people hated it,” said Becci Thomas, Director of the town’s Knight Museum and Sandhills Center. “I remember about 20 years ago, one woman built a new home across the road from the cars but had the house constructed at an angle so she wouldn't have to see Carhenge because it offended her so much.”

However, the popularity of the quirky structure increased over the years with many coming to appreciate its artistic and economic value. Inspired by England’s prehistoric Stonehenge, Reinders substituted the immense ancient silicified sandstone rocks with the bodies of junked cars – about two dozen in upright position partially buried for support with several more welded on top and others spread around the property. The cars were spray-painted grey to match the earthy tone of the original stones.

Reinders graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1950 with a degree in engineering and became fascinated with the mystical monoliths after many visits to Stonehenge while working in England for seven years during the 1970s. For Carhenge, he attempted to duplicate the ancient circular structure it was modeled after, and the attraction now draws curious visitors from across the world.

Thomas remembers meeting a couple from France visiting the site some years ago. “The husband was writing a book on automobile history and specifically wanted to photograph Carhenge for a section on American cars,” she recalled. “He literally spent the night under a tree photographing the site every hour, taking the same picture from the same angle for 24 hours. It does look different at various times of the day as the lighting changes.”

*Above: Dinosaur art at Carhenge.*

*Left: Massive old trees greet visitors at the entrance to Central Park in Alliance, Neb.*



She also recalls the passage of 2017's total solar eclipse over Nebraska and the thousands who gathered at the 10-acre Carhenge site to witness the rare celestial event. "It was one of the best eclipse viewing areas," said Thomas. "Among the crowd was a guy with a tinfoil hat waiting to be picked up by aliens – I kid you not. When nobody stopped to get him, he was just crushed. Strange things kind of gather strange people, I guess."

While the original idea to create Carhenge occurred to Reinders during his stay in England, a specific plan began to formulate when his family gathered at the Alliance property for his father's funeral in 1982. The group agreed to meet five years later to make it a reality. The first 25 vehicles were installed over a 6-day period during that summer family reunion on the land Reinders inherited from his father. The old vehicles, ranging from a 1950 Desoto up to a 1975 AMC Gremlin, were hauled in by family members and others purchased from a local man who collected junked cars.

Initially, Reinders had no intention to make Carhenge a permanent fixture. However, as its popularity and reputation grew, so did the number of cars and other whimsical art pieces including a life-sized metal dinosaur skeleton and a spawning salmon that were entries in a regional art competition. Reinders decided to leave the

site intact after eventually securing government permits and approval. After relocating out of state, he handed over the property to the Friends of Carhenge, a group consisting of locals dedicated to preserving and maintaining the property. Thomas, a member of the group's board, took on the role of Carhenge information director during this period.

"When the group dwindled down to about five women who all worked full-time it became difficult to keep up, so we decided to offer it for sale hoping some local people might buy it for the community," she explained. "Within two hours of listing, a company from Grand Island bid something like \$385,000. But they planned to tear it down and rebuild it in Grand Island. We about had a stroke! So, we approached the city and convinced them to take it over in 2013. They now own and maintain it."

Carhenge has been featured in commercials (e.g. for Nissan and Hyundai), television shows, documentaries, and books, and even appeared on record album covers such as 1993's "The Best of Steely Dan: Then and Now." While it has garnered national and international attention for the city, it isn't Alliance's only attraction.

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Visitors can also explore the museums and parks, including Central Park on Yellowstone Avenue. Established in the 1930s as a Works Progress Administration project, it's noted for its Pillars of the Park sunken garden, massive Chinese Elm trees, and spectacular fountain built in 1935.

"The fountain has been renovated several times over the years, most memorably in 1988 when our mayor – Eva Knight, who was our first woman mayor – devised a unique way to fund the repairs," Thomas said. "She created 'Coins for the Fountain.' Masking tape was laid down the whole ten blocks of Box Butte Ave and people were asked to put quarters on it – they raised \$20,000 which was amazing."

Listed on the National Historic Register, a colored light display was added to the fountain several years ago although the water has to be drained before the ground freezes. Last year, another fundraiser enabled the addition of Christmas lights attached to a custom-built wire frame giving the appearance of water spraying up so it can be enjoyed during the chilly winter months.

"We have about 135 acres of park which is pretty large for a town this size – around 8,500 people," says



Thomas who was born and raised in Alliance. "Carhenge is certainly the biggest tourist attraction for the town, but there's a lot to see and enjoy year-round."

Carhenge is located on US Highway 385, about three miles north of downtown Alliance and is open 24 hours daily throughout the year. Admission is free and a gift shop is open during the summer months. For more information visit [www.carhenge.com](http://www.carhenge.com).





## Continued from Page 5

would have been substantially longer but for the mutual aid agreements and help from neighboring utilities.

### Who Answers the Call for Mutual Aid

When a utility is hit with a disaster, they generally contact entities like NREA or NRECA to request help through mutual aid. That request is spread throughout the area and linemen volunteer to help. Often these volunteers are being sent into terrible conditions and could be away from their families for extended periods of time. During the April blizzards, Northwest Rural PPD had employees that spent about a week on restoration efforts in the cold, wind and snow banks. Volunteers for the hurricane

restoration will likely be there up to a month in hot, humid and flooding conditions.

### Benefits of Mutual Aid

Mutual aid not only helps restore power from disasters more quickly than a utility would be able to restore on their own but it also helps reduce the cost of restoration. Mutual aid workers are paid their normal hourly wage and overtime during their efforts. Without mutual aid, utilities would have to rely more upon contractors that are generally there to make a profit.

Another added benefit of mutual aid is strengthening community and morale. Not only do linemen appreciate getting the help when necessary but the assisting linemen know that one day the help will be reciprocated in their time of need

helping to build bonds that can last a lifetime.

In conclusion, among the Seven Cooperative (and PPD) Principles that our organizations stand for is "Cooperation Among Cooperatives." Mutual Aid is the highlight of that principle in action. Everyone can sleep a little easier and a little more comfortable knowing there are men and women ready to volunteer to help get the lights on and get the heat running a little faster through the Mutual Aid program.

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# Powering Nebraska's Future

## Sixteen Nebraska Communities Considered for Advanced Reactor Sites

Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) has reached Phase 2 of a feasibility study assessing preliminary siting options for advanced nuclear reactors in Nebraska.

In 2022, the Nebraska Legislature allocated \$1 million to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) to fund the feasibility study. DED subsequently awarded the funds to NPPD, which operates Cooper Nuclear Station near Brownville—the state's only nuclear power generator.

The purpose of the study's first phase was to review published data to help screen areas with geographic and infrastructure characteristics that would make them potential candidates for an emerging nuclear technology known as a Small Modular Reactor (SMR). SMRs offer unique attributes in terms of flexibility, efficiency, and safety. Phase 1 of the study considered areas across the entire state, including current generation sites.

Sixteen sites have been identified to proceed to the second phase of the feasibility study. These sites are located in proximity to the following cities: Beatrice, Brownville, Fremont, Grand Island, Hallam, Hastings, Holdrege, Kearney, Lexington, Nebraska City, Norfolk, Plattsmouth, Rushville, Sutherland, Valentine, and Wauneta.

"We're excited to help lay the groundwork for the potential future of this technology in

Nebraska," said DED Director K.C. Belitz, "Electrical generation is key to growing Nebraska's economy and this study is the first step in creating a tremendous economic impact for any community where it's located."

In 2023, nuclear energy provided almost 19% of U.S. utility-scale energy generation and about 47% of carbon-free generation in the U.S. There are 94 reactors licensed to operate in the U.S., and Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) is one of 21 utilities licensed to operate a nuclear plant. NPPD President and CEO Tom Kent noted, "Nuclear energy has played a vital role in safely and reliably powering Nebraska for more than 50 years. NPPD and many other utilities are closely following the progress of these next generation nuclear technologies."

The study's second phase will perform a more in-depth technical evaluation and will involve detailed field environmental and constructibility evaluations based on criteria used by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Phase 2 will also include engagement with the communities listed as potentially feasible sites. At the conclusion of Phase 2, the list will be shortened to two to four sites. Local support will be an important factor for a community to move past the second phase.

For more information on the feasibility study, visit [nextgennuclearne.com](http://nextgennuclearne.com).

**Illustration:** [istock.com/smartboy10](https://www.istock.com/smartboy10)

## Essential Kitchen Safety Tips for a Shock-Free Season

By **Larry Oetken**



The holiday season means one thing for kitchens across the country: action. From early morning prep sessions to those late-night baking sprees, our favorite holiday flavors are born amid the hum of appliances and the warmth of family tradition. But as you whip up Aunt Martha's famous mashed potatoes or experiment with that Pinterest-perfect pie recipe, there's one ingredient you won't want to forget—electrical safety.

The truth is, the kitchen can be a minefield for electric hazards, especially when we're all elbows-deep in holiday cooking. It's easy to overlook safety while trying to time the turkey and keep the gravy from boiling over, but a momentary lapse can lead to dangerous outcomes. According to the National Institutes of Health, about 1,000 people in the U.S. lose their lives each year to

electrical injuries, while 30,000 others suffer from non-fatal electric shock incidents. So, let's talk safety as much as sugar this season.

### **Kitchen Hazards You May Not Notice**

While electrical safety might seem basic, some kitchen hazards fly under the radar until they're too late. Here are a few shock-inducing culprits:

- Frayed or worn electrical cords – That old hand mixer from decades past? Check its cord before using.
- Faulty wiring in appliances – It's not just old gadgets. New equipment can have wiring issues, too.
- Water and electricity cocktail – Using damp cloths or wet hands near plugs, outlets, or appliances is a recipe for disaster.

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Larry Oetken is the Director of Job Training & Safety for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.



## Learn How to Protect Yourself from Scams and Fraud

As technology continues to evolve, so do the tactics of scammers trying to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers. One such scam that has been making the rounds recently is individuals pretending to be representatives of your electric utility company. These scammers will call you claiming that they are from your utility company and that you have overpaid and are due to receive a credit.

The scammer will then ask for your personal information, such as your social security number or credit card information, claiming that they need it to credit your account.

# Don't Get Duped

It is important to remember that your electric utility company will never call you to ask for personal information or demand immediate payment. If you do receive a call like this, it is likely a scam. If you are unsure if a call is legitimate, hang up and call your utility company directly to verify.

# Smart Insight About Buying Smart Appliances

Santa isn't the only one who makes an appearance as the year nears its end. Retailers start trumpeting deep discounts on home appliances. That's great if you've considered replacing some of your home's tired appliances with one of today's "smart" models. Before deciding to buy a smart appliance, take some time to get smarter about what they offer – and what you really need.

Begin with an honest look at how you live and consider the role your current appliances play in your daily routine. Would the capabilities of a smart appliance make your life easier? For example, if you frequently forget to start the laundry or your dishwasher, Wi-Fi enabled appliances with remote start capabilities may save you time and trouble. But if you're thinking about stepping up to a smart appliance because it has a cool feature you might use once a year, ask yourself if it's worth the extra cost.

Next, think about any smart devices you already use in your home. Make sure they're compatible with the smart appliance's operating system, so you can get all the benefits you expect. For example, many of these appliances are engineered to work with familiar voice assistants like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Apple's Siri. Incompatible systems might limit your ability to use the features that are most important to you.

Is your home's infrastructure ready to handle the demands of a smart appliance? Depending upon the model you choose, it might require anything from a basic internet connection to a home Wi-Fi network to provide the operation you expect. Some smart appliances may require Bluetooth, Zigbee, Z-Wave or other systems for connectivity. Others have the ability to receive software updates via wi-fi. Having access to the right technology ensures your system will function correctly and be able to handle updates as they become available.

It's always important to consider energy efficiency when purchasing a new appliance. Most smart appliances are designed to reduce energy consumption, with operating modes that deliver the performance you want while making more efficient use of energy. Smart



appliances that are Energy Star® certified meet or exceed federal energy efficiency standards and some may use only half as much energy as standard appliances. Many let you schedule operations during times of day when energy rates are lower. That's particularly beneficial with high-energy appliances like washing machines, dishwashers and clothes dryers.

Repairs to smart appliances can be expensive, so be sure to consider the warranty. Generous manufacturer warranties demonstrate the company's confidence in the quality of its products.

Finally, because most smart appliances are connected to the internet, make sure you think about privacy and security. Research the manufacturer's privacy policies and security features to ensure that data like your voice

*Many smart appliances are engineered to work with familiar voice assistants like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Apple's Siri. Photograph by Jakub Zerdzicki, Pexels*



commands and shopping habits don't fall into the wrong hands. Making sure the manufacturer takes your privacy and online safety as seriously as you do is a smart strategy.

For most homeowners, the biggest downside to smart appliances is that they carry a higher price tag than their not-so-smart counterparts. However, price is just one factor in the cost of any appliance. When you also consider the long-term value smart appliances deliver—whether that's in energy savings, helpful conveniences or improved reliability—most will save you money over their service life. In addition, smart appliances may be eligible for rebates and tax incentives, so ask your retailer what's available.

What's ahead for smart appliances in the foreseeable

future? The marketplace is starting to see the integration of basic artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities that can make smart appliances provide better service, greater reliability, and lower energy needs. As these AI-fueled systems become more common, your refrigerator might know your habits so well that it can generate a shopping list for you. Your dishwasher could adjust its operating cycle to better clean your family's uniquely dirty dishes. There was a time when appliances changed little from decade to decade. Today, products advance more quickly than ever before, and we can expect to see more big changes ahead. Fortunately, today's smart appliances give you a way to start using the technology that will make you the envy of your neighbors as it makes your life easier.

Electric blankets can add cozy warmth to cold nights, but they come with important safety considerations. Here are some tips to keep you and your loved ones safe while enjoying the comfort of your electric blanket.

### Say Goodbye to Old Blankets

If your electric blanket is more than ten years old, it's time to let it go. Even if it looks fine on the outside, the internal wiring can degrade over time, posing a risk. Newer blankets come equipped with advanced technology, like rheostats, which regulate heat by adjusting to both the blanket's and your body's temperature, offering a safer experience.

### Avoid Sitting on Your Blanket

Electric blankets aren't designed to withstand pressure from sitting or lying on them (unless they are specifically made for that purpose). Putting weight on the blanket can



*Electric blankets and heating pads provide comfort on chilly days and in the winter months. However, they could potentially be a fire hazard if not used correctly.*

damage the internal coils, leading to malfunction or even fire hazards. Treat your blanket gently for long-lasting warmth and safety.

### Handle with Care When Washing

Washing your electric blanket is important, but be cautious with the spin cycle. The twisting and tugging of the spin action can damage the blanket's internal wiring. Instead,

wash gently and avoid dry cleaning at all costs.

### Keep Pets at a Distance

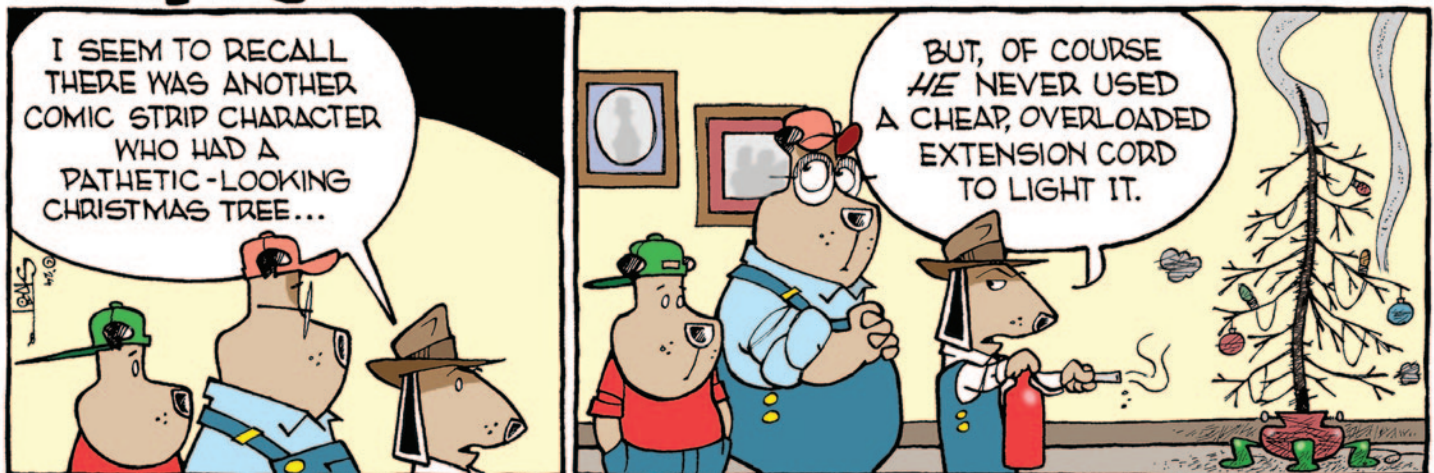
As much as we love our pets, their claws can tear electric blankets, exposing wiring that can lead to electric shocks or fires. If your furry friend just can't resist snuggling up, consider switching to a low-voltage electric blanket or getting a pet-specific heating pad for their comfort and safety.

### Don't Hide Cords Under Your Mattress

While it may be tempting to tuck those cords out of sight, running them under your mattress creates unnecessary friction, which can damage the cords or trap excess heat. Keep cords clear and visible to avoid overheating and reduce fire risks.

By following these simple precautions, you can enjoy the warmth of your electric blanket with peace of mind. Stay safe and cozy!

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The holiday season brings opportunities to enjoy meals with friends and family, leading to spending more time in the kitchen. Whether hosting a few or a crowd, consider making new energy efficiency traditions this year with these tips to manage your energy use.

Let's start with cooking your meal. Your electric oven is typically the highest-wattage appliance in the kitchen. Yet, people usually don't turn their ovens on for long periods of time. Assuming an average oven wattage of 3,000 and an average cost of \$0.16 per kilowatt-hour, according to the United States Energy Information Administration, it costs \$0.48 an hour. Let's say you use your oven for four hours to make a special meal. That's less than \$2 of electricity. While that may not seem like a big deal now, operating your oven for four hours every day is \$700 a year.

Using smaller appliances instead of your oven can help you save. A slow cooker uses between 100 and 450 watts, which is significantly less than an electric oven at 2,000 to 5,000 watts. That means you can use a slow cooker for a longer period and still use less energy.

Opt for your microwave or toaster oven to reheat or cook smaller items. The microwave uses significantly less energy than the oven. A toaster oven uses about half the energy of a conventional oven, according to EnergyStar.

You also want to avoid turning on your oven and leaving the door open to heat your home. This can break your oven and be a safety hazard,



*Before you start cooking on your stovetop, clean the burners to ensure the appliance heats evenly. Match pots to appropriately sized burners to avoid wasting energy.*

especially with gas ovens that can cause carbon monoxide buildup.

When cooking on the stovetop, match the pot or pan size to the burner. Lids help your pots retain heat, which cooks food faster and wastes less heat. Keep your stovetop clean to ensure the appliance heats evenly.

If you're looking to upgrade your stovetop, consider switching to an induction cooktop. It uses an electromagnetic field below the surface to heat pots and pans directly. This provides more precise heat, faster cook times and higher efficiency. It can also improve the air quality in your home when compared to a gas cooktop.

In my experience, people like to

gather in the kitchen during parties. To avoid overheating your guests in a room that has a hot oven, turn your thermostat down a few degrees before guests arrive.

Next, let's look for refrigerator savings. The gaskets on your refrigerator doors should make a tight seal to keep in cold air. Make sure you clean and maintain them or replace them if necessary. Don't let frost build up in the freezer, which can decrease efficiency and make your freezer work harder to maintain a balanced temperature.

Wait until food cools before putting leftovers in the fridge. Putting hot food in the refrigerator results in more energy used to cool it down. Aim for about 30 minutes of cool time. Perishable food should be refrigerated within two hours after it is cooked, according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Setting your refrigerator colder than needed wastes energy. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends 37 degrees for the refrigerator and 0 degrees for the freezer. Use an appliance thermometer to monitor the temperature.

When it comes to cleanup, run full loads of dishes in the dishwasher—being careful not to block any moving parts. Use eco mode if your dishwasher has that setting. If you are in the market for new appliances, select EnergyStar models.

Whatever you choose to cook or how you cook it, keep in mind these simple tips to make your kitchen more efficient and save energy this holiday season.

# 5 WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

As the temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items, the number of home fires tends to increase during winter months.

Here are five ways you can safeguard your home for the winter season.

## 1 Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly.

If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.

## 2 Inspect electrical cords.

We depend on more cords during winter, whether for holiday lighting, extension cords or portable heaters. Before using any corded items, double check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked. If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least 3 feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip. Speaking of power strips...



*Kelly Sikkema, Unsplash*

## 3 Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips.

When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.

## 4 Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency.

There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety. As wood burns, a sticky substance known as creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

## 5 Practice safety in the kitchen.

As we spend more time in the kitchen during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.

# Celebrate with Simple, Stunning Desserts

If holiday gatherings have started to feel more overwhelming than celebratory, it's time to go back to the basics with seasonal desserts that are easy yet elegant.

Wow your crowd this year with a mouthwatering Coconut Cake that call to mind holidays past without requiring hours spent in the kitchen (like grandma used to do).

For a classic take on an old favorite, these Christmas Cinnamon Cookies can even let the kiddos get involved – just make the dough then have your little helpers use their favorite cookie cutters to make festive shapes before the oven does the rest of the work.

Cupcakes, macaroons and even pies have some intense flavors, however, it's hard to top the delightful taste of these Fresh Ginger Cookies.

Find these recipes and more from “Cookin’ Savvy” at Culinary.net.



## Ginger Cookies

- 2 cups flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup salted butter, softened
- 1 cup, plus 3 tablespoons, sugar, divided



## Christmas Cinnamon Cookies

- 1 2/3 cups self-rising flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ginger
- 1/8 teaspoon cloves
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons water (optional)
- 1 cup powdered sugar (optional)

In mixing bowl, combine flour, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, sugar, brown sugar and egg to make

dough. If dough is too dry to form into ball, add water. Form into log and wrap in parchment paper. Refrigerate 1 hour.

Heat oven to 350 F.

Roll dough out and cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Place on cookie sheet covered in parchment paper and bake 8-10 minutes. Let cool on rack then dust with powdered sugar, if desired.

- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup grated fresh ginger

Heat oven to 350 F.

In medium bowl, whisk flour, baking soda, ground ginger, cinnamon and

salt. Set aside.

In stand mixer, beat butter, 1 cup sugar and brown sugar until fluffy. Add egg and fresh ginger; beat until combined. Gradually add dry ingredients to mixer until combined.

In small bowl, add remaining sugar.



## Coconut Cake

- 1 vanilla or white cake mix
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup coconut Greek yogurt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 3 eggs

### Frosting:

- 1 stick butter, softened
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
- 5 cups powdered sugar
- 2-4 cups shredded coconut

Heat oven to 350 F.

In mixing bowl, mix cake mix, flour and sugar. Blend in yogurt, milk, butter and eggs.

Grease two 8-inch cake pans with butter. Pour half the mixture into each pan and bake 45 minutes. Cool on rack before icing.

To make frosting: In mixing bowl, mix butter, cream cheese and heavy whipping cream. Slowly blend in powdered sugar.

Ice cake then pat shredded coconut gently into icing.

Using spoon, portion out dough, roll into balls then roll in sugar. Arrange balls on baking sheet at least 1 inch apart.

Bake 14 minutes, or until edges are golden brown. Transfer cookies to cooling rack and cool completely.

## Reader Submitted Recipes

### Appetizer Wreath

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 2 tubes (8 oz. each) refrigerated crescent rolls | 1 1/2 cups chopped fresh broccoli florets |
| 1 package (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened         | 1 cup finely chopped celery               |
| 1/2 cup sour cream                               | 1/2 cup finely chopped sweet red pepper   |
| 1 teaspoon dill weed                             | Celery leaves                             |
| 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder                       |   |

Remove crescent dough from packaging (do not unroll). Cut each tube into eight slices. Arrange in an 11-inch circle on an ungreased 14-inch pizza pan. Bake at 375 degrees for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown. Cool for 5 minutes before carefully removing to a serving platter; cool completely. In a small mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese, sour cream, dill and garlic powder until smooth. Spread over wreath; top with broccoli, celery and red peppers. Form a bow garnish with celery leaves.

**Diane Cerney, Shelby, Nebraska**

### Danish Christmas Pudding (Risalamande)

- 1 cup ground rice
- 1 cup chopped almonds
- 1 quart cream (Can substitute evaporated milk)
- 1 quart milk
- 3/4 to 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- Pinch of salt

Grind the rice in a coffee mill, blender or bullet mixer. Put milk and cream in a large double boiler. Heat to boiling point and add the rice. Stir. When thick, add sugar, salt and almonds and almond extract. Serve when cool. Use slightly sweetened pie cherry juice when serving or a spoon of cherry pie filling on top. This is one of my family's favorite recipes at Christmas time, served in a pretty glass dessert dish with cherry juice or cherry pie filling on top.

**Ramona Teegerstrom, Stromsburg, Nebraska**

### White Fudge

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 3 cups sugar                  | 1 12 oz. package white chocolate chips    |
| 1 cup evaporated milk         | 1 cup chopped nuts                        |
| 1/2 cup margarine             | 1 teaspoon vanilla                        |
| 1 7 oz. jar marshmallow crème | chopped red and green maraschino cherries |

Combine sugar, evaporated milk and margarine in a saucepan, bring to a full boil over medium heat. Boil for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat. Add marshmallow crème and white chocolate chips. Stir until chips are melted and smooth. Blend in nuts, vanilla and maraschino cherries. Put in greased 9-inch pan to cool and set.

**Deanna Cooper, Oshkosh, Nebraska**

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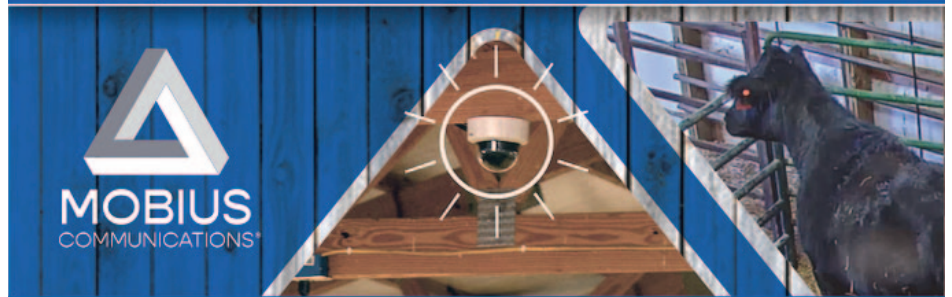
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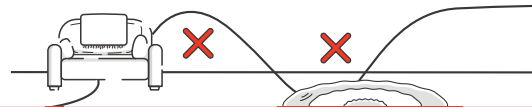


# TWELVE HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

**1** Keep decorations at least three feet away from heat sources – especially those with an open flame, like fireplaces and candles.



**2** The best decorations are safe decorations, so when you're decorating, make sure not to run cords under rugs or furniture.



**3** If you have a natural Christmas tree water it to keep it fresh and safe.



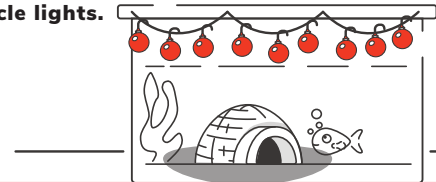
**4** Always turn off your decorations when you leave your home and when you're sleeping.



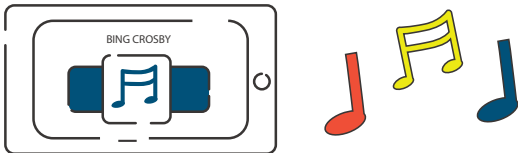
**5** If you're using extension cords or adapters that add receptacles, consider having a qualified electrician add more outlets to your home.



**6** Only use electronics in dry areas. As tempting as it is, you just can't decorate your aquarium with icicle lights.



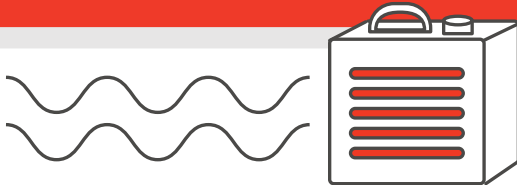
**7** Remember that phones and tablets should stay on your nightstand.



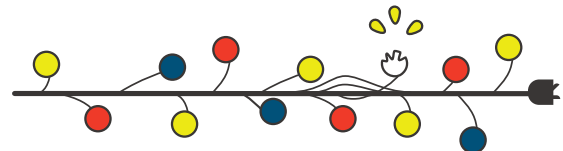
**8** Every home needs a working smoke alarm in each bedroom, outside sleeping areas and on every level, including the basement.



**9** If you're using a space heater, switch it off before leaving the room.



**10** Inspect your decorations and discard any that are damaged or worn out.



**11** Keep batteries stored safely in their packaging and out of reach from small children and pets.



**12** The best gift for your family is an Arc-Fault Circuit Interrupter breakers or outlets. Many electrical fires that occur every year could be prevented by AFCIs.



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