

# Better Home Living™

*The Newsletter That's Both Informative and Fun!*

## Fireplace safety: Where there's soot, there may soon be fire

Professional chimney sweeps say any soot deposits more than a quarter-inch thick present a fire hazard.

The soot, called creosote, is one of the top reasons for the thousands of fires involving fireplaces each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Creosote is flammable and should be cleaned out annually if the fireplace is used regularly.

- \* Have a cap installed at the top of the chimney to keep it from becoming blocked by birds, animals, or debris.

- \* Use clean-burning wood. Hardwoods like oak burn cleaner than softer woods like pine. Dried wood burns cleaner than green.

- \* Follow directions when using manufactured fire logs. Use one at a time. Don't crack or break manufactured logs. This will release energy at a high rate, resulting in a shorter burn time. Fire logs create less creosote than wood.

- \* Make a fire that fits the fireplace. If it's too big or too hot, it wastes fuel and can crack the chimney.

- \* If the fireplace has glass doors, leave them open while burning a fire log to allow air circulation and cleaner burning.

- \* Always use a fireplace screen.

- \* Keep a fire extinguisher on hand and have smoke detectors throughout the house.

- \* Use kindling to start a fire. Never use flammable liquid.

- \* When building a fire, place logs at the rear of the fireplace, preferably on a grate.

- \* Don't burn anything but wood in the fireplace. Never burn a Christmas tree.

- \* Keep the area around the fireplace and chimney clear of flammables.

## 10 ways to put safety at the top of your holiday list

If you consider winter heating, overloaded electrical circuits, and flammable decorations, you'll understand why December is prime time for home fires. Here are some old and new suggestions for a safe holiday season.

1. Look for the fire-resistant label on artificial trees and decorations.

2. Buy a natural tree that is really fresh. It should be very green and have needles that are hard to pull off. A twig shouldn't break when it's bent.

3. For outside decorations, buy only those made specifically for outdoors. Use heavy-duty extension cords and plug them into circuits that have a ground-fault interrupter.

4. Get a remote control to easily turn off lights before you go to sleep or when it snows or rains.

5. Avoid cooking fires by staying in the kitchen when cooking on the stove top.

6. Put candles in heat resistant containers and place them where they can't burn something or get knocked down.

7. Before lighting a fireplace or wood stove, clear the area of tree boughs, paper, and other combustibles. Never burn gift wrappings in a fireplace. They could cause a flash fire.

8. Protect small children by keeping decorations out of their reach. Inspect toys for small parts that could cause choking and keep scissors used for wrapping gifts away from children.

9. Be sure to lock doors and windows. Thieves think you have money and valuable gifts in your home. Put indoor and outdoor lights on a timer and leave a radio or television on when you leave the house.

10. If cold weather makes you want to use an indoor heater of any kind, be sure it is positioned well away from curtains, trees, and decorations. Never stack things on top of space heaters.

*Free Cleaning Tips at [www.mopsnbuckets.com](http://www.mopsnbuckets.com)*



*I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter!*

*Christopher Dunlap  
Mops & Buckets, LLC*

## Christmas activities that everyone can enjoy

Keep your holiday gathering lively and fun for all ages with these activity ideas.

- \* Oven mitts game: Dare everyone to open at least one present while wearing oven mitts. It's practically impossible, hilarious to watch and reminds us to slow down and enjoy the time we spend together.

- \* Candy cane hunt: Hide candy canes around the house (or yard, if you're brave or live somewhere warm) and challenge kids to find them all.

- \* Snowball fights: Take the party outside for a bracing battle in the snow. If you don't care to go outside or there isn't any of the white stuff on the ground, buy or make a bucket of cotton wool snowballs.

- \* Tabletop games: Board and card games are a great choice to entertain partygoers and keep conversation flowing while you munch on cookies and sip your favorite festive beverage. Focus on easy games that don't require a ton of concentration -- this is a social event, and nobody wants to spend hours learning the rules.

- \* Christmas movie marathon: When the party slows down and the kids start yawning, throw some blankets and pillows on the floor and let them unwind with some holiday movies. Odds are strong that you'll wind up with a pile of sleeping kids while the adults can relax, chat, and do a little bit of clean up.



## Want to Receive a FREE cleaning?

Do you know someone that could use our services? Perhaps a friend, family member, co-worker, or someone from church?

When a new client signs up for regular cleaning services at your recommendation; you will receive \$100 after their 4th cleaning! Are you a current client? After their 4<sup>th</sup> cleaning your next visit is Free!

If you would think of 3 or 4 people that could use our services, then do not hesitate to call them, and give them our name and phone number.

Be sure to have them mention your name when they call!

Thanks in advance for your help and we look forward to sending cash your way!

## Thanks a Bunch!

*A special thanks to all our customers who referred us!*

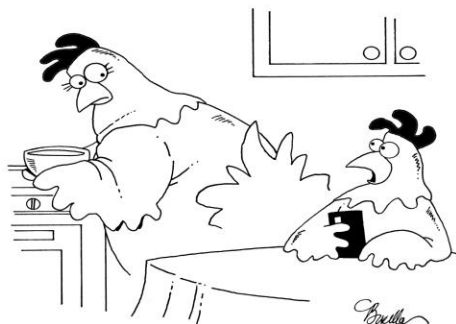
## Tax changes offer big benefits for families

Tax season is still some weeks away, but with a large number of changes coming into effect this year, it's smart to plan ahead. Various COVID-19 stimulus bills introduced a number of updates to different tax provisions, while higher-than-typical inflation has tweaked many thresholds. 2021 tax changes may affect individuals and organizations too.

The American Rescue Plan featured a large one-year expansion of the child tax credit, increasing the credit from \$2,000 to \$3,600 for children 5 years or younger, and to \$3,000 for other kids. However, the extra amount is reduced for single filers earning more than \$75,000 and joint filers earning more than \$150,000. The 2021 credit is fully refundable and there's no \$2,500 earned income requirement this year either.

The American Rescue Plan also temporarily expanded the child and dependent care tax credit, which helps defray the costs of childcare for children under 13 or dependent adults. Last year, families could claim \$3,000 in expenses and a maximum of \$6,000 per year. For 2021, claimable expenses per dependent jumps to \$8,000 with a maximum of \$16,000. Families can receive up to 50 percent of these expenses as a refundable credit. Credits phase out for individuals and families earning more than \$125,000.

Inflation substantially boosted the annual Social Security wage base. In 2020, Social Security taxes, including the employer's 6.2 percent contribution, had to be paid on all income below \$137,700. In 2021, this base jumps to \$142,800.



"Mom, what kind of soup do we eat when we're sick?"

## De-clutter for Christmas; cut stress

Your bedroom closet is already full. Your fridge and cabinets don't have a lot of room to spare, and neither do your storage closets. And it isn't even Christmas yet -- once the gifts, decorations, extra food, new holiday outfits and all the other assorted stuff comes inside, you'll be overwhelmed, just like you are every year.

If this sounds like you, consider giving yourself an early gift: A pre-Christmas de-clutter, to help you prioritize the items you value, make space for new things and cut back on stress so you can enjoy the things that really matter.

\* Check your stash of Christmas decorations. Separate the things you haven't used in a few years and donate them to a thrift shop for other families to enjoy.

\* Walk through the public areas of your house -- living room, dining room, foyer, hallways -- and pick out any decor items or small furniture that you don't love anymore. If you'd rather see an empty space, chuck it.

\* Declutter your furniture. Do you really need those worn-out throw pillows with all the coffee stains?

\* Work with your kids to sort through old toys and get rid of the ones they don't play with anymore. If they need a little motivation, explain that it's so they have plenty of room for this year's gifts.

\* Hit the kitchen and be absolutely ruthless. Toss expired foods, old water bottles or cheap plastic cups, cookware that you never use or that box of old dishes that you don't have room for.

\* Set priorities carefully for the rooms you'll spend the most time in and to accommodate the activities you've planned. The most important thing about the holidays is sharing them with the people we care about, so if you don't have the time or energy to hit every room, don't kick yourself. Do what you can, congratulate yourself for a job well done and enjoy the things that truly matter.



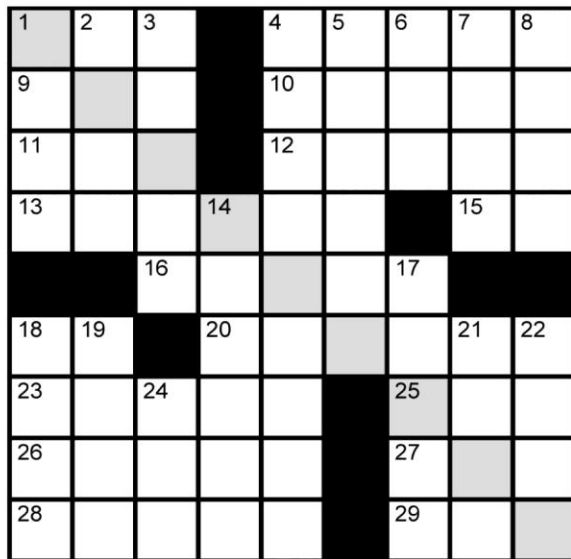
## December birthplace

### Across

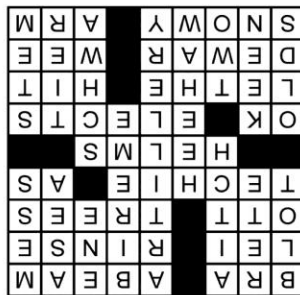
1. Lingerie item
4. Crosswise, on deck
9. Necklace of plumeria
10. Washing machine cycle
11. Polo Grounds legend
12. Corners
13. Computer whiz
15. Word in a simile
16. Ship steerers
18. Alright
20. Votes in
23. River in Hades
25. Big success
26. Big name in Scotch
27. \_\_\_ bit
28. Wintery forecast, perhaps
29. Escort's offering

### Down

1. Soak up
2. Neural network
3. Goalpost-shaped letter
4. Big guns



5. Ancient galley
6. Chemical suffix
7. Floating, perhaps
8. Military meal
14. Donkey sound
17. Pronunciation symbol
18. Cutlass, e.g.
19. Hot to trot
21. Bleacher feature
22. Stern's opposite
24. Wee hour



The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.

## Trivia Teaser – Land's End

1. While the U.S. is divided into states, Switzerland uses which other administrative divisions? a-Cantons, b-Parishes, c-Councils, d-Wards.

2. Keflavik Airport is the main international hub for which country? a-Lapland, b-Greenland, c-Iceland, d-The Netherlands.

3. The Sudetenland, which had a predominately German population, was incorporated into which country in 1918-19? a-Yugoslavia, b-Czechoslovakia, c-Poland, d-Austria.

4. Before their international matches, New Zealand rugby players perform which traditional Maori dance? a-Hula, b-Takalo, c-Hokey Pokey, d-Haka.

5. Formerly known as the Cimbric Peninsula, the northern part of Jutland contains part of which European country? a-Romania, b-Denmark, c-England, d-Greece.

6. Solidarity was the first independent trade union to exist in a Warsaw Pact country, established by shipyard workers in which city in Poland? a-Krakow, b-Gdansk, c-Lodz, d-Lublin.

7. Popular with tourists, which is Thailand's largest island? a-Nassau, b-Rapa Nui, c-Palawan, d-Phuket.

8. Finland's passport contains flick-book animation in the corners of its pages depicting which walking animal? a-Turtle, b-Reindeer, c-Moose, d-Wolverine.

9. Which dictator gave himself the title "The Last King of Scotland"? a-Idi Amin, b-Joseph Stalin, c-Adolf Hitler, d-Slobodan Milosevic.

10. Which of these African countries shares the largest border with Swaziland? a-Angola, b-Zambia, c-South Africa, d-Kenya.

- 1-a, Cantons  
2-c, Iceland  
3-b, Czechoslovakia  
4-d, Haka  
5-d, Denmark  
6-b, Gdansk  
7-d, Phuket  
8-c, Moose  
9-a, Idi Amin  
10-c, South Africa

Answers to 'Land's End'

## How you can reduce your electricity bills this holiday season

While the temperatures drop and the days shorten, many people are busy decorating trees and their homes with Christmas lights and elaborate decorations. Unfortunately, those bright and beautiful lights can increase your energy bills.

Want to save on your energy bill? If so, then you need to ditch traditional incandescent lights for LED lights, which consume up to 90 percent less energy.

Writing for ChristmasLightsEtc.com, Eric Allen found that for a large exterior display (featuring one 500-foot C9 string, one 200-foot C9 string, 45 light strings and one wreath), you'd shell out roughly \$115 to run the lights 5 hours a day for a month (assuming 11.3 cents per kilowatt hour). That same setup would cost about \$15 with LED lights.

And remember, the above estimates only cover running the lights for 5 hours per day. If you leave your lights on all night, say for ten hours, go ahead and double everything above (so, \$230 for incandescent bulbs, \$30 for LED). Using timers and apps to manage your lights is smart.

Keep in mind that energy prices vary, so the impact Christmas lights have on your energy bill may also differ substantially. Either way, using older, less efficient lights and keeping them on all day could leave you with sticker shock when the energy bill comes due.

Don't forget appliances either. An older 50-inch plasma TV may consume three times as much electricity as a newer 50-inch LED panel. The right holiday gifts for yourself and your family may pay for themselves in the long run.



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## About Our Company

Mops & Buckets is a full-service residential cleaning company that operates in both Miami Dade and Broward Counties.

Services include general cleaning, deep cleaning, carpet cleaning, construction cleaning, move-in/out cleaning, and window washing.

Owner Christopher Dunlap has been in the cleaning industry for over 10 years and feels it is important to provide cleaning services that place the utmost importance on the health and safety of his clients and employees. For that reason, Mops & Buckets is an active participant in the industry association ISSA (International Sanitary Supply Association). They also use Green Sealed Certified products to minimize toxins being released both in the environment and your home.

## New study sounds alarm on colorectal cancer

According to a study published in October in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, younger colorectal cancer patients are just as likely, if not even more likely, to die from the disease as older people. It's also one of the fastest-growing cancers among people under 50, but researchers don't know why, according to Axios, though it remains most common in adults between 65 and 74.

New U.S. screening guidance released in May recommends colorectal cancer screenings begin at age 45, according to Axios.

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*So shines a good deed in a weary world.*  
~Willie Wonka

## Try yoga as a foundation for healthy habits

Yoga is more popular than ever, and not just among flexible young folks with expensive studio memberships and even pricier workout clothes. Nearly 29 million people in the U.S. alone practiced yoga in 2018, according to Statista, and the growth shows no signs of stopping. And according to Harvard Health, regular yoga practice with its emphasis on the mind-body connection might be a useful tool to protect heart health and reduce certain risks.

According to a review published in the journal *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, researchers analyzed over 300 studies and found that among individuals with coronary artery disease -- plaque buildup in the arteries -- regular yoga sessions were linked to better blood pressure, improved cholesterol and triglyceride levels, healthier body mass index and better quality of life. The researchers also found evidence that when combined with conventional medical care, yoga might be helpful for people with atrial fibrillation or heart palpitations.

But even if your heart is in perfect working order, you can still reap benefits from regular yoga practice. According to Harvard Health, yoga's effect on sleep can directly impact other health issues, such as obesity and depression. And the emphasis on deep, even breathing can be useful in managing stress, which contributes to a host of health conditions.

Another advantage? Yoga's accessibility. Though you may prefer the community atmosphere of a class, those who like to practice at home can find an endless array of online classes for every style and difficulty level, including people with disabilities, children, seniors, and others.

## Buy the Gift of a Home Cleaning for a Friend, Get 50% Off Your Next Cleaning!

\$150 Minimum Purchase

Schedule by December 31st

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786-350-1736

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