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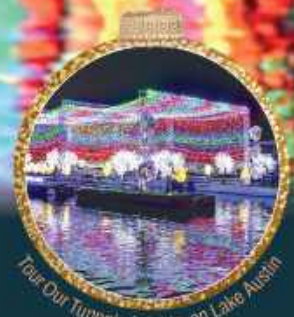
3
He Rules The World Rock Concert Dec. 12-20



4
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5
Dance on the T. Swift LED Dance Floor



6
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Light Shows
11 P.M. - 12 A.M.
Quiet Piano Music

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TUNE IN



Catch *Austin Family* magazine live on "Good Day Austin" every Thursday morning.



Lily is a first-grade student who is a great reader, artist, and friend. She loves spending time with family and friends, roller skating, hanging out at the ninja gym, and swimming. Photo taken by Jordan Ashley Photography.



View the
magazine
online

Editor's Note



CELESTE DIANNE WADE

Wade is a writer, public speaker, and a popular health coach in Austin. The eldest of seven children, she loves travel adventures with family.

As we welcome December, our city begins to glow with warm lights, familiar songs, and the joyful bustle of the holiday season. This time of year invites us to pause, gather close, and reflect on the people who shape our celebrations. For many families in Austin, that circle includes loved ones who cannot be here. We hold close the service members spending the holidays far from home, serving our country with courage, commitment, and heart. Their empty seats at the table remind us of both sacrifice and hope, and we send them our deepest gratitude, love, and cheer.

We also remember those who are no longer with us. Their laughter, stories, and steady presence remain woven through our memories. Each ornament

hung, candle lit, or recipe made becomes a tender way of keeping them near. In their honor, we continue the traditions they cherished, from decorating Christmas trees to shaping gingerbread and decorating cookies that fill our homes with sweetness.

And to those stepping up to carry these traditions forward, your hands help keep family spirit alive. May this season bring you comfort, peace, and joy as you build new moments to treasure. From our *Austin Family* to yours, we wish you a warm and meaningful December.

Celeste



Watch Now!



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Who's Hungry for Family Fun?

Family Matters



DR. BETTY RICHARDSON

Richardson, PhD, RN, CS, LPC, LMFT, is an Austin-based psychotherapist.



Q My husband and I have three young children. My parents have asked me to host a meal for our extended family. Organizing a dinner like that feels overwhelming. What would be the value of doing this, when everyone, kids included, is addicted to screens?

Is aiming for a traditional Norman Rockwell holiday dinner too ambitious in today's world?

A Large family dinners remain an important and cherished tradition for many households, and they continue to thrive because they offer something that screens and busy schedules cannot. These gatherings provide a rare opportunity to slow down, connect, and create shared memories with the people who matter most. The value goes far beyond the meal on the table. It lives in the stories that resurface, the laughter that fills the room, and the sense of belonging that strengthens with every gathering.

Planning a holiday dinner can indeed feel daunting, but the key to making it manageable is delegation. Invite

guests to contribute by bringing a dish or taking charge of a category such as meats, salads, desserts, or sides. When family members participate, they feel invested in the celebration, and the workload becomes far lighter. Involving your children can be both practical and meaningful. Young children often take pride in helping set the table, arranging napkins, or assisting with a simple family recipe. Teaching them how to make a favorite cookie or a traditional holiday dish connects them to their heritage and helps them appreciate the work that goes into creating a festive meal.

To shift the focus away from screens, introduce simple activities that encourage conversation across generations. Communication games can spark curiosity and laughter, making it easier for quieter guests or young children to participate. Options like *ChitChat*, *Family Talking Points*, or *Do You Really Know Your Family?* can help break the ice. You can also ask attendees to bring their favorite game to share, ensuring everyone feels included.

The deeper value of a holiday dinner emerges in the moments when children learn how to greet relatives, pass dishes around the table, and listen to family stories. These experiences help them understand where they come from and how they fit into a larger family circle. The bonds formed during these gatherings often last long after the decorations are packed away.

Hosting a traditional holiday dinner is not too ambitious. With thoughtful planning, shared responsibilities, and a spirit of togetherness, you can create a celebration that blends tradition with modern life. The result may not be a perfect Norman Rockwell scene, but it can be a warm, memorable moment your family will treasure for years.

VISITAR www.austinfamily.com
¿Quién tiene ganas de diversión en familia?

Austin IN ACTION

GO TO WWW.AUSTINFAMILY.COM FOR WEEKLY UPDATES OF AUSTIN IN ACTION NEWS

December Must Do's

December 6th

Capitol Tree Lighting &
Downtown Holiday Stroll
Source: www.austintexas.org

Dec. 10th–12th & 15th–18th

Austin Trail of Lights
Free Admission Nights
Source: www.austrailoflights.org

Thru December 24th

Enchanted Forest at
Mozart's Trail of Lights
Source: www.mozartscOFFEE.com

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*Do you need to reduce your
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Violet Crown Trail Celebrates Mile Zero Grand Opening

In November, families and outdoor enthusiasts gathered in Zilker Park to celebrate the grand opening of the Violet Crown Trail Mile Zero Trailhead and Education Pavilion. Hosted by Hill Country Conservancy, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, and community partners, the event marked a major milestone for one of Austin's most beloved trail systems.

Located at the intersection of William Barton Drive and Columbus Drive, the new trailhead serves as a vibrant entry point to the Violet Crown Trail, which now stretches 13 miles to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Visitors entering Mile Zero pass under a striking steel zero archway before exploring features such as a native wildflower meadow, a butterfly pavilion with benches, trail maps, and an overlook of Barton Creek. Interpretive signage explains how native ecosystems protect the region's aquifer and water supply.

Now families can enjoy longer bike rides, walks and hikes that highlight the beauty and significance of Austin's expanding trail system.

Gingerbread History Heroes: Celebrating Texas Legends Through Holiday Crafts

Each December, Austin families are invited to participate in the Gingerbread History Heroes program, a hands-on holiday tradition that combines creativity with a celebration of Texas history. Children and adults can decorate ornaments inspired by notable Texas figures and other cultural and historical icons.

The program provides free salt dough "gingerbread cookie" ornaments and decorating kits at participating museums, cultural centers, and community locations throughout the city. These ready-to-use supplies allow families to craft festive keepsakes while learning about the contributions and stories of Texas heroes. Participating locations vary, giving families multiple opportunities to join in the fun throughout the month.

In addition to crafting, the program encourages discussion about Texas history, offering a playful and educational experience that engages children in storytelling, art, and cultural appreciation. Families can personalize their ornaments with paint, markers, glitter, and other decorations, resulting in one-of-a-kind creations that capture both holiday spirit and historical significance.

Gingerbread History Heroes is a free, family-friendly way to celebrate the season while honoring the people who shaped Texas. Whether visiting a local museum or hosting a crafting session at home, families can enjoy a festive activity that blends creativity, learning, and holiday cheer.



Photos: Courtesy of Austin Parks and Recreation.



Austin's Downtown Holiday Stroll: A Festive Evening for the Whole Family

The 31st Annual Downtown Austin Holiday Stroll & Sing Along will take place on Saturday, December 6, 2025, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Congress Avenue between 10th and 11th Streets will be transformed into a festive hub, offering free, family friendly fun for all ages.

Attendees can browse more than 40 artisan vendors in the holiday market, sample offerings from local food trucks, and enjoy live music and performances. The evening's centerpiece is a joyful sing along led by KUT and KUTX, followed by the ceremonial lighting of the Capitol Christmas tree.

For younger guests, there is a children's market where child-run businesses showcase their handcrafted wares. Photo opportunities with Santa, holiday carolers, and roaming characters add to the celebratory spirit.

The event supports community giving: while admission is free, the Central Texas Food Bank encourages donations at its booth, helping local families in need.

Whether you're shopping, singing, or simply taking in the twinkling lights, Austin's Downtown Holiday Stroll offers a warm, joyous start to the holiday season for families across the city.



Lake Travis Sparkles at Annual Lighted Boat Parade

Families across Central Texas will kick off the holiday season in dazzling style at the Lake Travis Lighted Boat Parade on December 7. The beloved annual tradition invites spectators to bundle up, gather along the shoreline, and watch a glowing procession of decorated boats illuminate the water.

This year's parade begins at 6 p.m. at Crosswater Yacht Club, where participants will set sail in vessels decked out with twinkling lights, festive inflatables, and creative holiday themes. The parade will travel into the open waters of Lake Travis, cruising past Captain Pete's Boathouse for some of the best viewing spots on the route. The reflection of colorful lights shimmering across the lake adds a magical touch that delights both children and adults.

After the parade, the celebration continues at Captain Pete's with an awards ceremony, food, and drinks. Families can enjoy a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere as judges announce winners for categories such as Most Festive, Best Theme, and Crowd Favorite. The post-parade gathering offers a perfect opportunity to meet boat crews, snap photos, and soak in the holiday cheer.

Whether watching from the water or the shore, the Lake Travis Lighted Boat Parade is a memorable way to celebrate the season and create family traditions.

Winter Camp



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Must attend event in order to enter.

Unwrap Your Holiday Traditions



CATHERINE MICHALK

Michalk is a native Austinite, writer, and mom of three. You can follow her family's adventures at www.catherinemichalk.com.

No matter who you are or where you live, December is a month steeped in tradition. For most Austinites, December traditions include putting up a Christmas tree, visiting one of the many light shows around town, and exchanging gifts with friends and family. One of the best parts of raising kids is introducing them to your family's traditions and creating new ones of your own. How do you decide which traditions to keep and which to let go? And how do you make new traditions together? This December, gather your kids and invite them to help you unwrap your family's story through traditions.

Take a Look at Past Traditions

When you start a family, you bring traditions from your family of origin and combine them with your partner's traditions. While you may pick and choose which traditions stay and which go, it is not always a formal conversation. Often, it comes down to the time and effort a tradition requires. The less meaning a tradition holds, the more likely it is to fade away.



This year, take some intentional time to talk about your old traditions, what they meant to you as a child, and which ones are worth continuing. Is there a tradition you loved growing up that did not carry over into your current family? Would it be meaningful to bring it back?

It is also worthwhile to explore the "why" behind each tradition. Did your family have a ritual that helped ground you during the busy season, such as attending a Christmas Eve church service or baking cookies for neighbors between Christmas and New Year's? Was there something fun or silly, such as everyone getting a pair of crazy socks to wear on Christmas Day, that you want to introduce to your own children? Talk about the traditions that bring your family peace, joy, and laughter, and remind your kids why we celebrate this time of year.

Sort Through Your Current Traditions

Once you reflect on the traditions you grew up with, take a look at what you do intentionally, or even unintentionally, with your children each year. If your kids are old enough to have opinions, invite them into the conversation. Their understanding of what it takes to pull off certain traditions, such as baking 100 cookies for the neighbors, may not be complete, but they can offer valuable insight into what feels special and what they secretly dread.

Think broadly about the word "tradition." To you, a tradition may be something you did every year with your parents and continue with your kids. To your children, a

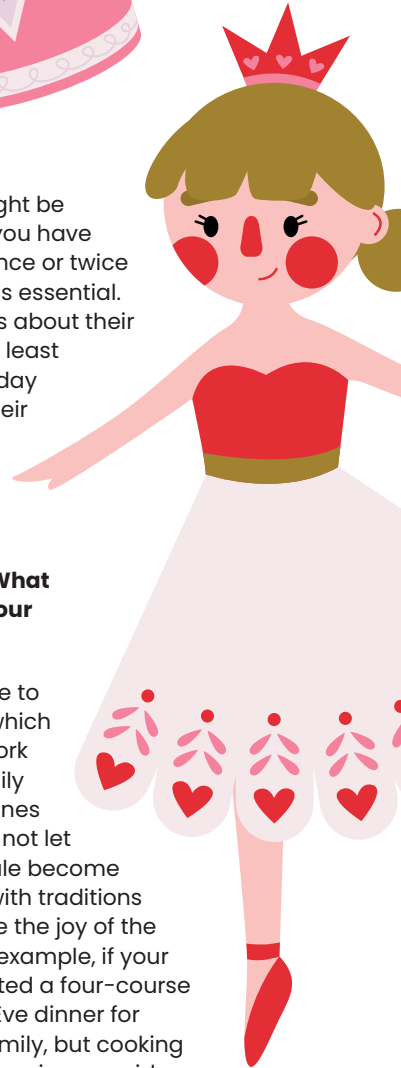


tradition might be something you have done only once or twice but now feels essential. Ask your kids about their favorite and least favorite holiday activities. Their answers may surprise you.

Figure Out What Works for Your Family

Now it is time to determine which traditions work for your family and which ones to let go. Do not let your schedule become so packed with traditions that you lose the joy of the season. For example, if your parents hosted a four-course New Year's Eve dinner for extended family, but cooking is not your passion, consider simplifying. Order pizza and focus on the time together instead. Your family life is different from the one you grew up in, and your traditions should reflect that.

It is also important to discuss how traditions reflect who you are. Talk with your children about what makes a tradition meaningful, and remind them that not all traditions are focused on entertainment. Many holiday traditions center on giving. Your kids may grumble about spending Saturday morning



at a shelter making sandwiches, but experiences like these help center their hearts on generosity. Over time, these traditions may become cherished memories and a legacy they carry into adulthood.

Is It Time to Add a New Tradition?

After reviewing your current traditions and deciding which ones to keep, consider what new traditions you might add. This is where you and your kids begin writing your own family story. Choose traditions that are unique to you. Think back to how your childhood traditions made you feel. Did they help you feel connected, peaceful, or joyful? If not, you have the opportunity to create a different experience for your own children. Add new traditions that reflect your family's values and the legacy you want to leave.

Here are some ideas to spark your imagination:

- Fun Holiday Activities Around Austin
- Watch a performance of The Nutcracker or A Christmas Carol.
- Visit the Austin Trail of Lights, Peppermint Parkway, or the Mozart's Coffee Roasters light show.
 - Sign up for a fun run, such as the Turkey Trot or the Trail of Lights 5K.
 - Shop for gifts at the Armadillo Christmas Bazaar.
- Ice skate at Whole Foods, Chaparral Ice, or The Crossover.

Ways to Give Back

- Choose gifts to donate to Blue Santa.
- Raise funds for your favorite charity on Giving Tuesday.
- Adopt and shop for a Salvation Army Angel Tree child.
- Put together blessing bags with toiletries, socks, and treats to give to Austin's homeless community.
- Bake cookies or make cards for friends and neighbors.

Family Togetherness Activities at Home

- Make gingerbread houses.
- Visit a local farm to pick out and cut down your own Christmas tree.
- Host a Christmas movie marathon with popcorn and hot cocoa.
- Make ornaments or other holiday decorations.
- Read a new holiday-themed book every night, or for older kids, choose a read-aloud chapter book such as A Christmas Carol.

Fun and Silly Things to Do

- Host a family Secret Santa or White Elephant exchange.
- Go caroling in your neighborhood.
- Pick out a themed gift, such as silly socks or unusual candy, to enjoy together.
- Hide small gifts around the house for each day of December.
- Have breakfast for dinner, ice cream sundaes for breakfast, or another playful meal theme.

This holiday season, take time to reflect on what really matters. Lean into creating memories with your family through traditions old and new, and let your kids take part in the process. Discover what works best for your family, and do not hesitate to start fresh traditions. You are unwrapping your family's tradition year after year.

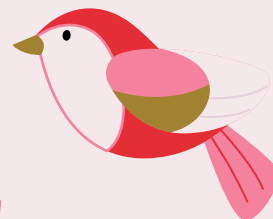
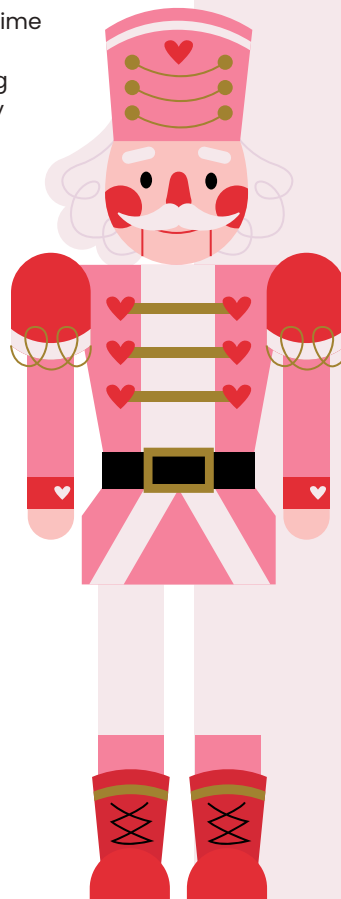
Quick Tradition Check-In

Ask your family:

- What tradition brings you the most joy?
- Which one stresses you out?
- Is there something new you would like to try this year?
- What tradition feels meaningful, even if it isn't necessarily "fun"?

Traditions That Cost Nothing

- Neighborhood caroling
- Movie marathons with homemade popcorn
- Making paper snowflakes
- Reading a holiday book together each night
- Hot cocoa and stargazing
- Family game night with holiday music



YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST WINNERS



WHAT'S THE BRAVEST THING YOU HAVE EVER DONE?



Reeva Kagitapu • 5th Grade Winner Harmony Science Academy

The bravest thing I've ever done was standing up for myself and the truth, even when I felt completely alone. I had two friends at school: one was the queen bee, popular but quick to throw me under the bus, and the other who never had my back. I stuck with them because I didn't want to be alone.

Almost every day, there was drama. I tried to speak up, but they always talked me into staying, and nothing changed. I felt angry, sad, and invisible, especially when they swept my feelings under the rug. I was walking on eggshells, afraid to rock the boat.

One day, during a group project, the popular girl blew a fuse and accused the other of leaving her out, even though we were bending over backwards to include her. She twisted the truth and expected me to support her. At first, I nearly did, thinking it might keep the peace. But then I saw the other girl was scared too. She stayed silent because she didn't want to burn bridges.

So I took a deep breath and spoke up. I laid it all on the line, the bullying, the lies, and how unfair it had been. I stood my ground, not just for myself, but for the other girl too. That day, we both turned the page and walked away from the toxic friendship. We've been together ever since.

I learned something huge: being brave doesn't mean being loud or fearless. It means doing the right thing, even when your back's against the wall. And when you stand up for yourself, the right people will stand by your side.



Egor Altoukhov • 5th Grade Runner-Up Harmony Science Academy

One sunny afternoon, I was riding my bike near the park. I saw something in the middle of the road. I thought it was just a rock. But then it moved! I almost fell off my bike. It was a turtle with little flippers instead of feet.

I didn't know if I could take her home. I looked for her family. I checked the grass, the bushes, and even a ditch nearby. No pond. No other turtles. I got worried because sometimes cars drive here.

I dropped my bike on the sidewalk, picked her up, and started running home. I covered her face with my sleeve so the wind wouldn't blow in her eyes. She stayed quiet. I think she trusted me. My heart was beating so fast I could hear it in my ears.

At home, I set up a big tank with water and rocks. She swam right away, moving her flippers like a tiny underwater dancer. I gave her lettuce and shrimp. She ate slowly but didn't seem scared. I named her Stesha. She is very playful and a real music lover. When I play the piano, she stops swimming and listens, almost like she understands the melody. I read that turtles can live 100 years. That means when Stesha is 50, I will be 58! I imagine us sitting in the garden, both old but still friends. I feel proud I was brave that day. And I am happy I have Stesha forever.



**Shefali Gandhi • 4th Grade Winner
Magellan International School**

My fear is something that has existed for a couple of years and I have tried to be brave before but failed. Until today.

My family and I were driving to Kalahari. It is one of my favorite places in the world! Unfortunately, my favorite place in the world also has something that scares me – The Sahara Sidewinder! It is a slide with a giant, sheer drop with crazy curves and one of the worst parts is that you can get hurt if you're not careful!

I decided that today is the day that I am going to go on this slide.

I had butterflies as we climbed up to the entrance. I looked down to see everybody looking at me confidently. I shakily smiled and waved and then kept going. I watched others go before me, this got some of my nervous jiggles out of me. I decided that nothing would happen to me, except that it would be an experience I would remember forever.

As I stepped into the slide, the fear was back and began to grow and spread over my body. Suddenly it's my turn and I am standing on transparent glass – this shows me how far I'm going to go! This makes my heart beat so fast that I get dizzy. I close my eyes and think, 'If I don't try this, I'll never know how it feels!'

That made me feel dauntless.

Suddenly the glass beneath my feet opened and I was falling! With gushing water all around me, and twists and curves, the slide wasn't as scary as I thought it would be! It turned out that most of the fear was in my head.

Today I learned that confidence is the key to bravery!



**Makena Ivarson • 4th Grade Runner-Up
Valor South Austin**

This summer I visited my grandparents in Japan for our family reunion. Since we all like to do fireworks together, we headed out to the store to buy more. My cousin, my aunt, my little sister, grandma and me. Grandma handed us each 1000 yen to get some treats.

There were so many options to choose from so it took me a long time, but I finally picked out the right one and I was ready to pay.

I needed to find my grandma.

I searched aisle by aisle, but I couldn't find anyone. "Where did they go?!" I double checked every single aisle just to make sure they weren't playing a joke. But they weren't there. They went home without me!

I found out later that there was a miscommunication between them about who takes who home.

I was furious at this point. But I told myself I can handle this. I knew what to do. I marched straight to the register. Then I gave the lady my thousand yen and she handed me the change.

First objective done, but I still have to get home. It was extraordinarily hot outside. After a few seconds, I was sweating from head to toe. Luckily, I knew which direction to go home but it felt as if it was taking hours.

Why would they leave me? I angrily walked home thinking what a terrible thing to do to me.

Finally, I arrived home and rang the doorbell. My mom opened the door looking surprised. I told her all about what happened and told her how angry I was. My mom was very proud of what I did for paying and coming home by myself. In the end my anger was gone, and I was also proud of what I did.

Holiday Camps and Family Activities

CAMPS FOR KIDS

Camp Doublecreek DC Adventures

December 29-31

Pflugerville Location

www.campdoublecreek.com/dcadventures

DC Adventures features one of the best high ropes experiences in Texas. Make lasting memories and lifelong friends. Voted Best Day Camp by *Austin Family* readers since 1993.

Camp Doublecreek DC Riding

December 29-31

Spicewood Springs Rd. Location

www.campdoublecreek.com/dchorseback

Horseback riding lessons, ground lessons (grooming, saddling, and horse care), gaga ball, archery, camp games, and crafts.

Camp Jump South

Camp Jump North

Camp Jump Domain

Camp Jump Hutto, now open

December

www.jumpgymnastics.com

We are open when school is closed. Jump Gymnastics voted Most Fun Camp. If you're looking for a day camp when school is out or winter camps around the holidays, we got you covered.

Country Home Learning Northwest

Country Home Learning Southwest

December

www.countryhomelearningcenter.com

Providing many enrichment opportunities unavailable to the students at the public schools. Our children spend fun-filled days on the move participating in activities that stimulate their creativity and spur their imagination.

Idea Lab Holiday Camps

December 22, 23, 29-31, January 2, 5

www.idealabkids.com/location/austin

Indoor activities focused on hands-on learning.

kidsActing Camps

January 5, 19

www.kidsactingstudio.com

When school's out, we are in. We will sing-a-long to great hits from your child's favorite movies, such as *Frozen*, *Encanto*, *Descendants*, *Moana*, *Jungle Book*, and more. Sign up now for spring and save.

Mad Science Holiday Camps

December

www.austin.madscience.com

Our interactive, engaging programs allow kids to explore the different fields of science in an interesting and entertaining way. You could be inspiring the next Einstein or Marie Curie.

Newk's Christmas Colorado Ski Camp

December 27 to January 3

www.newktennis.com/outback-adventures

All ages welcome. A week of skiing, snowboarding, sledding, and lots of winter fun.

Outback Thanksgiving and Christmas Tennis Camp

December 26-31

www.newktennis.com/tennis-camps/junior-camps

On the courts, the tennis is intense and the coaching is highly motivational. Off the courts, it is a true camp experience with fun activities.

Stepping Stone Schools Mind in

Motion Winter Camp 2025

www.steppingstoneschool.com

Stepping Stone School's Diamond Club™ hosts Mind in Motion, a camp with games, field trips, and service projects that build character, encourage creativity, and engage children mentally, physically, and socially.

Switch Willo

December 22-26, December 29-January 2

www.switchwillo.com

Switch Willo Stables has been an Austin favorite since 1993, and their Winter Camp gives kids a full week of horse fun. Campers enjoy daily riding instruction, learn horse care and barn etiquette, watch farrier visits, create arts and crafts, and end the week with a Friday horse show.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Family Fun Day at DC Adventures

December 8

www.campdoublecreek.com/dcadventures

Experience our rock wall and challenge course, play gaga ball, cornhole, ring toss, playscape, pickleball, volleyball, and more.

Bring the entire family and friends.

Big & Bright: Hill Country Holiday

December 5-7

www.hsbresort.com/christmas

Revel in a big and bright holiday season in the heart of the Texas Hill Country. From our dazzling Winter Wonderland tree lighting to the brand-new Jingle Bell Express Breakfast, the whimsical Charlie Brown Christmas Breakfast, and Christmas on the Lawn with live performances by Voca Libre, the magic of the season shines at Horseshoe Bay Resort.

Dave and Busters

Now until December 31

www.daveandbusters.com

Enjoy holiday games on big screen by reserving a table or have fun in the arcade enjoyed by kids young and old.

A great place to plan a holiday gathering. Check out their specials, and season passes.

Mozart's 2025 Lake Austin Festival of Lights

Now until January 3

www.mozartcoffee.com/pages/festival-of-lights

This year themed "Heaven and Nature Sing" is complete with flyboard battle from "The Nutcracker," plus a limited run Broadway style Christmas concert. Come see the extensive remodeling of this Austin tradition to include a Santa tower, Christmas village, twinkling lights, floating light experiences, and immersive light tunnel enjoyed by land or water.

Cameron Park Zoo Festival of lights

Now until December 30

www.cameronparkzoo.com

Just a short drive up IH35 to experience the spirit of the holidays at the zoo, featuring millions of Christmas lights, photo opportunities, and Santa. You will create unforgettable memories, as well as help fund vital conservation, habitat preservation, and emergency support efforts that advance our mission to protect animals and their homes.

Peppermint Parkway

Now until December 31

www.peppermintparkway.com

A winter wonderland experience with millions of lights, whimsical characters, and holiday cheer.

Pins and Wheels at Playland

www.playlandskatecenter.net

A fantastic entertainment venue since the 80's featuring skating, bowling, large arcade, karaoke, axe throwing, as well as good food. Schedule your holiday party or bring those holiday guests for some fun.

Austin Trail of Lights

December 10-23

www.trailoflights.org

This iconic event where Zilker Park is turned into a holiday celebration of lights, festive activities, food, and holiday magic for all ages. Seven days of free general admission, and free shuttle service available.

Zach Theater

www.zachtheater.org/tickets/shows

ZACH presents A Charlie Brown Christmas

Now until December 28

A Christmas Carol

Now until January 3

Watch these beloved holiday classics comes to life on stage!

Helping vs. Doing

The Learning Curve



ALISON BOGLE

Bogle is a writer living in Austin with her husband and three children. A former fourth grade teacher, she now enjoys writing about children and education. You can also catch her talking about articles from Austin Family magazine each Thursday morning on FOX 7 Austin.



As winter break approaches, many parents feel their stress levels rise. Not only is there decorating, shopping, and hosting to do, but children often have their own to-do lists of final school projects, overdue homework, and end-of-year performances to squeeze in. Everyone is tired, the days feel short, and we all want to cross the finish line to the much-anticipated holiday break. This can lead some parents to wonder: Can I step in to help my child, and when am I crossing the line into doing too much?

The urge to step in and help children “just get it done” comes from love and good intentions. However, each time we do something for them that they should learn to do for themselves, we send the message that they are incapable of managing without us. That is not the message we want to send. The good news is that it is possible to strike a healthy balance between supporting our children and rescuing them completely, and it starts with a simple mindset shift and a bit of awareness.

What Happens When We Do Too Much

We help because we care and because we want to protect our kids from pain, even if the pain is just a frustrating writing assignment. However, our instinct to help

can sometimes interfere with children’s learning and long-term growth.

When we swoop in to solve, fix, edit, or finish a task for them, they lose the chance to build tenacity, independence, and the confidence that comes with achieving something on their own. They might get a good grade on the assignment, but did they learn how to manage their time, organize their thinking, or handle imperfection?

That said, we do not need to take the opposite attitude of “figure it out yourself.” Kids do need help, especially as they learn how to plan, prioritize, and monitor their progress. The challenge is to take on the role of mentor or coach, not a fellow player. We should guide, encourage, and provide assistance without taking over the game.

In the short term, helping works. The homework gets turned in, the room gets cleaned, and everyone feels relief and moves on to the next thing. However, if children repeatedly see us take over, they start to expect that someone else will step in to do the work. When we add our finishing touches to their assignments to make them closer to perfect, kids may begin to feel pressure to maintain

standards not set by them that are unrealistic for their abilities. They are also less likely to feel proud of their work when they know they did not fully do it themselves. Finally, micromanaging their work can strain our relationship with them as power struggles, nagging, and avoidance creep in.

Our goal should be progress, practice, and pride rather than a perfect product. The stress of holiday preparations can even be viewed in a positive light if we use the season to model how to get through a crunch time without losing our balance. Children learn far more from watching us handle pressure calmly and deliberately than from any lecture about how to do it themselves.

A Few Things to Keep in Mind as You Work Toward Guiding, Not Doing

Redefine Help. Real help is not doing something for our kids. It is guiding them so they can eventually do it for themselves. In the beginning, especially with younger children, we may need to “do with.” That might look like brainstorming together or demonstrating a step and then coaching them as they try it independently. Our goal is to help them build confidence and understanding.

Over time, we can shift to checking in on progress and asking guiding questions. As we help, it is important to check in with ourselves and ask, "Is my help teaching them something they will be able to do without me next time?" If the answer is no, we may be entering over-helping territory and need to course-correct.

Normalize the Struggle. It can be hard not to step in when a child is in tears over schoolwork, but frustration does not equal failure. Most of us can recall times we felt at our limit but regrouped, pushed through, and succeeded. We do not want to take away that experience of growth for our children by erasing the frustration. However, normalizing the struggle can help them push through, ultimately teaching them that perseverance, not perfection, is what matters.

Statements like "I see you are frustrated, and that is normal when you face a challenge. Let's take a break and try again," and "I am here to help you if you need it, but I want you to take the first try," validate their feelings while encouraging independence.

Adjust by Age and Temperament. A 6-year-old and a 16-year-old need very different kinds of help. Younger children benefit from more structure and direct guidance, while teens need autonomy and trust, even when they falter.

It is also important to consider your child's temperament. An anxious child may need more emotional support, while a disorganized child may need more help developing organizational systems. As your child's skills increase, your involvement should decrease.

Praise Process, Not Product. Many parents fall into the understandable trap of praising grades, goals scored, and other outcome-based achievements instead of praising effort. When we praise how hard a child works, we reinforce the idea that success comes from persistence, not innate talent. Similarly, when we praise growth, such as "You did a great job managing your time better on this project," children feel a sense of accomplishment that is separate from the final result.

Looking Ahead

In 20 years, the grade your child earned on a language arts essay or how perfect a diorama looked will not matter. What will matter is whether they learned to face challenges, manage their time, and trust their ability to figure things out. The journey requires patience, empathy, and faith that your child's abilities will grow through experience, as well as faith in yourself to guide without controlling.

When you feel the urge to take over, pause and ask yourself: What will help my child grow in the long run, my efficiency or their effort? Even if the answer is uncomfortable, it is usually clear.



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6 Farmers Market Discoveries

Lifelines



TRACIE SEED

Seed, an Austinite, has won numerous awards for writing, art, and design. She's the happiest while writing, sewing, painting, or spending time with family.



While the holidays are filled with twinkling lights, trays of sweets, and seasonal scents, they also present an exciting and fun opportunity for families to cultivate a healthy habit: shopping local farmers markets.

With colorful vendor offerings, fresh air, tasty treats, and plenty of activity, farmers markets are more than a place to buy groceries. They offer families opportunities to teach children healthy habits, financial literacy, and an appreciation for shopping locally.

1. A Feast for the Senses

With produce in every color, the smell of kettle corn, live music, and the bustle of shoppers, farmers markets are a sensory wonderland. They also offer the chance to create lasting memories. Parents often find that children are more open to trying new foods when they take part in choosing them.

For young children, the market is an exciting place to learn colors and the

names of produce and other items. Older children can help plan a menu and shop for ingredients to cook a special recipe. Even picky eaters may jump at the chance to choose something new to taste or at least enjoy learning how to pick out quality foods they already like.

These activities promote healthier eating by making children active participants in food choices. The process gives them a sense of ownership and sparks curiosity about what ends up on their plates.

2. Money Lessons That Stick

Farmers markets are ideal settings for teaching financial health. Giving your child a few dollars and letting them choose what to purchase can build budgeting and decision-making skills. Children quickly learn that a dollar goes further when spent wisely.

Give your child a budget for a gift and guide them through the process, including counting money and figuring out change. This teaches practical

financial skills and gives parents the chance to model polite conversation with vendors, consider options the recipient would enjoy, and emphasize the importance of buying locally.

These lessons support social and emotional health by strengthening communication skills, building confidence in decision-making, and fostering empathy.

3. Community Connections

Shopping at farmers markets is about people. Children meet farmers, bakers, and artisans face-to-face, creating a human connection to what they eat and use. Products do not magically appear in stores. They are grown, created, and prepared by hardworking hands. Conversations with vendors can transform a simple shopping trip into a meaningful and inspiring experience.

The experiences children gain at farmers markets extend beyond healthy eating and financial literacy. They learn social skills by interacting with vendors, patience while waiting in

line, and responsibility as they handle money or carry purchases. They also discover that food choices matter not only for their own health but for the environment and the community.

4. Healthy Habits in Motion

Fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole foods form the foundation of good nutrition. Health is also about balance, activity, and connection. Farmers markets bring these elements together. Families walk, talk, and explore while stocking up on nutrient-rich foods, and they enjoy the mental health benefits of being outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine.

Slowing down, browsing the market, and moving to live music offer a kind of self-care. During a season filled with rushing, visiting a farmers market can be a refreshing pause and a reminder that food is more than fuel. It is culture, tradition, and human connection.

5. Traditions with Local Flavor

Seasonal farmers markets are especially festive. In addition to food, many feature holiday treats and unique gifts. Instead of crowded grocery stores and malls, families can shop for homemade jams, fresh vegetables for the holiday table, or ornaments crafted by local artisans. Children can select small gifts for teachers, friends, or siblings while learning the joy of giving thoughtfully.

Cooking with farmers market ingredients can also become a cherished holiday tradition. Imagine a family working together to prepare a meal based on produce chosen that morning. Children can proudly say, "I picked this," as they help serve a dish or dessert. Holiday recipes take on new meaning when they are made with fresh, local ingredients chosen by small hands eager to help.

6. A Gift That Lasts a Lifetime

As parents, we want to give our children more than toys or gadgets during the holiday season, even though those items have their place on wish lists. We want to offer lessons that encourage healthy living on every level. One of

the best ways to do that is to weave learning into fun activities so children do not even realize they are building lifelong skills.

A weekend morning at the farmers market is not flashy, but the skills, lessons, and memories children gain will outlast any trendy gift. They learn to appreciate healthy food, manage money, connect with their community, and value experiences over things.

Farmers markets are open year-round in Austin and throughout Central Texas. By making them part of family life, parents can provide not just groceries but guidance, not just gifts but grounding, and not just meals but memories.

See *Austin Family Magazine* calendar for farmers market events.



A promotional poster for 'Wild Lights' at Cameron Park Zoo Waco. The poster features a monkey hanging from a rope and two penguins at the bottom. The title 'WILD LIGHTS' is in large, colorful, brush-stroke letters. Below it, 'CAMERON PARK ZOO WACO' is written in green. The event is presented by 'members choice credit union'. Text on the poster includes: 'Join us the day after Thanksgiving through December 30 for a Holiday Light Spectacular at Cameron Park Zoo!', 'Purchase our special "Zoo/Wild Lights" combo ticket and enjoy the Zoo during regular hours and the enchanting Wild Lights starting at 6pm.', and 'The best part? Your tickets are valid through 12/30/25, and you don't have to use them on the same day.' Sponsors listed are Allen Samuels, Ascension Providence, H-E-B, and reliant. A green banner at the bottom says 'For times, tickets and pricing info visit: CameronParkZoo.com/WildLights'. At the very bottom, it says 'Family New Year Celebration DECEMBER 30, 10am to 4pm' and includes logos for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the WAZA World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

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**Family New Year Celebration
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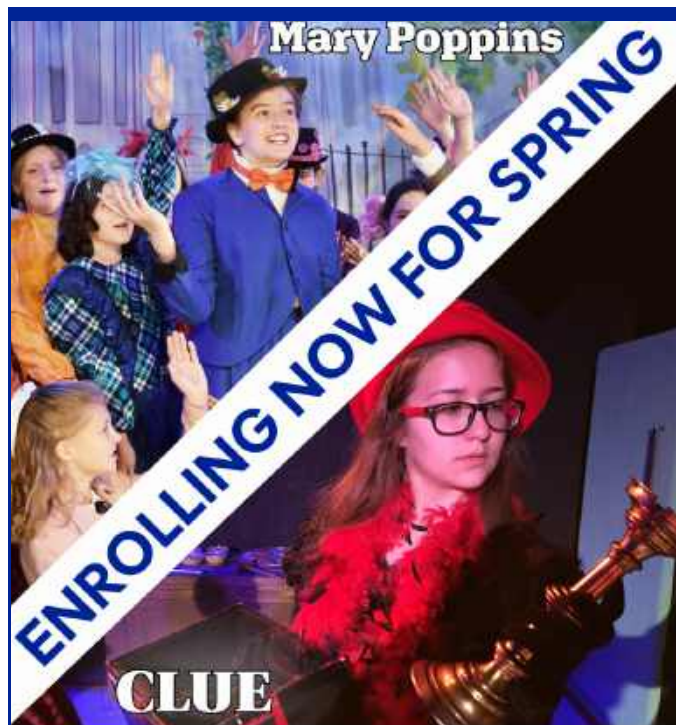
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December 2025 calendar

Go to www.austinfamily.com for expanded listings.

Check our calendar online, which is updated daily. Any family-friendly events can be posted at www.austinfamily.com and will be made live once approved. Certain restrictions apply.

Mon 1

Blue Genie Art Bazaar. 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. 6100 Airport Blvd. FREE. www.bluegenieartbazaar.com.

Santa's Arrival 2025. 4 to 9 p.m. Mary Kyle Hartson Park, 215 W. Center St. www.cityofkyle.gov/living-here/parks-and-recreation.

Mozart's 2025 Lake Austin Festival of Lights. Mozart's Coffee Roasters, 3825 Lake Austin Blvd. \$25 - \$45. www.showclix.com.

St. Nick's Enchanted Forest at Mozart's 2025 Lake Austin Festival of Lights. 6:30 to 9 p.m. Mozart's Coffee, 3825 Lake Austin Blvd. www.mozarts.com.

Tue 2

UMLAUF After Dark: Holiday Market.

Members FREE. General Public \$12. UMLAUF Sculpture Garden & Museum, 605 Azie Morton Rd. www.umlauptsculpture.org.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast. 7:30 to 10 p.m. Bass Concert Hall, 2350 Robert Dedman Dr. \$36 and up. www.texasperformingarts.org/event/disneys-beauty-and-the-beast-broadway-austin-2025.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1.

Wed 3

Clayton Farmers Market. 2 to 6 p.m. 1106 Clayton Ln. FREE. www.theclaytonfarmersmarket.com.

Hometown Holiday Shows. 5 to 8:30 p.m. Downtown Round Rock, 221 E. Main St. FREE. www.downtownroundrocktexas.com/events/hometownholiday.

Lights on the Lake. 5 p.m. Volente Beach, 16107 FM 2769. \$10 - \$15. www.volentebeach.com.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2.

Thu 4

Oh What Fun! Austin Holiday Market. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Republic Square, 422 Guadalupe St. FREE. www.ohwhatfunatx.com.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3.

Fri 5

Bilingual Musical Storytime with ACMS. 3 to 3:30 p.m. Howson Branch, 2500 Exposition Blvd. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

Georgetown's 44th Annual Christmas Stroll. 4 to 9 p.m. Downtown Georgetown, 103 W. 7th St. FREE. www.dgagtx.org/Christmas-Stroll-Guests.

Luminations. 5:45 to 9 p.m. \$30 adults and \$20 kids, non-members, \$23 and \$13 members. Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave. www.wildflower.org.

Lights On! 6 p.m. Lakeway City Hall, 1102 Lohmans Crossing Rd. www.lakeway-tx.gov/934/Special-Events.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4.

Sat 6

Old Town Christmas Festival. 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Old Town Leander, 100 N. Brushy Creek Rd. www.leandertx.gov.

Markets for Makers Austin Holiday Market. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$10. Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd. www.marketsformakers.com/austin.

A Charlie Brown Christmas. 11 a.m. Zach Theater, 202 S. Lamar Blvd. \$33 and up. www.tickets.zachtheater.org.

The Market at Zach. 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Zach Theater, 202 S. Lamar Blvd. FREE. www.zachtheater.org.

Holidays in Manor. 12 to 8 p.m. 15317 US Hwy 290 E. www.manortx.gov.

Holiday Sing-Along & Stroll. 5 to 8 p.m. Downtown Austin, 1006 Congress Ave. FREE. www.downtownaustin.com.

Light Up the Lake. 6 p.m. Old Settlers Park, Round Rock. www.roundrocktexas.gov/event/lightupthelake.

Holiday Market and Drone Show. Brushy Creek Amphitheater, 1001 County Rd. 137. FREE. www.huttotx.gov.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Georgetown's 44th Annual Christmas Stroll**, see Fri 5; **Luminations**, see Fri 5.

Sun 7

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Georgetown's 44th Annual Christmas Stroll**, see Fri 5; **Markets for Makers Austin Holiday Market**, see Sat 6; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6; **Light Up the Lake**, see Sat 6.

Mon 8

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1.

Tue 9

BASIS Leander Virtual Info Sessions. 6 to 7 p.m. Virtual Information Session (Zoom), FREE. www.eventbrite.com/e/basis-leander-virtual-info-session-tickets.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2.

Wed 10

Austin Trail of Lights. 7 p.m. Zilker Park, Barton Springs Rd. \$0 – \$116 (check for FREE nights). www.austintrailoflights.org.

Light Up Your Night. 6 p.m. Brushy Creek Amphitheater, 1001 County Rd. 137. FREE. www.huttotx.gov.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Clayton Farmers Market**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3.

Thu 11

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10; **Light Up Your Night**, see Wed 10.

Fri 12

Elf Movie Event. 6 p.m. Lakeway City Hall Parking Lot, 1102 Lohmans Crossing Rd. www.lakeway-tx.gov/934/Special-Events.

Swedish Candlelight Christmas. 6 to 9 p.m. FREE. Old Settlers Association, 3300 E. Palm Valley Rd. www.williamsonmuseum.org/event/swedish-candlelight-christmas-2025.

Christmas Movie in the Park. *The Santa Clause* (PG) 6 p.m. City of Kyle Parks and Recreation Department. Mary Kyle Hartson Park, 215 W. Center St. www.events.cityofkyle.gov.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10; **Light Up Your Night**, see Wed 10.



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Sat 13

Austin Pickle Ranch Pickleball & Peppermint Party. 5 to 8 p.m. Austin Pickle Ranch, 11000 Middle Fiskville Rd., Bldg. B. \$25. www.austinpicklelanch.com.

Kyle Grinch on the Green 2025. 5:30 to 9 p.m. La Verde Park, 3901 Burnham Rd. www.cityofkyle.gov/living-here/parks-and-recreation.

A Who-ville Holiday Show. 6:30 p.m. Chaparral Ice, 2525 Anderson Ln. \$20 – \$45. www.chaparralice.com.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6; **The Market at Zach**, see Sat 6; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10; **Light Up Your Night**, see Wed 10.

Sun 14

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Disney's Beauty and the Beast**, see Tue 2; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10; **A Who-ville Holiday Show**, see Sat 13.

Mon 15

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Tue 16

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Wed 17

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see

Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Clayton Farmers Market**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Thu 18

Winter Cheer at Howson. 5 to 8 p.m. Howson Branch, 2500 Exposition Blvd. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Fri 19

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Sat 20

Make & Watch Tree Slice Ornaments. 2 to 4 p.m. Cepeda Branch, 651 N. Pleasant Valley Rd. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see



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Roller's Poll Favorites 2025

Mon 1; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6; **The Market at Zach**, see Sat 6; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Sun 21

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Hometown Holiday Shows**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Oh What Fun**, see Thu 4; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Mon 22

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Tue 23

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6; **Austin Trail of Lights**, see Wed 10.

Wed 24

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Clayton Farmers Market**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6.

Thu 25

Christmas Day

Christmas Festival. 2 to 4 p.m. Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, 3525 Bee Caves Rd. FREE. www.ShepHills.org.

Fri 26

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6.

Sat 27

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6.

Sun 28

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3; **Luminations**, see Fri 5; **A Charlie Brown Christmas**, see Sat 6.

Mon 29 and Tue 30

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Luminations**, see Fri 5.

Wed 31

Lakeway Polar Bear Plunge. 10 a.m. Lakeway Swim Center, 3103 Lakeway Blvd. www.lakeway-tx.gov/events.

Noon Years Eve Celebration at Windsor Park Library. 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Windsor Park Branch, 5833 Westminster Dr. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

Noon Years Celebration. 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Little Walnut Creek Branch, 835 W. Rundberg Ln. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Mozart's Festival of Lights**, see Mon 1; **St. Nick's Enchanted Forest**, see Mon 1; **Clayton Farmers Market**, see Wed 3; **Lights on the Lake**, see Wed 3.



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Austin Then and Now

Trail of Lights: Holiday Cheer

Then

You probably already know that the Trail of Lights has been an Austin holiday staple for more than 60 years. But did you know it didn't begin as a trail or even a celebration of lights?

When the event began in 1965, it was called "Yule Fest." Sponsored by Austin Parks and Recreation, it centered on the ceremonial lighting of a giant yule log. Families gathered to stroll past simple displays, many of which were crafted by local schoolchildren and community groups. It was an event rooted in community, tradition, and holiday spirit.

Nearly 30 years later, in 1992, the celebration was renamed the Trail of Lights. In 2009, facing a budget crunch, the City of Austin staged a scaled-back Trail of Lights, then canceled the event entirely in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, the lights returned thanks to business sponsorships and private donations, and the much-anticipated tradition has continued to shine ever since.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the Trail of Lights shifted to a drive-thru format. While that might sound like a one-time pandemic pivot, it was actually the way most Austinites experienced the event throughout much of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. In 2022, the Austin Trail of Lights returned to its traditional walk-through format.



Now

The Austin Trail of Lights is one of the city's most anticipated holiday celebrations, attracting more than 400,000 visitors to Zilker Park each December. The event features more than 2 million sparkling lights, 70 elaborate themed displays, more than 90 lighted trees, and the towering Zilker Holiday Tree, which can be seen across the city.

The Austin Trail of Lights Foundation is made possible through corporate sponsorships, business partnerships, and private donations, which cover the costs of set-up, operations, and entertainment. This support allows organizers to offer a mix of free admission nights and ticketed evenings, keeping the event accessible to the community while managing crowds.

Beyond the glittering displays, the Trail of Lights offers food trucks, live music, and nightly performances that reflect Austin's creative culture. Visitors can stroll through tunnels of color, interactive exhibits, and family-friendly activity zones, making it a destination for all ages.

One of the most popular additions is the annual Fun Run, a 2.1-mile course that winds through the illuminated path. Runners and walkers finish with a festive celebration complete with music, food, and, of course, more lights. With its mix of tradition, entertainment, and community spirit, the Trail of Lights continues to shine as Austin's brightest holiday event.



TRACIE SEED

Seed, an Austinite, has won numerous awards for writing, art, and design. She's the happiest while writing, sewing, painting, or spending time with family.

KIDZONE

Picture-Perfect Watercolor Keepsakes

Considering how easy it is to take photos these days, sending a picture as a gift might not seem so special. But what if you could transform a cherished photo into a meaningful, creative holiday gift that kids can help make? This parent-child art project turns a favorite photo into a beautiful watercolor painting, perfect for grandparents, aunts, uncles, or anyone who treasures family memories.

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Family photo
- Access to an online line-drawing tool, such as Photopea, Picsart, or Snapstouch
- Watercolor paper suitable for printing
- Printer capable of handling thicker paper, or access to a local print shop
- Watercolor paints and paintbrushes
- Decorative frame
- Marker

Step 1: Choose a Special Photo

Start by picking a photo that holds sentimental value, such as a snapshot from a family vacation, a silly moment at home, or a portrait of your child with a beloved relative. The goal is to capture a memory that will make the recipient smile.

Step 2: Convert It to a Line Drawing

Use a free online tool such as Photopea, Picsart, or Snapstouch to turn the photo into a line drawing. These websites allow you to upload a photo and apply a sketch or outline filter, simplifying the image into clean lines that are perfect for painting. Kids love seeing the transformation.

Step 3: Print on Watercolor Paper

Once your line drawing is ready, print it on watercolor paper, which is thicker and textured to hold paint without

warping. You can find it at craft stores or online. Make sure your printer can handle thicker paper, or use a local print shop.

Step 4: Add Watercolor Magic

Now comes the fun part. Set up a painting station with watercolor paints, and let your child add color to the image. Encourage creativity, and remind them there is no need to stay inside the lines. The imperfections are what make it personal and charming.

Step 5: Frame It With Love

Once the painting is dry, place it in a decorative frame. Choose something seasonal, classic, or even homemade. Add a handwritten note, or include the date on the back to make it even more special.

This project is more than just a gift; it is a memory-making experience for you and your child. The result is a one-of-a-kind keepsake that will evoke loving memories, warm thoughts, and joy for years to come.

The Greater Austin YMCA will host a variety of holiday events and activities throughout December. Visit www.AustinYMCA.org to learn more.



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