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### Hold a Housewarming Party

Looking for help in setting up your first apartment? Since most first apartments are filled with second-hand furniture, appliances, and housewares from parents' homes, it's likely that you'll be starting from scratch. If you feel comfortable, you may want to hold a housewarming party in which your guests each donate something that they no longer want to your new home.

The couple gets free stuff to start off their household, and their friends get to feel good about passing along that slow cooker they never use or that dresser that they never liked or that extra set of dishes that they inherited from Granny. Tell your guests that you would be happy to give anything that you find that you don't need to charity, but make sure to accept every object with a smile.

K.

### Wedding Advice from a Caterer

I saw some wedding tips, and they made me think of my days as a caterer. There is a trend of purchasing a smaller sized wedding cake and then getting a sheet cake for the majority of the cake slices. The cake company may even add a "dummy" cake for display only. The bride and groom cut from the "real" cake that is part of the presentation; then the caterer removes the cake and cuts pieces from the sheet cake for the guests.

Another strategy for food is to do a later wedding, starting at 8pm with a reception to follow. Then serve a light buffet or appetizers with no sit down dinner. This is much easier on the wallet if you can find the right caterer. However, make sure on the invite that you state light appetizers or buffet so your guests know to eat the meal before they come.

Matt L.

### Better Septic Systems

For years, we would get a sewer smell in our basement after heavy rains or snow thaw. It permeated the house and made it difficult for us to have company. (We never knew just when we might get that sewer smell.) I had three septic experts evaluate the problem. One said that we needed new leach lines. One said that we needed to put a drainage system around our property. The other guy said that our water table is high and there's nothing we could do. No matter which way we decided to go, it would cost us thousands of dollars to repair.

A friend told us of an aerobic system that he would install for us. Most septic systems are anaerobic, which means no air gets into the tank. An aerobic system pumps air into the tank, thereby causing bacteria to break down the waste much faster. This system works great! We saved thousands of dollars and our leach lines are now clear. Most importantly, there is no more sewer stink!

If you do a search on "aerobic septic system," you can get the details from several dealers. The pump that puts air into the tank hardly adds anything to our utility bill.

We also learned that large water waste companies also pump air into the waste to cause the material to break down, which is the same principle.

Margie

### Repurposing Microwave Turntables

When your microwave goes out, put the glass turntable under your coffee pot to catch spills and drips. You can easily wash the turntable and put back under the coffee pot.

Rose K. in North Little Rock, AR

### Ready for Winter

While raking up my yard this season, I realized that the fallen pinecones would make great fire starters for the wood stove. I played a game with my granddaughter to see who could fill the bag first! Of course, she won, but now I have a quick start to a fire.

K.

### Ready Biscuits

In an effort to save money, I have started making biscuit mix biscuits in very large batches. I cut them out and place them on cookie sheets to freeze them. When I need biscuits, I take the needed amount out of the freezer and bake.

Caye H.

### Winterizing an Apartment

One thing I have found to make my condo warmer and more comfortable in the winter months is to run a vaporizer. With the moisture in the air, I can turn down my thermostat five to eight degrees and still feel warm. It also cuts down on carpet shocks from static electricity.

Kathy

### Slow Cooker Meals

The best slow cooker meal I ever made was so easy that it didn't require a recipe. I put a thawed pork roast in the slow cooker, covered it 2/3 with water, and added one jar of BBQ sauce and one large sliced white onion. Then I added some seasoning and let it cook all day. It was great with potatoes and a vegetable side dish, but the leftovers made some incredible sandwiches! Try it!

Jen T.

### Cat Clawing?

This is my method of deterring and training cats to leave my furniture alone. I buy thick, clear plastic off a bolt at the hardware or fabric store. I tape it (with clear tape) or attach it with upholstery pins to the sides and corners of the piece. It is not horribly noticeable and spoils all the fun for the cats until they finally give up and find an appropriate place to claw like outside on a tree, a scratching post, etc. I no longer have to cover anything, as my cats just ignore the furniture.

Robin

### Eliminating Odors from Wood Furniture

Scorched coffee grounds will eliminate just about any foul odor. Simply put some coffee grounds in a pan, moisten, and then heat enough to slightly scorch. Remove the pan from the heat immediately when the grounds begin to scorch to avoid creating a lot of smoke. Place inside the items for awhile. Set the pan on a trivet or pad so the bottom of the pan does not burn or mar the wood. In general, even plain coffee grounds placed in a confined space will absorb most odors.

Bruce

### Longer Lasting Razors

I keep a bottle of alcohol (medicinal, not drinking) in the bathroom. After using my razor, I clean it under running water and then I simply pour a small amount of alcohol over the blade. It dries almost instantly, keeps the blade as clean as possible (almost sterile), and helps extend the razor blade's life almost four fold.

Like most any other metal, when exposed to moisture and air, your razor blades begin to rust. It's rust that forms on the edge of the blade and hastens the "dulling" of your blade.

Phyllis

### The Rewards System

My husband and I have been trying to pay off a large debt (approx. \$15,000) for over a year and have made little progress. I've recently found a great way to motivate us.

After a certain amount is paid off, we are rewarding ourselves with something special. We just celebrated the \$3000 mark with a special dinner out. My husband commented that he couldn't believe we'd paid off that much, and it made him want to pay off even more.

M.

### The Bulk Food Group

I get together with friends to bulk order food from different places. It is like a food co-op of friends. We purchase spices from an online company. We order bulk food from another company. It really helps the budget to purchase items in bulk, and when ordering with friends once a year, we save by shipping it freight. The shipping cost is very small compared to UPS or regular mail.

We've saved so much by buying items like powdered milk in bulk bags. The same thing applies to bulk oatmeal, grains, TVP, and beans. Bulk baking cocoa is also very inexpensive when purchased in 50-pound bags compared to buying it in small bags. We often do this as a group with the ladies from church and the neighborhood.

M.

### Car Deodorizer

With my kids always eating in my van, there was always a strange smell in it. The deodorizers that are made for cars can be pretty overwhelming. I just put a fabric softener sheet under each row of seats. It's a nice smell, but it's not too powerful.

Tiffany

### Natural Flea Control

I worked with a man who had bird dogs and his wife was a student in plant sciences. They found that planting tansy (an herb) around the dogs' pens kept the problem in check. Their children played in the same yard as the dogs, and they were not bitten at all. This is a safe and effective way to solve a flea problem.

Melissa

# From auto aromatherapy to planning ahead: 7 tips for a calmer commute

(BPT) - The majority of Americans drive to work - 86 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau - and it's probably safe to say that all of them have been irritated by the commute at some point. Heavy volume, clogged roads, construction delays, bad weather and inconsiderate fellow commuters - driving to and from work can be downright stressful.

Those aren't the only reasons to dislike your daily commute; the average American spends 45 minutes on the road each way and shells out nearly \$2,600 per year on commuting to work, according to Citi's ThankYou Premier Commuter Index. Until you land your dream job working from home, however, you can do a lot to make your daily drive more pleasant. The calmness experts at Aura Cacia, a brand of Frontier Co-op, offer some tips for calming your commute:

- Get a good night's rest, especially if you hit the road at an early hour. If you're tired when you get behind the wheel, you're more likely to become irritated even by small annoyances. Plus, drowsy driving is dangerous.
- Aroma has a big impact on your mood. Road fumes, old food wrappers and spill-related funky smells can make the inside of your car an unpleasant place to breathe. Clean the trash from your car daily, and take steps to freshen the air inside. Wipe down the steering wheel and dash with an aromatherapy wipe, like Aura Cacia's Revive Body Cloths. Pre-moistened with pure essential oils to shift your state of mind, the compostable and alcohol-free cloths won't harm vehicle surfaces and will leave your car interior smelling fresh and calm.
- Take off in a good mood. Before you start the car, rest your hands in your lap, close your eyes and take a few deep, relaxing breaths. Silently repeat an affirmation for the day, such as, "Today will be a good day." Starting your drive in a calm mood can set the tone for the commute and the entire day.
- Give yourself plenty of time. Although your commute might normally be 30 minutes, things happen - from road accidents to car problems or just having to go back home for something you forgot. Build a few minutes into your schedule to allow for the unexpected. If all else fails, however, accept that you'll be late and don't drive aggressively or recklessly to make up the time. It's better to arrive late than risk an accident.
- Know alternate routes and use a GPS app to get real-time traffic updates on your smartphone, so you can avoid accidents, construction delays, severe congestion and all the stress they can bring to your commute.
- Many people listen to music or talk radio in the car to make the commute go faster. But remember, what you hear can affect your mood, so avoid music that's overly stimulating and that might make you jittery, or talk radio discussions that get you fired up. Choose soothing music and talk shows that are more entertaining than inflammatory.
- Avoid over-reacting to someone else's driving. You can't control what other drivers do, but you can control your response. When you're on the receiving end of inconsiderate behavior, try not to escalate the situation - and your level of aggravation - by reacting aggressively or rudely. You'll only make yourself more upset. Instead, take a few deep breaths and focus on your positive decision to not let your commute ruin the day.

Driving to work might never be your favorite part of the day, but with a few simple tactics, you can help yourself stay calmer and safer behind the wheel.



## Diversity and a strong tech industry

(BPT) - Last year, a number of tech firms released reports on the demographic makeup of their employees and highlighted how diversity is severely lacking in the industry. Google indicated that 61 percent of its employees were white, 30 percent Asian, 4 percent identified as two or more races, 3 percent Hispanic, 2 percent black and 1 percent other. These numbers were fairly consistent among other prominent tech companies, including Apple, Facebook and Twitter. When those same companies released progress reports this year, little to no gains were made.

In response, Twitter has teamed up with diversity organizations and colleges that serve minorities, and also encouraged in-house initiatives among employees. Apple has committed more than \$50 million to diversity efforts. Despite such efforts, many feel that more needs to be done to cultivate diverse perspectives in the tech industry and to expand a pipeline of talent that better reflects society.

How can the country tackle such a problem? Many believe the next generation of technology leaders cannot emerge, let alone include children from diverse backgrounds, until children in K-12 classrooms receive earlier access to tech education.

To illustrate the urgency, consider how computer programming jobs are growing at twice the national average compared to other industries. This makes particularly troubling a recent finding by Code.org, a non-profit organization committed to expanding participation in computer science, that nine out of 10 high schools in the U.S. do not offer computer science classes. What's more alarming is that according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2020 1.4 million computer science jobs will be available nationally, but only 400,000 computer science students will be available to fill those roles.

With such numbers, the need to encourage children and adults from all backgrounds to pursue STEM fields and build careers in tech cannot be understated.

Because specialized training for many sectors in the technology field begins in college, the higher education sector is in a unique position to expand opportunity in underserved communities and increase the diversity of the workforce in the tech industry.

One institution that has spearheaded such efforts is University of Phoenix. Given the unique needs of the students - many of who are working adults - the University developed degree programs in Information Systems and Technology. These programs provide students with a wide range of technical and organizational skills, as well as an understanding of core business concepts that emphasizes how technology is the bridge that connects them with their future careers.

This is one example of how industry leaders across the public and private sectors are making a commitment to building diversity in the workforce and filling the important rolls that the tech industry needs to stay strong.

