

Surrey Now

Stock that stocking with some originality

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My absolute favourite part of Christmas isn't the one big gift (so often disappointing) or the one big meal (way too filling), it's the assortment of random, fun and eclectic products that fill my Christmas stocking.

Growing up, Mum used to fill my sister's and my stocking with all kinds of cheap and cheerful treats -- from obligatory socks and bath beads -- to more eccentric items that always elicited a laugh or smile.

The underlying premise of stocking fillers is that they are an incongruent mix of gifts that can be either practical or completely frivolous. The one thing they have in common is that they are relatively inexpensive. More than \$30 and it's not a stocking filler, but a real gift.

THE STANDARDS

The standard stocking fillers are often clichéd, but always welcome and necessary. Who of us couldn't do with some new socks, knickers or soap? The key is to do everything in miniature and with great aplomb. None of this super-sized brouhaha: Look instead for mini-bottles or sample-sizes of favourite products, e.g. one pair of crazy socks, as opposed to that five-pair valuepack of boring black ones, and find creative ways of staying in budget.

For example, you can buy a set of something but break it up into smaller groups to be spread out for a number of recipients. This isn't about being mean: You're working with a limited space and you want to cram it full of variety and excitement, not allow one or two big items to hog it.

Gift cards are perfectly sized as stocking fillers and can be priced according to your budget. A Starbucks card in any denomination over \$5 will be used with pleasure and your recipient can refuel it for future use.

Each item should be individually wrapped to prolong the pleasure - basically the whole stocking unwrapping should be dragged out to maximize excitement and create an air of excited glee.

A SPARK OF ORIGINALITY

In the midst of more practical and usable stocking-filler presents, you should include some utter silliness. Dollar-store cheap thrills always elicit lots of laughter, especially when wrapped up to the nines.

Whether it's a fun fridge magnet, or a Christmas ornament with a special connection to the recipient,

there are all kinds of small treats that are fun. And this is the place to use those small products that are utterly quirky and useless, but still score big for novelty.

For example, I recently came across miniature toothpastes called Breath Palettes that come in an astonishing array of unconventional flavours -- from Pumpkin Pudding to L'Espresso. At \$7 a pop from Beautymark.ca, these are sure to be great conversation pieces and will make it into everybody's stockings this Christmas.

Of course the most original thing you can conjure up is something that you've made yourself. Whether you're skilled at rustling up crafts or culinary treats (pots of jam, or home-made truffles) these gifts show thought and creativity that every recipient will appreciate.

THE STOCKING

Finally, there's the stocking itself. I've had the same stocking since childhood and have dragged it everywhere with me. If you're establishing new traditions, there are a wide variety of stocking styles and sizes out there. Retailers like L.L. Bean offer a girl or boy stocking: You can even have the stocking monogrammed.

In this way, the stocking becomes a gift in itself and one that can be reused as a seasonal decorating item for years to come and associated with all sorts of fond memories of Christmas morning present-unwrapping.