

# House+Home

**Online Extra**  
Post photos of your favorite holiday lights display — and see other readers' top picks — at [www.mercurynews.com/features](http://www.mercurynews.com/features).

## TWELVE NIGHTS OF LIGHTS

It's the second-most awaited list of the season. While we don't keep track of who has been naughty or nice, we do keep track of just who among us makes a real spectacle out of Christmas. We suggest this year you savor the experience with Twelve Nights of Lights, light-viewing destinations for each of a dozen nights.

TEXT BY KIM BOATMAN | GRAPHIC BY WES KILLINGBECK  
MERCURY NEWS

**1 THE FIRST NIGHT:**  
Niles Canyon  
Train of Lights

**2 THE SECOND NIGHT:**  
Menlo Park/Redwood City  
Roofs, poles and trees adorned

**3 THE THIRD NIGHT:**  
East Palo Alto/Palo Alto  
Santas and reindeer and snowmen, oh my

**4 THE FOURTH NIGHT:**  
Fremont  
Classic displays and cartoon cutouts

**6 THE SIXTH NIGHT:**  
Sunnyvale  
Solar-powered displays and more

**5 THE FIFTH NIGHT:**  
Mountain View/Saratoga  
Holiday toy train displays

**7 THE SEVENTH NIGHT:**  
Downtown San Jose  
Christmas in the Park

**8 THE EIGHTH NIGHT:**  
Santa Clara  
50,000 lights and animation

**9 THE NINTH NIGHT:**  
San Jose  
From the chimney to the garage

**10 THE 10TH NIGHT:**  
Campbell  
10 years of tradition, 45,000 lights

**11 THE 11TH NIGHT:**  
Vasona Lake park  
Fantasy of Lights

**12 THE 12TH NIGHT:**  
Los Gatos/Monte Sereno  
Full-size sleigh and a train



Close-up maps of  
Twelve nights of lights

### WHAT TO EAT

A tin of cookies is an absolute necessity when you're light-gazing. Sure, some homes pass out candy canes. But you won't get a lot of mileage out of a miniature candy cane. And what's a tour of holiday lights without Dad grumbling about all the cookie crumbs — while he munches away?

This year, how about an alternative to the traditional sugar cookie? This sour cream cut-out cookie recipe came from Lands' End, which used to have a fine tradition of publishing Christmas cookie recipes from its associates. Alas, a recent search of [www.landsend.com](http://www.landsend.com) found lots of jaunty merchandise but no recipes. You'll want to use regular sour cream in this recipe, rather than low-fat; it's best to skip it elsewhere in your diet to save calories. The cookies have a slight tang and can easily be iced or decorated with sprinkles.

#### Sour cream cookies

- 1 cup shortening
- 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 5 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder

Cream together shortening and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla. Add baking soda to sour cream and add to mixture. Stir together flour, salt and baking powder and add to creamed mixture. Stir until stiff batter forms. Roll out cookies and cut into shapes (add more flour if needed). Bake at 400 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes.

From: Lands' End

### A LITTLE GOOD CHEER

Of course, a little cheer in this case must be of the non-alcoholic variety. Our beverage of choice is a spiced cranberry-apple cider that has the added benefit of providing that wonderful aroma of cinnamon we associate with the holidays. To our mind, it's much preferable to passing around one of those pine-scented, tree-shaped air fresheners.

If you're looking for shortcuts, simply heat up a bottle of Trader Joe's spiced apple cider and pour it into your travel mug.

#### Spiced cranberry-apple cider

- 2 3-inch cinnamon sticks
- 1/2 teaspoon whole allspice
- 12 whole cloves
- 1 quart cranberry juice cocktail
- 1/4 cup maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 quart apple cider
- Orange and lemon slices studded with cloves, for garnish

Place the cinnamon, allspice and cloves on a small square of cheesecloth, bring the corners together and tie with kitchen string. (If you don't have cheesecloth, simply add the spices to the cranberry juice and pour the mixture through a sieve before adding the cider.)

In a soup pot, mix together the cranberry juice, maple syrup and lemon juice. Add the spice bag and place over medium heat. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 20 minutes to blend the flavors. Remove from the heat, cover and let steep for 15 minutes.

Remove and discard the spice bag and stir in the apple cider. Reheat to desired temperature. If you're drinking the cider at home, garnish each drink with orange and lemon slices.

From "Christmastime Treats: Recipes and Crafts for the Whole Family" by Sara Perry

### GETTING THERE

In a perfect world, where we're all filthy rich, I suppose I'd go out and buy a new \$62,000 Lexus LS 460 (or the longer \$72,000 LS 460 L) to go see holiday lights. This is the car — you've seen the TV ads — that helps you parallel park. In negotiating for a tight spot along Crippis Park in Fremont, it would make things much easier.

But, no, that's not going to happen for most of us. Instead, another high-tech tool makes the hunt for merriment less taxing. A mobile navigation system allows you to type in an address and get directions — an invaluable aid when the kids are demanding *bigger, better, brighter* displays. The nearest one I've tried lately is the RoadMate 2200T from Magellan. It's relatively small, about the size of a shirt pocket. Still, it offers turn-by-turn directions with voice prompts and on-screen arrows. Millions of points of interests are inside, which means you can find the nearest coffee shop for a latte and hot chocolate after your tiring winter's night journey. The 2200T lists for \$499.99, but I've found it as cheap as \$431 online. It's easily portable, too, so you can hand it over to Santa for his sled on Dec. 24.

— Matt Nauman, auto editor

### WHAT TO SING

Personally, we find the traditional mangling of Christmas carol lyrics rather charming. But for those of you who are of a more orderly nature, a couple of Web sites offer assistance for the family light tour singalong. Check out [www.carols.org.uk](http://www.carols.org.uk) for lyrics and a bit of background on the songs and the history of Christmas carols. You'll also find lyrics at [www.christmas-carols.net](http://www.christmas-carols.net).

