

19

Give your pets extra TLC

Most pet owners are sensible enough to realise that cats and dogs need some extra attention around November 5, but Christmas can also be traumatic for our four-legged friends. Pets get stressed, too. So...

- Avoid using tinsel on your tree – young pets, in particular, may choke on it.
- Check that any plants that could be poisonous (such as poinsettia, mistletoe, amaryllis) are well out of their reach.
- Keep a check on all the bones after Christmas Day lunch. They should be thrown in the waste bin straight away.
- Dispose of all your wrapping paper quickly. Again, pets may be tempted to eat bits and pieces that are left lying around.
- Ensure that pets have a quiet space they can retreat to.
- Make sure they have some identification. Frightened animals run away. And if they don't have a tag and get lost, your holiday – as well as theirs – will be totally ruined.

20

Learn the secret of great brussels sprouts

They don't have to be boring. No, believe us, THEY REALLY DON'T HAVE TO BE BORING. Chestnuts, walnuts, hazelnuts, bacon – they will all complement the sprouts and lift them out of steamed tedium.

Delia Smith (www.deliaonline.com) has recipes for Brussels Sprouts in Riesling with Bacon, Sautéed Brussels Sprouts with Chestnuts, and Caramelised Button Sprouts and Shallots with Sherry Vinegar. Olive magazine advocates Sprouts with Walnuts and Bacon (see the recipe at www.bbcgoodfood.com) or Brussels Sprouts with Hazelnuts and Brown Butter. While Brussels Sprouts with Shallots and Wild Mushrooms can be found at www.epicurious.com.

21

Display your cards with style

The simplest ideas are often the most stylish. If you haven't any quirky card clips, use wooden clothes pegs (spray them if your theme is either gold or silver) and peg your cards along ribbon that can be looped from one end of a curtain pole to the other. Or find a piece of wall in the house that could be colonised by your Christmas cards using White Stick'n Fix (white tack). Be creative and create a collage.

Did you know?

The House of Commons voted in 2005 to establish National Mistletoe Day on December 1 (hah, you missed it). It is centred, annually, on Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire, which is England's official mistletoe town

Find the perfect present for her

An Apple iTouch: it's everything that the iPhone is except without the phone. Gorgeous and sleek, it inspires admiration wherever it goes (from £199; www.apple.com/uk/ipodtouch).

Funky wellies: these will bring a smile to anyone's face when the wrapping is ripped off on Christmas Day. With a choice of poppies, psychedelia, and spots of every hue, these wellies from www.funky-wellington-boots.co.uk come in



sizes 3-9 for £29-99. You can always throw in a welly bag, too, for an extra £12-50.

Jewellery, but not just any jewellery: make a statement with a mirror crystal heart and teardrop necklace from Butler and Wilson for £98 (drop of 7.5cm), which can be teamed with a multi-colour crystal bracelet, or a clear multi-oval elaborate necklace (with drop of 13cm) for £148 (www.butlerandwilson.co.uk). Don't be boring.

Can you go wrong with an It bag? Whether it is the Nancy (£950, designed by Samantha Cameron for Smythson), or the Chloe Paddington (£1,016), or Mulberry's Large Mabel (right) for a mere £750, one of these will bag it.

An IOU: plan and book something for February (it really is a grey month and needs cheering up). A visit to the theatre, a weekend away at a great hotel, a concert, a long weekend in New York... you get the idea.

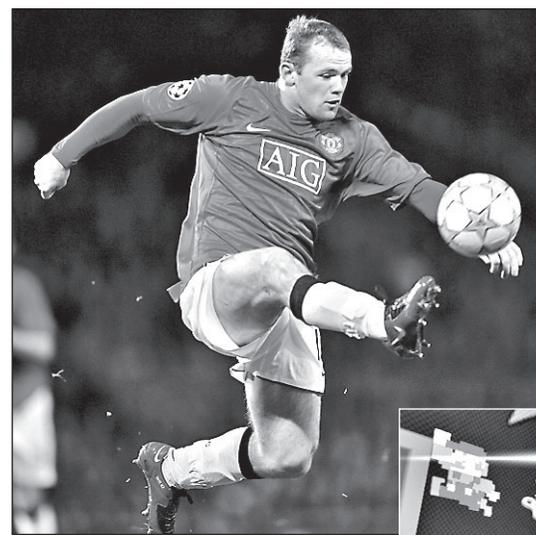


22

23

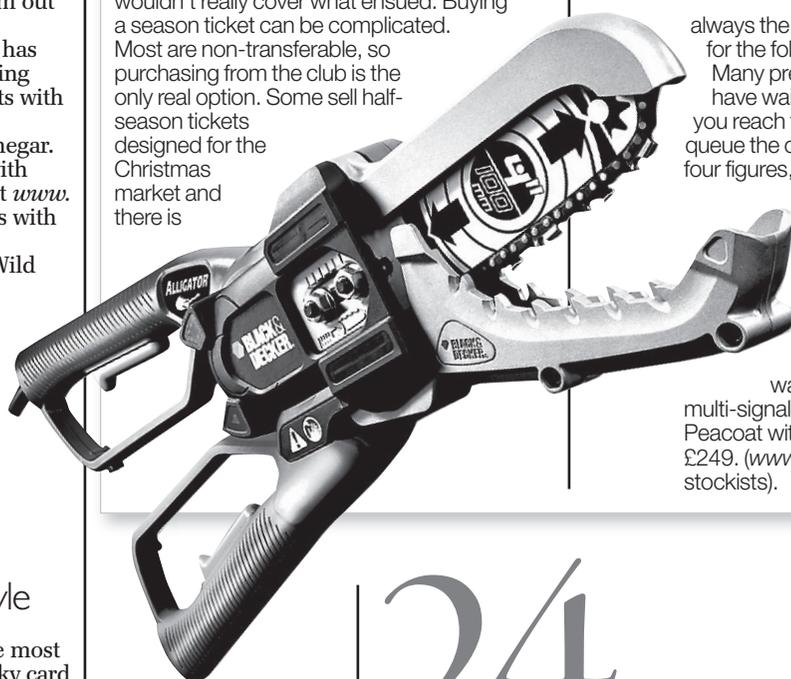
Find the perfect present for him

A football season ticket: the ultimate gift for a soccer nut. There is an urban myth that one loving wife bought her husband a Newcastle season ticket and gave it to him for Christmas, apparently oblivious that the season started in August. "Mixed emotions" wouldn't really cover what ensued. Buying a season ticket can be complicated. Most are non-transferable, so purchasing from the club is the only real option. Some sell half-season tickets designed for the Christmas market and there is



always the option of buying for the following August. Many Premiership teams have waiting lists and once you reach the head of the queue the cost of a ticket is in four figures, though if what you're after is for a non-Premiership side the club may bite your arm off. Check the club's website for details.

A Victorinox jacket: the company that brought you the ubiquitous penknife now has a range of clothing that includes the Wraxall alpine three-layer waterproof jacket with built-in SOS multi-signal light for £375. And the Calvary Twill Peacoat with removable Inova flashlight for £249. (www.victorinoxapparel.co.uk for stockists).



Power lopper: this won't have the man in your life bursting into 'I'm a Lumberjack...' because he'll be too busy attempting to control the beast. Black & Decker's magnificent Alligator Power Lopper costs £99-99 and is a cordless electric chainsaw with clamping jaw capable of a 10cm cut. He'll be out in the garden producing an endless supply of small logs. Available from Homebase (www.homebase.co.uk).

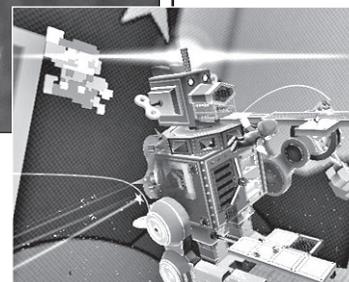
Games: for kids of all ages there is Nintendo's *Super Mario Galaxy* (from around £45). The best of the entire Mario series.

16 and older. *Assassin's Creed* (around £40). Ubisoft's new title groans under the weight of its own hype but previews suggest it lives to

the fanfare. Set during the third crusade, you play the role of an assassin charged with killing nine military leaders. Sound is of movie quality and the graphics take your breath away with painstaking historical detail – this may be the only title this year for which being a scholar of history (while not a requirement) may actually

enhance your enjoyment of a video game. Adults only: *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* (around £35) Borrowing heavily from film director Michael Mann's style, this first-person shooter mixes a gripping noir storyline with shoot-'em-up action. Be warned though; it truly earns its "18" rating for violence and foul dialogue.

A head torch: not just for pot-holers. You won't believe how useful these neat cranial lights can be around the house for any number of little jobs. If you want one gadget for the stocking, this is it. Check out www.gear-zone.co.uk for a range from around £15 to super "advanced technology" beams at £30-plus.



24

Stick on a DVD – for her

Hairspray
Who can forget John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*? He is no less unforgettable here, as a woman in a 30lb fat-suit.

The Painted Veil
John Curran's glorious adaptation of Somerset Maugham's novel was unfairly overlooked at this year's Oscars, despite two wonderful lead performances, an elegant script, and stunning cinematography of the Chinese landscape.

Ocean's 13

The boys are back in their best caper yet, having seemingly put the rather flaccid sequel behind them. George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon – for cool, charming, sexy thrills, you need look no further.

The Tudors

If you can ignore its rather liberal take on history this is a thoroughly entertaining romp through one of England's most exciting periods, and Jonathan Rhys-Meyers is simply exceptional as the young King Henry VIII: History according to *Heat*.

Rufus! Rufus! Rufus! Does Judy!

The impossibly sexy Rufus Wainwright recreates Judy Garland's legendary 1961 Carnegie Hall concert at our very own London Palladium. Gloriously camp – and reverential.

FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS

Enjoy an unforgettable Christmas at one of the North West's most renowned hotels.

- 4 Star Hotels • Rural settings
- Superb leisure / spa facilities
- Nightly Entertainment Packages
- Children welcome

Stay from
£85 per adult / £32.50 per child
Prices are per night

Call the hotel of your choice

01204 591131

Mercury Last Drop Village Hotel & Spa
Bromley Cross Bolton BL7 9PZ

01254 303400

Mercury Dunkenhall Hotel & Spa
Blackburn Road Accrington BB5 5JP
Terms & conditions apply.

www.mercury-uk.com