

THE *Current* Shadow Creek Ranch

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Smart Shopping Tips to Stay Safe this Holiday Season

By: Vivian Marinelli, FEI Behavioral Health

You've made your lists and you've checked them twice. Now it's off to shop for the naughty (maybe) and nice.

With holiday shopping upon us, here are tips for keeping yourself, your identity and your carefully picked gifts safe and the holiday season enjoyable, whether shopping online or at the mall.

Online Shopping

Before you log on and make your first purchase, keep these ideas in mind to protect your credit card and keep your bank account information safe:

- Only visit secure shopping websites—look for the “lock.” Check the address bar for a padlock symbol indicating it's a secure website. Also, addresses beginning with “https” (and not just “http”) indicate additional web security.
- Shop online only with a secure network. Although you might be enjoying a nice cup of hot cocoa at a coffee shop, avoid using the public Wi-Fi in order to keep your payment information safe.
- Protect your personal information. Never click the box to “remember” or save your password or credit card information. It only takes a few seconds to enter this information when you revisit a site. (This is not only a good idea for shopping, but should be a general rule for keeping your passwords safe.)
- Watch out for imposters. With online shopping, you typically receive a confirmation for the order and another when shipping occurs. One current phishing scam sends a fake email indicating a problem with your order and includes a link or attachment to click. Another phishing scam is targeting Amazon shoppers. Amazon will never send you an unsolicited email asking for sensitive personal information like your social security number, tax ID, bank account number, credit card information, ID questions like “mother's maiden name” or account password. If you receive a suspicious email,

please report it immediately by sending it as an attachment to stop-spoofing@amazon.com. (Likewise, if you are reporting a suspicious URL, put it in the body of the email and send it to stop-spoofing@amazon.com.)

- Monitor your purchases. This is another list to “check twice.” Hopefully, you are reviewing your credit card and bank statements throughout the year. During the holidays, it is even more important to be vigilant so you can catch any suspicious activity on your accounts.
- Ship to a secure location. Package theft is becoming a growing trend. Avoid having your boxes stolen from your front porch by shipping to your work address or a neighbor who is home during the day. Take advantage of delivery lockers in your area and have your order shipped there instead.

Brick and Mortar Shopping

For those of us who prefer feeling the “spirit of the holidays” by enjoying the sights, sounds and smells of the shopping experience, keep in mind that there may be people other than Santa and his helpers watching.

Some tips to keep in mind before heading out to the mall:

Prepare. Before you head out to shop, gear up for the trek. The stores can be warm and you may want to leave your coat in the car; that way, you are not trying to keep track of your coat, packages, your purse and/or your wallet.

Distractions. The most common distraction is to be on the phone or texting as you are walking to the next store, or to your car. You may be checking on information for your next purchase, but someone else might be checking for people they can catch off-guard. It's critical to be aware of your surroundings at these susceptible times. Wait until you are in a place where you can focus and not be a target.

Parking. Pay attention to detail when choosing a parking spot. It

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SHADOW CREEK RANCH

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Ambulance	911
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Alvin Senior High	281-331-8151
Manvel High School	281-245-2235
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Alvin ISD Transportation	281-331-0960

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OTHER NUMBERS

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Poison Control.....	800-764-7661
Brazoria County Health Department	979-864-1484
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(Continued from Cover)

may be daylight when you park, but it may be dark when you return to your car. Try parking in a well-lit area. Make note of the location of your car, or tie a holiday bow to your car where you will be able to spot it easily. Prior to leaving the store or mall, gather all your packages and have your keys ready in your hand. Walk with purpose to your car and scan your surroundings for anyone (or anything) that seems suspicious. Many shops or malls have additional security on-site, even in the parking lots. Some also have escorts available who will accompany you to your car.

Super-shopping. If you plan on a shopping marathon, following the first three tips will have you ready for the race. However, if you need to make multiple trips to your car to drop off purchases, you'll need to make sure they are secure until you return. Put packages in the trunk where they are out of sight. If packages need to be in the back or front seat, try to place them on the floor of the car and cover them with a blanket so they're not visible to anyone walking past the car.

By taking the extra time to ensure personal and financial safety and security during your holiday shopping excursions, you can enjoy finding the perfect gift for everyone on your list and see their faces light up when they unwrap their treasure that you picked just for them.

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

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SHADOW CREEK RANCH

Gardening To Do List - December in the Garden

By Marie Iannotti

Many of us do more shopping and planning for our gardens during the winter months than actual gardening but that doesn't mean there's nothing to do. In the warmer zones, December is the start of pleasant weather and a chance to enjoy planting cool season vegetables and flowers that don't tolerate your summers. Northern gardeners should use this period without leaves to scout for egg masses and other signs of trouble on trees and shrubs. Here are some more regional gardening tips for the beginning of winter.

In General

- Keep watering your holiday plants and give them plenty of light.
- Check houseplants and any plants you brought indoors for the winter, for insects that may have hitched a ride. With the heat on, they can multiply quickly.
- Also check any bulbs, corms, tubers and bare root plants for dessication or rot.
- Start eating those stored vegetables and think about planting more winter squash next year.
- Feed the birds.

In Southwest

- Be prepared for sudden swings in temperature and protect tender plants with row covers, newspaper or blankets.
- Start seeds of cool season vegetables and flowers.
- Cut back asparagus, as soon as it dies back or the ground freezes.

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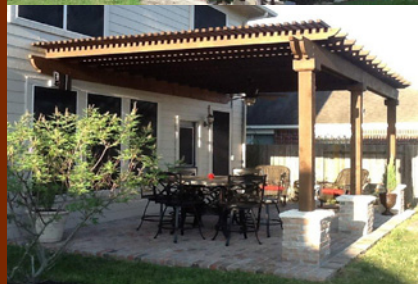
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