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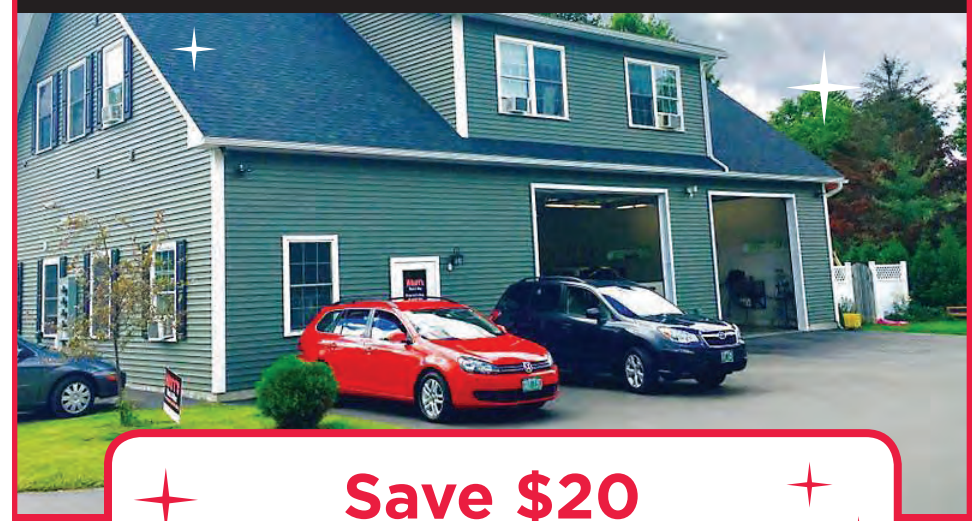
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Bringing Kwanzaa into your holidays



Kwanzaa is celebrated by millions of people every year. Individuals of all ages take part in the festivities, which were established in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Dr. Karenga, prompted by the Watts riots in Los Angeles, sought ways to bring African Americans together as a community, and Kwanzaa was born.

Kwanzaa can be a fun opportunity to gather with friends and family in the heart of the holiday season.

Kwanzaa, which celebrates the symbolism and traditions of African American culture, begins on December 26 and lasts through January 1.

There are many components of Kwanzaa celebrations, and decorating for the holiday remains an important way to demonstrate spirit. Celebrants can start by decorating with the traditional colors of red, green and black. These can be displayed in fabrics used in the home, clothing, linens, and other decor. The Bendera Ya Taifa, or the traditional Kwanzaa flag, can be hung and serve as the holiday's centerpiece.

Celebrants also will want to decorate with the seven symbols of the holiday, or Nguzo Saba: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). Posters, crafts or photographs can be used to symbolize these seven principles.

Another component of Kwanzaa is a seven-branched candleholder known as the "kinara." The kinara represents African ancestors and should be displayed on a table or in another prominent area of the home. Light seven candles to represent the seven principles.

Articles of African culture, such as masks or artwork, can complete Kwanzaa decor. Cultural artifacts can be tied into the creative aspect of the holiday. Celebrants might want to craft their own masks or African-inspired artwork to use throughout the holiday.

Families come together during Kwanzaa to celebrate African American culture and unity. Decorating for the holiday is a great way for African Americans to exhibit pride in their heritage.

DID YOU KNOW?



Dreidels are especially popular during the eight-day Jewish festival of Chanukah. Even though they may seem like novelty items for children, dreidels have a rich and interesting history. In ancient times, Greek Syrians infiltrated areas where many practicing Jews resided. Over time, the Greek Syrians became more oppressive and tried to convert the Jewish people to their pagan beliefs. However, their efforts were not very successful. As a result, the Greek Syrians established laws that outlawed ritual commandments and the study of the Torah. It is widely believed that Jewish people used dreidels to fool the Greeks into thinking they were just playing a game. Instead, rolls of the dreidel corresponded to numerical equivalents that could represent elements of the Jewish faith, according to My Jewish Learning. Others say the dreidel was a distraction. Children of Israel would learn the Torah in outlying areas and forests. When Greek patrols were nearby, the children would hide their texts and take out dreidels instead, says Chabad.org. Today the dreidel is a token of the Chanukah miracle. In Israel, the letters upon the dreidel are Nun, Gimel, Hay, and Pay, which stand for the Hebrew equivalent of "a great miracle happened here." Outside of israel, the last letter is Shin, which transforms the phrase into "a great miracle happened there."





