

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas

By Tara Spinelli for Jersey Moms Blog

"When can we decorate for <name of impending holiday here>?," asks my daughter brightly.

The dread this question provokes in me falls somewhere between "We have your test results." and "Can I talk to you about something?"

Most holidays, I manage to get away with the bare minimum, just like I like it. A nice cardboard cutout of Martin Luther King, Jr. in January ("Don't you love MLK, kids? Let's give him the spotlight he deserves with no distractions!"). A couple of heart- and shamrock-shaped window clings in February and March ("Anything more and you won't be able to see how cute these are, right, kids?"). A merciful break from decorating-oriented holidays for a good stretch if you don't count Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, or Columbus Day (which I certainly don't). And then some Halloween pumpkins that can last straight through Thanksgiving provided the squirrels don't have their way with them ("Hey, squirrels have to eat, too. And that life-size grim-reaper you kids wanted would've only scared them away and left them to starve. I thought you loved animals.")

But Christmas, that swaggering mack daddy of holidays, won't be denied. No light too twinkly, no tinsel too sparkly, no ornament too...ornamental for that big-shot Christmas. More! BIGGER! *Better!*

I feel the conspiratorial weight of every retail establishment in North America bearing down on me. Practically before we've all wiped the peanut-butter cup crumbs from the corners of our mouths (and I mean the ones we've eaten before October 31st), it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas at every supermarket and pharmacy, quickie-mart and coffee shop, warehouse club and gas station, department store and kiosk.

Then there are the so-called friends whose houses have been decorated ("Since the day after Thanksgiving! It's our special family tradition!") with animatronic elves, rooftop reindeer, lawn inflatables, light-up Christmas villages, around-the-tree train sets, musical nativities, personalized holiday doormats ("The Petersons Welcome You This Holiday Season! Bobby, Sally, Mom, Dad, Whiskers, Bingo"), St. Nick soaps and complementary hand towels plus a toilet paper roll that carols when you spin it (can't I even pee in peace while visiting you people?!).

You might figure me for the Martha Stewart type (if Scrooge or Grinch hasn't sprung to mind), but her cedar-wreath chandeliers, juniper- and pepper-berry garlands, citrus pomanders, evergreen bobeches, and yuletide topiaries don't ease my fear of holiday clutter. (The fact that I'm about as crafty as a lump of coal is beside the point.)

So what's a minimalist supposed to do, especially with the soulful, pleading eyes of her only daughter fixed on her as she breezes by "seasonal" and smiles insincerely at friends' holiday wonderlands while muttering a vague promise of "soon" and "let's see what we have at home, shall we" ("shall" selected for its combination of old-world holiday charm and distracting awkwardness)?

Then the day after Thanksgiving gives way to mid-December and my icy, holiday-resistant, stuff-o-phobic heart starts to thaw. With my daughter's face in mind and some serious concentration, I start to envision the stockings hung from the mantle (by my low-profile, décor-respecting hangers), our eclectic collection of ornaments on a nice, tall fir (yes, I have a group of gold ones that I insist go on first for visual balance), and even the light-up-bear on the front lawn (no possible explanation for this one...did I mention my daughter's face?).

Next thing I know, Christmas is here, and the house looks...ok! For a few short weeks, my daughter is thrilled. And I think to myself, next year, we'll add a couple of evergreen bobeches, a citrus pomander or three, and maybe even one of those personalized holiday doormats of our own: "The Bobeches Welcome You This Holiday Season!"