

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Light a Candle, Safely That is

Written by Becca Stackhouse, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Crisp County



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Candles can create a relaxing environment, and the scents are often connected to pleasant memories that help relax and calm your mind and body. However, burning scented candles could have negative impacts on the air quality in your home. That doesn't mean you shouldn't burn candles, just take time to learn more about them.

A burning candle releases volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and particulate matter into the air. The amounts are generally small, but impact people differently, so it is best to check with other members of the household before lighting up. You should know what type of wax the candle is made from. Paraffin wax is made from petroleum, and when burned it generally produces more soot than vegetable-based or beeswax waxes. Key to reducing the soot is to trim the wick to 1/8 inch, avoid drafts, and burn them for no longer than four hours at a time. Selecting candles scented with natural essential oils instead of synthetic fragrances reduces exposure to potentially harmful chemicals like phthalates and benzene. Remember, fragrance of any sort may lead to headaches or respiratory issues for some individuals.

Take precautions when burning candles to reduce the risks from that small flickering flame. This will help to keep your family and home safe.

- ◆ Keep candles away from flammable objects, like holiday decorations.
- ◆ Set candles out of the reach of small children and pets.
- ◆ To avoid blowing wax and smoke, use a snuffer when it is time to extinguish the flame.
- ◆ Stay safe by keeping that small flame in sight.
- ◆ Extinguish all candles before going to bed or leaving your home.

Consider alternatives to burning candles. Flameless or LED candles can provide the ambiance, while the aroma comes from a candle warmer, an essential oil diffuser, or a simmering pot of spices. As you enjoy the holidays with friends and family, let the scent of pine, cinnamon or pumpkin spice set your celebration mood.



4 Keys to Holiday Toy Safety

- ✓ For children under 3, avoid toys with small parts, which can cause choking.
- ✓ Do not allow children under 8 to play with un-inflated balloons or balloon pieces. They can present an aspiration/suffocation hazard.
- ✓ For children under 8, avoid toys with sharp edges and electric toys with heating parts.
- ✓ Look for labels with age and safety advice.

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
CPSC hotline: 800-638-2772 and 800-638-8270 (TTY)

This alert was produced by CPSC's Neighborhood Safety Network program. Sign up to receive free NSN safety alerts and posters at www.cpsc.gov



Image Source: Pixabay

Are Granite Countertops a Source of Radon in My Home?

Written by Leigh Anne Aaron, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Morgan and Oconee Counties

Recently, my husband and I began renovating our kitchen. We have been shopping around for new countertops and are considering granite ones. This got me thinking about the likelihood of the presence of radon in granite countertops, so I did a little digging to see what the probability is. Here's what I found.

Granite is a natural mineral formed by the earth's geological processes. It is quarried and processed to produce commercial products such as countertops. It is possible for any granite sample to contain varying concentrations of uranium that can produce radon gas, a source of alpha and beta particles and gamma rays. Some types of granite used for countertops may contribute variably to indoor radon levels. However, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), sufficient data does not exist to conclude that the types of granite commonly used in countertops are significantly increasing indoor radon levels.

Consider where granite countertops are typically installed – in kitchens and bathrooms. These two rooms are normally some of the most well-ventilated rooms in your home. The small amount of radon coming from granite countertops is very likely to be safely dispersed in the air. Granite is also less porous than other substances, which means less radon is likely to be released.

The EPA estimates that radon from soil underneath a house contributes to nearly 70% of the radon level inside a home. A granite countertop may increase indoor radon, but it is a very small percentage of the total indoor radon level. Whether or not you have granite in your home, the EPA recommends testing the total indoor radon level, and if necessary taking steps to ensure your home is safe.



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Testing the air in your home is all you generally need to do; however, it is possible to purchase a radon test kit specifically for countertops. Make sure the kit is designed specifically for testing granite countertops. A standard short-term radon test kit, whether laying on the counter or placed under a bowl, will not give an accurate measure of radon emitted from the granite.



(Image Source: UGA Radon Program)

Prolonged exposure to radon can lead to lung cancer, and radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. If radon exposure concerns you, test your home today.

Georgia residents can get a test kit from select UGA County Extension Offices, or order a test kit online at radon.uga.edu. If you reside in another state, you can find your state radon contact <https://www.epa.gov/radon>. If your home has a radon level of 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L) of air or greater, you should take steps to fix your home and reduce the radon level.

**Testing is simple to do
and can save your life and the life of a loved one.**

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Nicole Walters, FACS Agent, UGA Extension—Monroe County

Store ornaments in plastic cups. Packing up your holiday ornaments? Consider placing fragile ones in plastic cups to keep them organized and safe while in storage.



(Image Source: Pixabay)



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Replace gift tags for holiday or Valentine gifts with photos. Who doesn't love a nice photo? Snap a photo of a sweet moment with your friend or family member, have it printed, and place it on their gift.

Cool down hot drinks with frozen whipped cream treats. Use a cookie cutter to shape whipped cream and place it in the freezer. Not only will these treats cool your drink, but it will add a festive touch.



(Image Source: Pixabay)



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Reuse those left-over pumpkins as snowmen. Don't toss the pumpkins just yet. Paint them white, secure them on top of each other, add accessories and voila, you have a snowman perfect for the winter months!

Keep brown sugar moist by adding marshmallows and storing it in an air tight container. Brown sugar can dry out making it difficult to use. Adding marshmallows helps retain moisture and makes it easier to scoop for creating those holiday treats.



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Valentine's Gifts Beyond the Store

Written by Nicole Walters, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Monroe County

Valentine's Day is just around the corner. Soon after the December holidays end, stores will be bursting with flowers, candy, cards, and other trinkets to send to your special someone. Given the events of the last year, you may find your relationship could use a little more effort to express your appreciation for your mate or loved one. Listed below are some helpful tips to develop and maintain your relationship by focusing on your friendship with your mate. Consider these "gifts" before purchasing one this season.

Schedule meaningful and intentional time together

Highlight common interests and activities. Use these to create couple traditions and rituals

Offer your mate clear and positive messages

Work towards common goals and envision yourself as a "team"

Love your partner in the way they like to be loved

Offer a listening ear and be open to conversation

Value your differences and be accepting

Express caring actions, not crabby reactions



(Image Source: Pixabay)

When considering your relationship, keep the "Golden Rule" in mind. Treat and do for your partner as you would want them to treat or do for you. Maintaining a relationship during stressful times can be hard. Communicating with your mate while using the above tips will help to nurture your relationship. Maintaining a positive relationship involves balancing positive and negative interactions with your mate. In order to do this, consider the simple mathematical ratio of five positives for every one negative. This concept is not just relevant in the relationship with your partner, but can be applied to all types of relationships (parent-child, sibling, co-workers, and friends).



(Image Source: Pixabay)

Think of your relationship like a bank. A love bank. The more positive deposits you make, the more stable the relationship will be. Create positive deposits by showing appreciation for each other, being present and intentional with each other, and valuing each other. Limit withdrawals from your bank by limiting negative interactions. Below are some relationship building activities.


- ◆ Go on a walk together
- ◆ Cook a meal together
- ◆ Work on a home project together
- ◆ Play a game together
- ◆ Plan and go on a day trip together
- ◆ Spend time stargazing
- ◆ Send a random thoughtful text
- ◆ Try a new meal or restaurant together

For more relationship resources, visit www.elevatecouplesgeorgia.com.


Healthy Homes Resources

DANGER!


CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) POISONING




CAN'T BE
SEEN



CAN'T BE
SMELLED



CAN'T BE
HEARD



CAN BE
STOPPED

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that kills without warning. It claims the lives of hundreds of people every year and makes thousands more ill. Many household items including gas- and oil-burning furnaces, portable generators, and charcoal grills produce this poison gas. Following these important steps can keep your family safe.

CO DETECTORS


- Install battery-operated or battery back-up CO detectors near every sleeping area in your home.
- Check CO detectors regularly to be sure they are functioning properly.

OIL & GAS FURNACES

- Have your furnace inspected every year.

PORTABLE GENERATORS

- Never use a generator inside your home or garage, even if doors and windows are open.
- Only use generators outside, more than 20 feet away from your home, doors, and windows.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/co/copoisoningfactsheet.html>



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Environmental Health Toolkits from the CDC on winter weather, lead poisoning, asthma, radon, and more.

<https://tinyurl.com/53rdbsd7>

Energy KIDS lesson plans, puzzles, games, science fair experiments and other resources for educators from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

<https://www.eia.gov/kids/>

WaterSense for Kids from the EPA includes games and activity sheets to teach children about saving water. There are also lesson plans for educators.

<https://www.epa.gov/watersense>

Learning and teaching about the environment K-12 resources from EPA.

<https://www.epa.gov/students>

RadTown is a great way to learn more about radiation. A website for educators, and middle and high school students.

<https://www.epa.gov/radtown>

Kids Environment is a helpful resource about environment and health from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

<https://kids.niehs.nih.gov/>

Burnwise is an EPA program that provides helpful resources and information on wood smoke and health.

<https://www.epa.gov/burnwise>