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Nine New Ways to Share with Friends and Family

It's easier than you think to share both practical and just plain fun items with friends and family. Here are the tips and tools that can help



Sharing isn't just good for your conscience, it's also easy on your wallet, makes you feel closer to friends and family, and is environmentally friendly. Here are nine ways to share that you may not have thought of.

1. Kitchen gadgets. You don't *need* every cool kitchen toy out there, but you may *want*, say, an ice cream maker in July. Gather some like-minded locals and list who has what for a pantry-library sharing program. Now, who has that rice cooker?

2. Toys. To cut the clutter in your playroom and get your kids engaged, consider a toy-sharing site such as Baby Plays (<http://www.babyplays.com/>) or Toygaroo (<http://www.toygaroo.com/>); for a monthly fee, you can rent (carefully vetted and cleaned) toys for a period of up to 90 days, or à la carte (say, for a vacation). Or try organizing a (free) neighborhood plan like this on your own.

3. Family happenings. Sure, you can upload photos and share on sites like Kodak Gallery (<http://www.kodakgallery.com/>) or Shutterfly (<http://www.shutterfly.com/>), or download a free app like Instagram, with which you can create special effects and borders before sharing. Sites like Animoto (<http://www.animoto.com/>) let you create videos out of your photos, too. But even more interesting is the family journal feature on Cozi (<http://www.cozi.com/>) - it's kind of like a blog but anyone in the family can add to it. Then share journal updates via email or on a private family website.

4. Recipes. How did your friend make that roasted-veggie lasagna so delicious? If she's posted it at a free recipe-sharing site,

you can find it with ease - and share your own dishes. Try free sites like We Eatt (<http://www.weeatt.com/>) or My Recipe Circle (<http://www.myrecipecircle.com/>).

5. Home and garden tools. A power washer is nice to own, as is a snowblower. And what about that specialized power saw you needed for that one DIY project? Instead of buying and storing one-time or once-a-season items, gather trusted neighbors to buy and maintain a tool-sharing bank. Just be sure to hammer out details in advance, like where tools will be stored and how participants can request and access what they need, and how maintenance and repair will be handled.

6. Transportation. Pop out of town without the bother of car ownership by joining Zipcar (<http://www.zipcar.com/>). Its members share car rentals (available in many major metropolitan areas). Bike sharing is an even eco-friendlier option available in a growing number of communities (B-Cycle (<http://www.bcycle.com/>) is a good place to start; or just google “bike sharing”).

7. Books. Read an amazing novel all your friends should pick up? Post and share a review at Goodreads (<http://www.goodreads.com/>). Got paperbacks you no longer want cluttering up the bookshelf? List them at PaperBack Swap (<http://www.paperbackswap.com/>), and you’ll find someone to send them to - and get new reading material in return. If you’re an e-book reader, you can share some downloaded books via the Nook® or Kindle (just be careful of copyright laws; not all books you download can be shared legally).

8. Garden bounty. Did you have a bumper zucchini crop or are you overloaded with more tomatoes than you can eat? Swap with a friend who planted a crazy amount of basil or red leaf lettuce. Or, join a local CSA (community supported agriculture) program in your area (you can search for this at Local Harvest (<http://www.localharvest.org/>)), which you can also do with a friend.

9. Warehouse shopping. Buying in bulk can seem like such a great idea - but sometimes storage is an issue. Go big-box shopping with a friend and split up giant packages of paper towels or frozen hamburgers. You can also purchase spices in bulk – perfect for sharing, better prices, and fresher quality - at stores like Whole Foods (<http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/>) or Penzeys (<http://www.penzeys.com/>) Spices.

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