By Mary Beth Weisenberger

Holiday hallucinations

It's that time of year again. The fall décor gets pushed aside by all things red and green, the holiday music kicks in over PA systems everywhere, and the gift catalogs jam the mailboxes. And I, as I do every season, get overtaken by a rush of sentimentality and initiate grandiose plans to create lovely and personal gifts for everyone on my Christmas list.

Let's see. Will I make some aromatic homemade candles this year? Yes! I'll buy some scented oil and wax tomorrow. What about the pretty layered brownie mixes in quart jars, all tied with ribbon and a hand-stenciled recipe card? They'll be great gifts for the teachers. And as soon as I can, I need to cut and dry the perennials from my flowerbeds, so I can make beautiful wreaths and pressed flower arrangements for my sisters.

There's just one problem with all this: I am not what you would consider a domestic goddess. I rarely bake, unless you count Pillsbury Cinnamon Rolls on Sunday mornings. When my kids need something sewn, they know they have to call Grandma. I don't even own a sewing machine. And my attempts at anything craft-y usually end up in the garbage can. I was just not blessed with those skills. But still….

I can't stop myself. There's something uniquely motivational about the holiday season. All those home and garden shows touting the many ways you can decorate a home using only chunks of coal and pocket lint are enough to rouse my usually dormant homemaking genes from their deep sleep. The magazine covers shout at me to bake seven kinds of cookies and share them with my neighbors at a cookie swap.

I must cut real greens from a nearby woods to bring the authentic smell of Christmas to my home. And that nativity scene hand-carved out of soap doesn't look too tough to handle, does it? My children scatter when I start posing these questions and my husband suspects I've been

prematurely nipping into the eggnog. They try to talk me out of it, but it's too late. I am in a holiday planning frenzy and have already purchased yards of raffia ribbon and brown paper that I can hand stamp for gift wrap.

Now, I know in my mind that most of these projects will remain undone. It will get to be Dec. 23, and with the clock ticking away, I will resort to gift certificates and overnight deliveries from Amazon.com to round out the gift list. The raffia and quart jars will be stored in a basement cabinet, right next to last year's " 'Twas the Night Before Christmas" cross-stitch undertaking and the unfinished manger made entirely of twigs. But in my heart, I know I am creating something more: a genuine sense of anticipation and joy that comes from thinking about the ones I love and the many reasons I have to be thankful. And that's enough.

Except for maybe a pan or two of homemade fudge…..

Happy Holidays everyone!

MaryBeth Weisenburger is an award-winning humor columnist and lives in the country with her husband and two children who wisely just stay out of her way when she's getting ready for the holidays. Find out what else she's up to at www.marybethw.com.

The opinions stated are those of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect that of the newspaper.