

Turn a child into a magician. Find an inexpensive folding tray (or paint one that you already own) to serve as the magician's table; add a big scarf, to confound his audience; and then get as many little tricks and jokes from the novelty store as you can. If you include a top hat (from the party hat counter), the illusion will be complete and the child will be delighted.

Save, for a little girl, every bit of glitter, sequins, and unset stones and pearls that you can accumulate; dazzle her with the possibilities of making beautiful fashions at home. Take the trim from dresses, hats, and bags before you discard them; save one-of-a-kind earrings; and add as much as you can find of gilt and decoration from notion counters (fringe and tassels are wonderful). Include all these, plus the right glue and big needle and thread, with a bright red apron for the little girl to decorate, or a doll's evening coat, or a square of felt for a banner that will sparkle on her wall at night.

Set a little boy on the track of pirate treasure. If the weather at Christmas is anything short of deep snow, bury the treasure; otherwise, hide it above ground somewhere. Make as detailed a map as you can and present it at Christmas; have an actual treasure buried or hidden where the map shows it will be. Start with a metal candy or cookie box (or anything that will suggest a chest) and inside the box have gold-wrapped candy coins, or a hundred shiny pennies, or bunches of glass jewels and pearls and rhinestones pried out from broken jewelry — or all of these.

Give a city child a "green thumb" collection. There are all sorts of things in the stores today that grow almost magically fast: little pieces of log that sprout quickly, beans that grow beanstalks inches in days, flowers that bloom overnight in water, "stones" that unfurl in glass jars in all the prettiest colors. For the city child especially (but also for any child in the very middle of winter) all this sprouting and blooming is the greatest fun, and happens quickly enough to suit the most impatient little gardener. It would be nice, too, to include some narcissus bulbs in stones in a bowl. This will convince him there are ordinary flowers that grow too, as well as chemical miracles. With whatever you select, however, include a metal watering can, the proper pots and jars, and perhaps some gardener's gloves.