

Taste of Home®

Holiday

Carefree Christmas

50+ Easy Recipes for Merry Memories



Taste of Home

Simple Pleasures This Season!

Christmas brings a wonderfully exciting season, with much to celebrate. Now, thanks to the recipes in Taste of Home Holiday: Carefree Christmas, you can cook with confidence and enjoy even more time with those you love.

Here you will find a **traditional Christmas** dinner, 12 **slow-cooked** recipes to keep the season bright (on even the busiest day), and smart **brunch dishes** that prep the night before.

Plan an **easygoing lunch** with friends and a cute craft project for the kids. Everyone will be in the spirit when they see the children's gingerbread creations!

A taste-tempting cookie assortment is easier than you think...when you enlist the help of fellow holiday bakers. Whether you're hosting your first **cookie exchange** or need a fresh idea for this year's gathering, our irresistibly sweet treats and helpful tips have got you covered.

So go ahead, relax and enjoy this holiday season. Make this Christmas not only memorable, but blissfully carefree!



A TASTE OF HOME/READER'S DIGEST BOOK

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Make-Ahead Eggnog



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A Merry Meat & Potatoes Menu

If you're hosting a sit-down holiday dinner, you don't have to spend hours preparing gourmet foods. Instead, give everyday ingredients an elegant spin.

With a sweet-and-savory rub and a rich wine sauce, Peppercorn Beef Top Loin Roast is an appealing entree that takes mere minutes to prepare before being baked.

Tried-and-true recipes like Garlic Baby Potatoes and Jarlsberg Popovers are natural complements to the meaty main course. For an innovative vegetable, try Zesty Broccolini.



Countdown to Christmas Dinner

A Few Weeks Before:

- Prepare two grocery lists—one for nonperishable items to purchase now and one for perishable items to purchase a few days before Christmas.
- Order a 4-pound boneless beef top loin roast.
- Bake the Jarlsberg Popovers. Cool; place in a resealable plastic bag and freeze.

Two to Three Days Before:

- Buy remaining grocery items, including the top loin roast.

The Day Before:

- Set the table.
- Make the filling for Honey-Nut Endive Appetizers; cover and chill.
- Combine the first seven ingredients for the Garlic Baby Potatoes; place in a covered container and keep at room temperature.
- For Coconut Cranberry Shortcakes, bake the cakes; let cool. Store in an airtight container at room temperature. Make the cranberry sauce; cover and chill.
- Coarsely chop the onions for Onion-

Topped Cheese Spread. Refrigerate in an airtight container.

Prepare the wine sauce for Peppercorn Beef Top Loin Roast; cover and chill.

Christmas Day:

- An hour before guests arrive, assemble Honey-Nut Endive Appetizers. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate.
- Reheat the caramelized onions for Onion-Topped Cheese Spread. Pour over cream cheese and serve with crackers.
- For the Peppercorn Beef Top Loin Roast, trim fat and season roast with rub; bake as directed. Let stand for 15 minutes before slicing; reheat the wine sauce.
- Halve potatoes and toss with olive oil mixture; bake.
- Prepare the Zesty Broccolini and Creamed Mushrooms.
- While the roast is standing, reheat frozen popovers on a baking sheet in a 400° oven for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Assemble the Citrus Scallop Salad and serve it as a first course.
- For dessert, reheat the cranberry sauce, split the shortcakes in half horizontally and garnish.

Honey-Nut Endive Appetizers

Sweet and savory flavors combine in this elegant appetizer. It's a nice, light option to serve before a big meal.

—**CARMEL GILLOGLY** FORT MILL, SC

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled goat cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pine nuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped walnuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup golden raisins
- 4 bacon strips, cooked and crumbled
- 2 heads Belgian endive, separated into leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey

In a small bowl, combine the first six ingredients. Spoon into endive leaves. Drizzle honey over cheese mixture. Serve immediately.

YIELD: 1 dozen.



Peppercorn Beef Top Loin Roast

A red wine sauce complements the peppery brown sugar rub on the roast in this inviting entree from our home economists. You can't go wrong with this down-home dish!

**1 boneless beef top loin roast
(4 pounds)**

½ cup packed brown sugar

**3 tablespoons whole
peppercorns, crushed**

4 garlic cloves, minced

¾ teaspoon salt

1 large onion, finely chopped

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 tablespoons tomato paste

2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

1½ cups port wine

1½ cups dry red wine

1. Trim fat from roast. In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar, peppercorns, garlic and salt. Rub over meat. Place in a shallow roasting pan.

2. Bake at 325° for 1 to 1½ hours or until meat reaches desired doneness (for medium-rare, a meat thermometer should read 145°; medium, 160°; well-

done, 170°). Let stand for 15 minutes before slicing.

3. Meanwhile, in a large saucepan, saute onion in oil until tender. Stir in tomato paste and Worcestershire sauce until blended. Add wines. Bring to a boil; cook until liquid is reduced to about 1½ cups. Serve with roast.

YIELD: 10 servings (1½ cups sauce).

Jarlsberg Popovers

When hosting holiday dinners, why not serve our Test Kitchen's cheesy popovers instead of ordinary dinner rolls? They can be made ahead and reheated just before serving.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

4½ teaspoons shortening

3 egg whites

2 eggs

1½ cups milk

½ cup heavy whipping cream

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon sugar

¾ teaspoon salt

¾ teaspoon white pepper

4 ounces Jarlsberg cheese, shredded

1. Using ½ teaspoon shortening for each cup, grease the bottom and sides of nine popover cups; set aside.

2. In a small bowl, beat egg whites and eggs; beat in milk and cream. Add the flour, sugar, salt and pepper; beat until smooth (do not overbeat). Fold in cheese. Fill prepared cups two-thirds full with batter. Fill empty cups two-thirds full with water.

3. Bake at 450° for 15 minutes. Reduce heat to 350° (do not open door). Bake 15 minutes longer or until deep golden brown (do not underbake). Immediately cut a slit in the top of each popover to allow steam to escape.

YIELD: 9 servings.

Citrus Scallop Salad

With scallops, pears and citrus fruits, this deliciously different salad is an outstanding first course. It also makes a great main-dish salad for luncheons.

—**SARAH GEARY** OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

- 2 packages (5 ounces each) spring mix salad greens**
- 1 jar (24 ounces) refrigerated citrus salad**
- 2 medium red pears, thinly sliced**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup all-purpose flour**
- 16 sea scallops**
- 2 tablespoons butter**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup balsamic vinaigrette**

1. Divide salad greens among eight plates. Drain citrus salad, reserving syrup. Arrange citrus fruit on salads. In a small bowl, combine pear slices and reserved syrup. Using a slotted spoon, remove pears and arrange on salads. Discard syrup.

2. Place flour in a shallow bowl. Roll scallops in flour. In a large skillet, heat butter and oil over medium heat. Add scallops; cook for 2 minutes on each side or until scallops are firm and opaque. Top each salad with scallops. Drizzle with vinaigrette.

YIELD: 8 servings.



Zesty Broccolini

Garlic, gingerroot and red pepper flakes give this side dish from our Test Kitchen a little kick. The long, elegant spears are so attractive on a dinner plate.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 3 packages (6 ounces each) Broccolini or 18 ounces broccoli spears**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- ½ teaspoon grated fresh gingerroot**
- 3 tablespoons olive oil**
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes**

1. Place Broccolini and salt in a large skillet; cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 5-7 minutes or until tender. Drain well. Remove and keep warm.

2. In the same skillet, saute garlic and ginger in oil until tender. Add Broccolini and pepper flakes; saute for 1-2 minutes or until heated through.

YIELD: 6 servings.

BROCCOLINI BASICS

Broccolini is the trademarked name of the hybrid vegetable that's a cross between broccoli and Chinese kale. It's also called baby broccoli.

The long, slender stalks are topped with small buds that resemble a miniature broccoli head. The flavor is slightly sweet with a subtle peppery taste.

Broccolini is rich in vitamins A and C, iron, fiber and potassium.

Garlic Baby Potatoes

Our home economists suggest this recipe when you need a classic potato dish that pairs well with a variety of meaty entrees. It's assembled in a snap, then roasts in the oven for an aromatic side dish.

- 6 tablespoons olive oil**
- 12 garlic cloves, minced**
- ¼ cup minced fresh oregano**
- 4½ teaspoons balsamic vinegar**
- 3 teaspoons kosher salt**
- 1½ teaspoons paprika**

- ¾ teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning**
- 24 small red or fingerling potatoes, halved**

1. In a large bowl, combine the first seven ingredients. Add potatoes; toss to coat. Transfer potatoes to a greased 9-in.

square baking pan; drizzle with garlic mixture. Cover and bake at 350° for 40 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. Uncover, bake 10-20 minutes longer or until potatoes are tender.

YIELD: 8 servings.

Coconut Cranberry Shortcakes

Our Test Kitchen's twist on strawberry shortcake features a tender coconut-flavored cake and a slightly tart cranberry sauce.

It's a lovely dessert for the Christmas season.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 3 cups all-purpose flour**
- ½ cup sugar**
- 4 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 2 cups coconut milk**

TOPPING

- 1 package (12 ounces) fresh or frozen cranberries**
- 1 cup sugar**
- ½ cup coconut milk**
- ½ cup cranberry juice**
- Whipped cream, flaked coconut and fresh mint leaves, optional**

1. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Stir in coconut milk just until moistened. Drop by ⅓ cupfuls 1 in. apart onto a greased baking sheet. Bake at 400° for 15-20 minutes or until lightly browned.

2. For topping, in a large saucepan, combine the cranberries, sugar, coconut milk and cranberry juice. Cook over medium heat until the berries pop, about 15 minutes. Split warm shortcakes in half horizontally. Spoon topping over bottoms and tops of shortcakes. Garnish with whipped cream, coconut and mint if desired.

YIELD: 9 servings.



Onion-Topped Cheese Spread

I love to cook all kinds of dishes, but I'm known for my appetizers. In this robust spread, a cream cheese base is topped with caramelized onions. Cooking the onions in sugar mellows the flavor so they aren't overpowering.

—CAROL BESS WHITE PORTLAND, OR

**2½ pounds large sweet onions,
coarsely chopped**

1½ teaspoons sugar

½ teaspoon salt

2 bay leaves

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons butter

**2 tablespoons white wine or
chicken broth**

**2 packages (8 ounces each) cream
cheese, softened**
Assorted crackers

1. In a large skillet, cook the onions, sugar, salt and bay leaves in oil and butter over medium heat for 45-50 minutes or until onions are golden brown, stirring frequently.

2. Add wine, stirring to loosen browned bits from pan. Cook until wine is reduced by half. Remove and discard bay leaves. Cool slightly. Pour over cream cheese. Serve with crackers.

YIELD: 2 cups spread (1⅔ cups topping).

Creamed Mushrooms

If you're looking for a way to break from the usual Christmas sides, look no further. Fresh mushrooms are sauteed to tender perfection, then accompanied by a rich, creamy sauce. It's one dish that's full of comforting flavor.

—LOIS TELLONI LORAIN, OH

1 medium onion, sliced

3 tablespoons butter

1 pound sliced fresh mushrooms

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

1 teaspoon paprika

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup (8 ounces) sour cream

2 tablespoons milk

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

1. In a large skillet, saute onion in butter until tender. Stir in the mushrooms, parsley, paprika and salt. Cook over medium heat for 10 minutes or until tender. Combine the sour cream, milk and flour. Gradually stir into mushroom mixture; heat through.

YIELD: 6 servings.



Luminous Lantern Centerpiece

Bring the light of the Christmas season to your table with lanterns and candles.

Purchase lanterns in two different sizes in a color that coordinates with your dishes.

Remember that an odd number will look more appealing.

Place pillar candles in the large lanterns and votive candles in the small ones.

If desired, put a candle wreath inside each lantern or simply add small beads as shown. Set a runner down the length of your table. For added color, you can place some Christmas greens in the center. Arrange the lanterns on top of the greens.

For an even more glorious glow, put a small, votive-filled clear glass container at each place setting. Wrap each candle holder with a ribbon and a coordinating strand of tiny beads.



Slow Cooker *Seasonal Fare*

It's the most wonderful time of the year, but it's also one of the busiest. Why spend more time than necessary working in the kitchen when you can let your slow cooker do the work?

Feast on an array of home-style favorites all prepared with a set-it-and-forget-it attitude. With your slow cooker at your side and a tiny bit of preparation, you will not only free up space in the oven, but you'll find that it's a snap to set a memorable meal on the table with less effort than imagined.

After all, dishes like moist and tender Glazed Rosemary Pork Roast and Applesauce Sweet Potatoes serve up all the comforting flavors of a traditional Christmas dinner, but without all the fuss. Simply turn the pages for even more scrumptious ideas that make the most of your time, your holiday and your all-time favorite kitchen appliance!



Applesauce Sweet Potatoes

During the holidays, using my slow cooker not only frees up oven space, but time, too! Sweet potatoes are a must on our family menu, and this no-fuss version has everyone thinking I spent hours in the kitchen.

—PAMELA ALLEN MARYSVILLE, OH

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced**
- 1½ cups unsweetened applesauce**
- ½ cup packed brown sugar**
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted**
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ½ cup chopped glazed pecans, optional**

Place sweet potatoes in a 4-qt. slow cooker. Combine the applesauce, brown sugar, butter and cinnamon; pour over sweet potatoes. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours or until potatoes are tender. Sprinkle with pecans if desired. Serve with a slotted spoon.

YIELD: 8 servings.

Glazed Rosemary Pork Roast

For a change of pace, I'll serve this special pork roast at holiday gatherings. It's a welcome break from traditional turkey or ham, and when dressed with an herb-infused glaze featuring rosemary, thyme and sage, its flavor is unbeatable.

—JOYCE MANIER BEECH GROVE, IN

- 1 boneless whole pork loin roast (3 pounds)**
- 1 tablespoon butter**
- 1 teaspoon olive oil**
- 1 large onion, sliced**
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary**
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme**
- 1 teaspoon rubbed sage**
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel**

- ½ teaspoon pepper**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ cup apricot jam**
- ½ cup orange juice**
- 1 bay leaf**

1. Cut roast in half. In a large skillet, brown roast in butter and oil on all sides. Transfer to a 4- or 5-qt. slow cooker.

2. Add onion to the same skillet; cook and stir until tender. Stir in the brown sugar, herbs, orange peel, pepper and salt. Spread over pork. Combine jam and orange juice; pour over top. Add bay leaf.

3. Cover and cook on low for 4 hours or until a meat thermometer reads 160°.

YIELD: 8 servings.

Make-Ahead Eggnog

Homemade eggnog is a tradition in many families during the holiday season. Our slow cooker version shaves off calories and time spent preparing it.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 6 cups whole milk**
- 1 cup egg substitute**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar**
- 2 teaspoons rum extract**
- 1½ teaspoons pumpkin pie spice**
- French vanilla whipped topping, optional**
- Additional pumpkin pie spice**

In a 3-qt. slow cooker, combine first five ingredients. Cover and cook on low for 2-3 hours or until heated through. Serve eggnog in mugs; dollop with whipped topping and sprinkle with additional pumpkin pie spice if desired.

YIELD: 9 servings ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup each).



USE YOUR NOGGIN: NEW USES FOR EGGNOG

If you think eggnog is just for sipping, think again! While many prefer their eggnog “straight up,” some aficionados take a more inventive approach to enjoying the rich and creamy beverage.

- Use eggnog in place of milk when making French toast.
- Replace your usual coffee creamer with a few tablespoons of eggnog or make an eggnog latte.
- Use it to make thick and frosty homemade ice cream.
- Replace the milk in your breakfast smoothie with eggnog for added flavor and extra creaminess.

Old-Fashioned Tapioca

My family loves old-fashioned tapioca, but I don't always have the time to make it. That's why I developed this simple recipe that allows us to enjoy the comforting dessert more often.

—RUTH PETERS BEL AIR, MD

- 8 cups 2% milk**
- 1 cup pearl tapioca**
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar**
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt**
- 4 eggs**
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract**
- Sliced fresh strawberries and whipped cream, optional**

- 1.** In a 4- to 5-qt. slow cooker, combine the milk, tapioca, sugar and salt. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours.
- 2.** In a large bowl, beat the eggs; stir in a small amount of hot tapioca mixture. Return all to the slow cooker, stirring to combine. Cover and cook 30 minutes longer or until a thermometer reads 160°. Stir in vanilla.

- 3.** Serve with strawberries and whipped cream if desired.
- YIELD:** 18 servings.

Slow-Cooker Lasagna

My friend first made this recipe using a store-bought marinara sauce. I created a homemade sauce, and it has been a big hit whenever I serve it.

—SHERI OGANOWSKI DAYTON, OH

- 1 pound ground turkey**
- 1 pound bulk Italian sausage**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped sweet onion**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 3 cans (15 ounces each) tomato sauce**
- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes, undrained**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar**
- 3 tablespoons dried parsley flakes, divided**
- 2 teaspoons dried basil**
- 3 teaspoons dried oregano, divided**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, divided**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry red wine or beef broth**
- 3 cups (12 ounces) shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese**
- 2½ cups ricotta cheese.**
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese**
- 1 package (9 ounces) no-cook lasagna noodles**

- 1.** In a Dutch oven, cook the turkey, sausage, onion and garlic over medium heat until meat is no longer pink; drain. Stir in the tomato sauce, crushed tomatoes, sugar, 2 tablespoons parsley, basil, 2 teaspoons oregano and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 45 minutes. Add wine; cook 15 minutes longer.
 - 2.** Meanwhile, in a large bowl, combine the cheeses and the remaining parsley, oregano and salt.
 - 3.** Spread $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups meat mixture into a 6-qt. slow cooker. Arrange five noodles over sauce, breaking to fit if necessary. Spread $1\frac{1}{3}$ cups of cheese mixture over noodles. Repeat layers twice. Top with remaining meat mixture.
 - 4.** Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours or until noodles are tender.
- YIELD:** 10 Servings

SLOW COOKER SECRETS

Unless the recipe instructs you to stir in or add ingredients, refrain from lifting the lid while the slow cooker is cooking. Every time you lift the lid, steam is lost and you add 15 to 30 minutes of cooking time.

Spiced Split Pea Soup

A hint of curry adds the perfect amount of kick to this family-pleasing soup. Just assemble the ingredients in the slow cooker, then go about your day while it simmers.

—SUE MOHRE MT. GILEAD, OH

- 4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth**
- 1 cup dried green split peas**
- 2 medium potatoes, chopped**
- 2 medium carrots, halved and thinly sliced**
- 1 medium onion, chopped**
- 1 celery rib, thinly sliced**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 3 bay leaves**
- 4 teaspoons curry powder**
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- ½ teaspoon coarsely ground pepper**
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander**
- 1 can (28 ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained**

1. In a 4-qt. slow cooker combine the first 12 items.

2. Cover and cook on low for 7-9 hours or until peas are tender. Add tomatoes; heat through. Discard bay leaves.

YIELD: 10 servings (2½ quarts).



Sweet & Sour Turkey Meatballs

Pomegranates are my favorite winter fruit, so I try to enjoy them in many different ways. Here is one of my favorite recipes that uses the juice to flavor tender meatballs.

—CHRISTINE WENDLAND BROWNS MILLS, NJ

- 4 thick-sliced peppered bacon strips**
- 1 egg, beaten**
- ½ cup seasoned bread crumbs**
- 3 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon white pepper**
- 2 pounds ground turkey**
- 1 jar (18 ounces) apricot preserves**
- 1 can (14½ ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained**
- 1 bottle (8 ounces) taco sauce**
- ½ cup pomegranate juice**

- 1.** Place bacon in a food processor; cover and process until finely chopped. In a large bowl, combine the egg, bread crumbs, cilantro, salt and pepper. Crumble turkey and bacon over mixture and mix well. Shape into 1-in. balls.
- 2.** Place in two ungreased 15-in. x 10-in. x 1-in. baking pans. Bake at 400° for 8-10 minutes or until a thermometer reads 165° and juices run clear.

- 3.** In a 4-qt. slow cooker, combine the preserves, tomatoes, taco sauce and juice. Stir in meatballs. Cover and cook on high for 2-3 hours or until heated through.
- YIELD:** about 5½ dozen.

Butternut Squash with Whole Grain Pilaf

Fresh thyme really shines in this hearty slow-cooked side dish featuring tender butternut squash, nutritious whole grain pilaf and vitamin-packed baby spinach.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 1 cup Kashi whole grain pilaf**
- 1 medium butternut squash (about 3 pounds), cut into ½-inch cubes**
- 1 can (14½ ounces) vegetable broth**
- 1 medium onion, chopped**
- ½ cup water**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme or ½ teaspoon dried thyme**
- ½ teaspoon salt**

- ¼ teaspoon pepper**
- 1 package (6 ounces) fresh baby spinach**

Place pilaf in a 4-qt. slow cooker. In a large bowl, combine the squash, broth, onion, water, garlic, thyme, salt and pepper; add to slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours or until pilaf is tender, adding spinach during the last 30 minutes of cooking.

YIELD: 12 servings (¾ cup each).

SQUASH STORAGE TIPS

The most common varieties of winter squash are butternut, acorn, hubbard, spaghetti and turban. Look for squash that feel heavy for their size and have hard, deep-colored rinds free of blemishes. Unwashed winter squash can be stored in a dry, cool, well-ventilated place for up to 1 month.

Moist Corn Spoon Bread

One bite and you'll want to pair this comforting side dish with all your holiday meals! It's more moist than traditional corn pudding made in the oven, plus the cream cheese is a nice addition.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 1 cup 2% milk**
- ½ cup egg substitute**
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- ¼ teaspoon pepper**
- 2 cups frozen corn**
- 1 can (14½ ounces) cream-style corn**
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal**
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Monterey Jack cheese**
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced**

1. In a bowl, beat the cream cheese and the sugar until smooth. Gradually beat in the milk. Gently beat in the egg substitute, butter, salt, cayenne and pepper until blended. Stir in the remaining ingredients.

2. Pour into a greased 3-qt. slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean.

YIELD: 8 servings.



Crab & Artichoke Dip

Whenever my girlfriends and I got together, this rich and creamy dip always accompanied our favorite bottle of wine. Because the recipe relies on the convenience of a slow cooker, it's a great addition to holiday gatherings, too!

—CONNIE MCKINNEY MARSHALL, MO

- 3 cups fresh baby spinach**
- 1 can (14 ounces) water-packed artichoke hearts, rinsed, drained and chopped**
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened**
- 2 cups (8 ounces) shredded Havarti cheese**

- 1 can (6 ounces) lump crabmeat, drained**
- ½ cup sour cream**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**
- Assorted crackers**

1. In a large saucepan, bring ½ in. of water to a boil. Add spinach; cover and boil for 3-5 minutes or until wilted. Drain.

2. In a 1½-qt. slow cooker, combine the artichokes, cheeses, crabmeat, sour cream, salt, pepper and spinach. Cover and cook on low for 2-3 hours or until cheese is melted. Serve with crackers.

YIELD: 3½ cups.

Garlic & Herb Mashed Potatoes

Can you keep a secret? Cream cheese is the “secret ingredient” in these comforting spuds. Simply mix, mash and let them simmer in the slow cooker.

—FRIEDA BLIESNER MCALLEN, TX

- 4 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes (about 12 medium), peeled and cubed**
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened and cubed**
- 1 cup (8 ounces) sour cream**
- ½ cup butter, cubed**
- ½ cup heavy whipping cream**
- 3 tablespoons minced chives**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley**
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ teaspoon pepper**

1. Place potatoes in a Dutch oven and cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and cook for 10-15 minutes or until tender. Drain. Mash potatoes with cream cheese, sour cream, butter and cream. Stir in the remaining ingredients.

2. Transfer to a greased 3- or 4-qt. slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 2-3 hours or until heated through.

YIELD: 10 servings.

LEFTOVER MAKEOVER

It's hard to imagine there would be any Garlic & Herb Mashed Potatoes left over, but if there are, freeze the excess in muffin cups. Once they're frozen, remove the single servings and store in resealable plastic freezer bags. During the week, pull out as many servings as you need and reheat them in the microwave.

Beef Osso Bucco

Treat holiday guests to elegant comfort food at its best. Our hearty beef entree boasts a thick, savory sauce complemented by the addition of gremolata, a chopped herb condiment made of lemon zest, garlic and parsley.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- ½ cup all-purpose flour**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**
- ¾ teaspoon salt, divided**
- 6 beef shanks (14 ounces each)**
- 2 tablespoons butter**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- ½ cup white wine or beef broth**
- 1 can (14½ ounces) diced tomatoes, undrained**
- 1½ cups beef broth**
- 2 medium carrots, chopped**
- 1 medium onion, chopped**
- 1 celery rib, sliced**
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme**
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano**
- 2 bay leaves**
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch**
- ¼ cup cold water**

GREMOLATA

- ½ cup minced fresh parsley**
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon peel**
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**

1. In a large resealable plastic bag, combine the flour, pepper and ½ teaspoon salt. Add beef, a few pieces at a time, and shake to coat.

2. In a large skillet, brown beef in butter and oil. Transfer meat and drippings to a 6-qt. slow cooker. Add wine to skillet, stirring to loosen browned bits from pan; pour over meat. Add the tomatoes, broth, carrots, onion, celery, thyme, oregano, bay leaves and remaining salt.

3. Cover and cook on low for 7-9 hours or until meat is tender. Discard bay leaves.

4. Skim fat from cooking juices; transfer juices to a large saucepan. Bring to a boil. Combine cornstarch and water until smooth; gradually stir into the pan. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened.

5. In a small bowl, combine the gremolata ingredients. Serve beef with gremolata and sauce.

YIELD: 6 servings



Make Ahead Yuletide Brunch

Planning time to get together with a few friends, relatives or neighbors during the Christmas season can be a scheduling challenge.

Between office parties, school plays, open houses and sit-down dinners, your evenings are likely full. So think about hosting a late-morning brunch!

You don't need to get up at the crack of dawn to start cooking. The recipes in this chapter all have make-ahead elements to them.

The batter for Overnight Yeast Pancakes with Blueberry Syrup is made the night before. Just pour onto the griddle in the morning.

Both the Strawberry Citrus Slushies and Berries in Yogurt Cream can be prepared a day in advance and assembled before serving.

Last-minute fuss stays to a minimum with these do-ahead dishes!



Overnight Yeast Pancakes with Blueberry Syrup

Nothing says “good morning” like these fluffy pancakes topped with a fruity homemade syrup. When I don’t have the time to make the syrup, I’ll sprinkle a few blueberries over the batter when I spoon it onto the griddle.

—KATIE WOLLGAST FLORISSANT, MO

- 1 package ($\frac{1}{4}$ ounce) active dry yeast**
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups warm buttermilk (110° to 115°)**
- 1 cup all-purpose flour**
- 1 cup whole wheat flour**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar**
- 3 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt**
- 2 eggs**
- 2 tablespoons canola oil**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**

SYRUP

- 1 cup fresh or frozen unsweetened blueberries**

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup maple syrup**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch**
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt**

- 1.** In a small bowl, dissolve the yeast in buttermilk; let stand for 5 minutes.
- 2.** Meanwhile, in a large bowl, combine the flours, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Whisk the eggs, oil and vanilla; stir into dry ingredients just until moistened. Stir in yeast mixture. Cover

and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.

3. To make pancakes, pour batter by $\frac{1}{4}$ cupfuls onto a hot griddle coated with cooking spray; turn when bubbles form on top of pancakes. Cook until second side is golden brown.

4. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, combine the blueberries, water, syrup, sugar, cornstarch and salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 5-7 minutes or until blueberries pop.

YIELD: 18 pancakes (1 cup syrup).

Berries in Yogurt Cream

Yogurt, cream, brown sugar and fresh fruit are all you need to wake up your taste buds on mornings you’d rather sleep in. Save time by having guests assemble their own parfaits.

—MICHELLE STILLMAN LANCASTER, PA

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups (12 ounces) plain yogurt**
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups heavy whipping cream**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed brown sugar**
- 5 cups assorted berries**

- 1.** Place yogurt in a large bowl; whisk in cream. Sprinkle with brown sugar but do not stir. Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours.

2. Just before serving, stir cream mixture. Divide among 10 dessert dishes. Top with berries.

YIELD: 10 servings.

Butterscotch Maple Scones

Loaded with rich butterscotch flavor, these tempting scones could also be dessert. Wedges look so pretty drizzled with the maple glaze.

—LISA VARNER CHARLESTON, SC

- 1½ cups quick-cooking oats
- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup cold butter
- ¾ cup maple syrup
- ¾ cup 2% milk
- ¾ cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup butterscotch chips

GLAZE

- ½ cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Spread oats and walnuts on a baking sheet. Bake at 375° for 8 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring occasionally. Remove to wire racks to cool.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and oat mixture. Cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
3. In a small bowl, whisk the maple syrup, milk, cream, egg and vanilla; stir into crumb mixture just until moistened. (Dough will be soft.) Stir in chips.
4. Transfer dough to a greased baking sheet. Pat into a 7-in. circle. Cut into eight wedges, but do not separate. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake at 400° for 25-30 minutes or until golden brown.
5. Meanwhile, combine glaze ingredients; drizzle over scones. Serve warm.

YIELD: 8 scones.



Coconut Waffles

So tender they almost melt in your mouth, these waffles have a hint of coconut flavor in every bite. We like to top the golden stack with whipped cream and a drizzle of chocolate sauce for an indulgent morning treat!

—KATHY ANGELEY TUCSON, AZ

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- Dash salt
- 3 eggs
- 1 can (13.66 ounces) coconut milk
- 6 tablespoons butter, melted
- ⅛ teaspoon coconut extract
- ¾ cup flaked coconut
- Chocolate ice cream topping and whipped cream

1. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. In another bowl, whisk the eggs, coconut milk, butter and extract. Stir into dry ingredients just until moistened. Fold in coconut.

2. Bake in a preheated waffle iron according to manufacturer's directions until golden brown. Serve desired amount of waffles with whipped cream and chocolate topping.

3. To freeze waffles, arrange in a single layer on baking sheets. Freeze overnight or until firm. Transfer to a resealable plastic freezer bag. Waffles may be frozen for up to 2 months.

YIELD: 8 waffles.

TO USE FROZEN WAFFLES: *Reheat waffles in a toaster. Serve with chocolate topping and whipped cream.*

Strawberry Citrus Slushies

Ordinary juice is just fine for everyday breakfasts. But when hosting a holiday brunch, our Test Kitchen staff members suggest you serve something a little more special, such as this pretty and refreshing beverage.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

STRAWBERRY PUREE

- ½ cup frozen unsweetened sliced strawberries, thawed
- 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons water

CITRUS SLUSH

- ¾ cup sugar
- ¾ cup water
- ¾ cup lemon juice
- ¾ cup orange juice
- 4½ cups ice cubes

1. Place the strawberries, confectioners' sugar and water in a blender. Cover and process until blended; transfer to a small bowl. Cover and chill until serving.

2. In a small saucepan, bring the sugar and water to a boil. Cook and stir until sugar is dissolved. Remove from the heat; cool to room temperature.

3. Just before serving, place the lemon juice, orange juice, ice cubes and sugar syrup in a blender. Cover and process until it reaches a slushy consistency. Divide strawberry puree among four chilled glasses. Top with citrus slush. Serve immediately.

YIELD: 5 servings.



Bananas Foster Baked French Toast

Mmm...bananas foster for breakfast!

This yummy baked French toast serves up all the taste of the spectacular dessert in fine fashion.

—L. G. NASSON QUINCY, MA

- 3 large bananas, sliced**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, melted**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy whipping cream**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground allspice**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped pecans, optional**
- 12 slices egg bread**
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups 2% milk**
- 3 eggs**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**

1. In a large bowl, combine the bananas, brown sugar, butter, cream, cinnamon, allspice and pecans if desired. Transfer to an ungreased 13-in. x 9-in. baking dish. Arrange bread over banana mixture. Place the milk, eggs, sugar and vanilla in a blender; cover and process until smooth. Pour over the bread. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.

2. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Bake, uncovered, at 375° for 35-40 minutes or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

YIELD: 6 servings.



Corned Beef & Cranberry Hash

The make-ahead convenience of this deliciously different hash makes it a standby during the busy holiday season. Fresh cranberries bring sweet-tart flavor to a traditional breakfast dish.

—CAROLYN COPE ALLSTON, MD

- 2 cups cubed red potatoes**
- 2 cups cubed cooked corned beef**
- ½ cup fresh or frozen cranberries, thawed and chopped**
- ½ cup chopped onion**
- ½ cup chicken broth**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley**
- 1 tablespoon stone-ground mustard**
- 1 small garlic clove, minced**
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**

- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg**
- 5 tablespoons butter, cubed**

1. Place the potatoes in a small saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat; cover and cook for 10-15 minutes or until tender. Drain.

2. In a large bowl, mash 1 cup of potatoes. Stir in the corned beef, cranberries, onion, broth, parsley, mustard, garlic, thyme, pepper, nutmeg and remaining

potatoes. Cover and refrigerate for 3 hours or overnight to allow flavors to blend.

3. In a large skillet, melt butter. Stir in meat mixture. Cook and stir over medium-high heat for 15-20 minutes or until lightly browned and heated through.

YIELD: 4 servings.

Overnight Baked Oatmeal

My husband and I spent a long weekend at a bed-and-breakfast not far from our home. The owners shared this delicious recipe with me, which I've made my own after a couple of simple changes.

—JENNIFER CRAMER LEBANON, PA

- 2 eggs, lightly beaten**
- 3 cups 2% milk**
- 2 cups old-fashioned oats**
- ¾ cup packed brown sugar**
- ¼ cup canola oil**
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- ¾ cup dried blueberries**

- ¾ cup dried cherries**
- ¾ cup sliced almonds**

1. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs, milk, oats, brown sugar, oil, cinnamon and salt. Stir in blueberries and cherries. Pour into a greased 8-in. square baking dish. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.

2. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Uncover and stir; sprinkle with the almonds. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 45-50 minutes or until a thermometer reaches 160°. Serve warm.

YIELD: 9 servings.



Ham & Cheese Strata with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Brimming with ham, cheese and sun-dried tomatoes, this pretty breakfast casserole feeds a crowd while adding visual appeal to your brunch's spread. It's elegant comfort food at its best.

—KIM DEANE FENTON, MO

- 1 cup cubed fully cooked ham**
- 1 cup sun-dried tomatoes (not packed in oil), chopped**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley**
- 1½ teaspoons minced chives**
- 1 loaf sourdough bread (1 pound), crust removed and cut into 1-inch cubes**
- 2 cups (8 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese**
- 12 eggs**
- 1½ cups 2% milk**
- ¾ cup heavy whipping cream**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- ¾ teaspoon coarsely ground pepper**
- ¾ teaspoon ground nutmeg**
- ¾ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted**

1. In a small bowl, combine the ham, tomatoes, parsley and chives. Place half of the bread in a greased 13-in. x 9-in. baking dish. Layer with half of the ham mixture and half of the cheese. Repeat layers.

2. In a large bowl, combine the eggs, milk, cream, salt, pepper, nutmeg and cayenne. Pour over top; drizzle with butter. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

3. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 45-50 minutes or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean (cover loosely with foil if the top browns too quickly). Let stand for 10 minutes before cutting.

YIELD: 12 servings.



Make-Ahead Monkey Bread

Frozen bread dough makes this ooey-goey breakfast treat a snap to make. I have used it for Christmas because I can prepare it the night before, which allows me to join the family in seeing what Santa left under the tree.

—JUDITH GORDON TEXARKANA, AR

- ¾ cup packed brown sugar**
- 1 package (3½ ounces) cook-and-serve butterscotch pudding mix**
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 1 cup chopped pecans**
- ½ cup butter**
- 20 frozen bread dough dinner rolls, quartered**
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice**

1. In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar, pudding mix and cinnamon. In a greased 10-in. fluted tube pan, layer a third of the pecans, ⅓ cup brown sugar mixture, 2 tablespoons butter and half the rolls. Repeat layers. Top with lemon juice, remaining pecans, brown sugar mixture and butter; cover and refrigerate overnight.

2. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Bake, uncovered, at 350° for 30-35 minutes or until golden brown. Immediately invert the bread onto a serving platter. Serve warm.

YIELD: 1 loaf (12 servings).

South of the Border Citrus Salad

Orange, grapefruit and jicama add color and texture to this out-of-the-ordinary fruit salad. Sometimes I'll toss in slices of mango and cucumber for additional pizzazz.

—MARY FULLER SEATAC, WA

- 3 medium oranges, peeled and sliced**
- 3 medium pink grapefruit, peeled and sliced**
- 1½ cups cubed peeled jicama**
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro**
- 2 tablespoons lime juice**
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients. Arrange on a serving platter; refrigerate until chilled.

YIELD: 7 servings.

MAKE TIME FOR JICAMA



A jicama (HEE-kah-mah), also known as a Mexican potato, is a root vegetable resembling a turnip. It has thin brown skin, white flesh, a crunchy texture and a sweet, nutty flavor similar to a water chestnut.

Look for small jicamas (large ones tend to be woody and fibrous) that are firm and unblemished. Store whole in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Once cut, wrap in plastic wrap and use within a week.

Before using, wash jicama in cold water. Peel the skin and then cut or slice as desired. It will not discolor after cutting.

Overnight Baked Eggs Bruschetta

I like to take advantage of time with family and guests when I'm preparing a meal. Because most overnight brunch recipes are so similar, I came up with a breakfast bruschetta.

—JUDI BERMAN-YAMADA PORTLAND, OR

- 1** tablespoon cornmeal
- 1** tube (13.8 ounces) refrigerated pizza crust
- 3** tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1½** cups (6 ounces) shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese, divided
- ¾** pound sliced fresh mushrooms
- ¾** teaspoon garlic powder
- ¾** teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed
- ½** teaspoon pepper
- ¼** teaspoon salt
- 2** cups pizza sauce
- ⅛** teaspoon paprika
- 1** tablespoon white vinegar
- 9** eggs
- 2** ounces fresh goat cheese
- ⅓** cup French-fried onions
- Fresh basil leaves

1. Sprinkle cornmeal into a greased 15-in. x 10-in. x 1-in. baking pan. Unroll pizza dough; press to cover bottom of pan. Brush with 1 tablespoon oil; sprinkle with ¾ cup of mozzarella cheese. Bake at 400° for 8 minutes.

2. In a large skillet, sauté mushrooms in remaining oil until tender. Stir in the garlic powder, rosemary, pepper and salt. Remove 1 cup of mushrooms; sprinkle over the crust. Combine the pizza sauce and paprika; add to the skillet.

3. Place 2-3 in. of water in a large skillet with high sides; add vinegar. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer gently. Break cold eggs, one at a time, into a custard cup

or saucer; holding the cup close to the surface of the water, slip each egg into water.

4. Cook, uncovered, until whites are completely set and yolks are still soft, about 4 minutes. With a slotted spoon, lift eggs out of water. Arrange eggs over mushrooms.

5. Spoon pizza sauce mixture around eggs; sprinkle with remaining mozzarella

cheese. Crumble goat cheese; sprinkle over eggs. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

6. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Sprinkle with onions. Bake, uncovered, at 400° for 10-15 minutes or until golden brown. Garnish with basil.

YIELD: 9 servings.



North Pole Party

Like Santa's helpers at the North Pole, you're busy during the days leading up to Christmas. But that doesn't mean there's no time to host a holiday lunch for your friends and their children.

Chase away winter chills with hot selections such as Bacon-Tomato Quesadillas, Creamy Chicken Vegetable Soup and Crusty Italian Sub Supreme. For the kid in everyone, pass a platter piled high with Elfin Banana Sandwiches.

While the adults catch up, keep the kids busy by having them assemble a festive village of Christmas Cottages.



Holiday Croutons

To keep my kids entertained while I was baking one Christmas, I gave them slices of bread and small cookie cutters. The baked product was so cute, I decided to season the remaining batches and turn them into croutons.

BONNIE HAWKINS ELKHORN, WI

- 8 bread slices**
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Paprika, dill weed, minced chives or dried minced onion**

- 1.** Cut shapes from bread using 1½ in. Christmas cookie cutters of your choice. Transfer to a large bowl.
- 2.** In a small bowl, combine butter and oil; drizzle over bread and toss to coat. Divide into three batches. Sprinkle each batch with a different seasoning; toss to coat.

- 3.** Arrange in a single layer on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake at 300° for 20-25 minutes or until golden brown, turning occasionally. Cool. Store in an airtight container.
- YIELD:** 2½ cups.

Lime Pecan Bread

Lime juice is a terrific addition to ordinary quick bread. The chopped pecans add a pleasant crunch. I serve slices at breakfast and as a snack throughout the day.

NANCY LORE ROCKLAND, MA

- 1 cup butter, softened**
- 2 cups sugar**
- 4 eggs, separated**
- 3¼ cups all-purpose flour**
- 2 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1¼ cups milk**
- 1 tablespoon lime juice**
- 4 teaspoons grated lime peel**
- 1 cup chopped pecans**

GLAZE

- ¾ cup sugar**
- ½ cup lime juice**

- 1.** In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar; beat in egg yolks. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt; add to creamed mixture alternately with milk. Add the lime juice and peel. Stir in the pecans.
- 2.** In a small bowl, beat egg whites until stiff peaks form; fold into batter. Pour into two greased 8-in. x 4-in. loaf pans. Bake at 350° for 50-60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean.

- 3.** Combine glaze ingredients until smooth; pour over hot loaves. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks.
- YIELD:** 2 loaves.

Creamy Chicken Vegetable Soup

Children of all ages will love to eat their veggies when they taste this creamy chicken soup created in our Test Kitchen. Brie cheese adds a delightfully mild flavor.

- 1 small onion, finely chopped**
- 1 celery rib, chopped**
- 1 medium carrot, chopped**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- 1 tablespoon butter**
- 2 cans (14½ ounces each) chicken broth**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 1½ cups half-and-half cream**
- 2 cups cubed cooked chicken breast**
- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry**
- 1 round (8 ounces) Brie cheese, rind removed and chopped**

1. In a Dutch oven, saute the onion, celery, carrot and garlic in butter until crisp-tender. Stir in the broth, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat; simmer, uncovered, for 10 minutes.

2. Combine flour and cream until smooth; gradually stir into soup. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes. Stir in the chicken, spinach and cheese. Cook and stir for 5 minutes or until cheese is melted.

YIELD: 5 servings.



Christmas Cottages

To put a simple spin on the traditional gingerbread houses, our home economists employ purchased chocolate graham crackers. Make the “houses” ahead as an edible centerpiece...or let kids assemble their own during the party.

- 19 whole chocolate graham crackers**
1 can (16 ounces) chocolate frosting
1 can (16 ounces) vanilla frosting
Assorted candies

- 1.** For roofs, break six graham crackers in half, forming 12 squares. Using a serrated knife, cut four squares diagonally in half, forming eight triangles.
- 2.** Cut a small hole in the corner of pastry or plastic bag; insert a #4 round pastry tip. Fill the bag with chocolate frosting. Pipe frosting on the short edges of two

triangles; attach two squares. Repeat three times. Let stand until set, about 1 hour. Frost roofs with vanilla frosting and decorate with candies as desired.

- 3.** For short cottages, break four graham crackers in half, forming eight squares. Pipe chocolate frosting along one side of front of cottage and the adjoining side wall. Place walls at right angles to each other. Repeat with second side section and back. Repeat for second cottage. Let stand until set.

- 4.** For tall cottages, using whole crackers, pipe chocolate frosting along a long side of front of cottage and the adjoining side wall. Place walls at right angles to each other. Repeat with second side section and back. Repeat for second cottage. Let stand until set.

- 5.** Cut doors from remaining cracker. Attach roofs and doors to cottages with chocolate frosting. Decorate as desired with candies and remaining frosting. Let stand until set.

YIELD: 4 cottages.



CREATING CHRISTMAS COTTAGES

Party guests don't have to be architects or engineers to build these adorable, edible Christmas Cottages. (And because the recipe calls for purchased graham crackers, you don't have to spend hours making homemade gingerbread cutouts!)

Before getting started, set up the work station by putting down a covering on the table, opening the graham cracker packages, placing the candies in bowls and filling bags of frosting for each child.

To make it easier for kids to carry their creations home, you may want to have them assemble the Christmas Cottages in disposable pie tins.

If the children at your party range in age, encourage older kids to help the little ones.

Any kind of candy can be used to decorate the houses. (And don't forget the flaked coconut or confectioners' sugar for a snowy scene!) To help cut costs, you can even ask each guest to bring a bag of candy to share.

When the masterpieces are complete, display them as a Christmas village on top of a table until the end of the party.

Elfin Banana Sandwiches

A fruity, peanut-butter filling sandwiched between slices of banana bread will have guests asking for seconds.

—CARLA COOK FALCON, CO

- 1 package (14 ounces) banana quick bread and muffin mix**
- 1 cup reduced-fat creamy peanut butter**
- 4 ounces reduced-fat cream cheese**
- 2 tablespoons honey**
- 2 medium ripe bananas, sliced**

1. Prepare and bake bread according to package directions, using a greased 9-in. x 5-in. loaf pan.

2. Cut cooled bread into 12 slices. Toast slices until golden brown. In a small bowl, beat the peanut butter, cream cheese and honey until smooth; spread 1 tablespoon over each of six toast slices. Layer with bananas. Spread remaining peanut butter mixture over remaining toast slices; place over top.

YIELD: 6 servings.



Spiced Apple Cider

When the temperature drops outside, I like to warm up family and friends with steaming mugs of simple spiced cider. The recipe can easily be doubled for a larger group.

—DEIRDRE DEE COX MILWAUKEE, WI

- 6 cups apple cider or juice**
- 8 cinnamon sticks (3 inches)**
- 2 lemon peel strips**
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg**
- 8 whole cloves**
- 4 slices red apple, cored and cut in half**

1. In a large saucepan, combine the apple cider, cinnamon sticks, lemon peel and nutmeg. Insert a clove into each apple slice; add to the cider.

2. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 1 minute. Discard the lemon peel. Ladle into mugs.

YIELD: 8 servings.

Crusty Italian Sub Supreme

I encourage guests to grab a knife and fork before diving into hearty slices of this sandwich!
Each bite is loaded with sausage, cheese, artichoke hearts and sauce.

—TONI LOCKHART GILMER, TX

- 1 pound bulk Italian sausage**
- 1 jar (14 ounces) spaghetti sauce**
- 1 loaf (1 pound) unsliced Italian bread**
- 12 slices provolone cheese**
- 2 jars (7½ ounces each) marinated quartered artichoke hearts, drained and chopped**

- 1.** In a large skillet, cook sausage over medium heat until no longer pink; drain. Stir in spaghetti sauce; heat through.
- 2.** Cut the top third off the loaf of bread; carefully hollow out bottom, leaving a ½-in. shell (discard removed bread or save for another use). Line bread shell

with cheese slices; top with sausage mixture and artichokes. Replace bread top. Wrap loaf in foil.

- 3.** Bake at 375° for 15-20 minutes or until cheese is melted. Let stand for 5 minutes before slicing.

YIELD: 8 servings.

Savory Garlic Cheese Spread

One day I was in the process of roasting garlic when unexpected company arrived. Having little food in the house, I grabbed the roasted garlic and some cream cheese to create a delicious dip in a dash.

—AYSHA SCHURMAN AMMON, ID

- 2 whole garlic bulbs**
- 1 teaspoon olive oil**
- ¼ cup butter, cubed**
- ¼ cup unsweetened apple juice**
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives**
- 2 tablespoons water**
- 4 teaspoons grated lemon peel**
- 4 teaspoons minced fresh parsley or 1½ teaspoons dried parsley flakes**
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary or ½ teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed**

- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, softened**
- Assorted fresh vegetables**

- 1.** Remove papery outer skin from garlic (do not peel or separate cloves). Cut tops off of garlic bulbs. Brush with oil. Wrap each bulb in heavy-duty foil. Bake at 425° for 30-35 minutes or until softened. Cool for 10-15 minutes.

- 2.** In a small saucepan, melt butter. Squeeze softened garlic into pan; stir in the juices, chives, water, lemon peel, parsley, rosemary and salt; cook and stir for 2-3 minutes or until most of the liquid is absorbed. Transfer to a food processor. Add cream cheese; cover and process until blended. Serve with vegetables.

YIELD: 2 cups.



Chocolate Gingerbread Cookies

My mother developed this recipe, and I make the cookies in her honor every Christmas. People can't get enough of the molasses and chocolate combination.

KAREN SUE GARBACK-PRISTERA
ALBANY, NY

- ½ cup butter, softened**
- ¾ cup sugar**
- 1 egg**
- ½ cup molasses**
- 3 cups all-purpose flour**
- 2 tablespoons plus 1½ teaspoons baking cocoa**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ½ teaspoon baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- Icing and decorations of your choice**

1. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in egg and molasses. Combine the flour, cocoa, baking soda, cinnamon, baking powder and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour or until easy to handle.

2. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough to ⅛-in. thickness. Cut with a floured 3½-in. gingerbread boy cookie cutter; place 1 in. apart on ungreased baking sheets. Repeat with remaining dough; chill and reroll scraps.

3. Bake at 350° for 6-8 minutes or until edges are firm. Remove to wire racks to cool. Ice and decorate as desired.

YIELD: 3 dozen.



Bacon-Tomato Quesadillas

Kids of all ages will go crazy for these appetizers that taste like a BLT. They're crisp on the outside...and ooey, gooey and oh-so-good on the inside!

—VIRGINIA WARNER CARSON CITY, NV

- 4 medium tomatoes, seeded and finely chopped**
- 8 bacon strips, cooked and crumbled**
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Mexican cheese blend**

Cooking spray

4 flour tortillas (8 inches)

In a small bowl, combine the tomatoes, bacon and cheese. Spray cooking spray over one side of each tortilla. Place tortillas, sprayed side down, on a griddle. Spoon tomato mixture

over half of each tortilla. Fold over and cook over low heat for 1-2 minutes on each side or until cheese is melted. Cut each quesadilla into three wedges.

YIELD: 1 dozen.

Nutty Mini Cheese Balls

Ranch salad dressing mix is the fast flavoring for these small cheese balls. If your family isn't fond of nuts, roll the balls in minced fresh parsley, chopped ripe olives or finely shredded cheddar cheese.

—META WEST ABILENE, KS

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened**
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese**
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped onion**

- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce**
- 2 teaspoons ranch salad dressing mix**
- 1 cup finely chopped nuts**
- Assorted crackers**

In a small bowl, beat cream cheese. Stir in the cheddar cheese, onion, Worcestershire sauce and salad dressing mix. Shape into 1-in. balls; roll in the nuts. Chill until serving. Serve with assorted crackers.

YIELD: 2 dozen.

Sweet Apricot Candy

I first made this recipe for a ladies' Christmas luncheon, where it received rave reviews. Now it's a favorite with my family, too. I suggest presenting the divinity-like candies in pretty paper candy cups.

—LORAIEYER BEND, OR

- 1 jar (7 ounces) marshmallow creme**
- 1 tablespoon butter, softened**
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ teaspoon grated orange peel**
- 3 cups confectioners' sugar, divided**
- ½ cup finely chopped dried apricots**
- ½ cup finely chopped pecans**

1. In a large bowl, combine the marshmallow creme, butter, vanilla, salt and orange peel; beat until well blended. Gradually add 2 cups confectioners' sugar; beat until combined (mixture will be stiff).

2. By hand, knead in the apricots, pecans and enough remaining confectioners' sugar to make a very stiff mixture.

3. Press into a greased 8-in. square pan. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours. Cut into 1-in. squares.

YIELD: 1½ pounds.

North Pole Party Favors

Create a mini workshop for the little “elves” at your party and have them build these cute signs that point the direction to fun!

- 1 unfinished wooden wheel (1½ inch diameter)
- Red and green acrylic paint
- 2 green and white or red and white chenille stems (6 inch length)
- 1 square piece of white card stock (1 inch x 1 inch)
- 2 rectangle pieces of white card stock (about ½ inch x 2 inch)
- 1 sparkle pom-pom (½ inch)

1. For the base, paint the wooden wheel red or green; let dry.
2. Twist two different color chenille stems together to make the post. Fold one end of the twisted chenille stems up about ¼ in. and place in the center of painted base.
3. Cut both corners off one end of each rectangle piece of card stock to create an arrow. With a fine-line marker, write “North Pole” on the 1-in. square of card stock and “Santa’s Workshop” and the guest’s name on the rectangle pieces. Glue the square sign and pom-pom to top of post. Glue the rectangle signs to front of post.

YIELD: 1 sign.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Unfinished wooden wheels are available at craft stores.



EVEN MORE ELFIN FUN

Add to the fun of your North Pole Party with these other ideas:

- Stop by a discount store and pick up felt elf hats for little ones to wear during the party and to take home.
- Enlist a neighbor to dress up as Santa. Take pictures of each child telling jolly old St. Nick what they want for Christmas. Have Santa hand out candy canes or coloring books.
- Gather the kids around and read the book called The Elf on the Shelf.

An Old-Fashioned Cookie Exchange

'Tis the season for Christmas cookies...and more Christmas cookies! Maybe it's the memory of Grandma's famous sugar cookies, the opportunity to try out a new recipe or the homey aroma of a freshly baked batch of sweets just out of the oven, but something about the Christmas season seems to bring out the baker in each of us.

Double the delight of biting into a warm and gooey cookie such as Cranberry Orange Rugalach, by inviting your friends over for a cookie exchange.

Here, we've gathered a selection of can't-miss, high-yield cookie recipes perfect for sharing the Christmas spirit. You'll even find fun and easy ideas for making your get-together one that your friends will remember throughout the New Year.



Cranberry Orange Rugalach

A hint of cranberry and splash of orange are wrapped in a buttery cookie, then drizzled with chocolate. Can you say, “heaven?” A platter of the showstopping treats makes any event a celebration.

—GINGER SULLIVAN CUTLER BAY, FL

- 1 cup butter, softened**
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened**
- ½ cup sugar**
- 2 egg yolks**
- ½ teaspoon orange extract**
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 2 packages (5 ounces each) dried cranberries**
- 1½ cups golden raisins**
- ½ cup orange juice**
- 1 egg, beaten**
- Melted chocolate, optional**

- 1.** In a large bowl, cream the butter, cream cheese and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in egg yolks and extracts. Combine flour and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture and mix well.
 - 2.** Divide dough into four portions. Shape each into a ball, then flatten into a disk. Wrap each in plastic wrap; refrigerate for 2 hours or until firm.
 - 3.** Place the cranberries, raisins and juice in a food processor; cover and process until finely chopped. On a lightly floured surface, roll each portion into a 12-in. circle; spread each with ½ cup cranberry mixture. Cut each circle into 12 wedges.
 - 4.** Roll up wedges from the wide end and place point side down 1 in. apart on greased baking sheets; brush with egg. Bake at 350° for 10-12 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove to wire racks to cool. Drizzle with melted chocolate if desired. Store in an airtight container.
- YIELD:** 4 dozen.

FOR HAZELNUT RUGALACH *Omit filling ingredients. Spread ¼ cup Nutella over each circle. Proceed as directed.*

FOR CHOCOLATE-COCONUT RUGALACH *Omit filling ingredients. Place 1 cup miniature chocolate chips and 1 cup flaked coconut in a food processor. Cover and pulse until finely chopped. Sprinkle ½ cup mixture over each circle. Proceed as directed.*

FOR WALNUT RUGALACH *Omit filling ingredients. Place 1½ cups chopped walnuts, ⅔ cup packed brown sugar and 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon in a food processor. Cover and pulse until finely chopped. Sprinkle ½ cup mixture over each circle. Proceed as directed.*



MAKING RUGALACH

Rugalach is a traditional Jewish cookie prepared for Hanukkah. The dough for these crescent-shaped cookies is prepared with cream cheese and can contain fruit, raisins, nuts, jam and poppy seeds. By following the recipe above and photos here, your rugalach cookies will turn out with bakery-style perfection.

Heavenly Chocolate- Fudge cake Balls

My special treats are similar to the popular cake pops—but without the stick! They're guaranteed to calm any chocolate craving and jazz up holiday goodie trays all at the same time. Best of all, no one will guess how easy they are to make!

—LYNN DAVIS MORENO VALLEY, CA

- 1 package (18½ ounces) devil's food cake mix**
- 2 tablespoons hot water**
- 1 teaspoon instant coffee granules**
- 1 cup chocolate fudge frosting**
- ½ cup baking cocoa**
- ¼ cup chocolate syrup**
- 1½ cups miniature semisweet chocolate chips**
- 2 pounds white candy coating, chopped**
- Optional toppings: milk chocolate English toffee bits, toasted flaked coconut and crushed candy canes**

1. Prepare and bake the cake according to package directions. Cool completely. Crumble cake into a large bowl.

2. In a small bowl, combine hot water and coffee granules; stir until dissolved. Add the frosting, cocoa and chocolate syrup; stir until combined. Add to cake; beat on low speed until blended. Stir in chocolate chips. Shape into 1-in. balls. Arrange on waxed paper-lined baking sheets.

3. In a microwave, melt candy coating; stir until smooth. Dip balls in coating mixture; allow excess to drip off. Place on waxed paper. Sprinkle with toppings of your choice. Let stand until set. Store in airtight containers.

YIELD: 95 cake balls.



Chocolate-Covered Apricot-Pecan Pretzels

Salty pretzel rods dipped in a caramel, apricot and pecan mixture, then covered with dark chocolate, make a deliciously different treat during the holidays.

—**AYSHA SCHURMAN** AMMON, ID

- 1 package (6 ounces) dried apricots, finely chopped**
- 1½ cups chopped pecans, divided**
- 2 packages (11 ounces each) Kraft caramel bits**
- ¼ cup water**
- 42 pretzel rods**
- 3 cups dark chocolate chips**
- 1 tablespoon shortening**

- 1.** In a small bowl, combine apricots and ⅔ cup pecans; set aside.
- 2.** In a large heavy saucepan over medium-low heat, melt caramel bits with water, stirring constantly. Spoon caramel over two-thirds of each pretzel, rotating rods to coat all sides; allow excess caramel to drip off.
- 3.** Sprinkle caramel with apricot mixture. Place on a waxed paper-lined baking sheet and refrigerate for 30 minutes or until set.

- 4.** In another heavy saucepan over low heat, melt chips with shortening, stirring constantly. Spoon chocolate over coated ends of pretzels; allow excess to drip off. Return to baking sheet and sprinkle with remaining pecans. Store in airtight containers.

YIELD: 3½ dozen.

Cranberry Caramels

When I make holiday goodies, my sister always asks when I'm sending these cranberry caramels.

—**JAN RINKER** CRAIG, CO

- 1 teaspoon plus ¼ cup butter, divided**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 cup chopped fresh cranberries**
- 1 cup light corn syrup**
- ½ cup heavy whipping cream**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**

- 1.** Line an 8-in. square dish with foil; grease the foil with 1 teaspoon butter and set aside.

- 2.** In a large heavy saucepan, combine sugar, cranberries, corn syrup, cream, salt

and remaining butter. Cook and stir over medium heat until mixture comes to a boil, washing down the sides of the pan using a pastry brush dipped in cold water to eliminate sugar crystals. Once mixture reaches a boil, cook without stirring until a candy thermometer reads 248° (firm-ball stage).

- 3.** Remove from the heat. Pour into prepared pan (do not scrape saucepan). Let stand until firm, about 5 hours or overnight.

- 4.** Using foil, lift candy out of pan. Discard foil; cut candy into 1-in. squares using a buttered knife. Wrap individually in waxed paper; twist ends.

YIELD: 1¼ pounds.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *We recommend that you test your candy thermometer before each use by bringing water to a boil; the thermometer should read 212°. Adjust your recipe temperature up or down based on your test.*

Neapolitan Fudge

If you like Neapolitan ice cream, you'll devour my fudge version of that vanilla, strawberry and chocolate favorite! It makes a great addition to any Christmas candy platter but is well-received any time of year.

—**FAITH LEONARD** DELBARTON, WV

1½ teaspoons butter

1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened

3 cups confectioners' sugar

16 ounces milk chocolate, melted and cooled

VANILLA LAYER

1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened

3 cups confectioners' sugar

16 ounces white baking chocolate, melted and cooled

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

RASPBERRY LAYER

1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened

3 cups confectioners' sugar

16 ounces white baking chocolate, melted and cooled

1 tablespoon raspberry extract

8 to 10 drops food coloring, optional

1. Line a 13-in. x 9-in. baking pan with foil and grease the foil with butter; set aside. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Gradually beat in confectioners' sugar. Beat in the melted milk chocolate. Spread into a prepared pan. Refrigerate for 10 minutes.

2. For vanilla layer, in a large bowl beat cream cheese until fluffy. Gradually beat in confectioners' sugar. Beat in melted white chocolate and vanilla. Spread over the chocolate layer. Refrigerate for 10 minutes.

3. For raspberry layer, in a large bowl beat cream cheese until fluffy. Gradually beat in the confectioners' sugar. Beat in melted white chocolate and raspberry extract. Tint with food coloring if desired. Spread over top. Cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight.

4. Using foil, lift fudge out of pan. Gently peel off foil; cut the fudge into 1-in. squares. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

YIELD: about 6½ pounds.



Chai Snickerdoodles

When I think of winter, I think of two things: warm cookies and a chai. My recipe combines both in a comforting favorite—snickerdoodles!

—**EVANGELINE BRADFORD** ERLANGER, KY

- 2 cups sugar
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt

1. In a small bowl, combine the sugar, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom and allspice. Remove $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar mixture to a shallow bowl; set aside.

2. In a large bowl, cream butter and remaining sugar mixture until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Combine the flour, cream of tartar, baking soda and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture and mix well.

3. Shape into 1½-in. balls; roll in reserved sugar mixture. Place 2 in. apart on parchment paper-lined baking sheets. Bake at 350° for 10-13 minutes or until edges begin to brown. Cool for 2 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks.

YIELD: 6½ dozen.

Cocoa Butter Sticks

Mom has been making these delectable, melt-in-your-mouth cookies at Christmas time for as long as I can remember. Their wonderful cocoa flavor and crisp chewy texture make them a standout on any cookie tray.

—**REBECCA WILSON** LONGMONT, CO

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup butter, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons baking cocoa
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

TOPPING

- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon cold water
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped almonds
- 2 tablespoons coarse sugar

1. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in egg. Combine the flour, cocoa, baking powder and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

2. Divide dough into four portions. On ungreased baking sheets, roll each portion into an 8-in. x 1-in. log. Flatten with a fork dipped in flour to $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. thickness. Whisk egg and water; brush over dough. Combine almonds and sugar;

sprinkle over tops. Bake at 350° for 10-14 minutes or until set.

3. Place pans on wire racks. When cool enough to handle, transfer to a cutting board; cut diagonally with a serrated knife into $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. slices. Turn cookies over and place back onto baking sheets. Bake 5 minutes longer to crisp bottoms. Cool on wire racks. Store in an airtight container.

YIELD: about 3¼ dozen.

Peppermint Meringue Cookies

Green and red swirls set these whimsical delights apart from any other meringue recipe.

They look like they came straight from Candy Land! Each pretty bite packs just the right amount of refreshing peppermint flavor perfectly complemented by a bottom layer of chocolate.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 4 egg whites**
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar**
- ½ teaspoon peppermint extract**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 1 cup sugar**
Red and green paste food coloring, optional
- 6 ounces dark chocolate candy coating, chopped**

1. Place egg whites in a large bowl; let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. Add the cream of tartar, peppermint extract and salt; beat on medium speed until soft peaks form. Gradually add sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, beating on high until stiff glossy peaks form and sugar is dissolved.

2. If desired, using a new small paintbrush, paint four alternating red and green stripes inside a pastry bag fitted with a #2D star tip. Fill bag with meringue. Pipe 1½-in.-diameter cookies onto parchment paper-lined baking sheets, repainting stripes if necessary.

3. Bake at 250° for 40-45 minutes or until set and dry. Turn the oven off; leave meringues in oven for 1½ hours. Remove meringues from parchment paper.

4. In a microwave, melt candy coating; stir until smooth. Dip bottoms of

meringues into melted coating, allowing excess to drip off. Place on waxed paper; let stand until set. Store in an airtight container.

YIELD: 6 dozen.



Lemon Pirouettes

When you've had your fill of chocolate, indulge in one of these refreshing and dainty pirouettes. White candy coating and toasted coconut give each cookie an extra special touch.

—TASTE OF HOME TEST KITCHEN

- 4 egg whites
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon peel
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon lemon extract
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 8 ounces white candy coating, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup flaked coconut, toasted

1. Using a pencil, draw three 3-in. circles on a sheet of parchment paper. Place paper, pencil mark down, on a baking sheet; set aside.

2. In a large bowl, beat egg whites on medium speed until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, on high until stiff peaks form. Beat in the butter, lemon peel and extracts. Gradually beat in flour until smooth.

3. Spread 2 teaspoons of batter over each circle. Bake at 400° for 4-6 minutes or until edges are lightly browned.

4. Working quickly, loosen cookies from parchment paper with a thin spatula and roll up. Repeat with remaining batter.

5. In a microwave, melt candy coating; stir until smooth. Dip each cookie halfway, allowing excess to drip off. Place on waxed paper and sprinkle with coconut. Let stand until set. Store in an airtight container.

YIELD: 5 dozen.

Tender Cherry Shortbread Cookies

I can't begin to imagine how many dozens of these luscious cookies I have made over the years. The drizzled chocolate catches the eye of anyone who walks past the cookie tray...and prompts them to try one or two.

—LORRAINE CALAND SHUNIAH, ON

- 2 cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup cornstarch
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup dried cherries, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons dried lavender flowers, optional
- 1 cup dark chocolate chips, melted
- 1 cup white baking chips, melted

1. In a large bowl, cream butter and confectioners' sugar until light and fluffy. Combine the flour, cornstarch and salt; gradually add to the creamed mixture. Stir in cherries and lavender if desired. Divide dough in half.

2. Roll each portion into an 8-in. x 3-in. x 2-in. rectangle. Wrap each in plastic wrap. Refrigerate overnight or until firm. Unwrap and cut into ¼-in. slices. Place 1 in. apart on ungreased baking sheets.

Bake at 325° for 15-18 minutes or until edges are lightly browned.

3. Cool for 2 minutes before carefully removing to wire racks to cool completely. Drizzle each with melted dark and white chips. Let stand until set.

YIELD: 4 dozen.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Look for dried lavender flowers in spice shops. If you are using lavender from the garden, make sure it has not been treated with chemicals.

Bake 'n' Take Fun

It just isn't Christmas without Christmas cookies! Cookie exchanges are a great way to share recipes, baking and have a little fun in the process. Here are six memorable ideas to try with your friends.

1. TRADITIONAL COOKIE EXCHANGE

2. ALL IN THE FAMILY

3. GOODWILL COOKIE EXCHANGE

4. BAKING BONANZA

5. DROP IN & DECORATE

6. COOKIE RECIPE BOOKLET

1. For a **TRADITIONAL COOKIE EXCHANGE**, ask each guest to bring one dozen baked cookies. (You can get away with half a dozen cookies if the guest list is large, around 10 or more people.) At the party, provide containers for guests. These can be as basic as a paper plate and plastic wrap, a disposable food container or a resealable plastic bag, or as fancy as embellished paper boxes or Christmas-themed tins you picked up at your local hobby store.

2. The holidays are all about family traditions. For an **ALL IN THE FAMILY COOKIE EXCHANGE**, ask guests to bring one dozen of their favorite family Christmas cookie and to mail you the story behind the cookie in advance. Then, on the day of the party, give guests a booklet containing the stories behind each cookie.

3. With so many tempting treats, the holidays make it hard to avoid extra calories. But who wants to give up the fun of holiday baking? A **GOODWILL COOKIE EXCHANGE** lets you enjoy the best of both worlds. Have your guests bring a dozen cookies each and then assemble cookie packages to take to nursing homes, homeless shelters, or give as gifts to neighbors and friends.

4. A **BAKING BONANZA** party works best for smaller groups (fewer than five people). Ask each of your guests to bring one recipe and the necessary ingredients for it (alternatively, you can create a master ingredient list and divide it equally among the group). Then crank up the Christmas tunes as you bake your goodies.

5. In lieu of a traditional cookie exchange, invite friends to **DROP IN & DECORATE**. Ask each guest to bring one dozen baked, plain cookies. You supply a variety of decorating items (frostings, gels, dragees, colored sugars, etc.) or guests can bring some of their own. Then, spend the afternoon decorating Christmas cookies just like you did when you were kids.

6. Make your afternoon even more memorable by compiling the recipes you and your friends baked. Ask your guests to send you their cookie recipes in advance, and assemble a **RECIPE BOOKLET** for everyone to take home with their cookies.

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