

Gift Ideas From You

Giving is one of the joys of Christmas, and a gift that is homemade brings double joy to the giver because half the fun is in the preparation, while the other half is in watching the receiver open your specially prepared delicacies. Holiday foods that you make in your kitchen are homey and personal and are always appreciated because they reflect you. Gifts that you make yourself need not be elaborate. Sometimes the simplest thing, such as sugar cookies sprinkled with colored sugars, placed in a pretty tin and tied with a red bow, are the most appreciated, especially by those not inclined or not able to bake for themselves.

If you have exhausted your ideas of what to buy that certain person on your list, and cannot find the time to make a homemade one, all you have to do is find some clever food gifts from the grocery store and add your favorite recipe. These would be especially appreciated by busy young mothers, who would like an instant food idea later on. Coffee and teas are a good choice for creating all kinds of interesting gifts. Pack an assortment of tea bags in an Oriental teapot, or buy a can of espresso or other fancy coffee, and include a set of tiny cups. Buy a uniquely shaped wooden platter and load it up with cheese, a tiny loaf of bread, a jar of pickled mushrooms, and a box of fancy toothpicks and a decorative cheese spreader. Cover it all with plastic wrapping and add a large bow.

If you know someone who likes to entertain, why not give an instant party starter? Buy an inexpensive punch bowl packed with the ingredients necessary for making a punch, with the recipe for it on a decorated card which you have tucked in with the food. The recipe provided here is for Christmas Punch and is an excellent one for a refreshing non-alcoholic drink.

CHRISTMAS PUNCH

- 2 quarts cranberry juice cocktail
 - 4 lemons, juiced (1/4 c.)
 - 1 quart orange juice
 - 1/2 sugar
 - 2 quarts ginger ale, chilled
 - Thin orange and lemon slices
 - Halved maraschino cherries
- Mix juices and sugar. Pour

into punch bowl over ice. Add chilled ginger ale, pouring slowly down side of bowl. Makes about 6 quarts. Trim with floaters: stack an orange slice, a lemon slice, and a halved cherry on the surface of punch.

A basket of fresh oranges and a bottle of rum are the perfect accompaniments to the recipe for Orange Liqueur. If you are planning on making the liqueur, there is still enough time, as this should age for about two weeks. This is a smooth, spiced drink that has been steeped with oranges in the dark rum. Of course, you will want to present it in an attractive decanter. A set of cordial glasses would also make a nice accompaniment.

ORANGE LIQUEUR

- 5 large, thin-skinned juice oranges
- 1/2 c. sugar
- 1 c. water
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 2 cans (11 oz. each) mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 quart dark rum

Using vegetable scraper, pare peels from oranges as thinly as possible. Combine with sugar, water and cinnamon stick in a medium size pan. Over medium heat, stir until sugar is dissolved. Bring to a boil and add mandarin oranges and simmer, uncovered, for 3 minutes. Remove from heat. Remove cinnamon stick and allow to cool. Pour mixture into a large, wide-mouthed jar. Add rum and stir gently. Store, covered, in a cool place for two weeks. Pour liqueur into attractive decanter, straining out the mandarin oranges. Makes about two pints.

Need an easy, last minute gift? This holiday bread is irresistible, and the receiver will delight in getting something that can be served for any holiday get-together. This Spicy Fruit Ring can be given right in the bundt pan in which it is baked, or turned out onto a pretty platter and wrapped in decorated plastic wrap. A nice gift with this bread would be a tin of shelled pecans, or a basket of apples (to make the applesauce). This bread does well baked a day ahead for mellower flavor and easier slicing. A slicing knife, with a decorated handle, can be included with the gift.

SPICY FRUIT RING

- 1 13 1/4 oz. pkg. hot roll mix
- 1 pkg. (2-layer size) spice cake mix



- 1 8-oz. can applesauce
- 3 eggs
- 1/4 c. cooking oil
- 1 1/2 c. pitted dates, chopped
- 1 c. coarsely chopped pecans

Soften yeast from roll mix in 1 cup warm water. In large mixing bowl combine flour mixture from roll mix, the cake mix, applesauce, eggs, oil, and yeast. Blend on low speed of electric mixer; beat on medium speed for 5 minutes. Stir in remaining ingredients. Turn into greased and floured 10-inch tube pan. Bake at 350 degrees for about 65 minutes. Cool in pan. If desired, turn onto platter and dust with powdered sugar.

Presto Sauce combines parsley with garlic, cheese and nuts to make a bright green sauce that will turn any pasta, preferably linguini, into a gourmet meal. The ideas for combining gift "go-withs" are endless when you present a jar of this sauce to some lucky person on your list. A colander with a pound of linguini and some garlic buds would be ideal. Add a pair of spaghetti tongs to assist in the serving. A large, painted pasta bowl, available at Italian specialty stores, would be well received, as would a small cheese grater. When adding the recipe to the gift, make sure you include the special instructions on serving it with the addition of the drained macaroni liquid. Don't be surprised if, on some cold January night, you receive a phone call thanking you for the perfect Christmas gift, from the lucky person who enjoyed your Presto Sauce after the holiday season had passed.

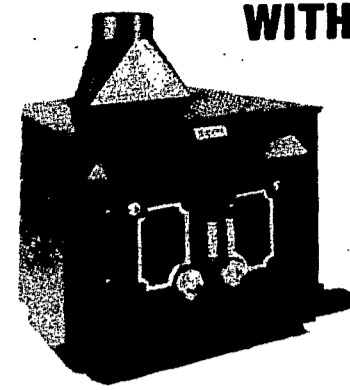
PESTO SAUCE

- 2 c. fresh, firmly packed parsley leaves, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/4 c. pine nuts, chopped
- 8 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. water
- 1/4 c. grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 Tbsp. fresh basil leaves or 1 1/2 Tbsp. dried basil leaves, crushed
- 3 Tbsp. butter or margarine, softened
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground pepper

Place parsley, crushed garlic, pine nuts, 4 Tbsp. of the oil, and water in container of food processor blender. Process for 1 minute, scraping sides occasionally. Add remaining ingredients, blending at high speed until mixture is smooth. Put mixture in screw-top glass jars and cover each with a thin layer of oil.

Note: When refrigerated, sauce will keep for several weeks. To serve, dilute sauce with 6-8 Tbsp. hot cooking liquid, drained from boiled pasta. Serve with additional grated cheese.

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