

Simply Service

for those interested in service relationships

Message from Bootpig

Welcome to the first Holiday Edition of Simply Service. When we originally cooked up this idea, we thought it would be great fun to have a holiday edition, and rather helpful. The holiday season can be daunting enough with gift giving and additional entertaining. Combine that with being in service and your standards can cause even more pressure than normal during a season meant for joy and celebrating.

What can we do? We've got some practical tips from chop on gift wrapping, and let me tell you, she's an expert. Our presents are so beautifully wrapped and styled that just looking at them is a great pleasure in the days leading up to Christmas. There is magic in her skill with this, like how she keeps track of boxes without gift tags. That is right. No gift tags. These fall under non-aesthetically pleasing, and that is verboten in chop's pretty world. Come Christmas morning, she knows exactly which presents are for which person. It is a great mystery of the universe.

Sir surprised us with a wonderfully sentimental sharing of our Christmas Eve traditions, and I've shared some of our first Christmas. Friends have come together as well in this issue with tips and tricks for charming their way through the holidays. What would a holiday edition be without recipes? We've got some great contributions in here, all set up on recipe cards for you to use in your own homes and perhaps building your own new traditions.

My continuing gratitude to each of you that has contributed to an issue, supported us by reading and sharing issues, or sent the wonderful emails about how much you enjoy it. Not an issue goes by that I don't realize how thrilled I am that chop has taken over the editing and pretty part, as well as kicking in some great articles on practical service.

From those of us cheerfully ensconced at the House O' Bob, we wish for you and yours a most joyous and happy holiday season! We look forward to seeing you in the New Year at Southwest in January, Tribal Fire in May, and who knows where else!

Happy Holidays!

BootPig

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Disco Xmas photos by porkchop

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The Matriarch of Merriment

By Sazmira

I don't know about y'all but during the holidays, I get sick unto death of being social. It would be one thing if everyone came to my house in one huge, gluttonous marathon of socialness. That's rarely the case for me.

First we go to Aunt Billie's house. Then to Uncle Bill's. Then we hop on over to Cousin Esther's. At all of these places, we have to stay some random and arbitrary amount of time as decided by the Matriarch of Merriment.

MoM has very strict holiday protocols. "No sneaking out the back door. No politics. No religion. No mentioning Peanut's ninth divorce. No making rotten rugrats of family members cry (even if they deserve it). No eyeball

rolling at the new in laws. Stay until after the presents are opened. Eat the food even if it does look like road kill. Be nice to everyone. Yes, even Aunt Ethel. No, I don't care if she tosses holy water on your head again. Just pack an umbrella for heaven's sake."

Failure to follow both letter and spirit of MoM's dictates results in death. Seriously! I used to have two sisters until they left before the presents were opened. That was a sad, sad day.

Anyway. With all the forced family time and the strictly enforced good behavior, there are still ways of surviving the holidays without disemboweling Cousin Buddy.

*Leave stuff in the car. Actually, leave EVERYTHING in the car.
You can make fifteen trips and mostly avoid talking to the crowd.*

From porkchop's lap:

Oh, the holidayze.

After several years and several department stores' worth of green, gold and red, the last thing I wanted to do was come home to *more* traditional holiday stuff. Voila! "Disco Xmas" was born.

This will be my third holiday season in Sir's house. The first year I was so homesick Pig and I madly recreated our all time family faves in quantities that could've fed a small country. Last year we started to create our own traditions @ The House o'Bob and had a wonderful holiday season together.

I'm actually looking forward to the holidays this year (even if it's Pig's year to do the Woodland Friends themed tree again). I can handle it; I don't have to sling the itchy, dusty green stuff from September 'til the day before Thanksgiving in stores any more. And I hope we bundle up in the convertible with thermoses full of spiced cider again this year. One can never see too many Christmas light swaddled palm trees, yannow.

Happy holidays to you!

~porkchop

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1. Keep moving. If you stop and linger in any one spot, someone will take that opportunity to talk to you. It's best if you're carrying some sort of food and making some sort of attempt to look busy. Warning: **Do not** hold the new baby. If you hold the new baby, everyone will be forced to come pet it, hold it, talk to you about it, or start that lame "when are you going to have another one" carping. If you simply must hold the new baby? Wait until it's puke or poop time. Actually, carrying around a dirty diaper might not be a bad idea now that I think about it...
2. You don't actually have to listen to people to make conversation with them. All you really need to do is smile and nod politely. You really only have to pay enough attention to hear if there's a question mark at the end of a phrase. A question mark at the end of the phrase means some sort of response is required from you. If they look happy? Smile and nod. If they look sad? Frown sympathetically and nod. This frees your mind up for important things, like how Uncle Ted's head really does look like a half peeled, slightly squished potato.
3. Leave stuff in the car. Actually, leave EVERYTHING in the car. You can make fifteen trips and mostly avoid talking to the crowd. Refuse any and all offers to "help" you carry stuff in. They're just trying to ease their own misery by ruining your escape plan.
4. You don't really have to eat. All MoM really requires is that you put stuff on your plate and make "this is fantastic" noises. So. Put lots of stuff on your plate. Pile it up into huge mountains of food. Then pretend you're a toddler and sorta... shuffle it around until it looks like it has been eaten, toss a napkin on the plate to hide the rest, compliment everyone on how wonderful it was, and voila! No gross food consumed and no one will ever know you didn't eat anything. Alternatively you can toss food on a new in-law's plate when no one is looking and let them deal with the whole mess.

Now. If you simply must escape early and/or often, here are some dire measures tips. You can't do this every holiday because MoM is not stupid. She will catch on sooner or later. And when she does, she really will kill you. (Continues on page 3)



The Matriarch of Merriment

continued

1. Either start smoking or pretend to smoke. The average smoker spends three quarters less time inside dealing with relatives than the average nonsmoker. Seriously, being or pretending to be a smoker is almost as good as leaving early. Yes, I know smoking is bad for your health. So is Aunt Bertha's lemon meringue sage stuffing with apricots and leeks. One is a slow, lingering death that gets you away from the crowd; the other is a quick painful death in the middle of a crowd. Look, the reason smokers smoke is to get away from annoying people. Watch at your next family gathering. Notice how all the smokers get up en masse, run for the door, and no one ever tries to stop them? You can do that too... but only if you can blend in. The downside of this is that MoM will spend the rest of the year rasing hell that you've started smoking. I figure all the bitching MoM will do is nothing compared to yet another story about Cousin Phil's high school football career... that happened forty years ago.
2. Show up feeling vaguely ill but don't have any specific ailments. This allows you to hog the bathroom (where the crowd isn't) and, if you play it just right, MoM will actually make your excuses for you! Don't whine. Don't complain. Just look vaguely queasy (take a sniff of Aunt Bertha's stuffing if you need help) and try to act brave. Say things like, "No, really. I'm fine!" then gag just a teensy bit and excuse yourself to the bathroom.
3. Prearrange an "emergency" at work. Keep your cell phone on, keep the battery charged, and don't let MoM see you using it or she'll figure out what you're up to and preemptively kill you. The karma gods might eventually bite you for it but needs must and whatnot.
4. This last resort is absolutely a LAST resort... Use the powah of the tween-aged child if you are blessed with one. Go rent one if need be. Nothing gets you out of a family gathering faster than a sleeping kid. "Kiddo. You know I love you, right? And you know I love your grandmother, right? And all the other family? And you know we aren't ever never supposed to lie, right? Okay. I need you to go over there and pretend to fall asleep. \$20. What? You want \$30? This is highway robbery! Fine, fine, yes I know beggars can't be choosers. Just go do it and I'll pay you in the car..."

Sazmira is a 36 year old service-oriented wildchild, beloved pet of sadists, adored friend, and general free spirit with a huge heart and bent towards slavery even if she won't admit it.

Green Holiday Ideas

Submitted by Elegant, slave to Archer

TREES

Nearly all cut holiday trees are grown on tree farms — meaning their stock is replenished yearly and natural forests aren't hurt by choosing a cut tree. Christmas trees can be recycled too - real trees that have been cut are a useful material for composting. Composting requires a carbon source and Christmas trees are just right for municipal operations which use chippers to shred the material. Look for tree drop-off locations in your neighborhood. If your older artificial tree needs replacing, recycle it! These older trees are usually made from twisted metal which is accepted by most recycling centers. (Note: Never burn real Christmas tree branches in your fireplace. It can cause the buildup of creosote, which is a highly flammable compound.)

DECOR

Take a page from our pioneer forefathers for green decorating during the holidays: Natural evergreen boughs cut from the tree, ivy, magnolia leaves, handmade ornaments, and bowls of fruit, nuts or pine cones. Mix these natural accents with seasonal plants like poinsettias and cyclamen to create a warm, welcoming feel without the petroleum and chemical waste. Decorate pots of rosemary, thyme and sage with leftover gift ribbons. These wonderfully fragrant evergreens can be used to season recipes all year long

WRAPPING SECURELY FROM THE INSIDE

Instead of wasting mounds of tissue paper to nestle gifts in a box put your paper shredder to work. Pop in those bank statements and credit card junk mailers and you will have plenty of fluff for packing. Forget the boxes completely and put gifts in re-usable plastic containers. Wrap the filled container and the recipient gets two gifts!

Give Someone Else to Your Owner

Submitted by Elegant, slave to Archer

Trade skills with someone else and treat your owner to personal service. Perhaps you are a massage expert but you cannot shine a pair of boots without sneaking them to the cobbler. Your friend is a bootblack. Make up pretty certificates on the computer and trade a personal bootblackening for a professional massage.



Cardamom Butter Cookies photo by Danae
(Recipe card provided in the recipe section below)

A Tree of Bounty

A Holiday Idea submitted by blush RedTail

One idea for the holidays is a tree that you and your family/household decorate with meaningful service and giving.

What you will need is (1) a tree or bush of your choice (real or fake, living or dead, inside or outside); and (2) a basket of bows in the color(s) of your choice (e.g., red.)

The challenge is for each member of the household to perform good deeds for others (family members, household members, strangers, co-workers, etc.) but to do it anonymously, without anyone knowing who did it.

"Good deeds" can be anything: cleaning up after a sibling, shoveling a neighbor's sidewalk, leaving baked goods at the office or someone's door, or even buying and giving an anonymous gift. Use your imagination, it's part of the fun.

For each good deed that is done – the person who did the task should secretly place a bow on the tree. In this manner, the tree will just magically fill up with bows as deeds are accomplished. And by placing the bows on the tree secretly (so no one knows who placed the bow and accomplished the 'good deed') – competition is avoided (which is especially important if children are participating.)

Hopefully by the New Year - you will have a tree COVERED with wonderful giving moments that embodies the true spirit of the holidays: a real Tree of Bounty.

Holiday Tips and Ideas

By Danae

- Save your Holiday and Christmas cards – especially those with notes about friends' activities and life and then refer to them in the following year when writing notes to far-away friends. This is a little personal touch that lets them know you are thinking of them.
- Another idea that is attached to the above, I hit the after Christmas sales to stock up holiday cards for next year. I then go ahead and address those cards in January or February of the New Year and also put that letter from the friend or at least a little sticky with the things I want to refer to when writing the card out. When you pull them out to get ready to mail out you will be a couple steps closer to getting them out.
- In early December, mix up batches of cookie dough to pop in the freezer. Then just take a few notes on rolling thickness, baking directions on paper and include it in the freezer bag. It saves time hunting for the right cookbook or going through your recipe box.
- When visiting friends during the holidays remember that pets like Christmas too. Wrap up a few treats for the pet and both pet and owner will be pleasantly surprised.
- Keep a file on your computer or on index cards that keep track of what gifts you buy or make for each friend and family member. It eliminates having to try and remember from year to year and also saves you time so that you don't get or make the same gift as a years previous.
- One that is an oldie but a goodie is taking cards you received years past and making them into gift tags. With all the scrapbooking supplies that are available at low cost places like Dollar Tree and Big Lots you can trim in inexpensive but cute ways. If something is on the inside of the card but you like the image on the front still use it and just glue a piece of white or festive paper to the back.
- Another oldie but goodie is making an old-fashioned paper chain either to decorate your tree or around a door. Or to use as a countdown to Christmas. Taking childhood crafts and making them as adults brings good memories to the holidays.
- Make a Hor D'Oeuvres Christmas Tree - Take a Styrofoam cone (10" tall) to make an edible Christmas tree/centerpiece. Cover the "tree" with romaine lettuces leaves or other leaves you think might work to make it green. Using toothpicks add olives, cherry tomatoes, chunks of cheese, cauliflower florets and other vegetables. They are the "ornaments." A thick piece of cheese cut in a shape of a star can top the tree. Around the holidays they have cute toothpicks that just add even more "decoration" to the tree. Let your imagination go on what you can do to bring a festive tree to your table.

Danae lives in Western Colorado and has been in a service oriented M/s relationship with Michael for the last 5 years. Before moving to Colorado, she lived in Ohio where she was active in several BDSM organizations through volunteering her time. In her free time she creates art, enjoys day trips around beautiful Colorado and frequently gets lost in books. She has written for newsletters, contributed to websites and reflects on her own journey in the lifestyle in an online blog.

For more information about Danae, please visit www.withinreality.com

Holiday Traditions

By Whipmaster Bob Clark

In every family there are traditions that are observed during the holidays. Many are passed down from generation to generation, some are developed over time. Many folks begin their own traditions when they reach adulthood-traditions that are uniquely theirs. I would like to tell you about one of mine. It started out, as just something fun to do. It has developed into something very personal, intimate and loving for my family.

This is a Christmas Eve tradition. There are three in my family, myself, pig, and chop. A couple of weeks before, we start discussing what we would like for dinner on that night. It is always something different, something special. Once we have nailed down the menu, we shop. Getting all the right ingredients, from where ever they can be found. This usually means multiple trips, to multiple stores and markets. On the day, we start cooking around noon or so. No rush, no hurry. Slow and relaxed, because this is about real quality, together time. When all the food is ready we sit down to an exquisitely prepared table. Everything perfectly placed and arranged. Of course, extra attention and detail is paid to plating the food too. We take our time in eating that sumptuous meal, savoring every delectable morsel. The wine, the laughter, and the food, are all perfect, all in the moment. A completely decadent meal with two of the most beautiful women on the planet! They are my slaves, my lovers, my best friends, my partners in crime and chaos, my family! What more, could a man want? But wait; there is more to this little tradition of ours.

After dinner is finished, and the kitchen is straightened a bit, we start preparing for The Drive. The home made, hot apple cider is put into a large thermos, and the travel mugs. We bundle up in our warmest winter wear: gloves, scarves, heavy coats, even warm, fleecy lap blankets and pile into the convertible. Yes, I said *convertible*. Top down and away we go! Where? On Christmas Eve? In a convertible with the top down? To look at all the Christmas lights and decorations in town, of course! We start our grand adventure driving through our neighborhood, and then go further out. We drive and laugh, listening to Christmas music and see all the beautiful lights and decorations. Some neighborhoods hold contests to see who can come up with the most fantastic display. Some neighborhoods or streets, have a theme, and as you drive down the street it all blends together, telling a story. Many of these people spend thousands of dollars and spend weeks putting it all together, getting it just right. All for our amusement and delight! We thank them profusely, with our "Oooh"s, and "Ahhhh"s, with our laughter and happiness. I hope they find that to be payment enough for all their hard work, just for us :-)

When we have seen all that we can, and the cold is finally wearing us down, we put up the top, turn on the heater and head for home.

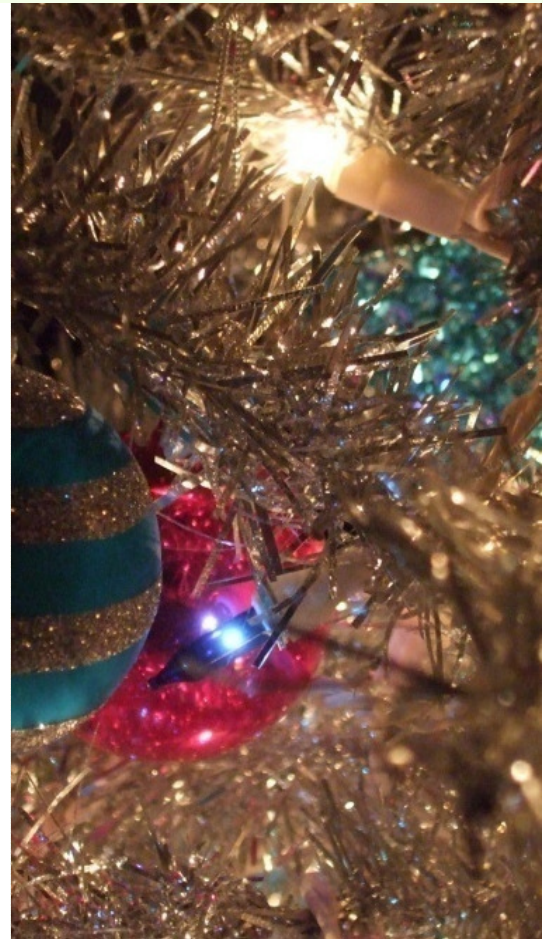
Home, for a warm fire and eggnog with freshly grated nutmeg sprinkled over the top. Home, for hugs, snuggles and kisses. As we wind down and sleep begs to come, I tuck the girls into bed, all safe and warm. Returning to the living room, I ease into my chair with a fresh glass of eggnog.

Staring into the dying fire, I sigh and smile with contentment. For I know how truly blessed I am.

Whipmaster Bob Clark is a Sadist, Leatherman, Owner, Chef, Edgeplayer, and Twisted Sick-Fuck (with no apologies). He's been active in this thing we do for 30+ years and a presenter for the last 15. While he's done A LOT in that time, he doesn't claim to have done it all, nor will he. He has a lot of experience in many areas of the lifestyle and loves sharing his knowledge. He loves working with folks new to the lifestyle and sharing thoughts, ideas, and perspectives with novice and experienced alike. It's not an entirely selfless thing; he admits he learns something from everyone he meets.

"I own two incredibly hot, raunchy, red-headed pigs, I travel and teach, meet new and interesting people. I cook. I am Very happy with my life. Ahhh, it's good to be king!"

He can be reached at whipmastrbob@cox.net.



'Chop's 12/24/2007 blog entry: Seasonal Sensory Overload

Since I didn't work today, I ran some errands and started prepping things for tomorrow's meal. I simmered pears in red wine, cinnamon, whole cloves, sugar, lemon juice and lemon zest/removed to chill/simmered cranberries in same concoction/removed to chill/reduced and put the syrup away to chill...

OMG- simmer cinnamon and cloves in *anything* and you have INSTANT Christmas! It smelled SO good... and welcomed them in from their [fortunately] short work days. It was decided we'd bundle up and take the Xmas light tour in the convertible with the top down (it's 45 degrees currently, so we felt a little silly walking out of the house looking like Eskimos). I cranked out some spiced cider for the ride. (d00d- I was very domesticated today!)

It was fantastic. And it's not over (but I suspect I'm not long for this world...) we came home and he started a fire, then I started some Xmas music while he whipped up some eggnog and sprinkled freshly ground nutmeg on top.

Merry Happy!



Toto, I don't think we're in Disco Xmas anymore:
Woodland Friends tree photos by Pig

Pig's 12/24/2007 blog entry: Spectacular Christmas Eve

(sighs)

Some days just have such spectacularly perfect, extended moments. This was one. Everyone was home by 4-ish, work done, last minute shopping done, chop starting tomorrow's dessert so this wonderful smell of simmering pears and wine and spices.

And then...Bundling up to go look at Christmas lights -- in the convertible with the top down with freshly made mulled cider in mugs and Christmas music playing. We went down to the lake and they had the trees all lit and coordinated with Christmas songs and lights on the water and cruising through neighborhoods...and it was lovely. Gorgeous moon out, clear skies.

And now...eggnog and a fire and OMG freshly grated nutmeg. who KNEW? This is amazing smelling, tasting stuff. And this is a perfect day.

Merry Christmas

The Great Christmas Tree Adventure

By BootPig

**Adapted from a journal posting after my adventure. It has become a favorite Christmas memory. It is also a wonderful part of our coming together as a poly family and the holiday spirit of trying to surprise each other. In conversations about poly, people often ask about how traditions are combined, or new traditions are built. This is one of those examples.*

Although 2006 was not chop's first Christmas with us, it was her first Christmas living here. Here we were, a family, celebrating our holiday season. No one had to get on a plane and go back somewhere. What I did need was to get them home, because they were off adventuring in Atlanta. That is where the story starts, a pig, home alone, unsupervised and planning holiday sneaking and scheming.

It has only been in recent years that Sir has sanctioned full-on holiday seasons with big trees and bright presents, stockings, music, looking at lights, etc. He really just sort of warmed up to the whole idea and now enjoys the holiday seasons as well, see his article about our Christmas Eve traditions. Being in service to someone that overlooked the holidays for many years has a special kind of fun. They really have not seen everything before so in some ways, it is a brand new experience.

I thought it would be nice if the tree was all up and ready when they got home from Atlanta. Now, I am Southern. My mother does BIG TREE. My grandmother does BIG TREE. BIG TREE means a Southern Living issue came alive and threw up all over your living room. These are not trees that come together quickly. They require thought, and themes. Chop has nicknamed this particular tree, "Woodland Friends". This helps us distinguish between years, Woodland Friends ('06) or Disco Xmas ('07).

When I get these brilliant ideas, I occasionally forget to think them through entirely. This will become painfully, or charmingly, evident.

Step 1: Obtain a tree. It must be a live tree. I cannot surprise someone with a faux tree. Live. Live Noble Fir. I always get a Noble Fir because they have great space between the branches for decorating, and the needles are, in theory, soft. I am not insane enough to drive to the north country and chop a tree down. I'm a city girl these days, so going to Home Depot's Lot O' Trees counts. Off I go, in my cute little car - this is where the failure to think things through problem strikes.

They have a perfect 7-foot Noble Fir. It is a reasonable price. Straight, tall, full, with great potential. I cheerfully claim it and drag it up to the nice man who will make it pretty. Now, desert Christmas is sexy. It is hot. The nice, muscled man is also sweaty. He has a chain saw. THIS is romance. He trims it all up, while I watch him and think impure thoughts and wraps it in the handy-dandy tree net. I am still daydreaming.

"Ma'am, Ma'am?"

"Oh, um, yes?"

"Where's your truck?"

"My what?"

"Your truck, where's your truck?"

"I don't have a truck"

"Where are you putting this?" (shakes tree about)

"In that..." (points to cute convertible)

He laughs. I laugh. I did have the foresight to bring some blankets to protect the trunk of the car that the tree will not fit in. We lay the blankets on the back seat, and put the top down on my little convertible. He stands the tree up in the back and off I go. This is Christmas in the desert. People look at you strangely with your little fishnet-condomed tree poking merrily up behind your roll bar.

When I get home, it dawns on me that I have not thought to bring home Mr. Butch Christmas Tree Trimmer Guy. I should have. I am now looking at the tree, the car, and the physics of removing said tree from car. I grab the handy netting wrapped around the tree. It stretches. And stretches. And stretches some more. POP! The tree dislodges from the car, sailing out past me and into the yard. Hooray!

I look back into the car. There are 9 million needles now decorating my interior. Mental Note: You will need to vacuum the car before picking them up at the airport. I set the tree free from the fishnet bondage. This is a stupid move. I drag the now unrestrained and MUCH larger tree up the sidewalk to the front steps. Mental Note: Sweep sidewalk. I've seen the movies, you must now bang the tree on the ground, and I have no idea why. Bang. Bang. Bang. Mental Note: Sweep porch. Drag tree in house. Mental Note: Vacuum the entire damn house. Again.

(Continues on page 8)



The Great Christmas Tree Adventure

continued

Now, the house rule is if you're home, you're naked. This is a habit. We come through the door stripping sometimes. I strip down; this will not go down as one of my smarter moves. It is, however, obedient, so sainthood is mine. I put the 7-foot tall tree in the tree stand. You know how hard it is to level this. You end up head down, ass up under the tree trying to wedge it about in the stand. This is funny looking on an average level and damned priceless doing it naked. Naked Slave Tree Wrasslin' – Film at 11. Remember the aforementioned "soft" needles? Yeh. Not so much.

Step 2: Decorate it. This involves 4 trips to Michael's because I am missing certain things that I have decided it cannot be without, including more birds because I had enough birds for a smaller tree but not this big one.

This tree is done in red, gold, and ivory. According to Ray, one of my best friends and consultant on all things fabulously gay, a tree may have no more than 3 major colors. Check! White lights only, no blinking. Check! A theme. Check! Nice little wintery cardinals sitting on branches, candied fruit with faux ice crystals, wheat bundles, twig fencing. You can imagine the mechanics of fencing, plus a bird sitting on it, and holding a spray of berries. Only ornaments can actually hang from hooks. Everything is wired together with floral wire. It is painstaking. It is obsessive. Ray delighted in it, he came over and laughed through the whole story and then helped me look for any gaps.

The only thing missing was the bow at the top. I do not make bows. I missed the genetic encoding for bow making. It is a source of scandal in my family, of course, that I cannot birth a bow from unlimited ribbon, but it is true. Chop, on the other hand, could make a bow out of paper towels and pipe cleaners given 10 minutes to make a plan. Thankfully, she is sharin' the secrets elsewhere in this issue. She is the MacGyver of wired ribbon.

The tree is done. I light a fire, and wait for them to come home in a day or two, so we can keep moving forward with our family, our Christmas traditions, our very neat life together.

And even in writing this, revisiting the journal post, remembering the details and adding them, I am reminded that I am most happy when I'm at home, and with both of them in my life. A third Christmas in our home together is right around the corner.

Happy Holidays!

BootPig is... awww, c'mon. I really don't have to 'splain who BootPig is, do I?

Personalized Recipe Cards

An Organizational/Gift Idea
submitted by cailinbeag

After having set out to organize my recipes and not finding anything ready-made that appealed to me, I decided to make my own recipe card templates. I wanted something interesting that added an element of whimsy to my otherwise utilitarian kitchen. In the process of doing this, it dawned on me what a great gift it would make.

If you would like to make recipe cards for yourself or as a gift, MS Office Recipe Card Templates (<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/CT101438651033.aspx>) are available for free, and are already formatted. You can change the picture and the font to reflect the tastes of the person you're making it for. If you see a picture on the internet that you'd like to use, simply hover over it, right-click on the mouse and choose "Save Picture As". Name the picture and save it to your desktop so it's easy to find. For additional fonts, FontCubes (<http://www.fontcubes.com/>) has all sorts of really neat ones. Make sure to save them to My Computer/Local Disk/WINDOWS/Fonts.

If you're making cards as gifts, create a folder that has all of the things you used to make it...the finished template, a copy of the font file, a copy of the picture, etc. Burn them to a disk. This will allow your friend/family member to create additional cards at their leisure. Do a bit of sleuthing and find out some of their favorite recipes, then fill in a few recipe cards for them to get them started. Avery 5389 postcards are excellent for this. There are 50 sheets in a package, with two cards per sheet, for about \$20. Create a gift pack of your filled in cards, the extra paper, the disk and, if you'd like, a 4"x6" recipe box to put it all in. You can find recipe boxes all over the place, from Target to Williams-Sonoma. eBay is a great resource, as well. Wrap it all up, and you're done!

A couple of variations on the theme:

- collect a favorite recipe from each person in your household and use them to fill in the cards.
- make a second gift of specialty items used in known favorite recipes, such as truffles, walnut oil or saffron.



Last year the gifts overtook the shiny little tree, so I "merchandised" them in the living room by

1. Recipient
2. Size/color

There were no tags... which confused everyone but me (and prevented the otherwise annual PigShakesGifts ritual). I'm on the left, he's in the middle, and she's on the right.

(For further proof of my OCD_ness, the blue striped package is actually 3 individually wrapped boxes tied with one bow. Notice how the stripes line up?)

I don't use gift bags because I really enjoy wrapping gifts and believe that opening gifts should be an adventure. The silver take out boxes are as close as I get to gift bags. We had no idea where the stockings were, but they're fuzzy and red; they aren't Disco Xmas at all! So the takeout boxes made nicely coordinating substitutes.

The Perfect Gift Wrapping Accompaniment!

Vince Guaraldi, of course! "A Charlie Brown Christmas: The Original Soundtrack Recording of the CBS Television Special" is my absolute favorite holiday music.

Charlie Brown: [Charlie Brown and Linus stop at a wall on their trip to the pond for ice skating]

I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel.

[begins to walk with Linus again]

Charlie Brown: I just don't understand Christmas, I guess. I like getting presents and sending Christmas cards and decorating trees and all that, but I'm still not happy. I always end up feeling depressed.

It always brings on the good holiday cheer.

I'm sure it's available at most retailers, but here's a handy amazon link: <http://www.amazon.com/Charlie-Brown-Christmas-Recording-Television/dp/B000000XDJ>

Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown!

Gift Wrap Like a PorkChop

By PorkChop

In my happy little "all about the presentation" world, the gifts and the tree complement each other. Because. It's. Pretty! So pretty I often hear the recipients proclaim they don't want to open them. They do it anyway.

The basics:

Buy **rolls of good quality gift wrap** (it's heavier, won't wrinkle/tear easily and holds a crease better) and **ribbon** (none of those pre-made plastic things at The House o'Bob; fabric ribbon ONLY, and usually wired because it holds its shape beautifully). Make note of square feet/yards to ensure you'll have enough. I typically buy two to three tree-coordinating gift wrap colors and ribbon that closely matches the wrap in solids, simple coordinated patterns, or metallics.

Hit department, specialty and/or craft stores' holiday shops. I usually stock up after the holidays for the following year to score some bargains. And now I look like a schizo-shopper because I pick up Disco Xmas stuff (for the odd years we put up my little silver tree) AND traditional stuff (for the even years when Pig does her Great Southern Christmas Tree). Hey, it works for us.

Buy **boxes**. Everything absolutely *must* go in a box. How will you get those amazingly crisp corners otherwise? Places like The Container Store are wonderful sources of all manner of boxes. I've actually measured gifts needing boxes, made a list filled with crazy dimensions and found everything I needed there. I also always have a stash of miscellaneous flat-folding boxes on hand for lightweight gifts. They're inexpensive and can be found practically *everywhere* during the holiday shopping season.

Keep a pair of **scissors** handy that are only used for gift wrap.

You can never have too much **white tissue paper**. This is essential for cradling a gift in a larger box, or anyone with a "gift-shaker" in the family. (Pig hates that I do this, because it prevents her from determining the contents. Score 'Chop!)

Invisible tape won't detract from the pretty wrap job.

A great optional item: a **gift wrap organizer**. Oh, how I love those things. I keep ribbon in a separate box, but keep rolls of paper in an organizer with assorted collapsible boxes, white tissue paper, rolls of invisible tape and a pair of scissors. It's a one stop (well, two) gift wrap "shop" for gift wrapping needs throughout the year.

The "how-to":

Preparation: Work on a clean, flat surface. Remove price tags (leave barcodes intact and include a gift receipt if you're *really* unsure. Make sure the box is nice and square (as in straight, flaps are flush and gap-free, etc). I add tape as needed to make everything as tight and flat as possible.

Wrap:

1. Determine the amount of wrap you'll need. I roll the out the wrap face down on my work surface, place the box on top then cut to size, leaving an approximate 2" allowance and ensuring there is enough to completely cover the ends (trim ends as needed).
2. Place box, top-down, in the center of the paper (still face down on the work surface).
3. Secure one of the paper's raw edges to the box with tape at the center point.
4. Run your hands along the paper covered box, from the anchor point toward the paper's free edge. Smooth and tighten as you go, creasing the paper against each of the box's corners.



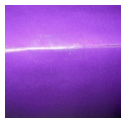
5. When you reach the end of the paper, make one more crease against the box.



6. Fold the cut edge under.



7. Secure the finished edge to the box with tape. The seam will magically disappear!



Gift Wrap Like a PorkChop

continued

8. Rotate the box so that a short end faces you. (The seamed side of the paper should remain at the top.) Bring both sides in toward the center, creating flaps at the top and bottom. Smooth and fold the edges down, crease both sides and secure with tape.



9. Bring top flap down, crease the corner and secure with tape.
10. Bring bottom flap up, crease the corner and secure with tape.

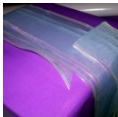


11. Repeat steps 8 through 10 on the opposite side.
12. Now it's ready for a festive bow.



Ribbons & Bows: I tie bows by hand; gifts are most commonly adorned with one long ribbon finished off with a shoe-string bow.

- a. To determine the length needed, wrap the ribbon around the box three complete times and cut.



- b. Find the cut ribbon's center and place at top center of the box.



- c. Bring around the box, twist at center then wrap ribbon around the width of the box. Make sure ribbon is smooth and taut.



- d. Back at the top of the box, tie a half knot.



- e. Tie a bow:
 - a. Make a loop with the ribbon in your right hand and bring ribbon in left hand over and around this loop.



- b. Bring ribbon in left hand under first loop, form a loop and bring it through the center loop.



- c. Pull loops to tighten bow, adjust lengths, trim tails, and style. Tada!



Kinky Cookies

A Holiday Idea submitted by cailinbeag

I don't know where the idea came from...it sort of snuck up on us. It was the Christmas season and my sister and I were in our teens. We had set out to make and decorate gingerbread men for the afternoon. Sitting in the kitchen, munching on legs and arms from casualty cookies while we waited for the others to cool, we discussed who was getting what for Christmas, parties and whether we would get any snow.

Once the cookies had cooled, we began the fun of icing them. My sister and I are both a little silly, so it was no surprise that our gingerbread men sported frosting evening gowns and thongs and horns and Jackie O sunglasses, sometimes all on the same cookie. However, when my sister noticed that my cookies were also wearing leather harnesses and blindfolds and collars and sissy panties...well, there was only one thing she could say.

"Silver and red dragees would make excellent ball gags, yanno."

And she was right.

These cookies would make great sweets at your next kink-friendly holiday gathering. Keep an eye out at your grocer for black cake icing around Halloween, since it's really difficult to tint your own. Silver dragees (those little sugar balls that will break your teeth) are good for hardware, and for that wet latex look, spritz the applied icing with a bit of water and then smooth out. Have fun!!!



Orange-Glazed Turkey with Rice Stuffing

Photo by pixie_mschf

(Recipe card provided in the recipe section below)

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Making Croissants for the Holidays

By Wildfleurs

I love making fresh breads and one of my favorites is a croissant, but because they are so good and fatty, I save them for the holidays! The recipe I use comes from Gourmet Magazine and some of the tips for making them that I've found handy over the years are:

- Once the croissant dough is folded into the ten by five rectangle, the easiest way to store it is in a really large freezer bag rather than trying to wrap it in plastic wrap (it also makes it easier since you have to take it out of the fridge and do multiple "folds."
- You can put the dough in the freezer for a half an hour instead of in the refrigerator for an hour if you need to get through the "folds" faster.
- Use European/Grade AA butter if you can - it really does help improve the taste.
- Before you start, take a ruler or measuring tape and mark out the length and width the dough needs to be rolled out to and mark it with tape on the corners.
- Cook them at 350 or 375 depending on your oven for about fifteen minutes

I make the croissant dough the day before I need it while I'm doing food prep and let it do the final rise in the refrigerator. And about an hour before I need it, I take out the dough, cut it into triangles and place it on baking sheets for a final rise before putting it in the oven - its almost always the final thing I cook before the meal.

Making croissants may seem complicated, but the more times you do it the more of a method you develop and once you have homemade and fresh croissants, nothing else will do!

Croissant Dough

Gourmet - October 2000

Nancy Silverton's Pastries from The La Brea Bakery

It's important not to try to halve this recipe. When you need only a half recipe of dough, as for the pains au chocolat, use the rest of the dough for a batch of Parma braids or a princess ring. Or make a double recipe of those irresistible chocolate croissants and share them with friends. One batch of this dough is enough for 24 plain croissants, 32 chocolate croissants, 16 Parma braids, or 2 princess rings.

1 ½ cups whole milk, heated to warm (105°F–110°F)

¼ cup packed light brown sugar

1 tablespoon plus ¼ teaspoon active dry yeast (from two 1/4-oz packages)

3 ¾ to 4 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon kosher salt

3 sticks (1 ½ cups) cold unsalted butter

Special equipment: a standing electric mixer with dough hook, 2 kitchen towels (not terry cloth), a ruler, a pastry brush

Make dough: Stir together warm milk, brown sugar, and yeast in bowl of standing mixer and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. (If it doesn't foam, discard and start over.) Add 3 ¾ cups flour and salt and mix with dough hook at low speed until dough is smooth and very soft, about 7 minutes.

Transfer dough to a work surface and knead by hand 2 minutes, adding more flour as necessary, a little at a time, to make a soft, slightly sticky dough. Form dough into a roughly 1 ½ inch-thick rectangle and chill, wrapped in plastic wrap, until cold, about 1 hour.

Prepare and shape butter: After dough has chilled, arrange sticks of butter horizontally, their sides touching, on a work surface. Pound butter with a rolling pin to soften slightly (butter should be malleable but still cold). Scrape butter into a block and put on a kitchen towel, then cover with other towel. Pound and roll out on both sides until butter forms a uniform 8- by 5-inch rectangle. Chill, wrapped in towels, while rolling out dough.

Roll out dough: Unwrap dough and roll out on a lightly floured surface, dusting with flour as necessary and lifting and stretching dough (especially in corners), into a 16- by 10-inch rectangle. Arrange dough with a short side nearest you. Put butter in center of dough so that long sides of butter are parallel to short sides of dough. Fold as you would a letter: bottom third of dough over butter, then top third down over dough. Brush off excess flour with pastry brush.

Roll out dough: Turn dough so a short side is nearest you, then flatten dough slightly by pressing down horizontally with rolling pin across dough at regular intervals, making uniform impressions. Roll out dough into a 15- by 10-inch rectangle, rolling just to but not over ends.

Brush off any excess flour. Fold in thirds like a letter, as above, stretching corners to square off dough, forming a 10- by 5-inch rectangle. (You have completed the first "fold.") Chill, wrapped in plastic wrap, 1 hour.

Make remaining "folds": Make 3 more folds in same manner, chilling dough 1 hour after each fold, for a total of 4 folds. (If any butter oozes out while rolling, sprinkle with flour to prevent sticking.) Wrap dough tightly in plastic wrap and chill at least 8 hours but no more than 18 (after 18 hours, dough may not rise sufficiently when baked).

Wildfleurs is a happily owned female slave living in New England.

For more information on her, visit: wildfleurs.com

Recipe for: Xmas Breakfast Casserole

Submitted by the [techno]wench

She notes: I used to make it Xmas Eve night, refrigerate and put in the oven when we start opening gifts. It goes well with a fruit salad and something sweet like coffee cake.

Ingredients

10 beaten eggs
 10 cubed slices of bread (crust or crustless)
 1 cup milk
 8 oz grated cheese (usually cheddar)
 salt and pepper to taste
 1 lb cooked breakfast meat (bacon, crumbled italian sausage, crumbled breakfast sausage)
 ***you can also do this vegetarian with sauteed veggies
 2 tsps favorite seasonings (Mrs. Dash, garlic, onion, sesonall, whatever you want)

Directions

Grease a 9x13 pyrex dish
Beat together egg and milk; add seasonings
Place cubed bread in bottom
pour egg mixture over the top
add breakfast meat
top with cheese

Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight

When ready to cook, bake at 325 for 45 minutes to an hour, uncover and bake 15 more minutes until mixture is firm when tested with knife

Recipe for: PorkChop's French Toast

From the kitchen of PorkChop

Yummy comfort food frequently requested at The House o'Bob, y'all.

Ingredients

8 slices of your favorite bread
 6 eggs
 1 cup whole milk or heavy cream
 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 1 teaspoon Cinnamon
 4 Tablespoons butter

Directions

Whisk eggs, milk/cream, vanilla and cinnamon in a large mixing bowl.
Melt 1 tablespoon butter in large nonstick skillet or griddle over medium heat.
Dip bread slices in egg mixture, allowing them to absorb.
Cook bread slices until golden brown, about 3 minutes on each side.
Arrange on plates with pats of butter.

Serve with maple syrup or fruit... or both! (I've served them topped with berries simmered in red wine with fantastic results.)

And remember, everything's better with bacon.

Serves 4.

Recipe for: Blue Cheese and Caramelized Onion Dip

Submitted by cailinbeag, from LeslieStowe.com

Ingredients

½ medium onion, thinly sliced
 1T olive oil
 ¼ c mayonnaise
 ¾ c sour cream
 3oz. blue cheese (Roquefort, Danish blue or Stilton)
 6oz. cream cheese
 4t fresh lemon juice
 Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Directions

Heat the olive oil in a small sauté pan to medium low. Add onion, cover and cook until deep golden brown, about 20 min., stirring occasionally. Cool.

Whisk together mayonnaise and sour cream in a medium bowl. Add the blue cheese and cream cheese. Mash with a rubber spatula until smooth.

Stir in caramelized onion. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Serve with baguette or whole grain crackers.

Recipe for: Deluxe Chex Mix

From the kitchen of cailinbeag, a family recipe

Ingredients

6 cups Chex Rice cereal
 6 cups Chex Corn cereal
 4 cups Shreddies or Chex Wheat cereal
 2 cups Pretzel sticks
 1 box Cheese Bites
 2 cups Cashews
 2 cups Brazil nuts
 2 cups Almonds
 2 cups Pecans

 1 lb Butter
 4 tbsp Seasoning Salt (less if you don't like it salty)
 4 tsp Onion powder
 4 tsp Garlic powder
 8 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

Directions

Put all ingredients from the first section into a BIG roaster. Don't worry about mixing it.

Preheat the oven to 275F.

Melt the butter on a low heat in a saucepan.

Measure dry seasonings into a measuring cup.

Take butter off the heat.

Gradually stir in the seasonings into the butter. Don't expect them to dissolve.

Add Worcestershire to the butter mix and stir while drizzling it over the dry cereals.

Lift and fold gently to moisten everything a bit.

Place in the oven for 1 hour, stirring well every 15 minutes.

Cool completely. Keeps well in Ziplocs. I don't know for how long because it never lasts.

Recipe for: Baked Feta Spread

Submitted by Elegant

Ingredients

1 teaspoon lemon juice
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 can diced tomatoes
4 oz crumbled feta cheese
¼ teaspoon oregano
¼ teaspoon basil

Directions

*Mix together all ingredients except feta.
Grease a baking dish and sprinkle the bottom with crumbled feta.
Top with tomato mixture.
Bake at 350 for 20 minutes.

Serve with pita chips*

Recipe for: Spiced Caramelized Cauliflower

Submitted by Elegant

Ingredients

1 large head cauliflower cut into florets
4 tablespoons melted butter
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon cumin
Coarse salt, for sprinkling

Directions

*Preheat oven to 450°F.
In a large bowl, toss the cauliflower with the butter.
In a small bowl, combine the sugar, paprika, salt, pepper, cinnamon, and cumin. Toss the spices with the cauliflower until evenly coated.

Spread cauliflower in a single layer on a baking sheet
Bake 20 minutes, stirring once or twice, until the florets are crisp, tender and caramelized.
Mound the florets on a serving platter and sprinkle with coarse salt.
Serve hot or warm.*

Recipe for: Curried Nuts

Submitted by *Elegant*

Ingredients

1 large egg white, lightly beaten
 1 tablespoon curry powder
 2 teaspoons ground cumin
 2 teaspoons ground ginger
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1 teaspoon salt
 4 cups walnut and/or pecan halves

Directions

In large bowl, combine egg whites with spices; stir in walnuts and coat thoroughly.

Coat a large, shallow baking pan with non-stick cooking spray.

Spread nuts onto pan.

Bake at 350°F 15 to 18 minutes, until dry and crisp.

Cool completely before serving.

Recipe for: Trio of Marinated Goat Cheeses

Submitted by *PorkChop*, from www.epicurious.com

Ingredients

1 11-ounce log fresh soft goat cheese (such as Montrachet)

Tomato and Garlic Goat Cheese

5 large garlic cloves (unpeeled), pierced
 1/2 cup (about) plus 2 tablespoons olive oil

5 sun-dried tomatoes
 5 small sprigs fresh rosemary
 5 small sprigs fresh thyme

Porcini Mushroom Goat Cheese

7/8 to 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms

1/2 cup (about) plus 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 large garlic clove, minced
 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
 Salt and pepper

Walnut Goat Cheese

1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons walnuts (about 1 1/2 ounces)
 1/2 cup (about) walnut oil
 Pepper

Directions

Cut goat cheese into twelve 1/2-inch-thick rounds. Set rounds aside.

For tomato and garlic goat cheese:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place garlic in heavy small pan. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons oil. Bake until garlic is tender when pierced with small sharp knife, about 20 minutes. Cool slightly; peel garlic cloves. Reserve oil in pan.

Place sun-dried tomatoes in small bowl. Add enough boiling water to cover. Let tomatoes stand until softened, about 15 minutes. Drain; pat dry.

Put 1 tomato, 1 garlic clove and 1 sprig each rosemary and thyme in bottom of 8-ounce jar. Drizzle with 1 1/2 teaspoons oil reserved from garlic. Place 1 cheese round atop herbs. Drizzle with more reserved olive oil. Repeat layering, using remaining tomatoes, garlic, herbs, garlic oil and 3 more cheese rounds. Pour in enough olive oil to fill jar completely. Seal tightly. (Can be prepared 1 week ahead; refrigerate.)

For porcini mushroom goat cheese:

Rinse mushrooms briefly with cold water; drain. Place mushrooms in small bowl. Add enough boiling water to cover and let stand until softened, about 30 minutes. Drain mushrooms.

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in heavy small skillet. Add garlic and sauté until just golden, about 3 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook until just heated through, stirring occasionally, about 1 minute. Mix in parsley. Season with salt and pepper. Cool completely.

Layer mushrooms, olive oil and 4 goat cheese rounds in 8-ounce jar, beginning and ending with mushrooms. Pour in enough oil to fill jar completely. Seal tightly. (Can be prepared up to 1 week ahead; refrigerate.)

For walnut goat cheese:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place walnuts on small cookie sheet. Toast until golden brown and fragrant, stirring occasionally, about 12 minutes. Cool completely.

Finely chop walnuts. Layer walnuts, walnut oil and remaining 4 goat cheese rounds in 8-ounce jar, seasoning each layer generously with pepper. Pour in enough walnut oil to fill jar completely. Seal tightly. (Can be prepared up to 1 week ahead; refrigerate.)

Makes three 8 ounce jars.

Recipe for: Butternut Squash Soup

From the kitchen of cailinbeag, a family recipe

Ingredients

1 large butternut squash
 2 carrots
 1 parsnip
 1 leek, white only
 2 T butter
 6 c. chicken or vegetable broth
 1 apple, peeled and chopped
 1 bay leaf
 2 t sugar
 salt & pepper to taste
 chives
 8 oz. brie, rind removed and cubed

Directions

*Preheat oven to 350F.
 Halve squash lengthwise.
 Place in a shallow baking dish, adding 1" of water.
 Bake for about 30 minutes, or until a knife is easily inserted.
 Remove from oven and allow to cool.
 Once cool enough to handle, scoop out squash from rind, placing squash in a large pot and discard rind.
 Coarsely chop carrot, parsnip and leek. Sauté in butter until tender.
 Place all ingredients except brie in pot with squash. Cook for 45 minutes.
 Using a food processor (tip: do NOT use a blender. The heat could crack the glass), whiz the soup in small batches until smooth.
 Set a chunk of brie in the bottom of each serving bowl, and pour hot soup over it. Serve.*

Recipe for: Chicken Apple Arugula Goat Cheese Salad

Submitted by cailinbeag, from Simply Recipes blog: www.elise.com/recipes/

Ingredients

Olive oil
 1 large shallot, peeled and sliced
 1 ½ lb skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut into 1 inch cubes
 Salt
 1 tart green apple, thinly sliced
 Baby arugula leaves - enough for a salad for four
 ¼ cup toasted walnuts, roughly chopped
 ¼ cup goat cheese - broken up into little pieces
 Lemon juice
 Salt and pepper

Directions

*Heat stick-free frying pan to medium heat.
 Add a tablespoon of olive oil and lightly sauté the shallot slices until translucent.
 Remove from pan.
 Add another tablespoon of olive oil and cook the chicken breast pieces, stirring occasionally, until just cooked through - 5 to 10 minutes.
 Sprinkle some salt on the chicken while you are cooking it.
 Remove from pan and chill.
 When chicken has cooled, toss together in a serving bowl the shallots, chicken, sliced green apple, arugula, walnuts and goat cheese.
 Dress with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper to taste.
 Serve.*

Recipe for: Tuscan Bean Soup

From the kitchen of cailinbeag, a family recipe

Ingredients

1 medium sprig fresh Rosemary
 2 leeks, sliced fine (whites only)
 2 bay leaves
 2 cloves garlic
 olive oil to fry

8 cups chicken or vegetable broth
 3 cans of cooked navy beans, well rinsed

Olive oil and freshly ground black pepper to garnish

Directions

Sauté the leeks, rosemary (whole - don't chop) bay leaves and garlic in the olive oil until the leeks become transparent like - don't brown them!!

Place in a pot with beans and broth.

Cook for 1.5 hours on a medium low simmer, or until it becomes nice and thick. (tip: skim the bubbles off the top. It'll cut down on gassiness)

Remove rosemary stem and bay leaves. Discard.

Put 3/4 of it thru the food processor (tip: do NOT use a blender. The heat could crack the glass) and the back into the pot to re-heat with the other 1/4.

Once placed in bowls, add a bit of cracked pepper and a drizzle of olive oil to soup's surface for presentation. Serve.

Recipe for: The Mayflower Sandwich

Submitted by Captvatng

Ingredients

Turkey
 Cream cheese (or neufachtel or tofutti)
 Cranberry sauce
 Bread

Directions

Put ingredients between two slices of your favorite bread

Enjoy!

Recipe for: Bubbe's Potato Latkes

From the kitchen of surrenderedsoul, a family recipe

Ingredients

4 pounds large russet (baking) potatoes
 4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 2 large onion (we usually use Vidalia onions)
 about 1 cup all-purpose flour
 6 large eggs, lightly beaten
 2 cup vegetable oil

Directions

Preheat oven to 250°F with rack in upper third.
Peel potatoes and coarsely grate into a bowl using large teardrop-shaped holes of a box grater or in a food processor fitted with medium shredding disk.
Add lemon juice and toss to coat.
Coarsely grate onion into same bowl.
Transfer to a kitchen towel (not terry cloth), then gather up corners to form a sack and twist tightly to wring out as much liquid as possible.
Wipe bowl clean, then return potatoes and onion to bowl and stir in flour, eggs, and 1 ¼ teaspoons salt until just combined.
Heat oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking.
Fill a ¼-cup measure halfway with latke mixture and carefully spoon it into skillet, then flatten to 3 inches in diameter with a slotted spatula.
Form 5 more latkes in skillet and fry until undersides are deep golden, 1 ½ to 3 minutes. (If latkes brown too quickly, reduce heat to medium.)
Turn over and fry until deep golden all over, 1½ to 3 minutes more.
Transfer to paper towels to drain briefly, then transfer to a metal rack set in a baking pan and keep warm in oven.
Note: you can also use a hot plate instead of the oven to keep them warm. The oven will keep them warm without making them soggy for up to an hour. The hotplate will keep them warm without making them soggy for about ½ hour.

Recipe for: Homestyle Greenbean Casserole

From the kitchen of Danae

Danae notes: these are a little more healthy than the tradition green bean casserole as well as so tasty.

Ingredients

½ cup buttermilk
 ¼ cup whole wheat bread crumbs
 ¼ cup ground walnuts
 1 onion cut crosswise into 1/4 inch thick slices and separated into rings
 ½ pound baby bella or cremini mushrooms – sliced
 1 onion chopped
 ½ teaspoon dried thyme
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 ¼ cup whole wheat flour
 3 cups 1% milk
 1 bag (16 oz) frozen french-cut green beans, thawed and drained

Directions

Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Coat a medium baking sheet and 13 x 9 baking dish with cooking spray.
Place the buttermilk in a shallow bowl. Place the bread crumbs and walnuts in another shallow bowl; stir to combine. Dip the onion rings into the buttermilk, then dredge in the bread crumbs and place on prepared baking sheet. Coat onion rings lightly with cooking spray.
Bake for 20 minutes or until tender and golden brown
Meanwhile, heat a medium saucepan coated with cooking spray over medium heat. Add the mushrooms, chopped onions, thyme, and salt. Coat with cooking spray. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 4 minutes or until the mushrooms release their liquid. Sprinkle with flour and cook, stirring until thickened. Add the green beans and stir to combine.
Reduce oven temperature to 400 degrees. Pour the bean mixture into the prepared baking dish. Scatter the onion rings over the top. Bake for 25 minutes or until hot and bubbly.

Recipe for: Pig's Holiday 2006 Rice Casserole

From the kitchen of BootPig

Ingredients

Rice:

½ cup long grain brown rice
 1 cup black rice (Also called Forbidden Rice)
 2 cups water
 1 cup orange juice
 2 tablespoons brown sugar
 ½ cup golden raisins, regular raisins, or craisins – or a fabulous combo – whatever you prefer
 ½ cup slivered almonds (roasted)
 Other nuts to consider: walnuts or pecans (That's puh-kahnnnnn, not pee-can)

Topping:

¼ cup crushed almonds
 ¼ cup brown sugar
 2 TBSP Bisquick
 ¼ cup butter

Directions

Bring water and orange juice to a boil, add brown sugar. Add brown and black rice. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a low simmer.

Add raisins/fruit. Cover tightly.

These are slow cooking rice and may need 30-45 minutes. Slower is better. No stirring. Step AWAY from the spoon. Stirred rice is sticky rice.

When rice has almost finished, remove from heat.

Stir in almonds gently. Place the whole batch in a buttered casserole dish.

Make a topping by combining crushed almonds, brown sugar, Bisquick, and cutting in cold butter for a crumbly texture. Sprinkle this across the top.

Bake at 400 degrees for about 10 minutes until butter melts, and brown sugar is slightly caramelized.

** There is a rice mix out there that combines wild rices, including black rice – this would also work.*

Recipe for: Green Beans with Wild Mushrooms

Submitted by porkchop, from <http://www.epicurious.com/>

Ingredients

1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
 1 cup boiling water
 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter, divided
 ½ cup minced shallots
 1 pound assorted fresh wild mushrooms (such as chanterelle, oyster, crimini, and stemmed shiitake), sliced
 1 ½ pounds green beans, trimmed, cut into 1 ½ inch lengths

Directions

Combine dried porcini mushrooms and 1 cup boiling water in small bowl; let stand until porcini soften, about 30 minutes. Strain, reserving soaking liquid; coarsely chop porcini.

Melt 4 tablespoons butter in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots and sauté until slightly softened, about 2 minutes. Add fresh mushrooms and porcini and sauté until juices form, about 10 minutes. Add porcini soaking liquid, leaving any sediment behind. Stir until mushrooms are tender and juices evaporate, about 2 minutes. Season mushrooms to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer mushrooms to bowl.

Cook green beans in large pot of boiling salted water until crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Drain. Cool green beans under cold water; drain well. (Mushrooms and green beans can be prepared 1 day ahead. Cover mushrooms and refrigerate. Wrap green beans in paper towels, enclose in resealable plastic bag, then refrigerate.)

Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add beans and mushrooms. Cook until vegetables are heated through, stirring often, about 7 minutes.

Season generously with salt and pepper. Transfer vegetables to bowl and serve.

Recipe for: Cornbread Dressing with Andouille Sausage

From the kitchen of cailinbeag

Ingredients

1 loaf of cornbread, cubed
vegetable oil spray for greasing pan
½ c. butter
2 c. coarsely chopped onion
3 stalks celery, chopped
3 jalapeno peppers, seeded and minced
1 lb Andouille sausage, diced
2 t dried thyme
4 t ground sage
2 t garlic powder
2 t salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
2 eggs, beaten
3 cups chicken stock or broth

Directions

Preheat oven to 350F.

Lightly coat a large roaster with vegetable oil spray.

In a skillet, melt butter over low heat.

Sauté onion, celery and peppers until soft.

Place sausage in skillet and cook over medium-high heat until heated through and slightly browned.

Drain and transfer to a large bowl.

Combine sausage mixture with bread crumbs, thyme, sage, garlic powder, salt, pepper and eggs.

Mix well.

In ¼ cup increments, add chicken broth to stuffing mixture.

Toss gently until evenly moist (adjust amount added as necessary).

Transfer to prepared pan, packing lightly.

Bake for 45 minutes.

Recipe for: Green Beans with Ginger-Pecan Butter

Submitted by cailinbeag, from www.atkins.com

Butter flavored with ginger and toasted pecans is a tasty way to dress up veggies such as broccoli or Brussels sprouts, as well. You can make it ahead and refrigerate until ready to use.

Ingredients

1 lb of green beans, trimmed and halved

Ginger-Pecan Butter:
¼ c. pecans, toasted and finely chopped
2 T butter, softened
1 t finely grated fresh ginger
¼ t salt

Directions

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to boil.

Add green beans and cook until tender-crisp, 5 to 6 minutes.

Drain well.

Meanwhile, make Ginger-Pecan Butter: Mix pecans, butter, ginger and salt together in a small bowl until blended.

Return beans to pot; add butter mixture.

Cook over low heat, stirring, until beans are hot and butter has melted, about 1 minute.

Recipe for: Cinnamon Chicken with Couscous

From the kitchen of surrenderedsoul, a family recipe

Ingredients

3 pounds of chicken – we usually use chicken legs and thighs, but really any part of the chicken (on the bone) can be used depending on what you like.
 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided
 1 teaspoon ground ginger, divided
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 cup chopped onion
 ¾ cup mixed chopped dried fruit (such as currants, apricots, and prunes)
 1 14-ounce can low-salt chicken broth
 1 cup couscous
 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh mint, divided

Directions

*Preheat oven to 375°F.
 Sprinkle chicken with salt, pepper, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, and 1/2 teaspoon ginger.
 Heat oil in large oven proof skillet over medium-high heat.
 Add chicken pieces, skin side down, and cook until skin is brown, about 8 minutes.
 Turn chicken and transfer skillet to oven. Roast chicken until thermometer inserted into thickest part of thigh registers 175°F, about 15 minutes. Transfer chicken to plate; tent with foil.
 Add onion and sauté over medium-high heat until beginning to brown, about 5 minutes.
 Add dried fruit and remaining 1 teaspoon cinnamon and 1/2 teaspoon ginger; stir to coat.
 Add broth; bring to boil.
 Remove skillet from heat, stir in couscous and 1 teaspoon mint.
 Cover and let stand 5 minutes.
 Season couscous to taste with salt and pepper.*

Recipe for: The Great After Thanksgiving Turkey Enchiladas

Submitted by Captvatng

Ingredients

3 tablespoons plus ½ cup vegetable oil
 1 ¾ cups finely chopped onions
 1 28-ounce can enchilada sauce
 5 plum tomatoes, finely chopped
 1 ½ teaspoons finely chopped canned chipotle chilies
 1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
 3 cups coarsely shredded cooked turkey
 2 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese
 ¾ cup sour cream
 12 5- to 6-inch corn tortillas

Directions

*Heat 3 tablespoons oil in large saucepan over medium heat.
 Add 1 ½ cups onions and sauté until tender, about 5 minutes.
 Add enchilada sauce, tomatoes and chipotles.
 Cover; simmer 20 minutes, stirring often.
 Remove from heat.
 Stir in 1/2 cup cilantro. Season sauce with salt and pepper.
 Mix turkey, 1 ½ cups cheese, sour cream, 1/4 cup onions and 1/2 cup cilantro in bowl.
 Season with salt and pepper.
 Preheat oven to 350°F.
 Heat 1/2 cup vegetable oil in medium skillet over medium heat.
 Cook 1 tortilla until pliable, about 20 seconds per side.
 Drain on paper towels. Repeat with remaining tortillas.
 Spread 1/2 cup sauce in 13 x 9 x 2-inch glass baking dish.
 Spoon 1/4 cup turkey mixture in center of each tortilla.
 Roll up tortillas.
 Arrange seam side down in dish.
 Spoon 2 1/2 cups sauce over enchiladas.
 Sprinkle with 1/2 cup cheese.
 Bake enchiladas until heated through, about 30 minutes.
 Rewarm remaining sauce in saucepan over medium-low heat. Transfer to sauceboat.
 Serve enchiladas, passing sauce separately.*

Recipe for: Rack of Lamb with Fresh Herbs and Garlic

Submitted by *PorkChop*, from www.epicurious.com

Ingredients

10 garlic cloves, peeled
 1/2 cup (packed) fresh mint leaves
 1/4 cup (packed) fresh parsley leaves
 1/4 cup fresh rosemary leaves (pulled from sprigs)
 2 teaspoons coarsely ground black pepper
 2 teaspoons herbes de Provence*
 6 tablespoons olive oil
 3 1- to 1 1/4-pound well-trimmed racks of lamb (each with 8 bones)

*A dried herb mixture available at specialty foods stores and in the spice section of some supermarkets. A combination of dried thyme, basil, savory, and fennel seeds can be substituted.

PorkChop notes: Or this recipe <http://theherbgardener.blogspot.com/2008/01/make-your-own-herbes-de-provence.html>

Directions

Combine first 6 ingredients in food processor. Blend until garlic is finely chopped. Add 4 tablespoons oil and blend until coarse paste forms. Sprinkle each lamb rack generously with salt. Transfer half of herb paste to small bowl and reserve. Spread remaining half of herb paste over lamb racks. Arrange lamb on rimmed baking sheet. Let stand at room temperature 2 hours. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover lamb and reserved herb paste separately and chill. Bring both to room temperature before continuing.)

Preheat oven to 450°F. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in heavy large skillet over high heat. Place 1 lamb rack, meat side down, in skillet. Sear until golden, about 2 minutes; return to baking sheet, meat side up. Repeat with remaining lamb racks. Roast lamb until meat thermometer inserted into center of lamb registers 130°F for medium-rare, about 20 minutes. Transfer lamb to platter. Let stand 15 minutes. Mix any pan juices into reserved herb paste. Cut lamb between bones into individual chops. Serve with herb sauce.

Makes 6 servings.

Recipe for: Cranberry Ginger Pork Roast

Submitted by *cailinbeag*, from www.atkins.com

Ingredients

4 pound bone-in pork loin roast
 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries, coarsely chopped
 1/4 cup maple syrup
 1 canned chipotle en adobo, chopped
 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

Directions

In a small bowl mix cranberries, syrup, chipotle, ginger, salt and pepper.

Place roast in slow cooker; rub with mixture.

Cover and cook on low 8 to 10 hours.

Recipe for: Seafood Manicotti/Seafood Puffs Appetizer

From the kitchen of Wolfspet, a family recipe

She says: My Grandmother made these appetizers every Christmas Eve (feast of the 7 fishes) and on Christmas day we would have the manicotti.

Ingredients

Filling:

3lb container Ricotta
2lb shredded mozzarella
2lbs peeled, chopped shrimp
2lbs crabmeat
4 eggs
Garlic, parsley, salt & pepper to taste

Crepes for manicotti:

6 eggs
2 cups flour
2 cups water
1/3 cup oil

Directions

Filling:

Mix all ingredients till well blended, set aside.

Crepes for manicotti:

Mix ingredients in blender until it has the consistency of runny pancake batter.

In a hot, well-oiled cast iron skillet (about a 6 inch one), pour just enough batter to cover bottom of pan completely. When top and sides look set, turn over for about a minute. Remove from pan, place on waxed paper or a oiled surface to cool.

When cool, pipe or spoon filling into center and roll up, place in pan. Cover with favorite marinara or alfredo sauce & cheese, bake at 350 for about 45 min or until filling is set.

Makes about 30

For seafood puff appetizers:

I admit I cheat. Use puff pastry cups from the freezer, fill with ricotta mix, and bake.

Recipe for: Tenderloin Steaks with Cranberry Port Sauce and Gorgonzola Cheese

Submitted by PorkChop, from www.epicurious.com

Ingredients

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) butter
2 large garlic cloves, sliced
1 large shallot, sliced
1 1/4 cups canned beef broth
1 cup ruby Port
1/4 cup dried cranberries

4 5- to 6-ounce beef tenderloin steaks (each about 1 inch thick)
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
1/2 cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese

Directions

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in saucepan over medium-high heat. Add garlic and shallot, then 1 cup broth, Port and cranberries. Boil liquid until reduced to 1/2 cup, about 8 minutes. Set sauce aside.

Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in large skillet over medium-high heat.

Sprinkle steaks with salt and pepper.

Add steaks to skillet; cook to desired doneness, about 5 minutes per side for medium-rare.

Transfer steaks to plate; cover loosely with foil.

Add rosemary to skillet, then sauce and remaining 1/4 cup broth. Boil 1 minute, scraping up browned bits.

Season with salt and pepper; spoon sauce over steaks.

Top each with cheese.

Recipe for: Thanksgiving Spicy Pumpkin Praline Pie

From the kitchen of theatricaltoy, with a little inspiration from Mom and Libby's

Ingredients

1 cup granulated sugar
 1 ¼ teaspoons ground cinnamon
 ½ teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon ground ginger
 ½ teaspoon ground cloves
 ½ teaspoon nutmeg
 2 large eggs
 1 can (15 oz.) pumpkin
 1 can (12 fl. oz.) Sweetened Condensed milk

Directions

*Preheat oven to 425.
 Mix dry ingredients together in a small bowl
 In a separate bowl beat eggs till frothy.
 Slowly add spice mix and then pumpkin mix.
 Add sweetened condensed milk last.
 Beat till smooth and slightly airy.
 Poor into UNBAKED pie crust (recipe below).
 Bake at 425 for 15 minutes.
 Reduce temp to 350ish and bake for 40-50 minutes, until knife in center comes out clean. For a moister pie take out sooner.
 Make sure pie is completely cool before putting in fridge, failure to do so will result in a fallen pie with a slightly oily top. Still tastes good, just looks funky.*

Recipe for: Pie Crust

Submitted by theatricaltoy, compliments of Crisco

Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour
 1 teaspoon salt
 ¾ cup CRISCO® All-Vegetable Shortening or CRISCO® Stick
 5 tablespoons cold water

Directions

Spoon flour into measuring cup and level. Mix flour and salt in medium bowl. Cut in CRISCO® All-Vegetable Shortening or CRISCO® Stick using pastry blender (or 2 knives) until all flour is blended in to form pea-size chunks. Sprinkle with water, one tablespoon at a time. Toss lightly with fork until dough will form ball. Divide dough in half. Press between hands to form two 5 to 6-inch pancakes. Flour dough lightly. Peel off top sheet for bottom crust. Transfer bottom crust to pie plate. Remove other sheet and press pastry to fit. Trim edge even with pie plate. Add desired filling to unbaked pie crust. Remove top sheet from top crust. Lift top crust onto filled pie. Remove other sheet. Trim to 1/2-inch beyond edge of pie plate. Fold top edge under bottom crust. Flute. Cut slits in top crust to allow steam to escape. Bake according to specific recipe instructions.

Recipe for: Whipped Cream

From the kitchen of theatricaltoy

Ingredients

½ pt. whipping cream
3 tbsp. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1 tsp. cinnamon

Directions

Whip cream with mixer.

Be careful not to overbeat or else will get too thick like butter.

When it begins to thicken, add sugar, cinnamon, and vanilla; stir.

Refrigerate.

Recipe for: Pecan Nut Crust

Submitted by cailinbeag, from www.AllRecipes.com

This is an excellent alternative cheesecake crust for those who don't eat refined sugar or flour.

Ingredients

2 1/2 cups ground pecans
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/3 cup granular Splenda
4 tablespoons unsalted butter,
melted

Directions

*Stir together ground nuts, cinnamon, and Splenda.
Mix in melted butter.*

*Press the mixture into the bottom and up the sides of a 9 inch,
deep-dish style pie pan.
Chill the unbaked crust in the refrigerator for about 30 to 45
minutes.*

*Place pie crust on a cookie sheet, and position on the middle rack of
a preheated 350F oven.*

*Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, or until lightly browned. WATCH it
carefully, as nut crusts burn easily; they DON'T have to turn black
to taste burnt! Cool completely before filling.*

Recipe for: Fruitcake

From the kitchen of surrenderedsoul, a family recipe

Ingredients

1 ¼ cups chopped pitted dates
 ¾ cup chopped candied orange peel
 1/3 cup chopped dried figs
 1/3 cup chopped dried cherries or pineapple
 2 tablespoons Frangelico (hazelnut liqueur)
 2 tablespoons water
 1 ¾ cups all purpose flour
 2 teaspoons baking powder
 1 teaspoon coarse kosher salt
 ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 ½ teaspoon ground cloves
 ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
 ½ cup plain yogurt
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 ¾ cup (1 ½ sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
 ¾ cup sugar
 3 large eggs
 2 cups coarsely chopped walnuts
 ¾ cup shelled unsalted natural pecans

Directions

Position rack in center of oven and preheat to 350°F.

Butter two 8 1/2x4 1/2x2 1/2-inch metal loaf pans. Spray with nonstick spray; dust with flour.

Mix dates and next 5 ingredients in medium bowl. Let stand 15 minutes.

Sift flour, baking powder, coarse kosher salt, nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon into another medium bowl.

Whisk yogurt and oil in small bowl.

Using electric mixer, beat butter and sugar in large bowl until blended.

Add eggs 1 at a time, beating well after each addition.

Beat in flour mixture in 3 additions alternately with yogurt mixture in 2 additions, beginning and ending with flour mixture.

Stir in walnuts, pistachios, and dried-fruit mixture. Divide batter between prepared pans. Smooth tops.

Bake cakes until tester inserted into centers comes out clean and cakes begin to pull away from sides of pans, about 50 minutes. Cool in pans 30 minutes.

Recipe for: Caramel Walnut Banana Upside Down Cake

From the kitchen of surrenderedsoul, a family recipe

Ingredients

Topping:

Nonstick vegetable oil spray
 ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
 1 cup (packed) golden brown sugar
 3 tablespoons dark corn syrup
 ¾ cup walnut halves or pieces

Cake:

1 ¾ cups cake flour
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 ¾ teaspoon baking soda
 ½ teaspoon salt
 ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
 ½ cup sugar
 ½ cup (packed) golden brown sugar
 2 large eggs
 1 cup mashed very ripe bananas (2 to 3 large)
 3 tablespoons sour cream
 1 tablespoon dark rum
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 Whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Directions

For topping:

Spray 8-inch round cake pan with 2-inch-high sides with nonstick spray.

Bring butter, sugar, and corn syrup to boil in medium saucepan, stirring constantly until butter melts.

Boil syrup 1 minute.

Stir in nuts. Be sure to watch that nuts don't burn.

Spread topping in prepared pan. Let topping cool completely.

For cake:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Mix first four ingredients into medium bowl.

Using electric mixer, beat butter and both sugars in large bowl until blended.

Beat in eggs 1 at a time, then mashed bananas, sour cream, rum, and vanilla.

Beat in dry ingredients in 2 additions just until combined. Spoon batter into pan.

Bake cake until tester inserted into center comes out clean, about 55 minutes.

Cool 15 minutes.

Cut around cake. Place platter over pan. Holding pan and platter together, turn over.

Let stand 5 minutes, then gently lift off pan. Cool at least 15 minutes for topping to set. Serve warm or at room temperature with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Recipe for: Pecan Pie Bars

From the kitchen of Danae

Danae notes: I absolutely love these bars. They are a cross between pecan pie but also have a hint of caramel because of those almond brickle chips.

Ingredients

2 cups all purpose flour
 ½ cup of confectioners' sugar
 1 cup (2 sticks) cold butter or margarine
 1 can (14 oz) sweetened condensed milk
 1 egg
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 1 package (6 oz) almond brickle chips
 (Heath brand is what I use)
 1 cup chopped pecans

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a medium-sized bowl combine flour and sugar. With a pastry blender or 2 knives, cut in the butter until crumbly.

Press mixture firmly on bottom of 9 x 13 inch baking pan.

Bake 10 to 15 minutes.

In a medium sized bowl with a electric mixer at medium speed beat the sweetened condensed milk, egg and vanilla until well blended.

Stir in chips and pecans.

Spread mixture evenly over crust.

Bake 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Cool in pan on wire rack. Cut into bars to serve.

Cover and store in refrigerator.

Recipe for: Easy Chocolate Fudge

From the kitchen of Danae, compliments "the back of a can of sweetened condensed milk"

Danae notes: This recipe is so easy. Fudge was one of those things that always intimidated me. It is something I always thought I would screw up, but this one makes it fail proof at least it was for me. The best compliment for me was my Mom asking me for my fudge recipe. She now makes it like this too and she is a fabulous cook/baker!

Ingredients

3 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
 1 (14-ounce) can Sweetened
 Condensed Milk (NOT evaporated
 milk)
 Dash salt
 ½ to 1 cup chopped nuts (optional)
 1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract

Directions

In heavy saucepan, over low heat, melt chips with sweetened condensed milk and salt.

Remove from heat; stir in nuts and vanilla.

Spread evenly into wax paper lined or buttered 8- or 9-inch square pan.

Chill 2 hours or until firm.

Turn fudge onto cutting board; peel off paper and cut into squares. Store loosely covered at room temperature.

I have not ever done these variations but I have made it in the microwave to make it even easier.

Notes: Microwave: In 1-quart glass measure, combine chips with sweetened condensed milk and salt. Cook on 100% power (high) 3 minutes or until chips melt, stirring after each 1 1/2 minutes. Stir in remaining ingredients. Proceed as above.

Variations:

Creamy Dark Chocolate Fudge: Melt 2 cups miniature marshmallows with chips and Sweetened Condensed Milk. Proceed as above.

Milk Chocolate Fudge: Omit 1 (6-oz) package semi-sweet chocolate chips. Add 1 cup milk chocolate chips. Proceed as above.

Rocky Road Fudge: Omit 1 (6-ounce) package semi-sweet chocolate chips, salt, nuts, and vanilla. In saucepan, melt chips with Eagle Brand® and 2 tablespoons margarine or butter. In large bowl, combine 2 cups dry-roasted peanuts and 1 (10 1/2-ounce) package miniature marshmallows. Stir in chocolate mixture. Spread in wax paper-lined 13 x 9-inch pan. Proceed as above. (Makes about 2 3/4 pounds)

Recipe for: Sugar-free Chocolate Delirium Torte

Submitted by cailinbeag, from www.Ochef.com

A sugar-free, flour-free chocolate torte that's perfect for those on a low-glycemic diet.

Ingredients

12 ounces sugar-free chocolate, in chips or small pieces

1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces

6 eggs

GARNISH:

1 vanilla bean or 1 tsp vanilla extract

1 cup heavy cream

3 Tbsp sugar

Edible flowers, berries, or chocolate curls

8 mint leaves

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350F. Grease or spray a 9- or 10-inch tart pan with removable bottom with nonstick spray and wrap the outside and bottom with aluminum foil so the bottom is water tight. If you have no tart pan, line the bottom and sides of a 9-inch pie plate with parchment paper or very smoothly with aluminum foil.

Melt the chocolate and butter in the microwave or in a heavy pan over very low heat, stirring with a rubber spatula or wooden spoon until completely melted. Set aside.

Lightly beat the eggs and stir them into the melted chocolate mixture. Pour the chocolate mixture into the tart pan, cover with foil, and set it in a heavy roasting pan. Pour hot tap water into the roasting pan halfway up the sides of the tart pan to create a bain-marie and place it in the preheated oven for 30 to 35 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and uncover it.

The torte will be a soft batter that will solidify when cold. Let it cool to room temperature on a wire rack, and then cover it with plastic wrap. Refrigerate or freeze at least 2 hours. Release the sides of tart pan. You can freeze the well-wrapped torte at this point for up to 3 months.

To make the whipped cream garnish, split a vanilla bean with a paring knife and scrape the seeds into a cold mixer bowl with the heavy cream and sugar. Start on low speed, slowly increase the speed, and beat on high speed until firm but be careful not to let it separate. If using vanilla extract instead of the bean, beat it in at the end. Refrigerate. (The tiny brown flecks, the seeds of a vanilla bean, give the whipped cream a "homemade" look.)

When ready to serve, cut the still cold or even frozen torte into 8 pieces with a hot, wet non-serrated knife. (Clean the knife in hot water after each cut.) The torte will defrost rapidly and is best moved when frozen. Place 1 heaping Tbsp of whipped cream on the torte. Place 1 wedge of frozen torte on a plate. Garnish with edible flowers, fresh berries, or chocolate curls.

Recipe for: Blushing Pears

Submitted by Cecelia, formerly owned by Master David Brown

Cecelia notes: My Master enjoyed inviting people out for dinner, then we would return to his home for dessert. A holiday favorite was Blushing Pears. It is light, refreshing, and very elegant looking without a lot of effort.

Ingredients

6 - 8 ripe Bartlett pears

1 box raspberry jello (regular OR sugarfree)

1 pint raspberries

Dark chocolate sauce

1/4 cup vanilla sugar

Whipped cream

Mint leaves

Directions

Peel and core the pears, leaving the stems on. Fill a large soup pot (big enough for all pears to be placed in) $\frac{3}{4}$ full with water dissolve the jello in water and bring to a boil.

Place pears in boiling water and poach for 5 minutes.

Remove from heat - let sit for 10 to 20 minutes.

Carefully remove pears from water and drain. Refrigerate. discard Jello water

Put raspberries through a food processor

strain out the seeds

mix with vanilla sugar.

chill

When ready to serve, pour a small puddle of raspberry sauce in an individual serving dish

Place a pear in the puddle

drizzle with chocolate sauce

place a cloud of whipped cream next to pear

drizzle with raspberry sauce

garnish with mint leaves

Notes: Can be served with angel food cake

Serves 4 - 6

(I always make at least 2 extras; poaching the pears can reveal bruises and some pears disintegrate. If none are bad... save the extras for a treat tomorrow.)

Recipe for: Cardamom Butter Cut-out Cookies

Submitted by Danae, compliments of [Epicurious](#)

Danae notes: Instead of doing in squares I rolled out and used cookie cutters. So this recipe has a few changes to it. It is one of my newer recipes. I have made them for about 3 years now but they get a ton of comments on how good they look and taste. Everyone always asks for the recipe.

Ingredients

For cookies:

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons ground cardamom
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground allspice
2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened

For espresso and chocolate icings:

1 teaspoon instant-espresso powder
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 tablespoons milk
1 cup confectioners' sugar
3 oz fine-quality bittersweet chocolate (not unsweetened), melted

Directions

Make cookies:

Whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, cardamom, cinnamon, and allspice in a bowl.

Beat together butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 2 minutes in a stand mixer (preferably fitted with paddle attachment) or 4 minutes with a handheld. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Reduce speed to low, then mix in flour mixture until just combined.

Form dough into 2 balls each on its own sheet of plastic wrap. Wrap and chill the dough until slightly firm, about 1 hour. After chilling, I remove the first ball of dough. Roll out and cut out with holiday cookie cutters.

Put oven racks in the middle of the oven and preheat oven to 350°F.

Arrange about 1 inch apart (chill remaining dough, wrapped in plastic wrap).

Bake cookies, until edges are golden, 10 to 12 minutes total. Cool on sheets 3 minutes, then transfer to racks to cool completely. Make more cookies with remaining dough on cooled baking sheets.

Ice cookies:

Whisk together espresso powder, vanilla, and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons milk until espresso powder is dissolved, then add confectioners' sugar and enough additional milk to make a thick but pourable icing. Drizzle the espresso glaze over the cookies.

Melt chocolate and then drizzle over cookies.

Let cookies stand on racks until icing sets, about 2 hours.

Notes:

- Dough can be chilled 5 days or frozen, wrapped in a double layer of plastic wrap, 1 month (thaw in refrigerator just until ready to roll out).
- Cookies (with or without icing) keep, layered between sheets of wax paper or parchment, in an airtight container at room temperature 1 week.

Recipe for: Best Sugar Cookies

Submitted by the [\[techno\]wench](#)

She notes: My favorite cookie recipe (I triple the recipe)

Ingredients

1 cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup margarine or butter, softened
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shortening
1 tsp vanilla
2 eggs
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all purpose flour
1 tsp baking powder
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt

Directions

In large bowl, combine sugar, margarine or butter, shortening, vanilla and 2 eggs; beat well.

In separate bowl combine the flour, baking powder and salt, mix well.

Then add dry ingredients to the wet slowly in mixer mix thoroughly.

Wrap dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour for easier handling.

Notes:

This dough is perfect for cut-out cookies.

When I make the frosting for sugar cookies, I use the traditional powdered sugar and butter and milk, but I add a couple tablespoons of Marshmallow Fluff to it. It makes it stiffer, a bit easier to work with.