



Your Guide to Stress Free Holiday Cooking

Holiday Cooking Tips & Delicious Recipes



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Holiday Joy

Everyone loves the holidays-- the family, the food, probably even the games on the television or out in the backyard. It's a shame that mom is too tired to enjoy this with us. Hey, where is mom anyway? What do you mean that she's hiding in her room?

Is this you? Did you drive yourself absolutely insane *again* this year? You pretended that you were Super Woman again this year didn't you? You organized everything, did all the cooking, and made sure everything was *just* right again... didn't you? And now you are sitting there with a barely suppressed need to throttle that ungrateful lout that you married, not to mention your new fantasy-- selling your kids on Ebay. Are you going to let this happen to you... *again*?

With the proper planning, this does not have to happen to you again this year. Indeed, with a few simple methods, you can enjoy the holiday as much as your family does. Heck, if you do it right, you might even begin to enjoy your husband and kids again. Now, no one can promise that any of this will make your mother-in-law any easier to deal with, but we're not shooting for miracles here; we're just trying to get you through the holidays without doing anyone serious bodily harm.



Put Your Feet Up

The most important part of this can be done in your robe. Relax, get yourself some coffee or a soda, maybe a small snack; turn on some music. Just make sure that you have something to write with, and something to write upon, and no, the back of your hand will not work for this, you'll be washing your hands later.

The biggest predictor of a disastrous holiday cooking session begins with planning, or more accurately, the lack of planning that so many of us are prone to. Think about it for a moment, you're preparing to feed and entertain a small army, and you were going to just wing it? The lack of proper planning will cost you more time than the amount of time that you will spend making this list. Most armies have a quartermaster corps that takes care of these small details, you only have Major Mom.

Now that you've gotten comfortable, ask yourself what you are trying to accomplish this year. What are you planning on cooking? Will you

be doing your own baking, or will you be buying prepared desserts? Are you interested in obtaining new decorations? How will you entertain your guests? Will you need supplies for that? What time will you be serving your meal or meals?

Have you got a clear view of all of this in your mind? Good, now write it down. Yes, I realize that this is more than a week away, but make your command decision Major! Dinner will now officially be at 3 o'clock (or whenever). You will be announcing this later, and no, you will *not* tell your guests "just come whenever you like" or "just walk all over me as if I were a dirty rug"; you are the one doing the planning here. You are the one doing the work; you are the one doing the heavy lifting... well, you're still in your robe right now, but they don't have to know that.



Second Verse, Same as the First

Okay, so now you have your list of what you want to cook and when you want to serve it. Now what? Well, now it's time to do some planning.

"What? More planning", you ask?

Yes, more planning! Unless you do all of your shopping at one superstore, now is the time to divide your meal into lists. If you plan of shopping at multiple markets in order to get better pricing or availability of your items, you should break your list down by store. If you have a husband, or an older child, or a baby sister who is willing to do the shopping for you, even better! But that brings us to the next point...

Make sure that you record the required quantities on your lists. If you need three quarters of an ounce of yeast for that bread recipe that you have in mind, then put three quarters of an ounce on your list. I know that this seems like simple advice, but remember the last time you shopped during the holiday season? The packed parking lot, the rude

and pushy customers, the screaming kids? Remember how you quickly got stressed out and completely forgot everything that you ever knew about your own name, what your husband looked like, or even the fact that you needed yeast to begin with?

Write down the exact quantities that you need, and if anything, guess on the high side. There is nothing worse than beginning the long day's worth of cooking only to discover that you are missing two or three of the main ingredients. If you have managed to convince someone else to do your shopping for you, then this is even more important. Unless, of course, you wanted your husband to bring home a Cornish game hen, instead of the 18 pound turkey that you had visualized. Be exact. Be dictatorial. You can do this; you are Major Mom!



Sharing, not Delegation

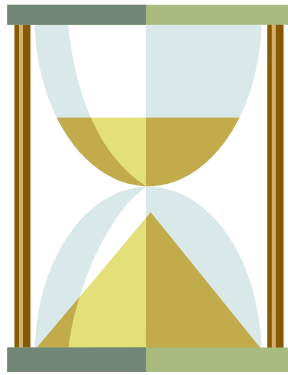
Remember how Tom Sawyer convinced all those other boys to paint his fence? Do you remember why that worked for him? Because he made it fun for them! The same thing will work with your family.

You're the Mom; you are smarter than they are! Depending on your particular family, this may work differently, but the overall concept will work no matter what your situation.

Step one is always to assign your family an enjoyable task. "Hey can you go down to the dollar store and pick out some decorations" is a good opener. Tell your husband and your loving children to pick out anything they like. Compliment them; tell them what a great job they usually do; then, cross your fingers and reach for the chocolate the minute that they leave the house, and while they are gone and the house is peaceful for a change, do an inventory. Make sure that you have all of the cookware that you need, all of the utensils, enough plates, plenty of silverware. You won't want to discover that you have a wonderful meal later, but nothing to serve it upon.

You are allowing them to participate in the process, building their character, and teaching them how to pitch in and help... and besides, it's the dollar store. If you hate the stuff that your family brings home, it won't have cost very much.

Once you've got the hook in them, you can get them into the habit of helping with the proceedings. "As long as you are going out, could you pick up a couple of..." or "that platter you brought back is wonderful, you'll look great when you carve the turkey". We're just taking baby steps here, but just make sure that they have their cell phones with them when they are out shopping, you might want to add something to their lists. Just try to refrain from the evil laughter when you call them.



Cooking Time

Hey, you thought that the day would never get here. It's time to start cooking, and oddly enough, this time you know that you actually have everything that you'll need today. You've got the food, the proper cookware, and you might even have some help for a change. Life is good!

So, now what are you going to do with all of your time? This year you've saved yourself a great deal of aggravation and you've even lowered your stress levels to an almost manageable level. You won't even have to schedule some time in your busy day for a tantrum like you usually do.

So instead we'll do this: We'll re-read the recipes before we start. We'll make sure that we have not forgotten anything that will be required. We'll make sure that the oven is pre-heated and that there is room on the table for everything that is on the menu. We'll touch base with those who have volunteered (or been volunteered) to help. We'll remind our guests that dinner will be served at 3 o'clock, and most importantly, we will remember to listen and respond to all offers of help. Yes, of course you can make the fruit salad! While you do that, I'll finish the bread.

And don't forget the cooking times! Before you put the first ingredient into the pot, think through how much time each dish will require in the oven, or on the stove, or even in the microwave. Will you be able to prepare several dishes at once? Do you have enough burners on your stove? Do the math! Will you have a burner available in an hour? Which pot will be out of the way by then? Visualize the entire process before you jump into it, and make sure that you have allocated extra time and space into your day-- you know that something always takes longer than you thought it would. If all of your planning goes off without a hitch, you'll *really* impress your guests!



Presentation

Do you know what the main difference is between the ten-dollar meal and the one hundred dollar meal? Sure you do, it's presentation! The chef dribbles a bit of chocolate on his dessert and suddenly, it costs twice as much. Put an ice sculpture on the table, and he can charge triple his original price.

This will work for you at home as well. There is a reason that they call it the "fine china". Use your best settings. If your budget allows for it, there are even many places that will rent these supplies. Spend some time decorating your table. Whether your tastes run to baskets and fresh flowers or instead to mirrored platters and silver cutlery, a well designed serving area will give your meal that extra touch of elegance, class or even playfulness, if that is the feeling that you are shooting for.

Keep it simple though; do not place so many decorations upon your table that your guests are afraid to reach for the food. You want your

guests to feel at ease; you want them to taste your food. And don't forget, the same approach works with all of your holiday baking.

Decorate your packages like you would your table! A sheet of see-through wrapping paper can work wonders for the eye appeal of that Christmas fruitcake or loaf of banana bread that you are going to share with the folks down at the office. Tissue paper surrounding the cookies in your tin gives them a festive flair. Don't be afraid to experiment, and again, the local dollar store has lots of very inexpensive options for you to try.



Share the Credit

When your meal goes well, you'll get compliments. Hey, your guests are probably glad that they were not in charge of the meal! So now it's time to bask in the glory... right? Wrong! Now is the time to share the credit. You have to make sure that your helpers will be there for you next time.

Publicly thank those who have helped you. Dave and the kids picked out the decorations. Sue made the salad. Dave's Mom gave me that wonderful casserole recipe! Yes, I know... she probably won't forgive you for stealing her son, but it's worth a shot. Let them all know how much you appreciate the fact they were all willing to pitch in. They say that happiness aids in the digestion process, and you don't want your guests to get indigestion do you?

Always remember, the difference between a successful holiday meal and a disastrous one usually comes down to planning and presentation more than it does to what is actually on the menu. This year, take the time to plan your event and you'll be able to actually enjoy yourself for a change!

Delicious Holiday Recipes

Holiday Roast And Vegetables

Ingredients:

- 1 4 to 5 pound beef rib eye roast
- 5 medium baking potatoes, cleaned and quartered
- 1 small bag of cleaned baby carrots
- 1 large onion diced
- 1 can of beef broth
- 5 cloves of fresh garlic, cleaned and minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Blend all spices and rub onto roast. Pour broth into a roasting pan and place roast inside. Surround roast with vegetables. Cover roasting pan. Bake for 45 minutes and then baste roast with broth from the pan. Return roast to oven for about 45 minutes to an hour longer, or until a meat thermometer registers 135 degrees for medium rare or 150 degrees for medium. Cooking times can vary depending on desired doneness and roast size. Once done, remove from oven and cool for about 20 minutes. Carve and serve with vegetables, rolls and other holiday dishes.

Christmas Duck With Orange Sauce

Ingredients:

1 5-pound duck, cleaned and rinsed
1 large orange, peeled and quartered
Salt and pepper

Orange sauce:

1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
Freshly squeezed orange juice from 3 oranges
1 whole bay leaf
1/4 teaspoon thyme
3/4 cup chicken broth or water.
Grated orange rind
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Clean duck and remove all excess fat. Rub duck, inside and out, with salt and pepper. Insert orange quarters into duck cavity and place in roasting pan. Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Remove duck. Pierce the breast with a knife or fork; drain excess grease. Reduce oven heat to 300 degrees and return duck to oven for 70 minutes, or until duck is quite tender. Meanwhile, blend sugar and vinegar in a saucepan. Cook over medium heat until sugar starts to caramelize. Add bay leaf, thyme, orange juice, rind and broth or water. Cook for five minutes or until well blended; remove and discard bay leaf. Remove duck from oven. Discard oranges; drain any remaining excess grease. Pour sauce over duck. Serve with vegetables, rolls and other holiday favorites.

Apple Stuffed Pork Tenderloin Holiday Feast

Ingredients:

1 4 to 5 pound boneless pork loin
2 tablespoons real butter
2 1/2 tablespoons chopped white onion
1 cup seasoned bread crumbs
2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and chopped
1/2 cup raisins
Lemon and orange zest
1 cup apple juice
1 cup sour cream
salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cook onions in butter over low heat until soft. Remove from heat. Add in bread crumbs, apples, raisins, citrus fruit zest and salt and pepper. Cool. Meanwhile, slice a pocket in the pork between the fat layer and the meat. Place stuffing in the pocket and then roll up pork line lengthwise. Tie with a cooking string or close with skewers. Mix sour cream and apple juice together and pour into a roasting pan. Place pork loin on top; cover. Bake for 30 minutes and then turn and bake for another half hour. Reduce heat to about 350 degrees and continue cooking for another hour. Baste pork frequently. Pork is done with a meat thermometer reads 150 degrees. Serve with potatoes, vegetables and rolls. Pan drippings can be blended with white wine for a gravy if desired.

Apple Baked Christmas Ham

Ingredients:

1 large pre-cooked holiday ham
5 cups apple juice
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 light brown sugar
1/4 cup water

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Clean ham and remove skin. Place in a roasting pan. Pour apple juice, cloves and brown sugar over the top; cover. Bake per package directions for 20 minutes per pound. Baste periodically during cooking. Remove from oven, cool slightly. Slice ham and baste with drippings from the pan. Serve with scalloped potatoes, apple sauce, vegetables, rolls and other holiday favorites.

Creamy Christmas Mashed Potatoes

Ingredients:

1 5-pound bag red potatoes, washed and cubed
1 16-ounce container sour cream
1 stick salted butter
1/4 to 1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup freshly ground parsley
3-4 green onion stalks, sliced thin
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Clean potatoes; cut out any brown spots. Cube or slice into quarters. Boil potatoes until tender; drain. Mash potatoes with hand masher or electric mixer. Add all other ingredients and mix until very creamy. If lumps are still present, or consistency is too thick, add more milk. Serve hot with butter and salt.

Festive Cheese Dip Color Explosion

Ingredients:

24 ounces cream cheese, softened
3 1/2 to 4 cups shredded mild cheddar cheese
2 tablespoons basil pesto
1 1/2 tablespoon grated white onion
3 drops medium to hot red pepper sauce
1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
1/4 cup sliced almonds
2 1/2 tablespoons chopped red bell pepper

Directions:

Mix cream cheese and cheddar together. Blend in pesto, onion and pepper sauce. Refrigerate until firm, about 3 hours. Remove and work into desired shape (balls, stars, Christmas trees). Roll cheese mixture in parsley, almonds and red peppers. Serve with an assortment of holiday crackers. Makes enough for two large cheese balls, trees or a variety of stars.

Christmas Spiced Banana Bread

Ingredients:

3 1/4 cups granulated sugar
2 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
3/4 cup real, unsalted butter, softened
3 large eggs
6 to 7 ripe bananas, mashed
1 16 ounce container sour cream
2 1/4 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 teaspoons baking soda
4 1/2 cup flour
1 cup chopped nuts, optional

Directions:

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Grease two large, or four small loaf pans. Mix 1/4 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon cinnamon in a small bowl. Dust greased pans with the mixture. Combine butter and 3 cups sugar. Add eggs, bananas, sour cream and remaining spices. Mix well; add baking soda and flour. Add nuts, if desired. Divide batter equally into pans. Bake for 55 minutes, or until toothpick comes out clean. Serve with fresh whipping cream.

Christmas Sweet Potato Pie

Ingredients:

1 pound of sweet potatoes, peeled
1/2 cup real butter, unsalted and softened
1 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup whole milk
2 large eggs
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 1/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 9-inch pie crust, prepared, but unbaked
1/4 cup crumbled pecan pieces, optional

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Boil sweet potatoes until soft and tender. Cool and drain. Mash potatoes in a mixing bowl. Add butter and mix until well blended. Slowly stir in sugar, eggs, milk, spices and vanilla. Mix with a hand mixer until creamy and potato chunks have disappeared. Pour potato mixture into the unbaked piecrust. Sprinkle pecan pieces on top. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, or until knife comes out clean. Cool and serve with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream. For an extra festive touch, sprinkle ice cream with peppermint candy pieces.

Festive Spritz Cookies

Ingredients:

2/3 cup granulated sugar
1 cup butter
1 egg
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
2 1/4 cups all purpose flour
Food coloring
Cookie press with desired cutouts

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Combine sugar, egg, butter, salt and vanilla in a large mixing bowl. Beat until mixture is fluffy; add flour. Beat until well mixed. Add a few drops of food coloring, 1 to 2 drops at a time until desired color is attained. Put dough into cookie press. Place desired shapes 1-inch apart on baking sheets. Bake for 7 minutes, or until edges brown slightly.

Christmas Thumbprint Cookies

Instructions:

2/3 cup real butter, softened
1/3 cup granulated sugar
2 egg yolks from large eggs
1 1/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
3/4 teaspoon salt
2 egg whites, beaten
1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans
Strawberry, cherry or raspberry preserves

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Blend butter and sugar together. Slowly add egg yolks, vanilla, and salt. Beat until well blended; add flour. Once well mixed, shaped dough into small balls. Dip balls into beaten egg whites and roll in nuts. Place on greased cookie sheet. Gently press down on each ball with thumb. Bake 15 minutes, or until golden. Remove from oven; cool. Fill indents with preserves prior to serving.

Holiday Mint Fudge

Ingredients:

1 cup granulated sugar
7 ounces marshmallow cream
2 sticks real butter, softened
10 ounces mint chocolate chips or mint chocolate candy chopped
2/3 cup evaporated milk
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Serving tray decoration:

Powdered sugar
Mint leaf sprigs

Directions:

Line a 9x9x2-inch pan with foil, grease; set aside. Combine sugar, butter, evaporated milk and marshmallow in large saucepan on medium heat until it boils. Stir constantly. Boil for five minutes. Add mint chocolate and vanilla. Stir until contents are well blended and melted together. Spread into pan. Refrigerate for minimum of 8 hours. Cut into desired size squares. Serve on a plate dusted with powdered sugar and decorated with mint leaves.

Christmas Cookie Cutouts

Ingredients:

1 cup real butter, softened
1 1/4 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
3 cups all purpose flour
1 1/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon almond extract, optional (reduce vanilla to 1 teaspoon if used)
Assorted holiday cookie cutters

Directions:

Mix butter and sugar together until very light and creamy. Add egg and extract(s); mix well. Slowly add flour and baking soda. Divide dough into equal parts; wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Roll out dough on waxed paper to about a 1/4 to 1/3 inch in thickness; cut into desired shapes. Bake on greased cookie sheets for 7 minutes, or until edges turn slightly golden. Cool and decorate.

Peppermint Brittle

2 lbs. white chocolate
30 small peppermint candy canes

Line a jellyroll pan with parchment paper or heavy tin foil. In a microwave safe container add the white chocolate and heat on medium in the microwave for about 4-6 minutes. Stop during heating and stir occasionally until the chocolate is smooth and melted.

In a large plastic bag add the candy canes. Using a rolling pin or another similar tool, begin breaking the candy into small pieces. Stir the candy into the melted chocolate and spread in the pan, evenly.

Place in refrigerator for about 60 minutes and then break the candy into pieces.

Christmas Gingerbread Men Cookies

Ingredients:

2 3/4 cup flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup Crisco
1/4 cup light brown sugar
3/4 cup molasses
1 egg, beaten
1 teaspoon warm water
1 teaspoon white vinegar
Desired decorations

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Blend all ingredients together until dough is well mixed. Roll out onto waxed paper, or a floured surface. Dough should be about a 1/4-inch thick. Cut into desired shapes. Place on greased and floured baking sheets. Bake for 8 minutes, or until browned. Cool. Decorate with desired frosting, candy pieces and other embellishments.

Holiday Surprise Fruitcake

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups all purpose flour, well sifted
1 cup unsalted butter, softened
1 1/4 cup raisins
1/2 pound candied citron, chopped
1/4 pound almonds, blanched and sliced thin
3/4 cup maraschino cherries green and red blend, rinsed and drained
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
3/4 teaspoon almond extract
lemon zest
1 1/3 cup granulated sugar
4 large eggs
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Directions:

Preheat oven to 275 degrees. Rinse and dry raisins; cut into small pieces. Slice cherries into small pieces; combine all fruit and nuts in a bowl. Add 1/2 cup flour and coat all fruit. Set aside. Grease two cake pans; line with brown paper and grease again. Mix butter, vanilla and almond extract with lemon zest. Slowly add sugar; blend until creamy. Add eggs one at a time, blending well. Sift remaining dry ingredients together and add to the butter blend. Add fruit mixture. Blend until well combined; add lemon juice. Divide batter between the two pans. Bake for 90 minutes, or until toothpick comes out clean. Serve with fresh whipped cream.