

One thing the experts agree on is planning a holiday meal as far in advance as you can. Go old school and write out the food, groceries, and timeline.

It is officially time to start planning the Christmas Meal - what will be on your table this year?

NOTE - This is your last chance to win a Darlene Dixon prize pack! This will be the last of our inventory, and this prize pack will include one of each of her four published cookbooks!

Submit your recipe and register to win at: clickit.entries@gmail.com

(All submissions will be entered into the drawing and need to be received by Dec. 18, 2023. Please include: Name and phone number/email address. Winner will be announced and contacted. We do not ship the prizes but are available for pick up Mon.-Thurs., 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.)

Peppery Roast Beef

Prep: 15 min.

Bake: 2-1/2 hours + standing

Makes: 12 servings

1 T. olive oil
1 T. seasoned pepper
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 tsp. dried thyme
1/4 tsp. salt
1 boneless beef eye round or top round roast (4 to 5 lbs.)

Horseradish Sauce:

1 C. sour cream
2 T. lemon juice
2 T. milk
2 T. prepared horseradish
1 T. Dijon mustard
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. pepper

Preheat oven to 325°. In a small bowl, combine the oil, seasoned pepper, garlic, thyme and salt; rub over roast. Place fat side up on a rack in a shallow roasting pan.

Bake, uncovered, 2-1/2 to 3 hours or until meat reaches desired doneness (for medium-rare, a thermometer should read 135°; medium, 140°; medium-well, 145°). Let stand for 10 minutes before slicing.

In a small bowl, combine the sauce ingredients. Serve with roast.

Green Bean Bundles

Prep/Total Time: 25 min.

Makes: 8 servings

1 lb. fresh green beans, trimmed
8 bacon strips, partially cooked
1 T. finely chopped onion
3 T. butter
1 T. white wine vinegar
1 T. sugar
1/4 tsp. salt

Cook the beans until crisp-tender. Wrap about 10 beans in each bacon strip; secure with a toothpick. Place on a foil-covered baking sheet. Bake at 400° until bacon is done, 10-15 minutes.

In a skillet, sauté onion in butter until tender. Add vinegar, sugar and salt; heat through. Remove bundles to a serving bowl or platter; pour sauce over and serve immediately.

Holiday Berry Meringue Wreath

Level: Easy

Total: 3 hr 45 min

(includes cooling time)

Active: 45 min

Yield: 10 to 12 servings

Wreath:

8 lg. egg whites, at room temperature
1 tsp. cream of tartar
1/2 tsp. fine salt
3-1/2 C. confectioners' sugar

Cranberry Sauce:

One (10-oz) bag fresh or frozen cranberries, thawed and drained if frozen
1/3 C. granulated sugar, plus more to taste
Juice of 1/2 lemon
4 C. fresh raspberries
1/2 C. pomegranate seeds
Leaves from 1 bunch fresh mint

Whipped Cream:

1 cup heavy cream

Position an oven rack in the lower third of the oven and preheat to 225°F. Line the back of a baking sheet with parchment. Use a 12-inch bowl as a stencil: Flip it upside down and trace a 12-inch circle onto the parchment. Use a 9-inch bowl to trace a circle inside the 12-inch one. This is the outline of your wreath.

For the wreath: Combine the egg whites, cream of tartar and salt in the very clean bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Whisk on medium speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase the speed to medium-high and beat until thick and opaque, about 1 minute more. Gradually add the confectioners' sugar, 1/4 C. at a time, and beat until stiff, shiny peaks form, 13 to 15 minutes.

Build the wreath: Using the template on the parchment as your guide, drop dollops of meringue in a line along the inside of the 12-inch circle. Use a rubber spatula to help clean off your spoon between dollops. Following the 9-inch circle and slightly overlapping the outer ring of meringue, make an inner ring of meringue dollops to fill in the rest of the template. Flatten the meringue slightly with the back of the spoon, making sure to keep a lot of peaks. Bake the meringue until it is dry, crisp, and pearly white on the outside, about 2 hours. Remove from the oven and let it cool completely.

Meanwhile, make the cranberry sauce: Bring the cranberries, sugar and lemon juice to a simmer in medium saucepan and cook until the cranberries are soft and just begin to burst and the sugar is completely dissolved, about 10 minutes. Set aside to cool completely. Gently fold in the raspberries and pomegranate seeds. Whip the heavy cream in a medium bowl until soft peaks form.

Before serving, spread the whipped cream on the meringue. Spoon over the cranberry sauce and sprinkle with mint leaves.

Pecan Bundt Cake

Cook Time: 1 hr 15 min

Prep Time: 45 min

Servings: 10-12

Nonstick baking spray w/ flour
3 C. all-purpose flour
1tsp. baking powder
1tsp. salt
1-1/2 C. unsalted butter, room temperature
1-1/2 C. packed brown sugar
4 lg. eggs
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 C. roughly chopped pecan pieces, toasted
3/4 C. canned crushed pineapple, in its own juice
1/2 C. golden raisins

Preheat the oven to 325° F and place a rack in the middle of the oven. Spray a 12-cup Bundt pan with baking spray.

In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder and salt. Whisk to combine.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the softened butter and brown sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating until each is incorporated before adding the next, about 2 minutes total. Add the vanilla. Reduce the speed to low and add the flour mixture. Mix until just combined. Use a rubber spatula to scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl as needed. Stir in the pecans, pineapple and raisins.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake until a cake tester inserted deep into the cake comes out completely clean, 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes.

Let the cake cool in the pan on a cooling rack for 10 minutes. Invert the pan to release the cake and allow the cake to cool completely before slicing and serving.

Tip: Be sure to use a cake tester or skewer to test to see if the Bundt is completely baked through. Even if it smells good and looks done, only a cake tester will let you know if it's done deep in the center. This cake can be stored, covered, at room temperature for up to 1 week.

Options: You can swap dried cranberries for the gold raisins (or leave them out altogether).

Ferrero Rocher® Cookie Cups

Level: Easy

Total: 2 hr 45 min (includes chilling & cooling time)

Active: 40 min

Yield: 24 cookies

Nonstick cooking spray

1 C. plus 2 T. all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

1/2 C. blanched hazelnuts

1/2 C. sugar

1/4 tsp. salt

8 T. unsalted butter, cold and cut into small cubes

1-1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

1 lg. egg, at room temperature, lightly beaten

24 chocolate hazelnut truffles, such as Ferrero Rocher®

1/2 C. dark chocolate chips

Liberally spray a 24-cup nonstick miniature muffin tin with nonstick cooking spray, then sprinkle each cup with a touch of flour. Shake the muffin tin so that the flour completely coats each cup, then shake out any excess. Set aside.

Combine the hazelnuts, sugar and salt in a food processor and pulse until the hazelnuts are finely ground. Add the flour and pulse until completely combined. Add the butter and pulse until the butter is finely chopped and the mixture begins to come together, then add the vanilla and egg and pulse until a dough forms. Use a rubber spatula to transfer the dough to a medium bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Position an oven rack in the middle of the oven and place a large baking sheet on the rack. Preheat the oven to 375° F.

Divide the dough evenly among the prepared muffin cups (about 1 scant T. each), then use your fingers or the back of a small spoon to flatten the dough in each cup, coming slightly up the sides. Gently press a chocolate hazelnut truffle into the center of each piece of dough (the dough will come up the sides of the truffles but should not come up over the edges of the muffin cups).

Slide the muffin tin onto the preheated baking sheet, and bake, rotating the baking sheet once halfway through, until the cookies are light golden brown around the edges, about 25 minutes.

Allow the cookies to cool completely in the muffin tin set on a cooling rack.

Use a small offset spatula or butter knife to gently coax each cookie out of its cup, then place the cookies on a cooling rack set over a baking sheet.

Put the chocolate chips in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave in 15-second intervals, stirring after each, until the chocolate is completely melted, about 1 minute total. Transfer the melted chocolate to a pastry bag or resealable plastic bag. Snip off the corner of the bag and drizzle the chocolate back and forth over the top of the cookies. Allow the topping to cool completely before serving.

Christmas Brownie Trees

Level: Easy

*Total: 2 hr 10 min
(includes cooling time)*

Active: 1 hr 10 min

Yield: 16 pieces

Brownies:

1 C. unsalted butter, melted and cooled, plus more for greasing the pans

1-1/2 C. granulated sugar

1 tsp. vanilla extract

3 lg. eggs

1 C. all-purpose flour

1/2 C. unsweetened cocoa powder

1 tsp. fine salt

1/2 tsp. baking powder

3/4 C. semisweet choc. chips

Sixteen 1 1/2-inch pieces candy cane

White and gold sanding sugar and small nonpareil candy-covered chocolates, such as Sno-Caps®, for decorating

American Buttercream Frosting:

1 C. confectioners' sugar
4 T. unsalted butter, at room temperature
Pinch of fine salt
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
1/4 to 1/2 T. whole milk
24 drops green food coloring
1 drop red food coloring

Special equipment: A piping bag or resealable plastic bag

Brownies: Preheat the oven to 350° F. Butter the bottom and sides of two 8-inch round cake pans. Cut two 8-inch circles out of parchment and line the bottoms of the cake pans with the parchment.

Stir together the butter, granulated sugar, vanilla and eggs in a medium bowl. In another bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa powder, salt and baking powder. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and stir until just combined. Stir in the chocolate chips and divide the batter between the prepared pans, smoothing the tops. Bake until the brownies begin to gain a crust around the edges, pull away from the edge and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes.

Let the brownies cool fully in the pans on cooling racks, about 1 hour. Cut each circle into 8 equal triangles with a knife. Use a small offset spatula or pie server to lift each triangle out of the pan.

American buttercream frosting: Combine the confectioners' sugar, butter and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment (or in a large bowl if using a handheld electric mixer). Mix on low speed until mostly incorporated. Add the vanilla, increase the speed to medium-high and mix until smooth. Loosen the consistency with milk as desired. Add 24 drops green food coloring and 1 drop red food coloring and mix on medium speed for 1 minute. Set aside.

To assemble: Using the tip of a paring knife or a skewer, poke a small hole along the bottom edge of each brownie. Insert a candy cane "trunk" into each hole.

Fill the piping bag with the frosting and cut 1/4 inch off the tip. Using a zig-zag motion, pipe the frosting from the base to the tip of each tree. Decorate the trees with the sanding sugars and candy-covered chocolate, as desired.

Cook's Note: When measuring flour, we spoon it into a dry measuring cup and level off the excess. (Scooping directly from the bag compacts the flour, resulting in dry baked goods.)

Quote of the Week:

"Christmas baking is a labor of love." ~ Anonymous