Gifts of Good Taste

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CRANBERRY PISTACHIO BISCOTTI

½ cup dried cranberries
½ cup boiling water
½ cup butter, softened
1 cup sugar
4 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
3 cups all purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup chopped pistachios
3 tablespoons sugar

Place cranberries in a small bowl. Cover with boiling water; let stand for 5 minutes. Drain and set aside. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add 3 eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Stir in vanilla. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture and mix well. Stir in pistachios and cranberries with liquid.

Divide dough into three portions. On a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, shape each portion into a 12x1-1/2 inch rectangle. Beat remaining egg and brush over rectangles and sprinkle with sugar. Bake at 375° F. 18-22 minutes or until set and lightly browned. Carefully remove to wire racks; cool for 15 minutes.

Transfer to a cutting board; cut diagonally with a serrated knife into 3/4 inch slices. Place cut side down on ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 6-8 minutes on each side or until edges are browned. Remove to wire racks to cool completely. Store in an airtight container. Yields 3-1/2 dozen.

CARROT MUFFINS

1 carrot cake mix
1 can pumpkin
½ cup water

Combine all three ingredients until well blended. Top with following streusel topping before baking. Place in 6 Texas size muffin pan or 12 regular muffin pan. Bake at 375 degree F.

STREUSEL TOPPING

1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup chopped pecans
2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon cinnamon

Cut butter into brown sugar, stir in pecans and cinnamon. Top muffins with streusel just before baking.

APPLE BREAD

3 cups all purpose flour
1-1/2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 eggs
½ cup unsweetened applesauce
1/3 cup light olive oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 cups chopped peeled tart apples

TOPPING:

½ cup all purpose flour
½ cup sugar
2 tablespoons chopped walnuts
1/3 cup cold butter

In a large bowl, combine the first six ingredients. In another bowl, whisk the eggs, applesauce, oil and vanilla. Stir into dry ingredients just until moistened. Fold in apples. Transfer to two 8x4 inch loaf pans coated with cooking spray, or miniature pans coated with cooking spray.

For topping, combine the flour, sugar and walnuts; cut in butter until crumbly. Sprinkle over batter. Bake at 350 degrees F. For 45-55 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to cooling racks. Yield: 2 loaves or 8 miniature loaves.

CHERRY ALMOND BLONDIES

2/3 cup butter, softened
2 cups packed brown sugar
2 eggs
1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder
2 teaspoons vanilla
1/4 teaspoon salt
2-1/4 cups all purpose flour
3/4 cup almond sliced, toasted
½ cup coarsely chopped red cherries

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly grease a 13x9x2 inch baking pan. In a large mixing bowl, beat butter on medium for 30 seconds. Add brown sugar; beat until well combined. Beat in eggs, baking powder, vanilla and salt. Add flour; beat just until blended. Stir in almonds and cherries. Spread evenly in prepared pan. Bake about 30 minutes or until golden. Cool completely in pan on wire rack. Cut into bars or squares.

BANANA PECAN MORNING SQUARES

3 eggs
1 cup mashed ripe bananas
3 tablespoons white sugar
1 can refrigerated cinnamon rolls with cream cheese icing
½ cup all purpose flour
1/3 cup packed light brown sugar
1/4 cup butter, softened
3/4 cup coarsely chopped pecans
1/4 cup maple syrup

Heat oven to 350°. Spray 8 inch square glass baking dish with cooking spray. In large bowl, beat eggs, bananas and granulated sugar with wire whisk until well blended. Separate dough into 5 rolls; set icing aside.

Cut each roll into 8 equal pie shaped wedges. Gently stir the dough pieces into the egg mixture until well coated. Spoon mixture into sprayed dish; spread evenly.

In medium bowl, mix flour and brown sugar. With fork, cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in pecans. Sprinkle mixture over dough mixture in dish.

Bake at 350° F. 35 to 40 minutes or until center is puffed and set and edges are deep golden brown. Cool 10 minutes. Meanwhile, in small bowl, mix icing and syrup until blended.

To serve, cut into squares; place on individual serving plates. Drizzle the icing mixture over each serving.

GLAZED PECANS

2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
2 tablespoons maple syrup
2 cups pecan halves

Heat oven to 350° F. Line cookie sheet with cooking parchment paper. In 12 inch skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add brown sugar and syrup; mix well. Cook until bubbly, stirring constantly.

Add pecans; cook 2-3 minutes, stirring constantly, until coated. Spread mixture onto parchment-lined cookie sheet.

Bake 6 to 8 minutes or until golden brown. Cool completely, about 30 minutes. Store in tightly covered container up to 2 weeks.

CHICKEN AND RICE SOUP MIX

2 tablespoons uncooked instant rice
1-1/2 teaspoons reduced-sodium chicken bouillon granules
1 teaspoon dried celery flakes
1 teaspoon dried parsley flakes
1/4 teaspoon dried minced onion
1/8 teaspoon pepper

In a small bowl, combine all ingredients. Transfer to a small spice jar. Store in a cool dry place up to 6 months. Yield: 4 tablespoons

ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS

3/4 cup boiling water
5 ounce can chunk white chicken, drained

To prepare soup: Place soup mix in a small microwave safe bowl. Pour boiling water over mix; cover and let stand for 5 minutes. Stir in chicken. Microwave, uncovered, on high for 1-2 minutes or until heated through.

FIRE AND ICE PICKLES

32 ounce jar sliced dill pickles
2 cups white sugar
1-1/2 tablespoons Tabasco sauce
1 teaspoon ground hot peppers with seeds
2 large cloves or garlic, diced

Drain vinegar fro pickles, discard. Place pickles in medium bowl and add rest of ingredients. Stir often and let set 2 hours until sugar is dissolved. Repack in jars and place in refrigerator. Let season about 1 week before using.

INSTANT LATTE MIX

1 cup nonfat dry milk powder
½ cup powdered nondairy creamer
1/3 cup instant coffee granules
1/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup instant vanilla pudding mix

In a blender, combine the milk powder, creamer, coffee granules, sugar and pudding mix; cover and process until mixture is a fine powder. Store in an airtight container up to 6 months. Yield: 1-2/3 cups.

TO PREPARE HOT LATTE: Dissolve 1/4 cup mix in 3/4 cup hot water; stir well.

TO PREPARE ICED LATTE: Dissolve 1/4 cup mix in hot water; stir in 1/4 cup cold water. Transfer to a blender; add ½ cup ice cubes. Cover and process until blended.

MINIATURE PECAN PIES

To make pastry, cut 2" circles from favorite pastry. Place into miniature muffin pans carefully as making a pie.

PECAN PIE MIXTURE:

1 cup white corn syrup
4 tablespoons white sugar
2 eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup chopped pecans

Mix in order given. Pour into unbaked miniature pecan pie shells. Bake in preheated 350° oven until set and pastry is golden brown, about 20-25 minutes.

Sock Snowman

Items you need:

White sock
Polly pellets or rice
Fabric paint
Fleece
String or rubber bands
Buttons
Orange polymer clay
Twigs
Spray glue and glitter (optional)

To make your snowman:

Cut off the top of the sock and set aside.

Pour a good amount of the pellets or rice into the toe of the sock. Tie a string or use a rubber band above the pellets forming the bottom portion of the snowman. Add more pellets or rice to form the middle section and tie with string or rubber band shaping to size. Form the snowman's head by filling the remaining sock portion and tie the end close.

To form the nose, create a pea size shape of orange polymer or fimo clay. While putting pressure on one end of the ball, press and roll, creating a cylinder shape. Stand this upright and flatten the bottom. Bake at 275˚ for 5 minutes. Cool

Tie the top of the sock that you have set aside and fold the bottom half up to make a hat. Glue the hat to the head of the snowman. At this step you can to add glitter to your

snowman by spraying him with glue and dusting with glitter. Cut a narrow strip of fleece and tie it around his neck. Decorate your snowman using buttons, the orange nose, twigs and any decorative items to make him yours.

Sandy Kreps: Modern Simplicity: Simple Green Living with Modern Style
http://www.modern-simplicity.com
(All links to items Sandy demonstrated are on her blog.)
Book recommendations from Sandy:
http://astore.amazon.com/modersimpl08-20/detail/0609803255
http://astore.amazon.com/modersimpl08-20/detail/0671535951

General Crafting

http://www.craftster.org/
http://tipnut.com/
http://www.etsy.com/
http://craftgossip.com/

Sewing

http://sewmamasew.com/index.php
http://www.youtube.com/threadbanger
http://mybyrdhouse.blogspot.com/
http://www.sewingsupport.com/index.html

Quilting

http://www.crazyshortcutquilts.com/margueritas-blog/
http://www.missouriquiltco.com/

Crocheting/Knitting

http://www.crochetville.org/forum/
https://www.ravelry.com/account/login#page=10&query=crochet&sort=best
http://www.crochetpatterncentral.com/index.php

Patterns

Angry birds--http://obsessivelystitching.blogspot.com/2010/12/angry-birds-plush.html
Apron--http://mybyrdhouse.blogspot.com/2007/06/june-clothspin-apron.html
Bow tie pillow--http://sew4home.com/projects/pillows-cushions/822-take-a-second-look-bow-tie-pillows-protect-your-neck
Crocheted slippers--
http://www.marloscrochetcorner.com/ribbed%20slipper.html
Tin can luminaries--http://www.crafts-for-all-seasons.com/tin-can-luminaries.html
Baked potato bag--http://craftsanity.com/2010/01/craftsanity-on-tv-a-potato-bag-tutorial-for-mircowaving-tasty-potatoes-on-the-fly/

Local Gifts for the Holidays

Everyone -- yes EVERYONE gets their hair cut. How about gift certificates from your local hair salon or barber?

Gym membership? It's appropriate for all ages who are thinking about some health improvement.

Who wouldn't appreciate getting their car detailed? Small, locally-owned detail shops and car washes would love to sell you a gift certificate or a book of gift certificates.

Perhaps that grateful gift receiver would like his driveway sealed, or lawn mowed for the summer, or games at the local golf course.

There are a bazillion owner-run restaurants -- all offering gift certificates. And, if your intended isn't the fancy eatery sort, what about a half dozen breakfasts at the local breakfast joint.

How many people couldn't use an oil change for their car, truck or motorcycle, done at a shop run by the local working guy?

Thinking about a heartfelt gift for mom? Mom would LOVE the services of a local cleaning lady for a day.

My computer could use a tune-up, and I KNOW I can find some young guy who is struggling to get his repair business up and running.

For more personal gifts look at local crafts people who spin their own wool and knit them into scarves. They make jewelry, and pottery and beautiful wooden boxes.

Plan your holiday outings at local, owner-operated restaurants and leave your server a nice tip. And, how about going out to see a play or ballet at your hometown theatre?

Musicians need love too, so find a venue showcasing local bands.

Leave the mailman, trash guy or babysitter a nice BIG tip.

Keep the local economy strong this holiday season.