

November 22, 2023

A Special Supplement to

Lake Okeechobee News

# HOLIDAY Traditions

'Tis the Season to Socialize

4 unique holiday party themes

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# HOLIDAY Traditions

**WHO WE ARE:**

Lake Okeechobee News' annual section Holiday Traditions publishes just in time for Thanksgiving to kick off the holidays. Featuring recipes, gift giving ideas, shopping tips and more, this special section will have you feeling festive in no time! In addition to this print edition, the special section is available online for one full year at southcentralfloridalife.com/holiday!

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# Simple tricks to disentangle holiday lights



light cords are made from twisted or braided wires that have spaces throughout. The lights themselves can get snagged in these pockets between the wires.

Although it can be frustrating to deal with tangled lights that look like balls of yarn in a knitting basket, there are ways to disentangle them with relative ease — and then pack them in a way that can reduce further tangles.

Begin by plugging all lights into the outlet to see if they work. If most of the bulbs are burnt out or the lights do not go on at all, discard the strand. There's no point untangling lights only to learn they don't work.

Start slowly, beginning on the plug end, when untangling the lights. Keep the strand you're working on separate from the other lights so they do not inadvertently become entangled. Tackle this job in a space with a lot of room. Lay the lights out on a large table or sit on the floor to do the untangling.

Utilize a pen or pencil to fish out more stubborn snags. This can help you loosen any knots and make it easier to pull snags through.

Lay the untangled strands out in a safe area away from your working

space as you work through each strand.

One of the ways to avoid the hassle of tangled lights is to remember to store the lights in ways that will reduce their propensity for tangling in the first place.

- Rather than wrap lights around your hand or arm to condense the strand, use something else. A piece of cardboard, a hanger and some PVC tubing can keep lights from becoming tangled.

- Store lights in a zip-top bag to keep them from tangling with other strands stored together.

- Save the original boxes and return the lights to them after each use.

- Icicle lights have hanging strands of lights on longer strands, which can compound tangling issues. Use a rubber band to gather the hanging "icicles" together, or use some plastic wrap for the same purpose.

- Invest in a cord reel, similar to what you might use for a garden hose. Longer light strands or wires are stored on such reels, and they can be used with Christmas lights.

Patience and care can prevent holiday lights from becoming tangled.

The joyous holiday season is enhanced by the beautiful and festive decorations that adorn homes and businesses during this special time of year. Twinkling lights are part of the holiday decorating equation. However, tangled lights in storage bins and boxes can sap anyone's holiday spirit.

Christmas lights can turn into a tangled mess no matter how hard people work to avoid such an outcome. Christmas lights get tangled partly because of their design. There is a metal wire inside the cord to help with the packaging of the lights, which gives the cord a natural curve. Furthermore, most

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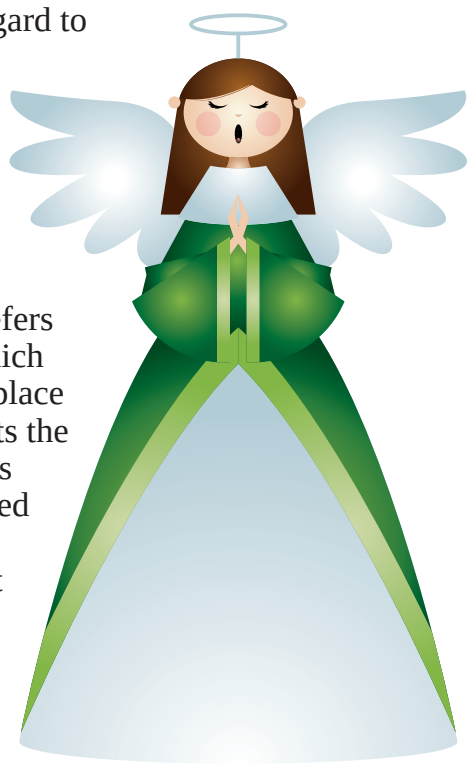
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# Did you know?

Christmas trees are a key component of many people's holiday season. It's a family tradition to choose (or take out) the tree each year and then adorn it with ornaments, tinsel, family mementos, and a beautiful tree topper. In regard to tree toppers, most people fasten the top bough with an angel or a star. The first tree toppers were the infant Jesus, but toppers are now available in other options symbolic of the Nativity of Jesus. The star refers to the Star of Bethlehem, which guided the Magi to the birthplace of Jesus. The angel represents the messengers of God as well as the Angel Gabriel, who visited Mary to share the news that she would be giving birth to the Son of God. People can choose whichever topper they prefer, but many refer to the religious significance of Christmas.



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# 4 unique holiday party themes



**T**he holiday season is a festive time of year filled with plenty of opportunities to socialize with friends and family. Parties abound this time of year, and many people may find themselves hosting everything from intimate gatherings to large family dinners.

As people will be attending many different events in the weeks to come, savvy hosts and hostesses may want to set their occasions apart in different ways. One option is to pick an entertaining party theme that guests can get excited about. A fun theme can provide a break from the standard traditions. Consider these four unique party themes when planning holiday parties.

## 1. Ornament exchange

Decorating the home is commonplace this time of year. Who couldn't use a new trinket for the mantle or an ornament to adorn the tree? Ask all guests to bring a gift-wrapped ornament to the party. Then place numbers in a bowl and have each guest draw a number;

this is the order in which they will then select an ornament. After the first person makes their selection, subsequent guests can choose a new ornament from the pile or "steal" one from those already picked. The guest who picked first then has one last chance to keep or steal at the end.

## 2. Tropical holiday

The weather outside may be frightful, but a tropical island party can be utterly delightful. Give the event an island flair with fruity drinks, grilled kabobs, coconut desserts, and steel-drum music.

## 3. Grinchy party

A party devoted to the Dr. Seuss character The Grinch can be a fun way to pass time together. While the holidays are supposed to be holly and jolly, a Grinch-themed party can put the emphasis on being a little bit more naughty than nice. And who doesn't enjoy an ample serving of roast beast? Have guests come decked out in Grinch costumes or Grinch emblazoned t-shirts or other clothing.

## 4. Christmas karaoke

Set up the karaoke machine or utilize one of the services available online, and make sure that guests are prepared to belt out their favorite holiday tunes — whether traditional carols or pop hits. A group of ladies can join together for The Waitresses' "Christmas Wrapping" or guests can try their hands at hitting the high notes of Mariah Carey's ubiquitous "All I Want for Christmas Is You." Chances are serving some liquid courage will help guests loosen up and be more inclined to grab the microphone. These are just a few different party themes that holiday hosts can consider this season.





# Merry Christmas

and have a  
**Blessed New Year!**



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Paige Sherman, Patrick Malone, Natalie Hubbard, Lauren De La Luz Caballero, Jimmy De La Luz Caballero, Lori Mixon, Melody Hodges, Phylcia Cortes, Krystal Moore, Cindy Brandel

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# Christmas stocking decorating tips and tricks



**H**anging Christmas stockings is just one of the many traditions that fill the days leading up to Christmas. One theory regarding the origins of stockings says the tradition began when a poor widower who had three daughters worried over having enough money for their wedding dowries to help secure the daughters' futures. The women, who had hung their stockings by the fireplace to dry, woke up to find solid gold spheres inside. This legend suggests kindly St. Nicholas visited the home in the night and left the presents, helping ensure the daughters could marry well, after all.

Christmas stockings were the first places where gifts were stowed, before under the boughs of Christmas trees became the primary spot for placing gifts. Then stockings were secondary vessels reserved for small trinkets. Today stockings are largely Christmas decorations rather than places to place gifts. Still, they're a key component of holiday magic.

When including stockings in holiday festivities, follow these tips for whimsy and more.

- **Utilize stocking holders.**

Stocking holders are either metal or wooden devices that are placed on mantels. Hooks on the holders suspend the stockings. Just be sure the holders are sturdy enough to handle the weight of a stuffed

stocking if you plan on filling it with goodies.

- **Determine your style.** There are Christmas stockings that coordinate to just about any interior design style. From farmhouse to modern to traditional, choose one that fits with your aesthetic. That isn't to say you can't mix and match stockings if you prefer a more eclectic, homespun feel.

- **Enhance your stocking look.** If stockings are strictly decorative, enhance their look with a few tricks. First, use tissue paper or balled up shopping bags to stuff the stockings and give them shape. Fill a small baggie with sand or florist glass and place in the heel of the stocking to balance it out and prevent the stocking from blowing around in the breeze.

- **No fireplace; no problem.** Stockings are traditionally hung from the fireplace mantel, but if you don't have a fireplace there is no need to fret. Simply use ribbons to hang them from the bannister of a staircase, or hang stockings right on walls with removable hooks, or from sturdy shelves. You also can think creatively and hang larger stockings on a door like you might a wreath.

Whether they're decorative or functional, stockings can be an integral component of holiday decor in a home.





# Snap a great Christmas card photo

**G**reeting cards are among the first signs that the holiday season has arrived. Mailboxes are filled with cards and email inboxes have new messages popping up each day wishing others well. Many of these greetings feature family photos.

A Shutterfly poll conducted by Ipsos in 2021 discovered that, while traditional holiday messages are by far the most popular missives at 63 percent, younger age groups show more interest in other types of cards, such as photo cards (between 34 and 38 percent depending on age group). Forty-one percent of

people polled prefer to receive photo cards. That means holiday well-wishers may want to brush up on their photography skills.

- **Keep cards in the back of your mind.** While the Norman Rockwell-esque family tableau or a wintry Christmas scene is a go-to holiday card, any photo-worthy moment throughout the year can suffice. Keep a lookout for ideas while vacationing or enjoying time together as a family.

- **Avoid busy prints.** Stick to solid colors when posing for holiday photos; otherwise, recipients' eyes may not know where to look when viewing the

photo. Photo subjects should coordinate, but wardrobes that completely match can seem contrived.

- **Plan around nap times.** If photos involve young children, schedule the photo shoot to occur when children are well-rested and fed. Now may be the time to offer kids treats they don't normally get in an effort to reward patience and happy smiles.

- **Avoid red eye.** Proper lighting can help avoid the occurrence of "red eye" in photographs, which happens when the flash bounces off a wide pupil. Asking subjects to look into bright light before the photo, or utilizing a camera that snaps a small burst of flash before the actual flash, can help alleviate this problem.

- **Embrace candid shots or mixups.** Some of the funniest and most memorable photos are when things didn't go according to plan. A crying infant or a parent looking away from the lens may not be magazine worthy, but don't be so

quick to discard those less-than-perfect snaps.

- **Zoom in tight and cropped.** Card recipients want to look at you and not the surroundings. Avoid landscape shots on holiday cards, and be sure to focus on the subjects' faces as much as possible.

- **Angle correctly for flattering photos.** Adjust your body posture to look your best. Turn the lower half of your body to the side and then adjust the upper half to move slightly toward the camera to appear more svelte. Position the camera lens at eye level or above to avoid double chins in photos.

- **Show off your sense of humor.** You can show friends and family you like to laugh by posing in funny ways or by mimicking pop culture references in your photo cards. Recreate childhood photos of yore, or imitate photos from album covers or movie posters.

Relax and have fun with holiday greeting cards. Plan outfits, watch lighting and catch kids at the right time to create memorable cards.



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# Burn candles safely for the holidays and beyond



**85%**  
of candle  
fires  
can be  
prevented

**C**andles are not in short supply come the holiday season. During Chanukah, candles are an integral component of celebrating the miracle of oil that burned in the Temple for eight days. Celebrants of Kwanzaa utilize candles to represent the seven principles of the holiday. Christians light candles during Christmas services and in their homes to represent the light Jesus brought to the world.

There is no denying the warmth and beauty candles can bring to a home when they are flickering delicately. But candles have open flames, so caution must reign supreme when they are in use. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission says 85 percent of candle fires can be prevented by following some key safety precautions. The National Fire Protection Association says Christmas is the most dangerous day for candle fires. Here is how to burn candles safely.

- Always trim wicks to 1/4-inch before burning candles. Long or crooked wicks can cause uneven burning, dripping or flaring.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy and will not tip over easily.
- Use a long match or long lighter to light candles to prevent fingers and hands from getting too close to the flames.
- Run used matches under water to cool them down and prevent fires from occurring after matches are

disposed in the trash.

- Never leave a candle unattended. It should be in sight at all times.
  - Place and store candles beyond the reach of children and pets where they will be less likely to get knocked over.
  - Never touch or move a candle while it is burning or while the wax is liquefied.
  - Place candles on stable, heat-resistant surfaces.
  - Keep candles away from drafts, vents and air currents.
  - Follow candle manufacturers' recommendations on burn time and proper use.
  - When utilizing multiple candles, place them at least three inches apart from one another. This reduces the chances for the candles to melt one another, or create their own drafts that will cause the candles to burn improperly.
  - Extinguish a candle if the flame becomes too high or flickers repeatedly.
  - Refrain from burning a candle longer than three hours at a time, and never burn a candle when there is less than one centimeter of wax at the base.
  - Use a candle snuffer to safely extinguish a candle, and make sure the candle is completely out (wick ember is no longer glowing) before leaving the room.
- Candles can be awe-inspiring components of holiday decor. But caution must always be the top priority when lighting candles inside a home.

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# Enjoy this traditional herbed dish when holiday hosting



Calendars tend to be full during the period between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. In addition to school concerts, work parties, shopping excursions, and tree lighting ceremonies, family gatherings are a great way to spread a bit of holiday cheer. Hosting for the holidays typically requires having foods and beverages on hand to keep guests jolly.

As most home cooks can attest, inspiration can fizzle when trying to come up with familiar flavors that will appeal to guests and offer that touch of "wow" when plated. "Pomodori Farciti all'Erbette" is an Italian dish of stuffed tomatoes with herbs. Although tomatoes are a New World food, and were a favorite of Mesoamerican people since at least AD 700, explorers brought tomatoes back to Europe and they became quite popular there, especially in the cuisine of Mediterranean nations where tomatoes grew readily. Today they are enjoyed across the globe and are an important component of many recipes.

Holiday entertainers can whip up this recipe for "Pomodori Farciti all'Erbette," courtesy of "Tasting History" (Simon Element) by Max Miller with Ann Volkwein, for a tasty offering. Holiday celebrants may be happy to see that the red tomatoes with green herbs in the dish fit right in with their holiday decor color scheme!

## Pomodori Farciti all'Erbette

Makes 6 to 8 servings

½ cup finely chopped fresh Italian parsley  
 ½ cup finely chopped yellow or white onion  
 ¼ cup finely chopped fresh sorrel  
 (or substitute arugula or spinach with a squeeze of lemon)  
 4 ounces prosciutto  
 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint  
 Salt  
 Freshly ground black pepper  
 8 ounces Provatura cheese (or fresh mozzarella)  
 3 large egg yolks  
 6 to 8 medium fresh tomatoes  
 2 or 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
 Ham broth or crusty bread, if desired, for serving

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F.
2. Mix the parsley, onion, sorrel, and mint together in a medium bowl. Tear the prosciutto into small pieces, then mix into the herbs and add salt and pepper to taste. Grate the cheese into the mixture, then add the egg yolks and mix together to form a paste.

3. Slice off the tops of the tomatoes and scoop out the inside with a spoon, discarding the tops and insides of the tomatoes. Stuff the hollow tomatoes with the herb mixture until full but not packed too tightly. The filling should be flush with the top of the tomato.

4. Add enough olive oil to cover the bottom of an oven-save frying pan and set over medium heat. Pan-fry the tomatoes, bottom down, for 2 to 3 minutes, then use tongs to quickly flip them over and to prevent the filling from falling out. Pan-fry top down for 2 to 3 minutes. Then place the frying pan into the oven and bake for 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and serve hot. The original recipe says these can be served with a ham broth, but they also can be served with a bit of crusty Italian bread, if desired.

**Cook's note: The quantities of the herbs and onion can be modified to suit your preference.**

# Put a twist on the traditional cupcake



are enjoyed throughout the year, particularly during birthdays and other special occasions.

It may seem like there is no way to reinvent the cupcake, but "Sticky Cinnamon-Walnut Spirals" marry the best of cinnamon rolls with the convenience of a muffin/cupcake tin preparation to form a flavor-packed product that can either be breakfast, brunch or

dessert. Try this recipe, courtesy of "Small Sweet Treats" (Gibbs Smith) by Marguerite Marceau Henderson, to elevate your cupcake game.

Cupcakes are diminutive, hand-held treats that come in a variety of flavors and styles. Each December, the humble cupcake gets its own day of celebration (December 15), but people know well that cupcakes

are enjoyed throughout the year, particularly during birthdays and other special occasions.

## Sticky Cinnamon-Walnut Spirals

Serves 6

½ cup dried currants  
 1 cup hot water  
 1 sheet frozen puff pastry (from 17.3-ounce package), room temperature  
 1 tablespoon butter, melted  
 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest  
 ½ cup finely chopped walnuts  
 ½ cup packed dark brown sugar  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 1 tablespoon butter, melted  
 1 tablespoon sugar

Place currants in a bowl and pour hot water over top to cover. Steep for 15 minutes and then drain off excess water. Cool currants to room temperature.

Roll out the pastry on a work

surface. Brush the pastry with the melted butter. Combine the orange zest, walnuts, brown sugar, cinnamon, and reserved currants in a bowl. Spread the mixture evenly over the pastry. Roll up jelly-roll style, loosely. Place seam side down and cut into six slices, each about 2-inches wide.

Brush the interior of the muffin tin with the remaining tablespoon of melted butter and sprinkle with sugar. Place the cut slices of pastry into each muffin cup. Bake on the middle rack of a preheated 400° F oven for 22 to 25 minutes until golden brown and puffed. Allow to cool for a minute or two before removing from muffin pan.

Note: This recipe easily can be doubled. Just use two sheets of pastry, double the filling, and use a 12-cup muffin tin.



# ‘Puerto Rican eggnog’ could be a hit of the holidays



bustle, there also are traditions that are unique to various cultures and ethnicities — particularly those pertaining to foods and beverages. From minced pies in England to kutia in Ukraine to spiced hot chocolate in Peru, many different foods and beverages are savored this time of year around the world.

Individuals of Puerto Rican descent might enjoy whipping up batches of coquito around the holidays. Coquito, which means “small coconut,” is made in batches with recipes passed down through families. It is similar to traditional eggnog, but Puerto Ricans will tell you it’s even better. The beverage is served throughout Navidad, or starting after Thanksgiving and ending in mid-January with the celebration of Fiestas de la Calle San Sebastián.

Those interested in making homemade coquito can follow this “Traditional Coquito” recipe, courtesy of Discover Puerto Rico.

**T**radition reigns supreme during the holiday season. Putting up Christmas trees, stringing lights, singing carols, and filling stockings with trinkets are just a few of the season’s many cherished traditions. However, amid the typical holiday hustle and

### Traditional Coquito

- 1 can of condensed milk
- 1 can of evaporated milk
- 1 can of cream of coconut (such as Coco López)
- ½ cup white rum (preferably Don Q or Bacardí)
- ½ teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon of ground cinnamon (add more to taste)

In a blender, add evaporated milk, cream of coconut, sweetened condensed milk, rum, vanilla extract, and cinnamon. Blend on high until mixture is well combined, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer mixture into glass bottles and chill in the refrigerator until cold. To serve, pour coquito into small serving glasses and garnish with ground cinnamon or a cinnamon stick.

*Note: This is traditional Coquito. Individuals can experiment with different flavors, like chocolate, guava or even mango coquito if they desire.*



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# Jelly doughnuts can be the culinary star of Chanukah



celebrants enjoy a specific variety known as sufganiyot.

According to My Jewish Learning, jelly doughnuts are one of the more symbolic dishes associated with Chanukah. Oily foods are made to represent the miracle of Chanukah since the first celebration, and fried jelly doughnuts became tied to Chanukah during the Middle Ages. Early on they were known as “ponchiks” because they were modeled after the doughnuts served in Poland around Christmastime. But eventually they took the name sufganiyot, from the “spongy dough” mentioned in the Talmud.

Enjoy this recipe for “Sufganiyot,” courtesy of Martha Stewart, for your next Chanukah celebration.

minutes (add more flour, if necessary). Place in an oiled bowl; cover with plastic wrap. Set in a warm place to rise until doubled, 1 to 1½ hours.

On a lightly floured work surface, roll dough to ¼-inch thickness. Using a 2½-inch-round cutter or drinking glass, cut 20 rounds. Cover with plastic wrap; let rise 15 minutes.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat oil until a deep-frying thermometer registers 370° F. Using a slotted spoon, carefully slip 4 rounds into oil. Fry until golden, about 40 seconds. Turn doughnuts over; fry until golden on other side, another 40 seconds. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a paper-towel-lined baking sheet. Roll in sugar while warm. Fry all dough, and roll in sugar.

Fill a pastry bag fitted with a #4 tip with jam. Using a wooden skewer or toothpick, make a hole in the side of each doughnut. Fit the pastry tip into a hole, pipe about 2 teaspoons jam into doughnut. Repeat with remaining doughnuts.

## Sufganiyot

Yield: 20

- 2 tablespoons active dry yeast
- ½ cup warm water (100° to 110° F)
- ¼ cup plus 1 teaspoon sugar, plus more for rolling
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 3 cups vegetable oil, plus more for bowl
- 1 cup seedless raspberry jam

In a small bowl, combine yeast, warm water, and 1 teaspoon sugar. Set aside until foamy, about 10 minutes.

Place flour in a large bowl. Make a well in the center; add eggs, yeast mixture, ¼ cup sugar, butter, nutmeg, and salt. Using a wooden spoon, stir until a sticky dough forms. On a well-floured work surface, knead until dough is smooth, soft, and bounces back when poked with a finger, about 8

# Treat overnight guests to a morning treat



Entertaining for the holidays frequently involves welcoming overnight guests. In these instances, having breakfast and brunch foods on hand can ensure that those spending the night will have something tasty to eat when they rise in the morning. Make-ahead foods, such as scones, can be ideal because they are

delicious at room temperature, which means can accommodate guests who are early risers as well as those who prefer to sleep in.

This recipe for “Lemon-Ginger Scones” from “Simply Scratch” (Avery) by Laurie McNamara produces refreshing flavor in a buttery scone. Serve with tea or coffee and guests will be in heaven.

## Lemon-Ginger Scones

Yield: 8

- ½ cup cold heavy cream
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon organic lemon extract
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2¼ cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) ice-cold unsalted butter, cut into cubes
- ¼ cup finely diced candied ginger
- 2 tablespoons grated lemon zest
- ¼ cup powdered sugar

Preheat the oven to 400° F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with a silicone baking mat or parchment paper.

In a 2-cup liquid measuring

cup, use a fork to beat together the heavy cream, eggs, lemon extract, and vanilla until combined. Chill until ready to use.

In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Drop in the ice-cold butter and use a pastry cutter to cut the butter into the flour mixture until it resembles coarse wet sand.

Pour in the chilled cream mixture, ginger and lemon zest and use a rubber spatula to stir until just combined.

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead it a few times before forming it into a ball. With floured fingers, flatten it out into a 1½-inch-thick round. Cut the round into 8 equal-sized wedges and transfer them to the prepared baking sheet.

Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, rotating the baking sheet halfway through baking. Transfer the baked scones to a wire rack to cool. Once the scones have cooled, dust generously with powdered sugar before serving.



# Holiday wreath dos and don'ts



**N**o greenery is more recognized during the holiday season than Christmas trees. However, wreaths likely take a close second to towering evergreens when it comes

to green holiday decor. It is important to treat wreaths with care in order to maximize their longevity and beauty. The following tips can help ensure wreaths remain fresh and festive throughout the

month of December.

- **Choose the right design.** Select a wreath that is not too busy nor too boring. It is important to strike the right balance. A good wreath has a focal point, which may be a festive bow or another decorative piece. Keep in mind this is a wreath which should have lots of greenery on display, rather than flowers that characterize other seasonal wreaths.
- **Weigh your wreath.** Take a moment to ask a salesman how heavy the wreath is when you purchase it. Knowing the weight of the wreath will help you identify the proper hanging mechanism, as hooks are generally characterized by the weight they can hold. A less than sturdy hook can increase the chances the wreath falls down and ends up damaged.
- **Determine your hanging method.** Once you know the weight of the wreath, you can figure out how to secure it to a door or window without having to drill holes into any structures. Removable adhesive strips are one option, provided you attach something like cardboard or another material to the back of the wreath upon which the adhesive strips can be stuck. Otherwise, over-the-door wreath hangers are wise investments that can support large, heavy wreaths.

- **Consider the safety of pets.** When decorating with plant material, it is important to know what is safe for pets in the household. According to the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, most holiday plants cause irritation of the mouth. Pine trees produce oils that can cause gastrointestinal issues.
- **Exercise caution with storm doors.** If you hang a wreath between a glass storm door and your front door, the air around the wreath will heat up and cause the wreath to turn brown.
- **Choose a cool spot.** In addition to avoiding heat that builds up between doors, you should select a cool spot out of the hot sun. Many pine trees, like balsam fir, react more favorably to cooler temperatures and will keep their vibrant green color and fragrance more readily.
- **Go artificial.** If you want to hang a wreath indoors, opt for an artificial one. Prolonged warm temperatures inside may prematurely dry out a fresh wreath, ultimately turning it into a fire hazard.

A few pointers can ensure wreaths remain a beautiful component of holiday decor throughout the season.



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# Dig into a sweet and traditional noodle dish



**W**hen preparing meals for Chanukah celebrations, some families may want to serve kugel. Kugel is a Jewish dish that is similar to a casserole or pudding. Kugel originated more than 800 years ago in southern Germany. Kugel soon became a staple within Jewish households throughout eastern Europe and eventually the United States.

There are many ways to make kugel. Some recipes feature potatoes, bread or rice as the main starchy ingredient. Kugel also can be sweet or savory. “Lokshen” (noodle) kugel is perhaps the most traditional. It blends light and airy egg noodles with moist and creamy dairy ingredients. Chanukah celebrants can try this recipe for “Noodle Kugel,” courtesy of Taste of Home.

## Noodle Kugel

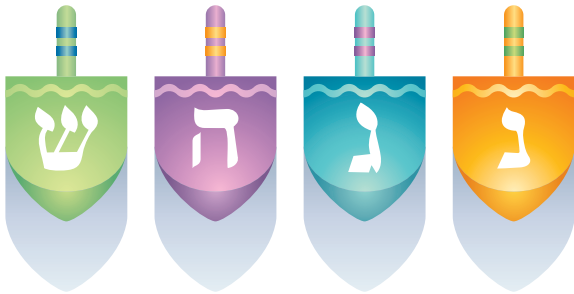
Serves 15

- 1 package (1 pound) egg noodles
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 8 large eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 cups sour cream
- 2 cups 4 percent cottage cheese

### Topping

- ¾ cup cinnamon graham cracker crumbs (about 4 whole crackers)
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted

1. Cook noodles according to package directions; drain. Toss with butter; set aside. In a large bowl, beat the eggs, sugar, sour cream and cottage cheese until well blended. Stir in noodles.
2. Transfer to a greased 13 x 9-inch baking dish. Combine the cracker crumbs and butter; sprinkle over top.
3. Bake, uncovered, at 350° F until a thermometer reads 160° F, 50 to 55 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes before cutting. Serve warm or cold.



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# Tasty tidbits about eggnog



festive facts about the beverage, courtesy of Mental Floss, The Fact Site and Tastemade.

- Eggnog likely originated in the medieval period and was known as “posset,” a hot, milk-based drink made of spices and wine. Even though posset could be a cocktail, it also was used as a remedy for colds and flu for its soothing properties.

- Milk, eggs and sherry used in the early recipes were difficult to come by, so when eggnog first appeared it was a drink only the wealthy could enjoy. That changed when eggnog was popularized in the American colonies, where dairy products and liquor were more readily available.

- Entymologists believe “eggnog” stems from the word “noggin,” which refers to small wooden mugs often used to serve strong ale, known by the slang word “nog.”

- In the Medieval period, it was risky to drink milk straight because it wasn’t pasteurized. Eggnog contained alcohol so that it would kill off any harmful bacteria in the milk.

- A typical homemade version of eggnog has roughly one egg per serving. However, commercial eggnog is regulated by the FDA and

can only contain 1 percent of the product’s final weight in egg yolk solids. That stems from fear of raw egg and salmonella.

- President George Washington apparently enjoyed serving eggnog at Christmas, and even had his own special recipe (see right), according to the Old Farmer’s Almanac.

- There is no right or wrong alcohol to use when preparing eggnog. Distilled spirits like rum, sherry, cognac, and whiskey all have produced suitable eggnogs.

- Puerto Rican coquito is a traditional drink that is very similar to eggnog.

- Individuals concerned about eggs or milk in eggnog can enjoy a vegan recipe made from nut milk instead. Commercially produced vegan eggnog offerings are now more widely available.

- One of the more notable flavors in eggnog comes from the use of nutmeg. Nutmeg is a fragrant spice made from grinding the seed of the nutmeg tree.

Now that you’ve learned about eggnog, whip up a batch of George Washington’s original recipe this holiday season.

## Eggnog (George Washington’s original interpretation)

- 1 quart cream
- 1 quart milk
- 1 dozen tablespoons sugar
- 1 pint brandy
- ½ pint rye whiskey
- ½ pint Jamaican rum
- ¼ pint sherry

Eggs (Washington forgot to include the number of eggs, so home chefs can improvise or use six, which seems to be the standard in traditional recipes)

Mix liquor first, then separate yolks and whites of eggs, add sugar to beaten yolks, mix well. Add milk and cream, slowly beating. Beat whites of eggs until stiff and fold slowly into mixture. Let sit in cool place for several days. Taste frequently.

*Tip: Today’s recipe makers may want to set the eggnog in the refrigerator as the “cool place” of choice.*

**E**ggnog is a rich and delicious beverage that has become synonymous with the most festive time of year. This milk- and egg-based concoction is tasty on its own, or it can be dressed up with other flavors and spiked with a favorite spirit when celebrating the holiday season with other adult partygoers.

December is National Eggnog Month, and December 24 is National Eggnog Day. There is no more perfect time of year to learn everything you can about eggnog - all the while sipping a cup of this creamy concoction. Indulge in these

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*And*  
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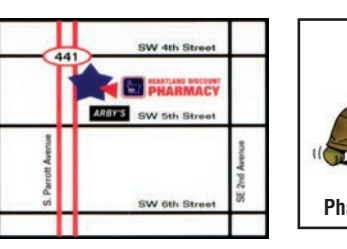
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# Holiday entertaining made easier



**E**ntertaining season peaks between November and January, when families, friends, coworkers, and even neighbors take every opportunity to gather and celebrate the joy of the holiday season. Individuals who regularly open their homes to company may find hosting easier if they have a ready-made list of foods and beverages to serve their guests.

Small bites and finger foods are ideal when hosting a crowd because they allow individuals to pick and choose among several different offerings. These “Easy Salmon Cakes” from “The Complete IBS Diet Plan” (Rockridge Press) by Amanda Foote, RD are perfect by themselves, or can be served on gluten-free (or regular) buns. Increase the recipe as necessary for entertaining.

## Easy Salmon Cakes

Serves 4

- 1 pound canned salmon, flaked
- ½ cup gluten-free bread crumbs
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill, plus extra for garnish
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 lemon, quartered, for garnish

1. Preheat the oven to 375° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
2. In a large bowl, mix the salmon and bread crumbs.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together the egg, mustard, dill, salt, and pepper. Fold this into the salmon and bread crumbs.
4. Form the salmon mixture into 4 patties and place them on the prepared baking sheet.
5. Bake for 5 minutes, flip, and bake for 5 minutes more, until the patties are golden. Garnish with fresh dill and lemon.

**Tip:** To make this GERD-friendly, omit the black pepper and reduce the mustard to 2 teaspoons.

*Merry Christmas*

*May this Christmas  
Fill your home with the  
Peace and Joy of Christ.*

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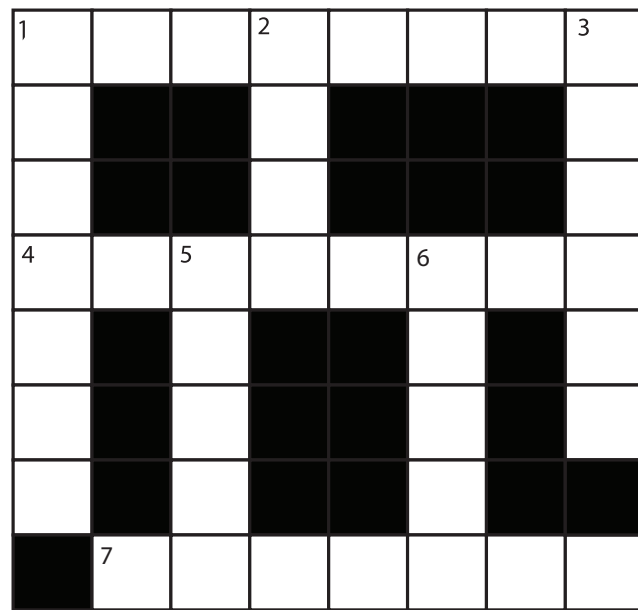
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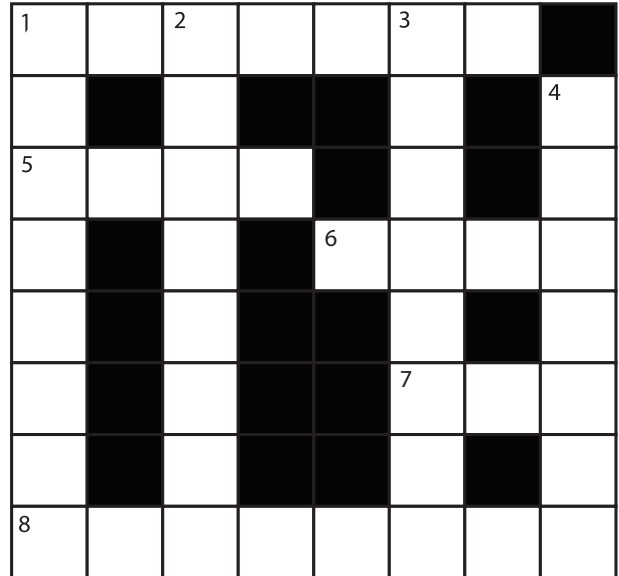


# Holiday FUN & GAMES

## Crossword Puzzle



## Crossword Puzzle



### ACROSS

- 1. Recollections
- 4. Accesses
- 7. Voyages

### DOWN

- 1. Fireplace shelves
- 2. Type of grain
- 3. Enjoys
- 5. Writing sheet
- 6. A person who helps the sick

Answers:  
 Across  
 1. Memories 4. Taps into 7. Travels  
 Down  
 1. Mantels 2. Oats 3. Savors 5. Paper 6. Nurse

### ACROSS

- 1. Things not known
- 5. Paper to fill out
- 6. Object of devotion
- 7. December 31 (abbr.)
- 8. Tree decoration

### DOWN

- 1. Popular food
- 2. Type of sweater
- 3. Style of dance
- 4. Gather

Answers:  
 Across  
 1. Secrets 6. Form 7. Idol 8. NYE 9. Ornament  
 Down  
 1. Soft taco 2. Cardigan 3. Tap dance 4. Collect

## WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to Christmas trees.

A L E N G

|  |  |  |  |  |
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Answer: Angel

## WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to Christmas.

N M A E R G

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|--|--|--|--|--|

Answer: Manger



# This whimsical fall treat is ideal for special gatherings



**P**umpkin spice may be all the rage in October and November, but it's all about apples in the early weeks of fall. Visiting a local orchard to hand-pick apples is an entertaining way to spend an afternoon with young or old, and it's a great opportunity to gather ingredients for apple pie.

For fall birthdays or other special occasions, skip the celebratory cake for something even more eye-catching: an elaborately decorated pie! Not too many people can resist the tart flavor of fresh apples and the buttery, flaky appeal of a delicious pie crust. Turn a store-bought or homemade pie into an artistic masterpiece with these directions for "Flying Unicorn Pie" from "Pies are Awesome: The Definitive Pie Art Book" (Quarto) by Jessica Leigh Clark-Bojin.

## Flying Unicorn Pie

Makes 1 pie

### Ingredients:

Egg wash (or almond milk if making a vegan pie)  
Brown gel food color  
Vanilla extract  
Assortment of sanding sugar, sprinkles, and small Sixlets or dragées  
Gold and pearl luster dust  
Vodka or any clear alcohol or extract to mix with the luster dust

### Supplies:

The pie pan of your choice  
Baking sheet  
Parchment paper  
Food-safe precision knife  
Pastry brush  
Food-safe artist brushes  
Ramekins or small containers to mix color and hold egg wash  
Fondant sculpting tool (or toothpick)

1. Roll out the dough of your choice onto parchment and cut out all the Flying Unicorn template pieces with a sharp knife. Cut out as many "rays" as you like. Don't worry if they look long; they'll shrink in the oven! (**Purchase the cookbook for the template or use clip art to create your own template.**)

2. Coat all the pieces in the egg wash using a pastry brush.

3. Paste the pieces together using the egg wash as "glue." Smooth out the joints with the back of your fingernail or a fondant sculpting tool. If you have any trouble lifting the pieces, just pop your work in the freezer for 2 minutes, then use a spatula to lift the bits.

Score some feather lines in the wings with a fondant sculpting tool.

4. You can either paint the unicorn now with gel colors, or just give it a quick vanilla wash. Make sure you choose colors that will stand out from your background. Bake the pieces at 400° F for about 8 minutes, or until golden brown. Every oven is slightly different so keep an eye on it. Set the baked pieces aside to cool while you make the base pie. If you are making your base pie, add a decorative crimped edge of some sort to fancy it up.

5. Once the base pie has baked, place your cooled "ray" pieces evenly around the top of the base pie with a spatula. Let the pie fully cool and then add the edible bling of your choice (this is the fun part!).

6. For the final step, place a dab of jam, chocolate, sugar glue, or leftover filling in the center as glue, and place your unicorn with a spatula. You can add some luster dust mixed with a bit of vodka now if you feel like it needs a bit more fabulousness.

**Tip:** Since you are going to be coating the top of this pie in sanding sugars, select a filling that is not overly sweet - maybe even something tart - and don't put any sugar in the crust. You can use any flavor of filling you like and the dough of your choice. You can also use a store-bought pie.



# A version of gingerbread with historical roots



**G**ingerbread is a popular sweet that often finds its way onto holiday dessert tables. Some people bake and construct lavish gingerbread houses, while others make cut-outs of gingerbread people to turn into cookies.

Legend suggests that gingerbread originally landed in Europe in 992 with an Armenian monk named Gregory of Nicopolis, who brought a honey-and-spice cake to other monks in France, where it quickly became a favorite and was considered a “food from heaven.” Historians are not really sure if the original gingerbread had any ginger in it at all. In fact, typical medieval recipes for gingerbread include no ginger and the French would later refer to it as “pain d’épices,” or spiced bread.

Gingerbread once was a treat only for the elite, but as the masses discovered it, recipes evolved to include soft cakes to hard biscuits and everything in between. The following recipe for medieval “Gingerbread” produces a chewy, almost candy-like texture with potent ginger flavor. Try it for holiday gatherings, courtesy of “Tasting History” (Simon Element) by Max Miller.

## Gingerbread

Makes 20 to 25 1-inch pieces

12 to 14 slices (238 g) stale white bread

1 cup (330 g) honey

1 tablespoon ground ginger

¾ teaspoon ground long pepper (a spice similar to black pepper but with more heat that typically must be ordered online)

½ teaspoon sandalwood powder, if desired, for color (one drop of red food dye can be used instead)

½ cup (50 g) or less sugar (enough for sprinkling)

20 to 25 whole cloves

Gold leaf

1. Either with a food processor or by hand, grind the bread into coarse bread crumbs. Commercially bought bread crumbs will work as well, though the texture from homemade bread crumbs is preferable.

2. Pour the honey into a large saucepan set over medium heat, and heat to a rolling boil; the honey will become like syrup. Note that it will boil up quite a bit, so do not use a small saucepan. Slowly add the bread crumbs to the honey while stirring. The mixture should come together and begin to pull away from the sides of the saucepan. Continue to mix until fully combined. Remove the pan from the heat and quickly stir in the ginger, long pepper and sandalwood, if desired. Turn the mixture out onto a sheet of parchment and spread with a spatula. Then, place another sheet of parchment and, with a rolling pin, roll the gingerbread out to about ½-inch thick (1.2 cm). Wrap in plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator until stiff, about 2 hours.

3. Once the gingerbread is cool, sprinkle sugar on top and cut into 1-inch squares or whatever shape you like. Keep in mind that each piece should be bite size, as they are very strong. They will also be quite sticky, so handle them as little as possible. Insert a whole clove into each piece of gingerbread and fleck with gold leaf. Leave the clove in until serving, then remove it just before eating.

# These tips can help make turkey terrific



**S**weet potatoes may be stars; cornbread dressing a contender. Dinner rolls are divine and green bean casserole a go-to. But Thanksgiving dinner isn’t complete without turkey.

Even in households that don’t eat meat, plant-based turkey alternatives find their way onto the dinner table in a nod to Thanksgiving tradition. Given the emphasis placed on the main course each Thanksgiving, cooking a turkey can be intimidating. These turkey-cooking tips can calm anyone’s nerves and result in a mouth-watering main course.

• **Allow ample time for thawing.**

Some people may not be able to buy a fresh turkey, and millions of individuals purchase frozen turkeys each year. The Food Network says it can take 24 hours per every five pounds to thaw a turkey. Therefore, if you have a 15-pounder, allow for three days for thawing. Always thaw a turkey in a refrigerator.

• **Get the right size bird.**

The general rule of thumb is 1 pound (uncooked) to 1½ pounds of turkey per person if you’re buying a whole turkey. Rather than purchasing the largest turkey you can find for a large crowd, consider two smaller turkeys or one turkey

and one breast to make cooking more even. Smaller birds are more tender as well.

• **Adjust the temperature.**

The food and cooking resource TheKitchn advises preheating an oven to 450 F, then dropping the temperature to 350 F after putting the turkey into the oven. Cook, on average, 13 minutes per each pound of turkey. The turkey is done when it registers a minimum temperature of 165 F in the thickest part of the thigh.

• **To brine or not to brine?**

Many food fanatics swear by brining turkey to achieve more moist and flavorful meat. However, a wet brine may not lead to the crispiest skin possible. Good Housekeeping suggests trying a dry brine instead. This involves rubbing salt all over the raw turkey, placing the bird into a large plastic bag, and refrigerating overnight or up to two days before cooking; otherwise, purchase a kosher turkey, which already has been salted from the inside out.

• **Avoid stuffing the bird.**

Rather than stuffing the turkey and cooking everything en masse, prepare the stuffing mixture separate from the turkey. This reduces the risk of contamination from the turkey’s raw juices and helps to achieve a crispy coating on the stuffing guests will enjoy.

• **Make an aromatic roasting rack.**

Turkeys typically are placed on a metal rack for cooking so the juices do not cause the turkey to stick to the pan. However, you also can cut onions and lay them with a bed of whole celery stalks and carrots to elevate the roast. This creates extra flavor in the bird and the vegetables also can be served or mixed into the stuffing.

Some turkey-roasting techniques can ensure a moist and flavorful main course this Thanksgiving.



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# Traditional foods add something special to Kwanzaa celebrations



**K**wanzaa is a traditional holiday that is celebrated by Black Americans, Afro-Caribbeans and others of African descent around the world. Kwanzaa was the creation of Maulana Karenga, a college professor who was inspired by South African first-fruits celebrations and other Swahili traditions. There are many components of Kwanzaa, but the culmination of the celebration is a feast known as Karamu on December 31.

African foods are a big part of Karamu festivities. Peanut stew, also called “maafe” or “mafe,” is a West African staple comprised of lamb, steak or chicken in a hearty tomato and peanut base. The stew varies by region, but the general result is a nutty and spicy dish that is warming and filling. Enjoy this recipe for “West African-Inspired Chicken & Peanut Stew” courtesy of Delish and Brooke Caison.



# HAPPY KWANZAA



## West African-Inspired Chicken & Peanut Stew

*Yields 6 to 8 servings*

- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ ground cardamom
- 4 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1 2-inch piece of ginger, peeled, minced, divided
- 4 cloves garlic, minced, divided
- 3 tablespoons peanut or neutral oil, divided
- 1½ pound skinless, boneless chicken thighs
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 Scotch bonnet pepper or habanero chile, halved
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme leaves, plus more for serving
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1¼ pound Roma or beefsteak tomatoes, finely chopped
- 1 cup smooth peanut butter
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth, divided
- 1 medium sweet potato, chopped into ½-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 3 cups cooked white rice
- ¾ cup chopped roasted peanuts, for serving

Step 1: In a small bowl, combine pepper, cumin, cardamom, and 2 teaspoons salt. In a medium bowl, combine 2½ teaspoons seasoning mix, half of ginger, half of garlic, and 1 tablespoon oil. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and add to bowl, tossing to coat. Let chicken sit at room temperature at least 15 minutes or refrigerate up to 2 hours.

Step 2: In a large Dutch oven or pot over medium heat, heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Arrange chicken in a single layer and cook, undisturbed, until a golden brown crust starts to form, 5 to 6 minutes per side. Transfer chicken to a plate.

Step 3: In the same pot, cook onion, carrot, and remaining seasoning mix, stirring occasionally and scraping up browned bits in bottom of pot, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add pepper and remaining ginger and garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add thyme and tomato paste and cook, stirring frequently, until paste darkens in color, about 4 minutes. Add chopped tomatoes and 2 teaspoons salt and cook, stirring occasionally and breaking up tomatoes with a wooden spoon, until mostly broken down, about 20 minutes.

Step 4: In a large bowl or measuring cup, whisk peanut butter and 1 cup broth until smooth. Add remaining broth 1 cup at a time, whisking until smooth and combined. Add broth mixture and potatoes to pot, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are tender and soup is thickened, about 30 minutes.

Step 5: Chop chicken into bite-size pieces. Remove pepper from pot, then return chicken to pot. Add fish sauce and stir until chicken is heated through.

Step 6: Divide rice among bowls. Ladle stew over rice and top with peanuts and thyme.



# This classic dessert is a star on any table



**S**ome desserts have withstood the test of time despite changes in consumer preferences. For example, classic graham cracker crust cheesecake, pineapple upside-down cake, chocolate chip cookies, and many other desserts continue to be perennial favorites. Banana pudding is another dessert that tops all-time favorites lists. It is hard to

beat the appeal of layers of sweet banana slices, vanilla cookies, pudding, and cream.

The following recipe for “Southern Banana Pudding” from Add a Pinch, an online recipe and meal planning resource, makes quite a tasty banana pudding that features a meringue topping. Serve it at holiday gatherings or any time you want a sweet treat.

## Southern Banana Pudding

Serves 8

- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups sugar
- Pinch kosher salt
- 3 large eggs, separated (you’ll need whites later for meringue)
- 3 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 11-ounce package vanilla wafers, approximately 45 wafers
- 5 to 6 bananas
- 3 egg whites, reserved from above
- ⅓ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 325° F. Chill the bowl and beaters for making the meringue (if making).
2. Combine flour, sugar and salt in a large, heavy saucepan.
3. Lightly beat egg yolks and combine with milk in a large bowl or measuring cup. Pour the egg and milk mixture into dry ingredients in heavy saucepan. Cook over low to medium heat, stirring constantly, until ingredients are thickened and smooth. Remove saucepan from

heat and stir in vanilla.

4. To layer your banana pudding, begin by placing 1/3 of the vanilla wafers on the bottom of a 2-quart oven-safe glass bowl or baking dish.
5. Slice bananas and place 1/3 on top of wafers.
6. Pour one-third of custard over wafers and bananas.
7. Repeat layering process two more times until all wafers, bananas, and custard have been used, ending with a final layer of the wafers.

### For the meringue:

1. Whip the egg whites with an electric mixer set at high speed.
  2. Allow egg whites to foam, add cream of tartar and then gradually add sugar one tablespoon at a time. Continue whipping until sugar is well-dissolved. Add vanilla once stiff peaks have formed and whip until well-combined.
  3. Spread the meringue over banana pudding, making sure to spread to the edges of the dish.
  4. Bake for about 25 minutes until the meringue is lightly browned.
- Banana pudding will keep covered in the refrigerator for up to three days.

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~ JESUS

Isaiah 9:2 NIV

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# Homemade pie makes for a perfect ending to a holiday meal

Millions of people insist no holiday meal is complete without some pie for dessert. Pie served with coffee certainly makes for a fitting end to a holiday meal, and hosts can serve any type of pie and still end up with some satisfied guests.

Though pie aficionados typically have their own go-to pie, pumpkin pie is especially popular at the holiday dinner table. Hosts who want to cater to the masses can serve up the following recipe for “Pumpkin Pie” courtesy of Emily Luchetti’s “Classic Stars Desserts” (Chronicle Books). Featuring homemade pumpkin purée and cream, this recipe is sure to make guests happy this holiday season.



## Pumpkin Pie

Serves 8

- 3 large eggs
- ½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup dark corn syrup
- 1½ cups heavy whipping cream
- 1½ cups pumpkin purée, homemade (see below)
- 1 tablespoon rum
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 prebaked 9½-inch pie crust
- 1 recipe chantilly cream (see below)

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs and brown sugar until blended. Add the corn syrup and whisk until smooth. Whisk in the cream, pumpkin purée, rum, cinnamon, ginger, and salt until well mixed. Pour into the prebaked pie crust.

Bake until the filling is set, about 30 minutes. Let cool to room temperature. Serve with the chantilly cream.

**Chef’s Tip:** The pie may be made a day in advance, covered and refrigerated. Bring to room temperature before serving.

## Pumpkin Purée

Makes 2½ cups

- 2½ pounds sugar pumpkins
- ¼ cup water

Preheat the oven to 325° F. Cut each pumpkin into sixths. Scrape out the seeds and any stringy pulp. Put the pumpkin pieces, cut-side up, and the water in a baking pan and cover the pan with aluminum foil. Bake until soft when pierced with a fork, about 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Remove from the oven and, when cool enough to handle, scoop out the flesh with a spoon and purée in a food mill or food processor. If the purée is watery, place it in a large sauté pan and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until thick. The timing will depend on how watery the purée is.

Let cool, cover and refrigerate until using.

## Chantilly Cream

Makes 2¼ cups

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar

Put the cream, vanilla and sugar in a bowl and whip by hand with a whisk or with an electric mixer on medium speed until soft peaks begin to form. The cream should hold its shape but still be very smooth.

Cover and refrigerate until serving.

**Chef’s tip:** You can whip the cream an hour or two in advance, cover and refrigerate it. If it sits longer than that, it will start to thin out and you will need to rewhip it lightly before using. A few quick stirs with a whisk will do the trick.

# Holiday FUN & GAMES

## Guess Who?

I am an RV-driving, Rottweiler-owning unemployed individual with a plate in my head that reacts when a microwave is used. My cousin’s husband is not a fan of my cowboy charm.

Answer: Cousin Eddie

## Guess Who?

I have a penchant for pinstripes and goth accessories, more so than for a furry hat and red coat. Despite being much more at home on Halloween, I try Christmas on for size.

Answer: Jack Skellington

## Guess Who?

I have a tendency to burglarize homes that are empty during the holiday season. My shiny, gold tooth gives away that I should not be trusted. However, I get bested by an 8-year-old who is left home alone.

Answer: Harry Lyme





# Holiday FUN & GAMES

## Santa's Word Search

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 G C D I T F O I U R E A Y F A J D D N P  
 O K C A D F B D F D N E C M I T J Y N U  
 G R W T S B L C O T O R P K W S D H A H  
 A F S O U G N Y A R E L K U G A J G U S  
 O O A S R W P E I E W E P N W D R J G G  
 L E G N V K I R R N V C I H O W E D H D  
 T D L P N B S T F E G K F V G I E D T R  
 Y R S O I O F H I K C R J I T N D V Y A  
 M T S D P J B L O O Y O F E M T N A U E  
 F N B A B H E P T P A T M C J E I V F B  
 H R T G M B T S K T S A G I E R E E L N  
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 O B T C H D S G O K W A D A Y W D A L D  
 S S O R R G I I P N Y E N M I H C L Y J  
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 A C B G D O D E Y H L L A K H D J W H J  
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 C M M F E O T S O S R M G E T H V N U M  
 C R A U Y B E J M W D S G G S V E S V U

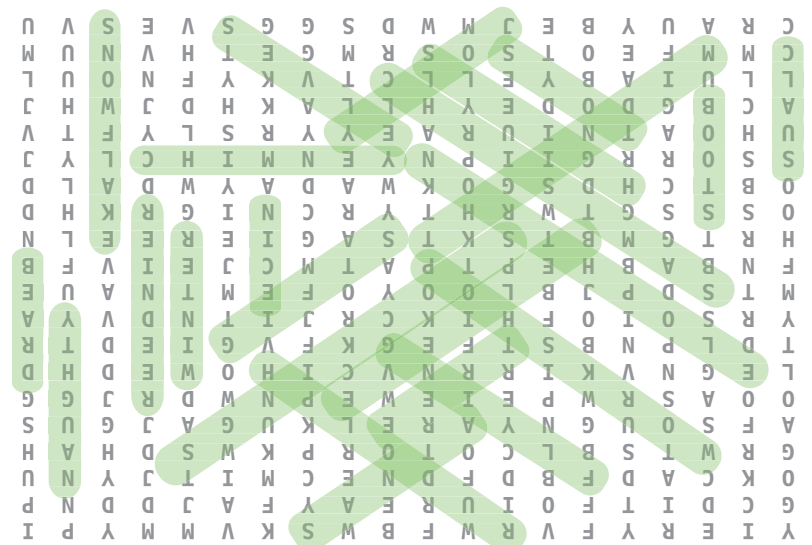
### WORDS

- BEARD
- BELIEVE
- BOOTS
- CHIMNEY
- CHRISTMAS
- CLAUS
- ELVES
- FLYING
- GIFTS
- JOLLY
- MIDNIGHT
- NAUGHTY
- NICE
- NORTH POLE
- REINDEER
- RUDOLPH
- SANTA
- SLEIGH
- SNOWFLAKE
- STOCKINGS
- TOYS
- TREE
- WINTER
- WORKSHOP

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

## Guess Who?

My miserly tendencies do not win me rave reviews with my employees nor the townsfolk. It takes some spirited spirits to break me of my habit to hoard gold coin.



Answer: Ebenezer Scrooge



# Pears and chocolate: an unexpected pairing



**O**pportunities to entertain or visit with family and friends abound during the holiday season. Dessert is always a big hit during festive occasions, and the following recipe

for “Pear and Chocolate Frangipane Tart” melds many popular flavors. Frangipane is an almond-flavored cream. In this recipe from “Chocolate: Deliciously Indulgent Recipes for Chocolate Lovers” (Ryland, Peters & Small) by Maxine Clark, it is paired with decadent chocolate and sweet pears.

## Pear and Chocolate Frangipane Tart

Serves 8-10

- 4 medium, firm pears, unpeeled
  - $\frac{2}{3}$  cup seedless raspberry jam
  - 2 tablespoons Ruby Port
- Toasted shredded or silvered almonds, to scatter (optional)

### Pastry

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 stick (8 tablespoons) unsalted butter, softened

- 1 large egg yolk
- $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 tablespoons chilled water

### Chocolate Frangipane Filling

- $6\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup granulated sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 to 2 tablespoons chocolate liqueur
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup ground almonds
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa

To make the pastry, sift the flour and salt onto a

sheet of waxed paper. Put the butter and egg yolk in a food processor and blend until smooth. Add the chilled water and blend again. Pour in the dry ingredients and blend until just combined. Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead gently until smooth. Form into a disk, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Bring to room temperature before rolling out.

To make the chocolate frangipane filling, put the butter in a large bowl and beat with an electric mixer until creamy. Gradually add the sugar and beat until pale and fluffy. Gradually beat in the eggs and the chocolate liqueur, then stir in the ground almonds and the cocoa. Cover and set aside.

Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured work surface and use to line the tart pan. Prick the pastry all over with a fork and refrigerate until firm.

Preheat the oven to 400 F, and put a heavy baking

sheet on the middle shelf. Spread the chocolate frangipane evenly over the chilled pastry crust.

Halve the pears and scoop out the cores. Cut each half into thirds and arrange them randomly over the chocolate frangipane.

Transfer the tart to the preheated baking sheet and bake for 10-15 minutes, or until the pastry starts to brown. Reduce the oven temperature to 350° F and bake for a further 15-20 minutes or until the pears are tender and the frangipane is set. Remove from the oven and transfer to a wire rack to cool.

About 20 minutes before serving, melt the jam with the port in a small pan and boil for 1 minute to make a glaze. Remove the tart from the pan, brush with the glaze, scatter with the almonds, if using, and serve at room temperature - never chilled - with cream, if using.

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# A new way to enjoy butternut squash



**M**any foods are inextricably linked to certain growing seasons. For example, most people seldom eat juicy watermelon before or after summer, as this juicy, refreshing fruit seems tailor-made for long, warm days. The same can be said for other produce, including squash. While zucchini and yellow squash are decidedly summer fare, acorn squash, spaghetti squash and butternut squash seem much more at home when the chilly weather arrives. That might be why these squashes are commonly featured in holiday dining, which dominates the third quarter of the year.

There are many different ways to prepare butternut squash, with some of the most popular including soups and casseroles. However, this versatile gourd, which cooks quickly when cut into chunks and produces a lush texture, can be a colorful winner in other presentations - including stir-fry. This recipe for “Butternut Stir-Fry with Peppers and Peas” offers a new take on the familiar butternut squash. Serve it as a side dish for the holidays or any time you desire subtle, Asian-inspired flavors. Enjoy, courtesy of “300 Best Stir-Fry Recipes” (Robert Rose) by Nancie McDermott.

## Butternut Stir-Fry with Peppers and Peas

Serves 4

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger root
- 2 cups cubed peeled butternut squash (½-inch cubes)
- ⅓ cup diced red bell pepper
- ⅓ cup frozen tiny peas
- 2 tablespoons water
- 3 tablespoons barbecue sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt

1. Heat a wok or large deep skillet over high heat. Add oil and swirl to coat pan. Add ginger and toss well, until fragrant, about 15 seconds.

2. Add squash and spread into a single layer. Cook, undisturbed, for 1 minute. Toss well. Cook, tossing often, until squash is browning lightly around edges, 2 minutes more.

3. Push squash aside and add red pepper and peas. Scoop squash on top of vegetables. Add water, pouring in around sides of pan.

4. When everything is sizzling away, add barbecue sauce and salt. Cook, tossing once or twice, until vegetables are tender and evenly coated with sauce, 1 to 2 minutes more. Transfer to a serving plate. Serve hot or warm.

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# Rich hot chocolate in cookie form



**H**ot chocolate does a fine job of warming people up on cold winter days. This rich and creamy beverage is enjoyed many ways, with some people floating miniature marshmallows on top or adding a touch of liqueur for an adult treat. Of course, hot chocolate is equally delicious topped with whipped cream and a dusting of cinnamon.

What if you could replicate the taste of hot chocolate in a cookie? That's just what happens with this recipe for "Hot Chocolate Cookies" courtesy of creator Rachel Perry and American Lifestyle magazine. Enjoy them on their own, or paired with a mug of hot cocoa.

## Hot Chocolate Cookies

Makes 24

- ½ cup butter
- 1 12-ounce bag semisweet chocolate chips
- ¼ cup light brown sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 8 ounces semisweet baking chocolate, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 12 large marshmallows, sliced in half

1. Place the butter and chocolate chips in a microwave-safe bowl, and heat on high for 1 minute. Stir, and then heat for 30 seconds; repeat until chocolate is melted.

2. Beat the brown sugar, eggs, and vanilla extract together on medium speed, and then blend in the chocolate mixture.

3. Add the cocoa powder, flour, baking powder, and salt, and mix on low until combined. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 2 hours.

4. Preheat oven to 325° F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper. Scoop 12 tablespoons of dough onto each cookie sheet.

5. Bake for 12 minutes, remove from oven, and top each cookie with 1 piece of chocolate and 1 piece of marshmallow. Bake for another 4 minutes, and let cool for 5 minutes before placing on wire racks to cool completely.

**Merry Christmas!**  
**I have a blessed New Year!**

**21**

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# Bake up a sweet holiday treat



**E**ntertaining is a big part of the holiday season. Calendars are packed this time of year with gatherings with friends, family and professional colleagues.

Entertaining requires keeping plenty of refreshments on hand to ensure guests maintain their holiday spirit. Dessert is no stranger to the season, with office break rooms, dining tables and

buffet stations brimming with sweet treats to tempt celebrants' palates. Everyone should have a go-to dessert to bring along to a holiday party or to offer guests when hosting their own fêtes. Cookies are a standard due to their versatility and portability.

Festive "Sour Cream Cookies" provide all of the holiday feels and can be customized in color to reflect celebrations of Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, or New Year's. Bake up a batch, courtesy of "Live Well Bake Cookies" (Rock Point) by Danielle Rye.

## Sour Cream Cookies Makes 22 cookies

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, spooned and leveled
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ½ cup sour cream, at room temperature

### Vanilla Buttercream Frosting

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ cups powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon heavy whipping cream or milk
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Gel food coloring (optional)

1. To make the cookies: Preheat the oven to 350° F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment

paper or silicone baking mats and set aside.

2. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt until well combined. Set aside.

3. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a handheld mixer, beat the butter and granulated sugar together for 1 to 2 minutes, or until well combined.

4. Mix in the egg and vanilla extract until fully combined, making sure to stop and scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed.

5. Mix in the dry ingredients in two additions, alternating with the sour cream. Make sure to mix in each addition until just combined, and be careful not to overmix the batter.

6. Using a 1½-tablespoon cookie scoop, scoop the cookie dough onto the prepared baking sheets, making sure to leave a little room between each one.

7. Bake for 14 to 16 minutes, or until the tops

of the cookies are set and spring back when touched lightly. Remove from the oven, and allow to cool on the baking sheets for 10 minutes, then carefully transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

8. To make the vanilla buttercream frosting: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a handheld mixer, beat the butter for 1 to 2 minutes, or until smooth. Add the powdered sugar, 1/2 cup at a time, mixing in each addition until well combined.

9. Add the heavy whipping cream, vanilla extract, and gel food coloring (if using), and continue mixing until fully combined.

10. Once the cookies have cooled completely, spread the frosting on top of the cookies.

11. Store the cookies in an airtight container at room temperature or in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.

# Merry Everything!

Wherever you are, however you celebrate, we hope the holiday season brings love to your heart, peace to your soul and joy to your spirit.

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