

homemade for the holidays

Give the gift of deliciousness this year, with these easy ideas. by *Marygrace Taylor*

Every fall, I dream up personalized presents for everyone on my list. An embroidered laptop case for my husband! Sparkly sequin ornaments for my grandma! A jewelry box for my sister! Next thing I know, it's two weeks into December—and I haven't had time to start a single project. Instead of crafting my heart out for ten days straight, this year, I'm taking a different route by heading to my kitchen to whip up tasty edible gifts. Ready in a few hours or less, homemade sweets make for thoughtful, budget-friendly gifts that are guaranteed to please. Here, some festive, no-fail options.

TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED

Make a list... Figure out who you're baking for, and then get out a calculator. Most recipes (including the ones here) stand up well to being doubled or even tripled. (There's an app for that, too: *Serving Sizer*, which can help you make trickier conversions, like turning a recipe for 36 cookies into a recipe for 50.) Just be sure to jot down all the new ingredient quantities—it's too easy to think you'll remember to double, then get caught up in cooking and forget to count out the right number of cups of flour.

...And check it twice! It might sound obvious, but the last thing you want is a missing bottle of vanilla to force you out of your baking groove and back into massive grocery store lines.

Pick a time Try swapping a weekend shopping marathon for a Saturday in the kitchen—or break up the work into a few smaller time slots: Gather supplies Saturday afternoon, make your treats Sunday morning, then pack them up on Sunday night.

Rally the troops Enlist the rest of your family to help turn out the goods. Little kids can help mix, stir, and decorate holiday cards, while older ones can package up the treats. This is another reason to double your recipes: You'll still have enough to give as gifts once your taste-testers are finished!

Pack it up When possible, choose reusable packaging: Small baskets, glass jars, or cookie tins can be found at craft or thrift stores. If you go for disposable, opt for containers made from recycled materials, like the bakery boxes from BRP Box Shop (starting at \$18 for 100 boxes, *brpboxshop.com*). Add decoration with natural fiber ribbon (\$4 for 25 yards, *nashvillewraps.com*).



KIWI
recommends
ORGANIC
ingredients

★ MAKE IT TO GIVE:

Easy Cherry-Almond Fudge Bites

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 5 to 10 minutes, plus 2 to 3 hours chilling time

Most fudge recipes call for heating sugar and water to a specific temperature with a candy thermometer (and if things get too hot, you have to start over!). This variety is more forgiving and needs no special equipment—but is just as sweet.

2½ cups chocolate chips

⅓ cup unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

3½ cups powdered sugar, sifted after measuring

½ cup cocoa powder, sifted after measuring

¼ cup + 1 tablespoon brewed coffee (leftover from your morning brew works great)

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

½ teaspoon almond extract

2 tablespoons almond butter

Pinch salt

½ cup toasted almonds, coarsely chopped

½ cup dried cherries

1. Place the chips and butter in a double boiler (or set up your own with a saucepot and heat-safe bowl: Read how at *kiwimagonline.com/recipes*). Stir frequently until melted. Add the powdered sugar, cocoa powder, and coffee in small increments, stirring after each addition. Mix in the two extracts, almond butter, and salt. Fold in the almonds and cherries.

2. Transfer to a greased 8-inch-square dish. Refrigerate for 2 to 3 hours, then allow to come to room temperature before cutting into squares.

Makes 36 fudge bites

Per fudge bite: calories 141, fat 7 g, protein 1 g, carbohydrates 22 g, dietary fiber 2 g

***GIVE FOR THEM TO MAKE:**

Ginger-Oat Scones

Prep time: 5 to 10 minutes

Scones make for a special holiday breakfast, but they taste best when they're super fresh. The solution? Give a homemade scone mix, and your recipient can do the baking any morning she likes.

- 1 cup unbleached, all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups whole wheat pastry flour
- ¾ cup rolled oats
- ⅓ cup sugar, divided
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- ½ cup crystallized ginger, chopped finely

1. In a medium bowl, add the all-purpose flour, baking powder, and salt, and mix to combine. Set aside.
2. Layer ingredients in a 1-quart glass jar. First, add the whole wheat pastry flour. Top that with the all-purpose flour mixture, followed by the oats, half the sugar, ground ginger, remaining sugar and crystallized ginger.
3. Close the jar, and attach the scone recipe (below) around the lid with a ribbon, or use the recipe as a label.

GINGER-OAT SCONES

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 15 to 18 minutes

- ginger-oat scone mix
- ½ cup cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
 - 1¼ cups low-fat buttermilk
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla

1. Preheat the oven to 375°. Lightly grease two baking sheets.
2. Place the scone mix in a bowl. Cut in the butter pieces to form coarse, walnut- to pea-size crumbs (do this with a pastry cutter or by using two butter knives). Add the buttermilk and vanilla, stirring to combine.
3. Place the mixture onto a floured surface and flatten into a large disk. Slice into 12 wedges.
4. Divide the wedges equally among the two baking sheets and bake until golden, 15 to 18 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Scones will keep 2 days, covered.

Makes 12 scones

Per serving: calories 254, fat 9 g, protein 5 g, carbohydrates 44 g, dietary fiber 4 g



SUPER-QUICK EDIBLE GIFTS

Who needs to cook? Get creative by tailoring these gifts to your recipients' tastes.

● TRAIL MIX

Pack your favorite combination of nuts, dried fruit, and other goodies into a mason jar. Some winners: Shelled peanuts, raisins, and mini yogurt-covered pretzels; dried banana chips, pumpkin seeds, and grated coconut; or dried apples, walnuts, and butterscotch chips.

● TEA BLENDS

Find loose tea in the bulk section of a natural food store, or order online (try teavana.com). Combine a base flavor, such as green or black, with an herbal accent like cherry or citrus. Offer the mix in a small tin, or divide them at a local tea shop, or try T-Sac Loose Tea Filter Bags, \$9 for 100, mightyleaf.com).

● FLAVORED POPCORN

Pop up a fresh batch, then doctor it up: Try dried rosemary and Parmesan cheese, cumin and chili powder, or cinnamon and sugar. Place in one of those old (clean!) popcorn tins, if you've got one, or find a pretty vintage tin at a thrift store.