



Photo courtesy Lisa Crandall



Photo courtesy Tara Douthwright



HOLIDAY GIFTS FROM THE KITCHEN

By Lisa Crandall

I live in a household of two these days and yet, I love to play and experiment in the kitchen. That makes the Christmas season one of my favourites, because I get to bake to my heart's content then package it up and share it. I don't have to eat all those calories myself. It's a win-win in my world.

Knowing this, I plan and experiment all year round, now it's time to figure out who gets what. Everyone will get maple syrup in their gifts. Some friends have already put in their requests for molasses cookies and short breads. Most households will get tomato sauce, made from my own organic tomatoes, hand pressed, slowly simmered and seasoned with our own onions, and garlic and other herbs, cut fresh from the garden while the pot is simmering. Other gifts include; jams and preserves, made from foraged apples, wild grapes or donated plums. It is fun to figure out who will enjoy what.

These are not the only gifts that can be made in the kitchen. I was totally impressed when one of my sisters told me that she makes cookies for her kids' teachers at Christmas.

The awesome part of her idea is that she makes up packages of raw cookie dough, which she freezes, then delivers to the school at the end of the day (so they arrive in their new home still frozen and can go right back into the freezer). Each package contains 2-3 dozen preformed cookies of mixed varieties. The intent is that these cookies can be taken out, thawed quickly and baked up fresh any time they are needed. Holiday entertaining made easy or, if they last beyond the holiday season, who doesn't like warm cookies and hot chocolate at some point during the snowy days of winter. I just know those teachers love her cookie care packages.

My other sister also shares holiday gifts from the kitchen, but in a totally different way. She married into a huge family and has lots of

sisters-in-law, and every year for the past half-decade or so, she hosts a family sweet swap. Each year the theme is different, previous years have included squares instead of cookies, specific colors – white, red, green etc. This year the theme is Family Classics and you have to share the memory behind the one you bring. The requirement is that everyone contributes 6 dozen sweets. The sisters gather for an afternoon filled with coffee and games, then the goodies are divided up and everyone leaves with several different kinds of sweet things for their households to enjoy during the holiday season. I am torn between contributing molasses cookies or short breads.

Another gift idea from the kitchen is a homemade cookbook. This takes a little planning ahead, but these days it can be easily done with a computer and email. Send everyone a note asking for their favorite recipes. Sort them by category, print them out, add a cover and table of contents, then voila, a gift that will be treasured for years to come.

Holiday gifts from the kitchen can be as special as they are frugal. They are always well received. Though they sound like perfectly ordinary things, I have come to realize that, to friends who don't have time, or don't have the knack, a gift from your kitchen is a luxury and a sign of affection. Isn't that what Christmas is all about? My favorite sweet to receive is fudge. It's one of those things I just don't have the knack for making. [LH](#)