

HOLIDAY *gift guide* 2012



A Special Section of the Walkill Valley Times • Mid Hudson Times • Southern Ulster Times • November 14, 2012

Boost holiday spirits with holiday 'spirits'

The holiday season is a festive time of year when opportunities to entertain abound. The search may be on for the ideal food and beverage recipes to tie into the holiday season.

Although just about any drink can be given a holiday spin with the right name (think Merry Martinis), you may want to come up with a theme drink that fits with your particular party. Explore these ideas for delicious and festive alcoholic and non-alcoholic options.

White Christmas Hot Chocolate

- 3 cups light cream or half-and-half
- 3/4 cup vanilla candy melts, chopped
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

- Pinch of ground cinnamon
- 1 ounce Irish cream liqueur

Combine 1 cup of the cream with the candy in a saucepan. Melt over low heat, being careful not to burn. Add the remaining cream, vanilla and cinnamon until everything is heated. Add the liqueur and

stir. Garnish with more cinnamon. Serve warm.

The Candy Cane

- 1 ounce vodka
- 1 ounce peppermint schnapps
- 1/2 ounce heavy cream
- Dash of grenadine for color

Mix all ingredients in a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Pour into glasses filled with crushed ice. Garnish with a candy cane.

Sweet Santa Shots

- 1 ounce Midori liqueur
- 1/2 ounce grenadine syrup

Carefully layer the grenadine syrup and the Midori liqueur in a shot glass to have red and green layers.

Holiday Sparkle

- 2 ounces apple cider

- 1 ounce club soda
- Cinnamon stick

Mix cider with club soda and serve in a tall glass with a cinnamon stick garnish. A refreshing and nonalcoholic drink option.



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Enhance your holiday meals with flavor

Thanksgiving and Christmas meals often incorporate a lot of traditional foods and flavors, which as a host, may become a bit boring. But when you have friends and family visiting for several days, there are plenty of opportunities to shine with new flavors and interesting meals.

Embrace the meals you'll be serving, which provide you with an excellent chance to show off your culinary skills. To help you plan the menus and entertain your guests during their entire visit, Gaby Dalkin of What's Gaby Cooking and Lindsay and Taylor Landis of Love and Olive Oil have recipes and tips to make everything much easier.

"I think like most people, I'm not just entertaining on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, but am making meals on the days surrounding the holiday," Dalkin says. "These are times when I feel like can stray from the ordinary holiday tradition and experiment with my recipes."

- Assess your spice cabinet to ensure all holiday essentials like cinnamon, cloves, vanilla bean, nutmeg, flour and sugar are available for all recipes.

- Choose recipes ahead of time so you know that you have all ingredients available. Purchase the dry goods you need at

least a week ahead to help reduce stress. Purchase perishable items like meat and dairy products a day or two before guests arrive so you have everything ready to go.

- Make non-perishable snacks ahead of time and store them in containers to bring out when needed. Try this recipe from Dalkin to keep your guests happy:

Sweet and Spice Roasted Nuts

1 cup raw whole cashews
1 cup raw whole walnuts
1 cup raw whole almonds
1 cup raw pepitas
1 egg white
1 teaspoon water
1/2 cup white sugar
1/4 teaspoon sea salt
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line a baking sheet with a piece of parchment paper and set it aside. Combine the cashews, walnuts, almonds and pepitas in a large bowl and toss to combine. Whisk together the egg white, water, sugar, salt, cayenne pepper and cinnamon. Drizzle the wet mixture over the nuts and toss to combine, making sure they are evenly coated. Transfer the nuts to the baking sheet and spread in an

even layer. Roast for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the nuts from the oven and separate the nuts as they cool. Store in an airtight container and serve as needed.

- Add a surprising and special touch to cocktails. Slice a Vanilla Bean in half and drop it into your bottle of vodka or bourbon several days prior to the arrival of your guests. It will add a delicious and warm flavor to all cocktails.

"I always create interesting cocktails for my seasonal entertaining, and this year, I'm making something special for the kids," says Lindsay Landis. Her holiday drink gives a festive gingerbread twist to the classic root beer float. Instead of using root beer with ice cream, she instead uses vanilla cream soda and spiced molasses syrup to make the drink taste just like liquid gingerbread.

- Finally, choose recipes that can be easily made in large quantities. Dalkin serves her Classic Pumpkin Pie Chocolate Chip Pancakes the day after a big holiday for guests enjoy during the holidays.

Pumpkin Pie Chocolate Chip Pancakes

1 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
3 tablespoons white sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon sea salt
1 cup 2 percent milk
1/2 cup pumpkin puree
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 egg
1/2 cup chocolate chips

In a large bowl, combine the flour, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, sugar, baking powder and salt and set aside. In another large bowl, whisk together the milk, pumpkin, vegetable oil and egg. Add the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients and stir until everything is just combined, being careful not to over mix. Fold the chocolate chips into the mixture. Heat a griddle or large pan to medium-low heat. Coat the pan with cooking spray. Drop 1/4 cup of batter onto heated skillet. Cook until the edges begin to bubble, about 2 minutes. Flip pancakes over and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes or until golden. Continue this process making sure to lightly spray the pan between each pancake. Serve immediately.



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Six tips for taking the best family portraits

As the holidays approach, many families are planning annual portraits for personalized cards and gifts to loved ones. But this can be a complex planning ordeal for even the most organized person. In addition to coordinating schedules and what everyone should wear, it's just as important to focus on the best photography tips, tools and techniques to make the most of your family portrait.

Everyone who has ever taken or posed for a family photo knows it's a rewarding yet challenging endeavor,' says Tim Meyer, owner of Meyer Photography and program chair of the portrait division of photography at Brooks Institute, a leading provider of higher education for film, visual journalism, graphic design and photography. "The good news is that with proper planning and digital photography advances families can get higher-quality photos than ever before, whether you're hiring a professional photographer or doing it yourself."

While it can still be difficult to capture the entire family with smiles on their faces, Meyer offers six tips for taking the perfect family portrait this holiday:

1. Invest in quality camera equipment. Digital photography has brought the world of photography to the masses, and high-quality digital cameras can be purchased new or used at reasonable prices. For family portraits, make sure the camera has a timer so you can be a part of the picture. You should also consider buying a tripod



to steady your camera and make your photo shoot easier.

2. Scope out the best locations and

background for the shoot. Think outside the family fireplace to create interesting indoor backdrops for family photos - but avoid mirrors and windows that can create issues by reflecting light. If choosing an outdoor location, make sure it is free from distraction. Like indoor shots, intricate patterns or background commotion can distract from the subject of the photo - in this case, your family.

3. Consider the best time for taking photos with your family. Natural lighting is great for family photos, particularly the golden hour - the first and last hour of sunlight during each day. If this isn't convenient for your family, choose a time when any children involved in the picture are well rested and more apt to patiently pose for photos. If you're shooting indoors, ensure there's adequate lighting, whether

natural or from other sources.

4. Take lots of shots, but remember that the best expressions with children are

often the first ones. Group photos are challenging, considering the number of people who must smile and look their best at the same time.

Chances are you'll have several photos with eye-blinking subjects and wiggly children. To increase your odds of getting the best family portrait, take as many photos as possible and vary the composition to get different angles and arrangements.

5. Plan ahead if including a furry friend in your family portraits. Many people view their pets as members of the family, so it's only fitting that you might want to include your beloved pet in a family portrait. If so, choose a time when the pet is naturally calmer, perhaps after a walk or at nap time. Also, bring treats to hold the pet's attention and reward the pet for a job well done.

6. Leave it to the professionals. If the challenge of taking your own family photographs becomes overwhelming, connect with a professional photographer who can provide additional tips or work within your budget to help you get professional family photos in time for the holidays. Today's professionals offer a greater variety of styles and ways of sharing your images than ever before.

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Out-of-the-box party themes

Parties are an integral part of the holiday season, when friends and family gather to celebrate and give thanks. For holiday hosts, parties are a great opportunity to make the season even more festive with an event that guests won't soon forget. The following are just a few themes to make your holiday party as memorable as it is merry.

- **Christmas sweater party:** Christmas sweater parties have grown in popularity over the last decade, when revelers have tried to outdo one another with the most outrageous holiday-themed sweater. Give prizes for the most outlandish sweater and let guests know early on so they can begin their hunt for a holiday sweater that's so ugly or outrageous you can't help but love it.
- **Christmas costume party:** Costume parties aren't just for Halloween. This holiday season, consider making your holiday bash a costume party, encouraging guests to dress up as their favorite characters from holiday tales like "Frosty the Snowman," "A Christmas Carol" or any of the host of beloved holiday legends.
- **Caribbean Christmas:** The weather come

the holiday season may be the one thing to put a damper on the festivities. To combat blue feelings from potentially inclement weather, consider a Caribbean theme for your holiday party this season. Rather than wearing sweaters and long pants, wear beach attire and give the party a touch of the Caribbean. Outfit your home in beach decor and serve food and drinks reminiscent of the Caribbean instead of more traditional holiday fare like eggnog and gingerbread cookies.

- **Film festival:** Holiday movies are another tradition of the season, so why not invite friends and family over for a holiday film marathon? Include classics like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "A Christmas Story" and encourage guests to submit their own favorites for consideration.
- **Christmas karaoke:** For those who love to belt out their favorite holiday tunes, consider throwing a Christmas karaoke party that allows guests to perform their own renditions of their favorite Christmas carols. Purchase a home karaoke set and ask guests in advance of the party if there are any particular songs they'd like to perform.

Tree lighting tips

Lighting a Christmas tree may seem easy, but time and again people struggle with the task. Untangling wires and wrapping them around boughs can be nerve wracking, but lighting a tree doesn't have to be a chore. First, keep in mind that wrapping lights around the tree horizontally is more work and often doesn't produce a multi-dimensional effect. Rather, string the lights from the trunk up to the top, working vertically. This is actually how the tree decorators at Rockefeller Center in New York City do the famous tree year after year. This method helps eliminate tangled wires and empty spots. Remember to plug in the strands of lights before you begin to check for burnt-out bulbs and to adjust the spacing of lights to prevent dark spots. Think about varying light bulb sizes to add more dimension. String an inner layer of small LED white lights to produce an inner glow on the tree before adding larger, colored lights on top to increase visual appeal. Just be sure to match the same wattage of the lights so that you do not have power surges and can prolong the life of the bulbs.

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Help kids adjust to sleep schedule changes through the holiday season

As a parent, you know how important a routine can be in keeping your children happy and well-adjusted. However, there will come a time where your tried-and-true routine must be adjusted to handle life's circumstances.

Whether it's late night activities or holiday travel, you'll often be faced with the challenge of adjusting what time your child wakes up and goes to bed. But there's no reason to panic when sleep schedules change. With a few helpful tips, you can have your children back on a routine and feeling rested as they adjust to the ups and downs of seasonal schedules.

It can be hard for children (and adults) to fall asleep in a new place. To help make it easier, bring along a lovey and pack a night light, and go ahead and take along favorite books and toys. You want your child to have items that feel and smell comforting and familiar.

Whatever the transition or change is create a calm and relaxing bedtime routine. Bedtime preparations should be in your child's room, not all over the house. Include stories, songs, or games that soothe, not stimulate. Make sure the rules for how many stories, or how long you will read, are completely clear and non-negotiable. Leave plenty of time, at least a half



hour, for her to unwind, and to get the attention from you she needs. If she starts bargaining for an even longer time with you, tell her the clock says you have to stop reading at 8 p.m., so you have 10 minutes. If two parents take turns at bedtime, you don't have to follow an identical script but you should have a similar routine, style and response to bedtime power plays, fears or manipulation.

Many children may not be comfortable in complete darkness, but darkness is important to a restful night of sleep as it allows the body to initiate the melatonin secretion process that's key to restorative rest. Toys designed to help your children sleep can help soothe your child and provide a dim light to put him more at ease as

he falls asleep.

By consciously making an effort to help your child adjust to a new schedule, you'll help ensure that sleep-filled nights will continue for everyone in the family.

The small changes you make will have big effects, as everyone will be happier when they're getting a good night's sleep.

(BPT)

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To recognize the first holiday season since the transition from paper to digital savings bonds, the Treasury Department created a new video that explains how to give a digital gift savings bond using TreasuryDirect.gov. TreasuryDirect.gov is a safe, secure and convenient website operated by the Treasury Department where people can buy, manage and redeem savings bonds 24/7.

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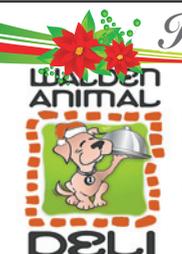
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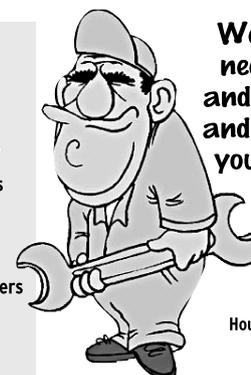
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