

Cornelius

on Christmas

I'm definitely not the first to say it, nor will I be the last. Surely, one of the most satisfying answers to holiday giving is... food!

Of course, you expected me to say that, didn't you?

Just look at all the things we're doing around the holidays! There are parties and gatherings of all kinds—many of them in private homes. This means hosts and hostesses abound and everywhere there is—food.

A gift of food lets you contribute either to the event itself or to the host's post-party relaxation after the guests have left and the pace has slowed.

While usually greatly appreciated, let's face it, food gifts don't last. If you're like me and prefer to have a more



enduring—if not endearing—aspect to your gifts, do as I do—"wrap" your food gifts in yet another gift of appropriate cookware.

It need not be expensive—just something functional that will be used again and again after the initial contents are long gone.

So, for this holiday season column, I'm offering no full-blown recipes to arouse your gastronomic juices. Instead, I want to get your creative juices flowing by dashing off some basic ideas I've used in the past. What you do to embellish them will provide your own personal touch to each gift.

Ring in the holidays

What could be more appropriate than a ring mold creation to ring in the holidays? While a homemade fruit cake is probably your first thought, consider these alternatives.

Start by arranging a variety of appropriate fruits in a decorative pattern in an oven-safe glass ring mold.

Then, go in any of three (or more) directions: Use gelatin to form an attractive dessert or salad; add water and freeze for an attractive holiday punch bowl ice ring; or—and I like this one best—take a cue from your host or hostess and add appropriate spices to produce a fruit ring that, when heated briefly in an oven (conventional or microwave), will provide a nice complement to a meat or poultry main dish.

I'll even toss in a non-food ring mold idea. Just array seasonal greens and pine cones in the ring mold, sprinkle with just a bit of water (to keep them fresh), cover with a large clear glass oven-safe serving platter, and turn the whole thing upside down. Voila! A holiday wreath-under-glass centerpiece.

I've been known to insert a pretty candle in the center of the ring mold—but take care to blow the candle out if it burns down near the ring mold itself.

While I'm on candles, they also make excellent party gifts because they serve as air

fresheners—especially in enclosed rooms occupied by smokers.

A glass Hurricane makes an excellent, functional holiday hostess gift when it contains a festive pillar or dressy taper candle; the only wrapping needed is a pretty bow.

When the party's over...

Here's another gift that holiday hosts will thank you for when the party's over and the guests have left. I've even gotten calls weeks later thanking me for this one.

Whip up several of your favorite one-dish meals in individual-sized portions—Grab-It bowls or Sidekick or Casserette dishes are the perfect containers. Freeze them, then wrap simply with a bow.

Your recipient can pop them in the freezer and be assured of an evening or more of no-cook meals...to say nothing of those oh-so-versatile little dishes.

Be sure you tell your host the gift is perishable so it will be promptly and properly stored. Label each gift with contents and re-heating instructions.

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