

What's Cookin': Make yourself a Christmas gift

Today's recipe is a great example of how to make something yourself as a Christmas gift, a hostess gift or a decoration for your own home.

A couple of words of warning before you start this recipe though. First of all you will find it easier if you have a candy thermometer. You can use the glass of cold water method to find out if your syrup has reached soft ball stage, but a thermometer makes it easier. If you are using a candy thermometer for the first time, you attach it to the side of the pot and leave it in the liquid as you cook it. However, do not let it touch the bottom of the pot or you will get a falsely high reading.

Lori Gysel & Gerry Kentner



Also, when making the syrup, the temperature will increase quite quickly at first, then it will go much slower. This is normal— don't panic.

Once you've got the nuts mixed into the syrup and you're ready to form the rings, be VERY careful, as the syrup is not only searingly hot, but it sticks to you— so if you get it on your hands, you are in trou-

ble. Just in case, work close to a bowl of cold water for quick immersion if it happens. Needless to say, this part of the recipe is not a good part to do with the kids!

If you prefer, you can just make the spiced nut mixture. They taste yummy at this stage— you could just serve them up as is, or put them in a nice jar with a ribbon as a gift.

Have fun and keep cooking!

Email questions and comments to whatscookin@independentfreepress.com



Nut wreaths

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup orange juice concentrate
- 3/4 cup water
- 3 cups white sugar
- 4 cups walnut halves (unsalted)
- 4 cups hazelnuts (unsalted)
- 4 cups almonds (unsalted)
- 4 cups pecan halves (unsalted)
- 2 tbsp ground cinnamon
- 2 tbsp ground nutmeg
- 2 tbsp ground ginger
- 2 tbsp ground cloves
- zest of 2 oranges

Method

1. Combine orange juice concentrate, water and sugar in a pan. Bring to a boil without stirring and then cover for 3 min-

utes. Remove the lid and reduce the heat to medium. Boil to a "soft ball" stage or 235 degrees F. on a candy thermometer (about 25-45 minutes)(Soft ball stage means that if you fill a glass with cold water, then drop a bit of the candy liquid into the glass, it will form a ball that does not disintegrate, but will flatten out when handled. Be careful— the syrup is very hot!)

2. Meanwhile, roast the nuts on a flat sheet in the oven at 350 degrees F. for 7-10 minutes and turn out into a large bowl.

3. Combine the spices and pour over the nuts. Toss the nuts and spice mixture with a spoon to distribute the nuts evenly.

4. Pour the syrup over the spiced nuts and toss through with a spoon. Return the nuts to a baking sheet and place in a 350

degree F oven for 15-20 minutes or until the caramel on the outside of the nuts is bubbling.

5. In the meantime, brush some oil over a counter top (not wood), remove the nuts from the oven and dump them on the counter top. With two spoons, make 3 wreaths out of the nuts. Note: you will have to work fast and be very careful as the caramel on the nuts is very, very hot! Let the nut wreaths cool completely before moving them.

6. Attach bows.

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Don't miss your chance to shop this weekend in the Dan Cooper "Shop for Kids Sake" Online Auction held in support of Big Brother Big Sisters of Halton, a United Way funded agency.

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To log on to the auction go to <http://auction.bbbsshalton.ca/> or through the Big Brothers Big Sisters site at www.bbbsshalton.ca and follow the link. Bidding closes at 9 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 12.

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