

A cup of Christmas joy

Hot chocolate, the slow and satisfying way

After years of resisting, I gave in and bought a faux Christmas tree. An artificial tree always seemed like it produced 22% less Christmas joy and cheer to me. However, not driving around with an evergreen lassoed to the top of my car made it seem worthwhile. I took the plunge.

And what happened? My new faux Christmas tree electrocuted me.

When the middle section of the pre-lit tree did not light, I assumed it was a loose bulb. I checked each tiny bulb and that's when it occurred. Due to a manufacturing flaw, two bare electrical wires were hidden in the foliage waiting to strike. And zap, a bolt of hand tingling electricity shot through my body. Mother Nature would

not do this to me.

I now believe an artificial tree produces 88% less Christmas joy and cheer. Let's be clear, if your artificial tree sparks Christmas joy, stick with it. I assume, though, that it has never treated you to a galvanic jolt.

My "simpler" faux tree resulted in hours on the phone and eating an entire pint of ice cream to soothe my frayed nerves.

Holiday life is complicated and hectic. What I thought would be easy and quick was not, and I missed out on a slower-paced holiday ritual. This happens in the kitchen as well. We've all passed over slower step-by-step, everything-by-hand cooking in favor of premade and effortless.

One of my favorite holiday splurges is hot chocolate. I've opened many Swiss Miss packets (for the record, it isn't even Swiss!), but when I'm feeling extravagant, I rip into a Ghirardelli Peppermint Hot

Cocoa mix. Sure, it's delicious and quick, but it's like my artificial tree. I miss out on the ceremony, the satisfaction and the ritual of the real thing.

Since my replacement faux tree has already arrived, I'm all-in on real, homemade hot chocolate this season. It's a few more steps than ripping open a package, but the anticipation of slowly stirring the components, rather than waiting for the microwave to ding, brings a sense of cozy homeliness.

There's always something unexpected that happens during the holiday. When Christmas calamity strikes (like for instance, your Christmas tree turns on you), savor the pleasure of sneaking away for a homemade cup of real hot chocolate.

Homemade Hot Cocoa Ingredients

Serves 2

- 2 ounces semisweet or dark chocolate
- 2 tablespoons unsweet-

ened cocoa powder

- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 pinch salt
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar (more or less to taste)

Directions

In a saucepan, mix the chocolate, cocoa powder and 1/2 of the milk over low heat. Stir continuously until the chocolate is melted.

Add the rest of the milk and the salt. Stir and heat the milk through.

Stir in the sugar (to taste) and warm for another 1 to 2 minutes. Pour into a mug and top with softly whipped cream, if desired.

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CrosswordAnswers

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Homemade hot chocolate provides a sense of calm amid the holiday rush.

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