

# Sweet treats for Christmas giving

## Gifts from the kitchen

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The rewards of candy making at home are sweet indeed. Call it nostalgia for Christmases past or maybe self-satisfaction with a job well done, but the enjoyable accomplishment of turning out confections in one's own kitchen is catching on.

Definitely not for consumption for those whose sweet tooth may still be of interest to the tooth fairy, the goodies we're writing about today are adult fare only. All are gloriously spiked and call for more

than a mere splash of Ameretto di Saronno, the spirit of the Renaissance, which lends its unique flavor to these delectable delights.

### SARONNO BALLS

In a bowl, mix 2 cups each crushed chocolate wafers crumbs, confectioners' sugar and finely chopped pecans. Add 1/2 cup Ameretto de Saronno and mix with the hands until mixture forms a smooth

ball. Shape into 1-inch balls. Roll half of the balls in chopped pecans and half in flaked coconut. Makes 48.

### SARONNO FUDGE

In a large saucepan, combine 4 cups sugar, 2 cups (1 pint) half-and-half, 1/2 cup Ameretto de Saronno and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Brush the sides of the pan with butter or margarine. Stir over moderate heat until

sugar is dissolved. Bring to a boil and cook without stirring until 238°F. on a candy thermometer, or until a small amount forms a soft ball when dropped into water. Remove from heat and let stand until 140°F. Beat with a spoon until mixture begins to thicken slightly (mixture will still be shiny). Pour quickly into a foil-lined 8-inch square pan. Let stand until hard and cool. Use foil to remove from pan and cut with a sharp knife into 1-inch squares.

### SPIRITED PECANS

In a saucepan, combine 1 1/2 cups sugar and 1/2 cup Ameretto de Saronno. Bring to a boil and boil until 238°F on a candy thermometer, or until a small amount forms a soft ball when dropped into cold water. Stir in 3 cups pecan halves and keep stirring until sugar syrup becomes cloudy and grainy. Spread out on cookie sheet and let harden. Separate into small pieces. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dry place. Makes about 1 quart.

Here we are into December. If you're like the people I visit with, you're saying, "Christmas is coming so fast and I have so much to do."

There are some welcome seasonal items available this time of year. For instance, filberts and walnuts are being offered at very reasonable prices at roadside stands and produce markets. If you purchase these "in the shell" and then do the cracking, they can make a special gift for the person on your list that doesn't take the time to crack them but would love to have them available for their favorite recipe. One of the nicest gifts I received last year was a jar of ready-to-use nuts. This can even be a family project with everyone pitching in to crack them.

You can take this present one step further and roast, season, or candy-coat them—making them a real gourmet treat, ready for snacks or entertaining.

Yeast breads are always welcome. There are many traditional Christmas yeast breads that come from other countries and are beautiful to see as well as good to taste. There are even especially fun breads or puddings that include little surprises inside—such as a silver trinket or thimble in the plum pudding or a ceramic animal in a Mexican fiesta bread. If you do add this fun touch, be sure to let the receiver know, so you won't be responsible for a broken tooth. A pretty card or flag telling the tradition adds a personal touch. These are gifts that take time, but several can be made at once and then packaged and frozen.

When you think gift-giving, think nutrition. Sweets and cookies have been a tradition for years and are nice, but many people are starting to limit the sweets they eat, so would appreciate some non-sweet treats. A cheese spread, some marinated mushrooms, cereal nibbles, or other party foods can also be packaged nicely and make a thoughtful gift.

If time is limited, consider purchased food items for gifts. One of the most successful gifts I gave my son and daughter when they were grade school age, was a collection of mixes that was theirs. I had been shopping in the toy store and noticed the miniature mixes with their tiny pans. I commented to my husband that that was certainly a ridiculous price for such a little item of food. He suggested that I buy some of the kid's favorite foods and desserts in full size, put their name on the packages and let them fix them when they wanted to. I did have some rules that went along with the mixes. The kids needed to ask before making something, and they couldn't make a new dessert unless there were no desserts around. But beyond these simple rules, they were free to choose when to make them.

Kids have fewer skills in the kitchen. With this in mind, I often chose special mixes that I would never purchase for my use. For example, I made powdered sugar frosting by the dump method, but the kids couldn't learn this technique easily, so I would sometimes buy a frosting mix for them. I didn't just select sweets though, I chose some of the other things they liked. Scone mixes, corn bread, potato casseroles and spice packets helped them make main dishes.

It was a great help to me and made them an active partner in making the meals. They had good feelings, developed better reading skills, and the family benefited from the special items.

Another popular gift item that can be purchased is tea. I have a special friend in Japan, and just as an afterthought, I included some strawberry tea in her Christmas package. At the time I thought, "This is silly—sending tea to Japan!" It turned out to be the best part of the gift, very much appreciated because it was so unique.



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