

# Baking for the holidays

*The I-O staff tries out three new holiday recipes with mixed results*

**By Jolene Guzman**

Anytime you have to eat fudge with a spoon, there is something wrong.

That is how my assigned recipe (self-assigned, I might add) turned out — spoon required.

I failed at making fudge.

But my generous co-workers, the guinea pigs in our newsroom experiment, complimented the flavor.

They even poured it over Lukas Eggen's brownies (which turned out fantastic, for the record) and said if I put it in a jar, I could pass it off as sundae topping.

Kind-hearted souls.

Actually, it did taste like fudge — it would have been better if it had resembled a solid — but at least I followed the ingredient-mixing part of the recipe OK.

Helping it set up was the problem.

I think I was fine until I reached the part of the recipe that said "beat until entire mixture has thickened it loses its gloss." I'm still not certain I know what that means. I'm guessing I didn't mix it long enough.

Oh well. You can't succeed (or fail) if you don't try, right?

I can always use it for topping on vanilla ice cream.

This baking challenge was a chance to prove myself.

When I proudly announced to my parents I would be baking something for the first time, their reaction was not to give me any tips. Instead, they laughed.

Who needs baking tips? It was time to show off Iron Chef Lukas.

I'd love to say I spent hours in the kitchen, perfecting my craft.

Honestly, I used Betty Crocker brownie mix.

I wasn't going to stop there. In a moment of artistic inspiration, I decided to try and add strawberries covered with green icing and M&Ms to give the illusion of tiny Christmas trees.

The photo made it look so delicious! And it didn't seem too hard.

I took out my first strawberry, began to put the icing on it and quickly realized I made a big error.

As a young child, art was never my favorite class. I was always the kid who people said, "Oh that looks interesting, tell me about what you made?"

At the time, I mistakenly thought people just took a great interest in my artwork.

Years later, turns out not even I could tell what I was attempting to portray.

My "Christmas trees" looked more like green blobs with chocolate on them.

Turns out in 25 years, my artistic ability hasn't improved at all.

As for the brownies, they turned out pretty well if I don't say so myself.

Apparently not spraying the pan beforehand is a bit of a no-no, as I found out (as is leaving fresh strawberries out over the weekend).

But, all in all, I'd say my foray into baking was a (semi) success.

Look out Iron Chef. A new challenger is coming.

**By Emily Mentzer**

When discussion of holiday baking came up in a news meeting (full disclosure: I may have brought it up), my co-workers and I got the idea that we could try out some recipes and see how they work.

I expected a "Pinterest Fail."

The only way they would let me play along is if I promised to try something tricky.

Well, this Swedish Sandwich Cookie is something I'd been wanting to try for a few years, and definitely fits the bill.

I would not recommend it to a beginner, but I would highly recommend the cookie.

The texture is very like shortbread, very rich with flavor, but the dough, while easy to assemble, is difficult to work with.

Not only is it sticky, it crumbles under the slightest pressure from a rolling pin.

I had to use a lot of flour to get it to stop sticking, and even then, it was a constant fight.

Once I got them completed — made easier with my husband's suggestion of adding a splash of water to the dough, similar to what you might do to a pie crust — it was clear that these cookies are definitely a "win," and worth the effort.

The cookie was good the day of baking with a crisp texture, but almost better the next day, having softened up nicely.

I love holiday baking in our home, not just for the smells, but giving away bags of handmade goodies to neighbors and friends, making old favorites of loved ones who have gone, and trying new recipes such as this one.

Happy baking and Merry Christmas!

**Fabulous Failed fudge**

- One-half cup butter
  - One cup semisweet chocolate chips
  - One teaspoon vanilla extract
  - Two cups white sugar
  - One (5 ounce) can evaporated milk
  - 10 large marshmallows
  - One cup chopped walnuts
- For directions, go to [www.polkio.com](http://www.polkio.com)

Source: Allrecipes.com.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

**Fudge is not a candy for the faint of heart, and doesn't always turn out quite as planned.**

**Brownies in a box**

- Betty Crocker brownie mix
  - Two eggs
  - Water
  - Vegetable oil
  - Strawberries
  - Green frosting
  - M&Ms
- Mix the brownie mix with the eggs, water and vegetable oil. Coat the strawberries with frosting and M&Ms and place on the cooked brownies.



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

**Brownies from the box are easy for a beginner, but creating a forest out of strawberries proves challenging.**

**Swedish Sandwich Cookie (Syltkakor)**

- 1 cup butter, softened
  - 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar, divided
  - 1 large egg yolk
  - 1 large egg, separated (I used both egg whites)
  - 2 to 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
  - 3 tablespoons ground almonds (I used pecans)
  - 3 tablespoons red currant, strawberry, (apricot, blackberry) jelly (jam). (I probably used closer to half a cup)
- For directions, go online to [www.polkio.com](http://www.polkio.com).



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

**Swedish Sandwich Cookies are delicious and lovely, but tricky to make because of a sticky and fragile dough.**

**By Lukas Eggen**

I spent a rather large number of nights watching Iron Chef as a child. Add to that Chopped, Kitchen Nightmares, Hell's Kitchen and Restaurant Impossible, and you'd think I'd have a future in cooking.

I even had a few dreams of stepping into a TV kitchen and doing battle, showing off my culinary skills.

Alas, over the years I found out cooking talent cannot be passed telepathically.

My cooking ability extends to a few dishes and promptly ends there.

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*May your holiday be full of glimmer and brimming with precious memories. A sincere "Thanks" to everyone.*

