



TRASHTALK

BARBARA O'NEAL

A festive holiday without so much waste

It is no surprise that December is the most festive month of the year. A little more light and warmth is just what we need for these short, cold winter days. I think that's why in my younger years I went overboard with the gift buying, decorating, and celebrating — first Christmas, then Christmas and Hanukkah, then (why not?) Kwanzaa too. Capping it all off with a rousing New Year's Eve to remember. These days, I'm still up for all the warmth and fellowship I can get, but I am a lot more conscious of the waste that parties and gift-giving can generate.

And wow, do we have a waste problem, not only nationally, but also right here in Baker City. In 2016 (the most current information available on the Oregon DEQ website), Baker County produced 15,543.1 tons of waste and recovered just 3,111.1 tons for a recovery rate of 20 percent, one of the lowest in the state. With the current crisis in the recycled materials markets, that rate is even lower, with an additional 4 to 5 tons a month of plastic and mixed paper going into our landfill instead of into new products.

I know, I know, I flipped from party to a party pooper too quickly there. To redeem myself I'd like to share some ideas for gift buying and celebrating that won't dampen the fun and might actually improve your holiday experience while saving you a little money at the same time. Reducing your personal waste through any of these options might seem to be just drops in the bucket towards reducing our national waste problem, but drops add up. So here goes.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Gloxinias puts on a real show

Florist Gloxinias: *Sinningia speciosa* is one of the showiest gesneriads, a big commercial success in the market all year.

What we buy at retail is less than 1 year old from seeds. Specialists ship seedlings to local growers for finishing. Buy only from a known source, as this plant can't take rough handling or chilling — below 60F temperatures stops everything.

At home, remove wrappings and ribbons so that air and light can reach leaves and buds. At purchase, florist gloxinia typically has a mere 10 percent of the blossoms it is capable of producing. Here's how to bring out the other 90 percent:

- Light: 2000-2500 foot-candles in lightly shaded greenhouse; sunny-bright window garden, but be careful of hot direct midday sun; or 6-10 inches beneath the tubes of maxi light garden (four 40-watt tubes burned 14 to 16 hours out of every 24).

- Temperature: Best all around to keep gloxinia warm...68 to 70 at night, 75 to 85 during the day. Always shield from drafts, hot or cold.

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Put On A Pancake Social During The Holidays



The spread for a pancake social

Christina House/Los AngelesTimes-TNS

PANCAKE PARTY

By Amy Scattergood

Los AngelesTimes

One of the annual class projects at the Midwestern boarding school where I grew up was making maple syrup. After collecting sap from the local stand of sugar maples, we'd stay up all night, boiling the stuff into syrup in a wood-burning contraption we'd set up near the decrepit tennis courts. Then we'd celebrate the season's haul with a pancake social. It was a party we looked forward to all year — an excuse to pull an all-nighter outside when normally we'd be under curfew in the dorms, followed by the reward of towers of pancakes as night turned into morning.

Now that I'm not a teenager but a parent to one, my pancake socials are more modest: They started as breakfasts I made when the kids were little and had sleepover guests to feed; now they're an excuse for the family and the occasional friend or two to get together on the weekend without the imperative that anyone change out of their pajamas.

My weekend plan for pancakes usually involves hitting the market on Saturday — to load up on fruit, jam, honey, flowers, maybe a wreath for the door — and stay home on Sunday — to read the paper, watch the early NFL game and engineer the first wave of caffeine while I wait for folks to arrive.

The guests might be my daughter and her friends, taking a break from homework or college applications; or my friends, gathering for a few hours of cooking and conversation. Because one of the myriad joys of pancakes is that they can be eaten for any meal of the day — or sometimes all of them, as my older daughter, now with a college kitchen of her own, points out.

HOW TO PANCAKE

Batter up. I cook pancakes in a cast iron pan that likely predates my mother's griddle, with quite a lot of butter over medium-high heat. The trick is to calibrate the heat, butter and batter so that the interior cooks through while the edges pan-fry into a crispy, bronze filigree. Ladle the batter into shapes — snowmen are the easiest — or coordinate the diameters to stack or pyramid. I've made pancakes as big as omelets and used cookie cutters; squirt bottles also work, though not with blueberries. The first pancake or two might be imperfect (I eat those) then I pile up the rest on a plate kept warm in a very low oven. Depending on the size of your crowd, you can start early and have the whole batch cooked before folks sit down; or you can griddle and serve, handing them off hot from the stove.

FRUITIFY THE MENU

The easiest thing is just to dump your market berries into the batter, or dot them into pancakes to order if you've got a picky crowd. But for me, hearkening back to those



Make your own brown sugar syrup to pour over your pancakes.

Christina House/Los AngelesTimes-TNS

Ohio pancake piles, apples are always part of the mix: There was an apple orchard at the boarding school too, so we added cut apples to the batter. I like to saute them now — same pan, more butter — and put them on top of the stacks rather than in them. You don't need a recipe: Core and thinly slice as many as will comfortably fit into the pan, leaving the pretty skins on. (Choose a tart, firm apple variety, which holds up better in the pan, such as Pink Lady or Arkansas Black.) Add a big nub of butter and a pinch of salt, and cook the apples on medium-high heat until they're caramelized, flipping as you go.

WHAT TO PUT ON YOUR PANCAKES

I make brown sugar syrup because my mother did: Not having the budget for real maple syrup, she boiled down brown sugar and water. For the Canadians among us: Rogers Golden Syrup, a thick sugar syrup the color of French copper pots. Butter makes things better. Look for Beurre de Baratte or Le Beurre Bordier, or serve up butter you make yourself by shaking a Mason jar of good cream until it is transformed. Syrup is fine, but locally made and sourced jams are easier to find than syrups from Canada or Vermont.

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