

Made for giving

For those who love to cook, there's as much joy in creating food gifts as there is in being one of the lucky recipients. Homemade gifts from the kitchen are thoughtful, easy and affordable ways to treat family and friends at the holidays. Make them even more festive by dressing up jars, bottles and boxes with decorative paper, ribbon and raffia.

SPICY MARINATED OLIVES

MAKES 2 CUPS

- 2 cups olives (manzanilla, Kalamata, black or combination)
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon dried rosemary
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup olive oil

In a large bowl, thoroughly combine all ingredients. Pour into a wide-mouth Mason or clamp-top jar, and seal. Refrigerate. These will last up to six months.

PHOTO BY GINA MOORE

CHOCOLATE AND PEANUT BUTTER ALMOND BRITTLE

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

- 2½ cups almonds, toasted
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 cups sugar
- 1½ cups water
- 1¾ cups chocolate morsels/chips (semisweet or bittersweet)
- ½ cup peanut butter morsels/chips

Spray a large baking sheet with cooking spray, and set aside. In a medium bowl, combine toasted almonds, cinnamon and cayenne pepper. Set aside.

Spray inside of a medium, heavy-bottomed saucepan with cooking spray; add sugar and water. Over medium-high heat, stir and bring to a boil. Stop stirring; cover, and cook 3 minutes over medium heat. Uncover, and reduce heat to medium-low. Cook until sugar is a light-amber color, 7–10 minutes. Watch closely to ensure sugar does not boil up and out of pan; if mixture starts to boil too high, lower heat or remove from heat for a few seconds. (Note: Handle hot sugar carefully to avoid burns.)

Stir almonds into sugar mixture, and mix thoroughly. Immediately pour onto baking sheet. Using a buttered spatula, spread the mixture thinly, so nuts are a single layer. Let rest 2 minutes. Sprinkle mixture all over with chocolate morsels, and let rest an additional 5 minutes. Using a clean spatula, spread chocolate evenly, and sprinkle with peanut butter morsels. Cool completely, and break into pieces.

CARAMEL-COVERED PETITE POUND CAKES

MAKES 3 SMALL LOAVES

Use 3-inch-by-6-inch disposable paper mini-loaf pans for baking and packaging the cakes as gifts.

CAKE

- Cooking spray
- 2 sticks unsalted butter at room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup sour cream
- 4 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons lemon extract
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 cups all-purpose flour

Preheat oven to 350 F. Spray inside of loaf pans with cooking spray, and place on a baking sheet. Set aside.

FOR THE CAKE: In the bowl of a stand mixer, blend 2 sticks butter, sugar and sour cream until light and fluffy, about 3–4 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly after each addition. Add vanilla and lemon extracts, and continue beating until combined. Blend salt with flour. Reduce mixer speed to lowest setting, and add flour mixture gradually, until thoroughly blended, but do not overmix. Divide mixture into loaf pans. Bake 40–45 minutes or until a cake tester inserted into center of cakes comes out clean. Cool completely in pans.

FOR CARAMEL ICING: In a medium saucepan, combine brown sugar, 1 stick butter, evaporated milk and vanilla extract. Over medium-high heat, bring to a boil. Stir well, and turn heat down to low. Gently boil 7 minutes. Remove from heat, and let cool 5 minutes. With a wooden spoon, beat icing 3–5 minutes, until it thickens. Working quickly, spoon on top of cakes, spreading to all corners, and let harden.

FOR DRIZZLE: In a microwave-proof container, microwave chocolate 30 seconds, and stir. If not completely melted, continue to microwave, 15 seconds at a time, until spreadable. Drizzle over top of pound cakes.

ICING

- 2 cups light brown sugar
- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 3½ ounces evaporated milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅓ cup chopped white melting chocolate, for drizzle

HERB-INFUSED OILS AND VINEGARS

MAKES 2 CUPS EACH

Use any combination of your favorite oils, vinegars and herbs. These make a perfect base for homemade salad vinaigrettes and meat marinades.

ROSEMARY-INFUSED VINEGAR

- 1 sprig fresh rosemary, rinsed and thoroughly dried
- 2–3 strips lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon whole peppercorns (or to taste)
- 2 cups white wine vinegar

In a 2- to 3-cup jar or bottle, insert rosemary, lemon zest and peppercorns. Using a funnel, pour in the vinegar. Close with a tight-fitting seal or stopper. Use right away, or refrigerate up to one month. The longer the vinegar sits, the more the flavors will infuse the vinegar.

BASIL-INFUSED OLIVE OIL

- 2 cups olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 4 garlic cloves, whole and peeled
- 1 cup fresh basil, rinsed and loosely torn

In a small saucepan over low heat, heat oil until a few bubbles start to appear. Do not let this come to a boil. Remove from heat, and let cool for 10 minutes.

In a 2- to 3-cup jar or bottle, insert pepper flakes, garlic and basil. Using a funnel, pour in the oil. Close with a tight-fitting seal or stopper. This infused oil will last in the refrigerator up to six months.

WHAT'S COOKING AT SCLiving.coop

A gift box filled with homemade truffles is an indulgent treat for the chocolate lovers on your list. Learn how to make them at SCLiving.coop/food/chefbelinda