

December: The Gift of Healthy Food

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Homemade food and cooking ingredients can be great gifts for friends and family this holiday season. It is also the time of year when local food pantries need additional food items. This season try giving health-related gifts and providing healthier food donations. The possibilities are endless, but here are a few ideas to help get started.



Healthy holiday gifts and donations:

Fruit and vegetable bouquet. Try giving a colorful selection of fruits and vegetables, keeping them at peak quality by putting the basket together shortly before giving it. Examples of items to include are green and red grapes, apples, oranges, peppers, broccoli, cucumber, or zucchini.



Holiday snack jar. Select a clear, covered container and fill it with healthy snacks such as small boxes of raisins, trail mix, 100-calorie packs of various crackers or snack mixes, dried fruit, baked chips and pretzels. Decorate the lid and/or jar with holiday cheer.



Spice up your gifts. Zest up your holiday gifts this year by giving an assortment of herbs and spices. Examples that are good at replacing or mimicking the taste of salt include black pepper, minced garlic or garlic powder, minced onion or onion powder, basil, oregano, curry powder, and ginger. Examples of sweet-tasting spices that help reduce the need for sugar in certain foods and recipes are cinnamon, allspice, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, cardamom, mace, and anise.



Mailing holiday food gifts. Food is a popular holiday gift and can be mailed safely if carefully chosen, well packaged and delivered in a timely manner. Coffee blends are easy to pack into decorative plastic or metal containers. Dried foods, nuts and dry mixes such as spiced teas, herb blends and party mixes, are also good choices.



Gift certificate from your kitchen: Give a homemade “gift certificate” for fresh, healthy treats from your kitchen. You might promise to cook a complete meal for several people or to bake one fresh loaf of bread per month for the next year.



Donating food items. Help your local food pantry improve the quality of the food it distributes by donating healthier items:

- **Fruits:** Canned fruit (such as peaches, pears and pineapples) in water or its own juices, no-sugar-added applesauce, dried fruits (such as raisins, cranberries and apricots) or 100 percent canned or boxed juices.
- **Vegetables:** Low-sodium or “no-salt-added” canned vegetables and soups.
- **Grains:** Brown rice, whole grain cereal, dry noodles and pastas, popcorn, and low-fat graham crackers.
- **Protein:** Canned chicken, turkey or tuna (choose canned in water or lower fat), canned or dried beans (such as black, kidney, navy or pinto), unsalted nuts such as peanuts, almonds or walnuts, and peanut butter.
- **Dairy:** Examples include non-fat dry milk, evaporated or canned milk, and pudding cups made with milk (non-refrigerated).



Additional Resources & Links:

- **Helpful Winter Holiday Food Preparation, Food Safety, & Healthy Eating Links.** Need an ingredient substitution, answer to a baking or food preparation question, or advice on preparing foods ahead? Help can be just a click away. Look for highlighted links that are also available in Spanish.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/helpful-holiday-links>
- **Mail Order Food Safety.** USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, Food Safety Information.
http://www.fsis.usda.gov/pdf/mail_order_food_safety.pdf
- **Highlights – Holiday Goodies.** A year-round food safety guide to help keep yourself and your guests safe while entertaining. Also available in Spanish.
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/HealthEducators/ucm083744.htm#TheJoy>
- **4-Day Throw Away Campaign and App.** Learn more about leftover safety and how to protect yourself and your family from bad leftovers. <http://www.4daythrowaway.org/>
- **Food Safety for Families.** Holiday food safety newsletter. <http://go.unl.edu/7fo>
- **Holiday Food Safety Success Kit.** Find tips on food safety, shopping organizers and checklists, and menus and recipe ideas for the holidays.
<http://www.holidayfoodsafety.org/>

Sources:

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2. University of California. 2005. Healthy Eating for the Holidays. Student Nutrition Awareness Campaign. Accessed at:
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3. University of Illinois Extension. 2012. Making the Most of your Food Basket Donations. Urban Programs. Accessed at:
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