

# Festive holiday fun with cookies and cocoa

Treat your holiday guests to something special this Christmas. From mouth-watering spritz cookie recipes that will outshine the rest, to delicious hot cocoa boosted with salted caramel, you'll be the host with the most in no time at all.

## ■ Spritz Cookies with a Little Glitz

You know gingerbread and sugar cookie, but do you recall the most impressive cookie of all? Spritz cookies are fast and fun. Use a Wilton Cookie Press to make dozens of delicious, perfectly-shaped uniform cookies quickly. Add a spritz of edible silver or gold Color Mist Food Color Spray to make them shiny and bright.

## ■ Santa's Favorite Spritz Cookie

Indulge Santa's sweet tooth with decadent chocolate spritz cookie sandwiches filled with a layer of peppermint icing. Take a shortcut by using decorator icing that is already flavored and ready to squeeze, perfect for the time-crunch holidays.

## ■ Ho-Ho-Hot Cocoa with a Twist

There's nothing quite as comforting as a cup of hot cocoa on a cold winter day, but add a dash of salted caramel flavor and you're in for a real treat. Made with velvety Dark Cocoa Candy Melts candy, steamed milk and a splash



of Treatology Salted Caramel flavor, this cocoa offers just the right balance of salty and sweet.

## ■ Metallic Spritz Cookies

Makes: 10 dozen cookies  
3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1	teaspoon baking powder
1 1/2	cups (3 sticks) butter, softened
1	cup granulated sugar
1	egg
2	tablespoons milk

▶



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1 teaspoon Wilton Pure Vanilla Extract  
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 Silver & Gold Color Mist Food Color Spray

#### ■ Buttercream icing

Wilton Silver & Gold Sugar Pearls  
 Heat oven to 350 F.

In medium bowl, combine flour and baking powder. In large bowl, beat butter and sugar with electric mixer until light and fluffy. Add egg, milk and extracts; mix well. Gradually add flour to butter mixture, mixing to make smooth dough. Do not chill.

Place dough into cookie press using an 8-petal flower disk and press cookies onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 10-12 minutes or until lightly browned around edges. Cool cookies on pan on cooling grid 2 minutes. Remove from pan; cool completely on grid. You will need two cookies per treat.

Use silver or gold Color Mist food color spray to spray cookies. Let dry, about 3-5 minutes. Turn cookies over and spray underside. Let dry, about 3-5 minutes. Prepare buttercream icing or use pre-made buttercream icing. Use tip 12, cut disposable decorating bag and icing to pipe elongated beads on bottom of one cookie, following cookie shape. Sandwich two cookies together. Use tip 4, cut disposable decorating bag and icing to pipe a dot in center of sandwich cookie. Top dot with either silver or gold sugar pearls.

#### ■ Chocolate Peppermint

#### Spritz Sandwich Cookies

Makes: 4 dozen sandwiches

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
 2/3 cup cocoa powder  
 1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
 1/4 teaspoon salt  
 1 1/4 cups (2 1/2 sticks) butter, softened

1 cup granulated sugar  
 2/3 cup firmly-packed brown sugar  
 1 teaspoon Wilton Pure Vanilla Extract  
 2 eggs

Wilton Peppermint Decorating Icing  
 Heat oven to 350 F.

In medium bowl, combine flour, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt. In large bowl, beat butter and sugars until light and fluffy. Add vanilla and eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture, mixing to make a smooth dough. Place dough into cookie press and press cookies onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 10-12 minutes or until edges are slightly browned. Cool cookies on pan on cooling grid 2 minutes. Remove from pan; cool completely on grid. Sandwich cookies together with Peppermint Decorating Icing.

#### ■ Salted Caramel Hot Chocolate

Makes: 4 cups

4 cups milk  
 1 cup Dark Cocoa Candy Melts Candy  
 1/4 teaspoon Wilton Treatology Salted Caramel Flavor Concentrate

In large saucepan, cook milk on medium heat until hot; remove from heat. Whisk in candy and flavor concentrate. Continue whisking until candy is melted and mixture is smooth. Serve immediately. Family Features

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## Holiday Hints: Find something on everyone's wish list



No matter who you're buying for this holiday season, your shopping list is sure to be long and complex. Simplify it with these holiday hints, which feature something for everyone on the list. From gifts that keep on giving, month after month, or

the latest in handheld functionality to a stylish classic and tasty treats both sweet and rich in flavor, this guide has you covered - right down to shipping your gifts to their intended recipients.

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# Great holiday gifts for the handy DIY-ers in your life

The holiday season is the perfect time to ensure the handy guys and gals in your life are well-equipped for all their planned projects in the coming year -- whether that is building shelves, making home improvements or fixing up the car.

Every DIY-er needs an up-to-date, comprehensive toolbox, as damaged or dull gear can pose a safety hazard, and the wrong implement for the job can slow down work and even be dangerous to the user and anyone nearby.

When doing your gift shopping, consider opting for a few high quality tools. It can be tempting to try to save a few dollars when holiday budgets are tight, as well as add heft to a gift basket with more items, but you will be doing your gift recipient a bigger favor by investing in fewer tools that will out-perform and out-last their flimsier alternatives.

With this top of mind, here are a few gift ideas to consider:

**A durable, strong set of screwdrivers will be designed to handle the rigors of everyday use.** Consider a 10-piece set from CHANNELLOCK, which recently



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**Give the gift of versatility with an adjustable wrench.** Look for one with slim jaws for extra reach and maximum accessibility, but great jaw capacity to support larger nuts and bolts.

**Every home and garage needs a high-quality straight jaw tongue and**

**groove plier.** For one that will last long enough to pass down to the kids, consider CHANNELLOCK's, which can be purchased solo or as part of a two-piece gift set that also includes a diagonal cutting plier. Treated to grip better, last longer and prevent rust, these tools will prove useful for years to come.

**For those whose handy projects take them places or if they spend a lot of time on different home projects indoors and outside:** consider a transportable toolbox that is lightweight in structure but durable, waterproof, and lockable.

Don't know what's needed? Get a gift card to a hardware retailer so your gift recipient can make the right purchase. High-quality items and sets are available at such retailers as Home Depot, Lowes, Do It Best, True Value, Ace and at [www.Channellock.com](http://www.Channellock.com), a family-owned plier and hand tool manufacturer.

Practical and useful tools make excellent gifts that keep on giving. With extra attention paid to making quality purchases, you can ensure they last for many years. StatePoint

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# Deck the Halls: Inspiring ideas for festive holiday decor

Among the most treasured of holiday delights is, as the carol says, decking the halls. It's the perfect excuse to pull out the bling and bring an aura of festivity and fun to your home, whether it's for your personal enjoyment or setting the stage to celebrate the season with loved ones.

All you need is a little imagination and some design inspiration to create an inviting holiday home, both indoors and out.

Shopping at stores recognized for a wide assortment of quality furnishings, such as Pier 1 Imports, will give you a variety of decor that fits every style at an excellent value. Trim your tree beautifully and learn how to artfully incorporate wreaths and garland into your holiday home decor with Pier 1 Imports' additional tips for a Christmas as merry and bright as you make it.

## ■ A tree worth gathering 'round

As the focal point of your holiday trimmings, your Christmas tree should



reflect your personal style and make a statement about your holiday spirit. Start by choosing the right theme or look for your tree, from traditional to glamorous to fantastical. Ultimately, you can carry this theme throughout every element of the tree, from the ornaments to the gift wrap to other accents sprinkled throughout.

To get started, select a pre-lit tree in the shape and style that best matches your vision: noble fir or pine, in slim or full silhouettes, the

options go on. Be sure to spend some time fluffing branches for a more natural look, or choose one of Pier 1 Imports' new memory trees with self-shaping branches that let you start decorating right away with the fastest setup ever.

Begin decorating by placing large elements. Weave garland through the tree branches first. Then start tucking larger ornaments and decor into the branches, placing evenly throughout. Fill in open spaces in the branches with smaller ornaments and floral picks.

Keep adding until the branches are filled. Crown your tree with a decorative topper that fits your theme to add height and an extra personal touch.

Adorn the base of the tree with a coordinating tree skirt or collar, and remember, you're not quite finished until the presents are under the tree. Bundle your gifts with high-quality wrapping paper, gift bags, tags and bows that also fit your theme for a cohesive, finished look from top to bottom. ▶

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#### ■ Creative uses for traditional trimmings

Don't let your vision for a festive holiday home stop at the front door. Wreaths and garlands can actually bring a stylish touch to your holiday decor from the outside in.

You can create a wintery landscape in your

home by decking your halls, tables and more with inspired Christmas wreath placements. One idea is to nestle a hurricane in a berry wreath for a burst of color and texture; the candlelight will lend an air of cozy comfort.

Home is where the hearth is, and a well-adorned mantel is a must. Make a stunning wreath the star of your fireplace display, and incorporate a supporting cast of berry garland and even a woodland creature or two to help make your look complete.

Actually, repurposing garland in different locations throughout your house is another inventive way to infuse Christmas spirit. From staircases to bookshelves to headboards, cleverly installed garland sends a message that you have a passion for the season.

You can even use a shimmering Christmas tree garland as a table runner for a simple but elegant touch of joy. Add a natural touch with a garland crafted of pinecones, or go for glamour with golden accents. Find more ideas and garland to fit your personal style at pier1.com.

Make your holiday merry and bright with a hint of starlight and sparkle. As you explore decorating ideas, remember to add a lighter touch with hanging ornaments, embroidered accents and candleholders. After all, Christmas is the perfect time to let your inner light shine.

#### ■ Decorating Room by Room

**Living room:** Add a touch of frost to your room with inspiration from a wintery wonderland. Shining, snowy accents, along with plush pillows and a faux fur throw, create a warm, inviting space.

**Mantel:** Who says a fire always melts snow? While your hearth heats your home, keep your holiday accents crisp and cool, with plenty of snowflakes, trees and wreaths to go around.

**Staircase:** Think beyond the tree and loop garland and festive lighting, such as Glimmer Strings from Pier 1 Imports, around your banister.

**Dining room:** Craft your own centerpieces with a few essential ingredients. A pretty mixture of evergreens, woodland creatures and metallic pillar stands shines in the soft glow of candlelight.

**Bedroom:** Create a welcome retreat within your bedroom with an elegant headboard, bright bedding and seasonal accents - everything you need to settle down for a long winter's nap.

**Outdoors:** Take your holiday party out to the patio. Lanterns filled with LED candles, soft pillows and garden stools offer all the festive features of indoor decor but with the durability for outdoors. Family Features

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# Create the perfect cheese board in 4 easy steps

A delicious assortment of cheeses, paired with the right foods, is a feast for the eyes and the palate. You don't have to be a professional chef to create a cheese board that looks and tastes like a culinary masterpiece.

"For entertaining or just a quiet night at home, you can't go wrong with a gourmet cheese board," says Chef Michael Symon, co-host of ABC's "The Chew," author of three best-selling cookbooks and owner of several restaurants. "It's a fast-and-easy appetizer that can make even a novice cook look like a culinary mastermind."

Consider the following as you prepare your next cheese board:

## Determine the right quantity of cheese

If you're serving it as an hors d'oeuvre, plan for 1 to 1.5 ounces of each cheese type per person. If it's for a light meal, plan for 2 to 3 ounces per person.

## Purchase multiple cheese styles

For visual appeal, select an odd number of cheeses, such as three or five, depending on the number of people. Try a variety of cheeses in flavors that complement one another, such as:



**Aged Havarti:** Mild and buttery, this specialty cheese from Castello has a delicate, crystalline structure that forms during its long maturation period, creating a flavorful, crunchy surprise.

**Brie:** Extremely spreadable and creamy, Brie is easy on the palate and pairs with a wide variety of foods.

**Blue:** A full-flavor variety, such as Castello Traditional Danish Blue, has a wonderful "bite," with characteristically tangy notes of blue balanced by sweet and salty undertones.

## Select gourmet pairings

The perfect cheese board includes foods that complement and enhance the taste of the cheeses. The best boards have four pairings: A bread item, charcuterie, something sweet and something savory or salty. Breads to consider are flatbread, grilled crostini or baguettes, while great charcuterie options include prosciutto or a pork pâté. For sweets, figs, honey or berry preserves are delicious additions. And for savory and salty pairings, include Marcona almonds, cornichon pickles or Kalamata olives.

## Keep your presentation simple

Arrange your cheeses from mildest to strongest, in a clockwise pattern on the board. Be sure to leave space for pairings. Precut half of each cheese on the board, to make it easy for guests to dive in. Set out the cheeses 30 minutes before serving so the flavors fully come to life.

Before serving, place pairings on the board in small groups. Lastly, set out one knife per cheese to keep the flavors from mixing together. For additional cheese board tips and techniques, visit CastelloCheeseUSA.com. (BPT)

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