



Have You Heard?

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Make Sure Holiday Food Gifts Arrive Safely

A box filled with homemade treats is sure to warm the heart of that special someone who cannot make it home for the holidays. Too often, though, it's only the thought that warms the heart because the treats arrive in crumbs. To make sure that the food you send arrives fresh and safe, select, prepare, and package it carefully.

When selecting foods to send, choose baked goods that are moist

and firm or hard, but not brittle. These travel well and should arrive whole, not in crumbs.

Bar cookies are a good choice. Most are moist and keep well. Fruit, date or fig bars, brownies and coconut squares are examples. Wrap individually in plastic to preserve each bar's shape and moisture.

If you want to send a cake, try fruitcake, pound cake, carrot cake, spice cake, or a fruit-based cake such as applesauce. Pound cake with a pour-on icing is a good

choice. The icing not only adds moisture, but also forms a coating to keep the cake moist. Layer cakes usually do not arrive in good shape. You can, however, split a pound cake in half and add icing to it as you would a layer cake.

Fruit and ginger breads travel well. Yeast breads, may not. Hard candies, such as peanut brittle and rock-candy, generally ship better than fudge and divinity.

If you are not sure how well a food will ship, test it. Place the food in a container and shake it a few times. If it holds its shape, it should mail well. Place the food in a draft (made by a fan or the wind) to see if the food retains moisture well.

Once you have selected and prepared your holiday food gift, a proper package is a must. Most breads, cakes and bar cookies can be baked in a foil or light-weight aluminum pan, or coffee can that also may be used for shipping.

If you are going to ship the food in its baking container, follow the

directions in the recipe for cooling and removing the food from the pan. When thoroughly cooled, wrap in plastic wrap or foil and return to the cleaned container.

Other good shipping containers include: rigid plastic freezer or refrigerator containers, metal cake boxes and metal canisters. Two, one gallon plastic milk jugs can be cut to hold food. Cut the top half off each jug. Wash and air well to remove any odors. Place the wrapped food inside one half; fill any empty spaces with crumpled tissue or unsalted air-popped popcorn. Fit the second jug half over the first like a lid and seal with freezer tape. Place in box to send. It is critical to wrap all foods in

aluminum foil or plastic before placing in shipping containers when drying during shipping is a problem. Wrap small items like candy and cookies, individually. Small plastic bags are ideal for this.

Select a strong cardboard box to mail the food in. Place a cushion of crumpled newspaper, paper towels, styrofoam pellets or unsalted air-popped popcorn in the box and then add the containers of food. Finish packing with paper. Securely close the box and label it "perishable." Check with available mailing services to determine which one best fits your delivery needs.

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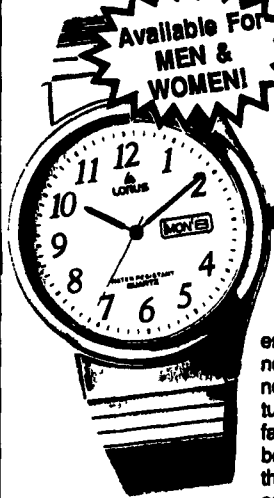
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