

Make Family And Friends Priority During Holidays

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Many of us splurge at Christmas, not just on gifts but on parties, decorations, cards and food. The result is not only empty pockets but often exhaustion, stress and frustration, says a family resource education specialist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"We need to reevaluate what the Christmas holidays mean to us," says Dr. Marilyn Furry, assistant professor of agricultural and extension education. "The holidays should be a relaxing time to spend with family — something children need as much as adults do."

"Children want attention from parents who are busy trying to buy gifts, clean the house and decorate the tree," says Furry. "But parents often are at parties or gatherings with friends, and the children end up spending time with a babysitter or with tired, harried parents."

Too often holiday responsibilities aren't shared by the entire family. "Buying and wrapping gifts, decorating the home, baking cookies and mailing cards often is done solely by the mother," says Furry. "Then, if the family doesn't have the Christmas they would like, the mother feels guilty."

Furry points out that families need to sit down together and set priorities for holiday activities. Some of these suggestions are too late to do this year, but try it next year. "Complete only as many things as you can do comfortably," she says. "Ask yourself, 'Do I really need to mail all those cards or bake three extra batches of cookies?' Congratulate yourself on what you've accomplished rather than agonizing about what you haven't done. To spend more time together, you can refuse social invitations after a certain date, such as December 15, unless they include the whole family."

Families also need to set realistic expectations about gifts. "Ask yourself if you really need to buy gifts for everyone," says Furry. "Perhaps you could draw names with friends and relatives. Set a price limit for gifts and have everyone agree in advance."

"Buy gifts that will last or that can be recycled or repaired. Use your creativity to make gifts - capitalize on talents such as baking, jelly making, weaving, sewing or wreath making. Give a coupon book of favors to be redeemed throughout the year, or make a donation in a loved one's name to a charity or church group."

Furry says that families also need strong holiday traditions to stabilize the unsettling holiday season. "Do some of the same things each year so that the children can say 'When do we make the wreath?' or 'When can we decorate the tree?'" says Furry.

"Discuss with your family the traditions that they enjoy the most. They can be simple things the

family does together such as decorating the tree, opening cards together, taking a walk in the woods or calling friends. Include activities not centered around giving gifts."

Furry also emphasizes an evenly paced holiday season. "From Thanksgiving on, and sometimes even earlier, the holidays receive a huge buildup," she says. "Then on

December 26, the activities drop dramatically. Everyone feels let down and the children are left surrounded by a stack of gifts, wondering what to do next."

"Instead, wind down the holiday season gradually. Have some of those get-togethers after the holidays. The tree and other decorations don't have to come down the day after Christmas."

Dairy Tidbits

To soften (or bring to room temperature) other types of cheese, remove wrapper and place on microwave-safe plate. Microwave at 30 percent power until cheese reaches desired softness and/or temperature. Check every 10 seconds to prevent overheating.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 1988, milk and other dairy foods (excluding butter) provided 75 percent of the calcium and 35 percent of the riboflavin (vitamin B₂) available in the U.S. food supply.

Once cream is whipped, it may be stored tightly covered in the freezer for up to three months. After thawing, it may lose some of its volume and thickness.

Peanut Butter Pleaser

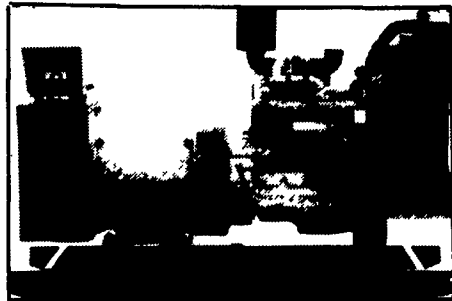
- 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1/2 cup honey
- 4 cups milk

Beat together peanut butter and honey in a blender or with an electric mixer. Gradually add milk. Chill. Stir before serving. Yield: 5 cups.

VARIATIONS:

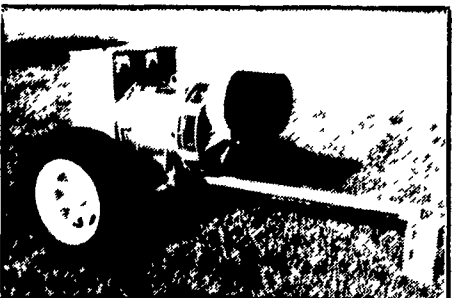
- Maple: Substitute 1/2 cup pure maple syrup for honey.
- Chocolate: Reduce honey to 3 tablespoons and add 1/2 cup chocolate syrup with honey.

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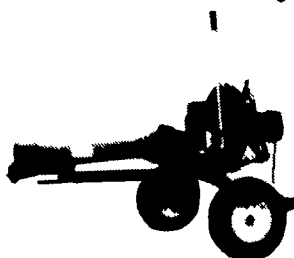
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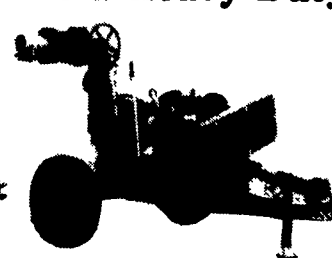
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