

## Consuming Thoughts

by

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Creative cooks would love to peek inside their Christmas stockings and find shiny new tools for their kitchens. Particularly if the Christmas stocking hanging at your mantel belong to people who like to cook. Take a trip to your local kitchen shop where you'll find many hand utensils to speed the cooking process and make life easier for the chef. Here are several stocking-stuffing ideas, as well as alternate suggestions for the utensil's use. (Be sure to tuck in the suggestions for using the gifts in with the gift.)

Spread softened butter or magazine into rubber buttermolds, chill until firm, and you can pop out shapes of butter as varied as the molds themselves. With the same molds you can shape almost anything. (But be sure that you don't try to bake in them or mold items so hot that they might melt the molds.) Use them for molding gelatin, marzipan, chocolate, mints, or other candies. You can also shape firm cookie doughs or dough ornaments in the molds.

Metal egg rings with a retractable handle aid you in frying perfectly round eggs for use in sand-

wiches or breakfast dishes such as Eggs Benedict. Be sure to oil the inside of the rings before adding the egg so that the cooked egg will release easily. In addition to frying eggs, you can use the rounds to cook evenly shaped pancakes and potato patties as well as to shape burgers or English muffin rounds.

Metal two-piece tea ball screws together to form a ball with a cavity to hold tea leaves while you simmer tea. You can also use the tea ball (available in several sizes) when you simmer pieces of ingredients — such as coffee beans, spices, or citrus rind — that you want to keep separate from the cooking medium. Unscrew the ball and use the rounds as a canape or small biscuit cutter.

Shell bakers are available in several sizes and were created for baking seafood appetizers or entrees. Rounded shapes and fluted edges make them a great choice for molding items, too. Try molding ice cream (line shells with plastic wrap first) or gelatin (lightly oil the shells first) or marzipan. You can use the shells to shape and bake decorative pastry shells, too.

## Keep Holidays Calm For Young Children

A citrus zester is a metal implement with a small grooved knife edge to cut strips of citrus rind. Use the zester for stripping small pieces of rind for cooking or to speed up making crystallized citrus rind. You can also cut decorative strips from citrus wedges to garnish dishes or cut designs in citrus cups or baskets. Cut long strips of citrus and gently tie them into bows or use them as ribbon garnishes. You can even use the citrus zester to cut decorative strips in the skins of other fruits or vegetables.

The garlic press was made to mince and juice cloves of garlic. Use the hand gadget also to press pieces of soft cheese into a mass of playful strings to garnish a cheese or appetizer tray. When making dough ornaments, you can press a girl's hair, Santa's furry beard, or animal fur. Or use it for crushing fresh herbs to release flavor for cooking, or to crack small nuts, such as hazelnuts.

A safety grater works like a regular grater but doesn't have the protruding sharp edges of many graters. Its knife blades are woven into squares, so that you can press the grater through potatoes or eggplants and make French fry cuts. Since it has slightly raised edges, you can use it as a cooking rack. In another use, you can place the grater over a bowl, and invert the bowl to drain liquids from solid ingredients.

Sometimes it seems to parents that the more effort they put into making the holidays fun for young children, the more they get tears and tantrums in return. What's going on here?

During this busy season it's better to do one thing calmly than 10 things frenetically. The pace is often what does in parents and children alike. Too many new and exciting experiences, too much of a change in routine can throw everyone into a tizzy.

Slow things down so that children can participate in holiday activities in a satisfying, simple way. Make preparations in small, easily managed steps that you can all do together. When it comes to baking, for example, make just one plain kind of cookie or streamline the process by using ready-made cookie dough and let the children do the decorating.

Remember that from the child's point of view it doesn't matter what the cookies look like, it's the fun of making them together that counts. The same goes for holiday decorations and making or picking out and wrapping presents. Young children enjoy making cards or simple handmade gifts and in doing so, they learn how to be givers as well as receivers.

Another way to help make

the holidays more pleasurable is by sticking to regular routines as much as possible. Children need consistency and sameness in their daily lives as well as stimulation. When this balance gets out of whack, as it invariably does during the holiday season, every can feel out of sorts.

Maintain bedtime rituals and, when you can, allow a little extra time to answer the questions young children will have about all the on-going activity. Often, in the rush of too many activities, parents forget that children need calm, leisurely explanations of the customs and rituals of their particular holiday tradition. Since it's often difficult for young children to accept going to bed at the end of a big day, talking quietly, reading a story, or singing a song related to the holidays can help calm down everyone.

Paying attention to routines goes for the adults, too. With having a sense of control and not being exhausted, you will be ready to enjoy the family time together.

Young children are satisfied by very simple things; they are pleased and reassured by repetition. So remember to keep your holiday season simple and manageable for you and your little ones.

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