

# Hostess Gifts From The Heart

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Stymied about what to give as hostess gifts?

Today's collection of ideas are from Fay Strickler, Ruth Armbuster, and Barbara Mills. They recently presented the ideas during the holiday workshop conducted at the Berks County Extension.

Clip these pages. The ideas are sure to spark your creativity and warm the hearts of the receivers.

## Homemade Gift Ideas

- Fuse a fabric applique to a paper bag to package a gift.
- Napkin holders — Glue or stitch items such as buttons, holiday ornaments, and silk flowers to napkin holders.
- Rosemary or sage basting brushes — Tie three long sprigs rosemary together with red and gold cord. Give to the one who roasts the Christmas goose or turkey. You can also tie together a set of wooden spoons and add a tiny jar of dried sage, thyme, and rosemary.
- Flavored vinegars — Basil, bay leaves, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, and thyme are excellent choices for flavoring vinegar and oil. Use them singularly or in any combination desired. Add a bit of mint to other herbs for flavor.
- Flavored coffee — To unflavored ground coffee, add 1/4-1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom and 1/4-1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon per pot. Brew the coffee as usual. (Add a coffee mug and cookies or biscotti for a special touch).
- Stencil aprons with Christmas motifs.

## HOT AND SWEET MUSTARD

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup dry mustard
- 3 eggs, well beaten
- 1/2 cup vinegar

In a medium saucepan, whisk together sugar and mustard. Add eggs and vinegar, blend well. Cook over low heat (stirring constantly), until thickened (approximately 8-10 minutes).

Pour into two 1-cup canning jars and cap with lid and screwband. Refrigerate for up to one month.

For an evening get-together with friends, take a decorated jar of homemade hot and sweet mustard, ring bologna, and hard pretzels for dipping.

## LEMON BUTTER OR LEMON CURD

Blend:  
2 cups sugar  
5 eggs, well beaten

Add:  
2 lemons (grate rind first, then juice the fruit)  
3 tablespoons butter

Cook in the top pan of double boiler, over low heat, stirring constantly. Keep the water in the bottom half of the double boiler at just under boiling temperature. Cook until it thickens, about 25 minutes.

Pour into half pint canning jars and cover with lid and band. Cool. Refrigerate for up to one month. Can be frozen. Tastes great on blueberry muffins, fruit breads, warm bagels, rolls, or as a fruit dip.

## RASPBERRY VINEGAR

Bruise one cup fresh raspberries lightly and place in sterilized pint jar. Heat distilled white or wine vinegar to just below boiling point. Fill jar with vinegar and cap tightly. Allow to stand 2-3



Ideas for hostess and holiday gifts abound according to these workshop instructors at the Berks County Holiday Program. From left are Fay Strickler, Ruth Armbuster, and Barbara Mills.

weeks. Strain vinegar, discarding fruit. Pour vinegar into a clean sterilized jar. Seal tightly. Use in dressings for mixed green or fruit salads or marinades for children.

## LEMON THYME VINEGAR

Remove peel (colored portion only) from one lemon in a thin spiral and place in a sterilized pint jar with 4-5 sprigs thyme or lemon thyme. Heat distilled white vinegar to just below the boiling point. Fill jar with vinegar and cap tightly. Allow to stand 3-4 weeks. Strain vinegar, discarding peel and thyme. Pour vinegar into a clean sterilized jar, adding fresh thyme sprig and peel for garnish. Seal tightly. Use in dressings for tossed green salads or marinades for vegetables.

## BLACK BEAN FIESTA SALSA

Vegetables:  
2 (15.5 ounces) cans black beans, drained, rinsed  
1 cup frozen corn, rinsed under warm water until thawed  
1/2 pound jicama, peeled, diced in small pieces  
1 sweet red pepper, remove seeds, dice  
5 whole green onions, cleaned, chopped  
2 fresh tomatoes, diced  
2 teaspoons minced garlic (refrigerated or fresh)  
1/2 or whole bunch fresh cilantro, finely chopped

Dressing:  
1/2 cup lemon juice (fresh or bottled)  
1/4 cup lime juice (fresh or bottled)  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
3 tablespoons olive oil

Combine vegetables in 2-quart bowl. Measure dressing ingredients into pint jar, cover and shake until sugar is dissolved. Add dressing to vegetables and stir thoroughly. Marinate in refrigerator overnight or at least 2 hours to blend flavors.

Serve with slotted spoon as a condiment with chips, tacos, fajitas or as a salad. Salsa may be refrigerated up to two weeks.

Jicama is a root vegetable similar to potatoes. It can be found in large supermarkets. If desired, water chestnuts may be substituted for jicama. Yields approximately 7-8 cups.

This is a prize-winning recipe.

## JELLY JAR SCENT

1 cup simmering potpourri  
2 packages unflavored gelatin  
1 jelly jar with screw lid  
1 piece of lace or ribbon

Take 1 cup liquid potpourri and warm on range. Add gelatin and stir until it dissolves. Don't let it get too hot or let boil. Pour into jar, put lid on and refrigerate for at least two hours. When set, decorate with lace and ribbon. To use, take off disc from lid and put lace over top of jar and tighten the lid to keep lace in place.

## WIDOW FINNEY'S SWEET AND TANGY NUTS

1 pound pecans  
3 egg whites  
Dash salt  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup butter  
Splash soy sauce

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Toast pecans in oven until lightly browned. Beat egg whites in a medium bowl until foamy. Add salt, and then gradually add sugar, continuing to beat until stiff peaks form. Fold in nuts. Melt butter in bottom of sheet cake pan, add soy sauce, and spread nut mixture over top. Bake about 20 minutes, stirring nuts every 10 minutes. Cool nuts and break into pieces before serving.

## BEAN SOUP JAR

2 cups mixed dried beans  
Place beans in different layers in pint canning jar. Seal with lid.

On a recipe card, include the following information for preparing soup:  
2 quarts water  
1-2 pounds ham hock  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
28-ounce can stewed tomatoes  
1 large onion, chopped  
Seasoning to taste

Rinse beans; soak in two quarts water overnight. Do not drain. Add remaining ingredients. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook slowly, uncovered, until beans are tender and soup thickens. Makes 8 cups.

To make diet cocoa, delete sugar and add eight packages

Equal. For mocha, add 1/2 cup instant coffee crystals.

## PUPPY CHOW (For humans)

1 cup peanut butter  
1 stick butter  
2 cups chocolate chips  
Combine peanut butter, butter, and chocolate chips. Melt in microwave. Toss mixture until covered with  
18 cups Chex cereal  
Then toss with  
3 cups confectioners' sugar

## SCISSORS HOLDER

7-inch square potholder  
2 1/2-inch fabric yo-yo  
Large button  
8-inch scissors

With hanging loop at top, fold two side corners of potholders toward center, forming a cornucopia. Stitch or glue in place.

For yo-yo, cut 5/4-inch circle from fabric. Press raw edge of circle 1/4-inch to the wrong side. Using heavy thread, work loose running stitches along pressed edge. Pull ends of thread to tightly gather the circle, knot thread to secure. Flatten circle with gathers at top center. Glue flat side of yo-yo to potholder cornucopia; glue a button to center of gathers on yo-yo. Insert scissors.

## SEASONING FOR SOUPS, STEWS, SALADS

1/2 teaspoon dry mint  
1 teaspoon dry basil  
1/4 teaspoon dry dill weed  
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Mix all together. Add 1 teaspoon (or to your taste) to your favorite soup.

## CREOLE SEASONING MIX

1/4 teaspoon lemon peel  
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/2 teaspoon celery salt  
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard  
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves  
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger  
1 1/4 teaspoons paprika  
1/4 teaspoon onion powder  
1/4 teaspoon red pepper

Mix together all ingredients. Package in a clear cellophane bag and tie with ribbon or in small tin. Add as a seasoning to meats, poultry or soup mix. This is a spicy seasoning so start with a small amount and adjust taste.

## SNACK MIX GIFT

11-14-ounce box flat oyster crackers  
1 scant cup salad oil  
1 package ranch salad dressing mix  
Dash lemon pepper seasoning (without salt)  
Dash garlic powder  
1/4 teaspoon dill weed

Mix oil and seasonings in large bowl. Stir during the day. Let set overnight. Next day store in airtight containers. Tall plastic containers are right for storing this appetizer.



## Give A Themed Gift Basket

Here's a perfect idea for those hard-to-shop for friends and family: a gift basket filled with items customized to the recipient's needs and interests.

A Breakfast Basket might contain cranberry bread or assorted muffins, gourmet preserves, a special coffee or tea, and book of short stories. For heartier appetites, consider pancake mix, and speciality syrups.

A Soup Supper with dried soup and bean mixes, fancy crackers, cornbread mix, a wooden ladle, and soup cups.

For a Pasta Basket, replace the basket with a large pasta

bowl filled with a cheese grater, a garlic press, fresh Parmesan cheese, checkered napkins, and, of course, gourmet pastas.

Other gift ideas include baskets customized for tea drinkers, coffee lovers, choc-a-holics, gourmet cooks or late night snackers.

If the recipient is moving to a new home or apartment, a cleaning basket stocked with sponges, rubber gloves, and assorted cleaning products would be welcome. To make it extra-special, tuck in a gift certificate for a cleaning service.