

Happy, Healthy Holiday Treats

By: Roxanne Gold

At no time during the year is cooking more fun than the holiday season. No matter what holiday you might be commemorating – Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa – food for the holidays has a special quality about it. It's meant for sharing with a wider circle than your immediate family.

But holiday food can mean “fattening food” and this is the time of year that people often put on weight. So I have created some nifty recipes that are healthy and still celebratory. Think of them as “gifts” to your family and friends.

My philosophy is simple enough: Let the flavors of the best ingredients shine bright; make it fun; and get the kids involved.

Each of my recipes has no more than five ingredients (one for each finger on your hand), not counting salt, pepper, or water. With the help of nutritionist Helen Kimmel, MS, RD, the recipes are healthy. Although some of them contain “luxurious” ingredients such as cheese, cream, olive oil, and maple syrup, they are used in moderation and can be enjoyed without guilt. All of the ingredients are fresh, unprocessed, and transfat free.

Make it Seasonal

The recipes rely on the color and flavors of the season: stark red-and-white radishes placed in a circular fashion atop dark green radish leaves look like an edible wreath. A plump turkey breast gets stuffed with dried apricots and garnished with boughs of rosemary that look like the piney leaves of a Christmas tree.

Sweet potatoes get a royal treatment when roasted and drizzled with warm maple syrup. And here's a way to love broccoli, pureed with fresh ginger and a touch of cream. (And it's still low calorie and low fat!) Whole cloves gently spice a holiday drink of apple juice warmed with Red Zinger tea – which turns the color of rubies and fills your kitchen with holiday cheer. For dessert? Frozen Lime Yogurt dusted with crushed candy canes is exhilarating.

“Instead of the usual buttery Christmas cookies,” says nutritionist Kimmel, “try these c-r-u-n-c-h-y meringues made with tiny chocolate chips. They are incredible satisfying and are very low in fat.”

Getting the Kids Involved

As you read the recipes, see where young chefs can take part in their creation – from decorating the platters to spooning meringue onto the cookie sheet.

Other ways for children to participate:

- Create a shopping list (like Santa) and check it twice
- Trim the radishes and smooth goat cheese on top
- Cut kitchen string into ten 14-inch pieces
- Help roll and tie the turkey roast
- Peel the sweet potatoes
- Grate the fresh ginger and squeeze in a paper towel to extract juice
- Remove the leaves from the rosemary branches

- Churn the ice cream
- Crush the candy canes
- Plop the meringue onto the cookie sheets
- Make the Mulled Red Cider
- Help set the table
- Decorate the platters

Part of the fun starts at the supermarket. Then, when you're ready to cook, organize *each* recipe by putting together the ingredients you need – called “mise en place” or everything in its place – just like professional chefs do. A timeline is key to a successful holiday meal, so it's great to have dishes that can be prepped early in the day and gently reheated. The turkey can be stuffed and tied and roasted before serving; the broccoli warmed before serving; the sweet potatoes popped in the oven along with the turkey. Dessert *should* be made a day ahead.

With the hassles of shopping and the manipulation of many ingredients gracefully streamlined, surely this will be your merriest season.