

Christmas Recipes

Growing up, our family hosted a Boxing Day Open House every year. (For my American friends, Boxing Day is December 26, and our big after-Christmas shopping day!) Some years, we'd have dozens of people show up, since my Dad seemed to know everyone, and my mother is a great cook, as a former Home Economist. We'd prepare a big spread of appetizers and treats, and my mother would prepare an enormous pot of chili, served with her fresh, home-baked buns. It was what I looked forward to each year! Serving appetizers and treats buffet-style made the day much more enjoyable for all of us – we could prepare and then enjoy them right alongside our friends and family.

Whether you're hosting a few people, a crowd, or just being asked to bring an appetizer to a work Christmas potluck lunch, hopefully these simple recipes that our family loves help make your job much easier so that you can spend your time making memories!

From Ellen

My favourite childhood Christmas chocolate was a box of chocolate macaroons. This version uses great quality ingredients to make those simple drops even more delicious! If you can find vanilla paste, it's worth the investment. You can use it in other recipes measure-for-measure as a substitute for liquid vanilla and it adds so much more depth of flavour.

Coconut Macaroon Drops

What you need:

- 200-gram bag (approx. 2.5 cups) of unsweetened shredded coconut (we like Camino fair trade)
- 225 - 250-gram bag (approx. 1.5 cups) semi-sweet chocolate chips or melting chocolate (we like Camino or Ghirardelli)
- ½ tsp vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract (we prefer the paste)

Heat oven to 325° F. Spread coconut in a thin, even layer on a baking sheet. Toast for 5 minutes, checking regularly, to ensure that it is golden brown, and not burnt. Remove from oven to cool.

Place chocolate in a non-stick medium-sized saucepan (large enough to hold both the chocolate and coconut) over low-medium heat,

stirring constantly to melt it evenly. When it's melted, remove from heat, and add vanilla bean paste.

Pour coconut into saucepan, stirring to coat evenly with the chocolate. Using a silicone spatula will help get all the chocolatey goodness out of the pan!

Drop by teaspoonfuls onto parchment paper or a silicone mat, on a cookie sheet. Place in freezer / fridge or a wintery Ontario garage to harden. Store in an airtight container in the fridge, and bring to room temperature before serving.

Makes approx. 24 treats.

Ellen Wraf-Martin

From Ellen

My husband LOVES these! It's a Christmas standby in our house. We have included them in a cookie exchange – just make sure you have enough to keep around your house. The sweet / salty / chocolatey combination is a killer, and they look so pretty and special in foil cups on a cookie tray!

Salty & Sweet Peanut Drops

What you need:

- 3 cups salted peanuts (*we like the crispy Kirkland Virginia Peanuts from Costco*)
- 2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips or melting chocolate (*we like Camino or Ghirardelli*)
- Mini foil candy cups (*like tiny, shiny cupcake liners - you can find them with baking supplies or at a bulk food store*)

Arrange foil cups on a cookie sheet to be filled with the hot mixture.

Place chocolate in a non-stick medium-sized saucepan (*large enough to hold both the*

chocolate and peanuts) over low-medium heat, stirring with a silicone spatula constantly to melt it evenly. When it's melted, remove from heat, and add the peanuts, stirring to coat evenly.

Drop by teaspoonfuls into the foil cups. Cool in the fridge / freezer, and store in an airtight container.

Makes approximately 3 dozen.

Ellen Wraf-Martin

From Ellen

This shortbread is SO super-simple, and easy to make gluten-free. We love it regardless of what kind of flour is used – gluten-free, spelt, or regular wheat flour! When we toured Dundurn Castle at Christmastime years ago, my husband fell in love with this simple, delicious treat. It's a must-have Christmas cookie in our house!

Four-Ingredient Scotch Shortbread

What you need:

- 2 cups flour (to make this gluten-free we use Robin Hood, Bob's Red Mill or King Arthur gluten-free baking blend)
- 1 cup butter – softened
- ½ c sugar (we use organic cane sugar)
- ½ tsp vanilla paste

Preheat oven to 325° F. Line an 8x8" cake pan with parchment paper, with enough to create a "sling" on two sides used to lift the shortbread out after it is baked.

Using a mixer, cream together the sugar, vanilla paste and butter. When well combined, add flour. Knead together until it comes together into a smooth dough.

Press evenly into the lined cake pan. Poke with a fork, keeping in mind that you'll cut this into small squares when they are baked. (I line up my fork marks in even lines, about ¼ - 1/2 inch apart, top to

bottom, so that each square is marked when cut into 1.5 x 1.5" or 1" x 1" squares.)

Bake for 25 – 30 minutes, or until golden. Remove from oven.

While the shortbread is still warm, and still in the pan, cut your 1" or 1.5" squares carefully. Allow to cool, and remove from pan using your parchment paper "sling." This will keep them neat, and help prevent crumbling!

If you want to make them extra-special, for your chocolate-loving friends, melt ½ cup of chocolate in a saucepan or in the microwave (stirring so that it doesn't burn.) Using a teaspoon, drizzle spoonfulls of chocolate on top of the shortbread as it cools. You may need to recut the squares just to cut the chocolate, so do this carefully.

Ellen Wraf-Martin

From Ellen

We always include a hot cheese dip at our holiday parties – something warm just hits the spot, and the dish is always scraped clean! This is also one of my husband's favourites.

Four Cheese Hot Spinach Dip

What you need:

- 16 oz. (2 bars) of cream cheese
- 1.5 tsp. garlic powder (or 2 cloves of fresh garlic, chopped or pressed)
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tbsp. grated Romano cheese
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped red pepper
- 1 green onion – finely chopped
- 1 pkg. frozen, chopped spinach, thawed
- 1 cup shredded old or sharp cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Using a mixer or food processor, combine cream cheese, garlic, parmesan and Romano until well incorporated. Squeeze spinach in cheesecloth or paper towel to remove excess liquid. Add spinach, red pepper and green onion, and mix until combined.

Scrape into an oven-safe dish (we use a round pie plate or baking dish), spreading evenly.

Sprinkle cheddar on top evenly.

Bake for 15 – 18 minutes, or until bubbly. Stir and allow to cool for five minutes before serving.

Serve with tortilla or pita chips, celery sticks or other veggies for dipping.

Ellen Wraf-Martin

From Ellen

Every Christmas I can remember has included my mom's party mix. We spend a couple of weeks in the lead up to December finding all the ingredients – we use different cereals to make two versions in our house – one regular and one gluten free. In recent years, it's been so popular that we've had to make three triple batches! It makes a great Christmas gift in a jar or pretty container. Have fun adding your own selections to make it uniquely yours!

Mama T's Party Mix

What you need: (doubles or triples well)

- 1/3 cup neutral-flavoured oil (*we use avocado, grapeseed or regular vegetable oil*)
- 1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. garlic salt
- 1 tbsp. seasoned salt (*we like Lawry's as it has no MSG*)
- 8 cups mixed low-sweetener cereals (*like Chex, Cheerios, Shreddies, puffed wheat, Crispix*)
- 2 cups pretzel sticks
- 1 cup salted peanuts

Heat oven to 250° F.

Place cereal in a roasting pan (*one you might roast a turkey in.*) No need to grease it or line it!

Mix the oil and seasonings together, stirring well. Pour over cereal mixture and stir thoroughly but gently to evenly coat, but not break up the cereal.

Place roasting pan in the oven, setting timer to remind you to stir every 15 minutes.

After one hour, remove from oven. Add the peanuts and pretzels, and bake 15 minutes longer.

We often add other things after it is out of the oven – tiny cheesy crackers, Bugles, small corn chips, crunchy cheese curls – any salty snack that you like and that will add some colour! Watch out – it can be addictive to eat when you're watching a Christmas movie!

Allow to cool before serving.

*To make this recipe (mostly) gluten free, use gluten free cereals (not hard to find now!) and gluten-free pretzel sticks. Note – your Worcestershire sauce may not be gluten-free, so double check the label! This small amount of regular Worcestershire sauce does not bother me, but may well be a problem for those with celiac disease or more sensitive food allergies.

Ellen Graf Martin

From Ellen

I'm a west coast girl. Always will be! Growing up, salmon was plentiful, and we looked forward to one of my uncles or my dad's friend sharing their smoked salmon stash. Everyone had their own special recipe. If you don't live on the west coast, visit your local grocery store with a fish counter where you can likely order a piece to size, or find it vacuum sealed.

My whole life, my mother has made this smoked salmon dip, and served it in a scallop-shell shaped jadeite dish. This year, she passed along that dish to me, so I'll be responsible for filling it with smoked salmon pate for our holiday guests.

Smoked Salmon Pate

What you need:

- 8 oz (1 bar) cream cheese
- 1 dash Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ cup diced onion
- ½ cup smoked salmon (canned, frozen or vacuum sealed)

Place ingredients in food processor. Pulse until well combined, and a light "whipped" consistency (this should be a light pink colour). Scrape with silicone spatula into a pretty dish.

Cover and refrigerate for 1 - 2 hours, allowing the flavours to combine. Serve with crackers and a pate spreader.

Can be stored in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 5 days.

Ellen Wraf-Martin