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FAST IDEAS

Aw, honey

Attach dippers to your jars using festive washi tape. Pretty sweet!

1. Infused Honey Trio

3 cups honey • 2 tbsp. pink peppercorns • 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise • ½ cup balsamic vinegar • 2 star anise → Divide honey among 3 half-pint jars with lids. Stir peppercorns into first jar. Scrape seeds from vanilla bean into second jar; stir to incorporate, then add bean pod. In small saucepan, boil vinegar with star anise until reduced to ¼ cup, 4 to 5 minutes; let cool. Stir into third jar of honey. Cover jars. Makes 3 cups.



Cut it out!

Press a decorative cookie cutter into your bark immediately after garnishing it for a totally giftable treat.

2. Matcha-Sesame Bark

2 lbs. white chocolate, chopped • 2 tbsp. matcha green tea powder • 1 tbsp. black sesame seeds → In bowl, microwave 1½ lbs. chocolate at 50 percent power in 15-second increments, stirring in between, until melted, about 3 minutes. Stir in remaining chocolate to melt. Pour half onto foil-lined baking sheet; spread to ¼ inch thick. Stir matcha into remaining chocolate; dollop over chocolate on sheet. Swirl with knife. Top with sesame seeds. Refrigerate until set, about 1 hour. Break into pieces. Makes 2 lbs.



4. Tangy Escarole Salad

¾ cup chopped pecans • ¼ cup EVOO • 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice • 1 tbsp. grainy Dijon mustard • 1 small head escarole, torn • 1 Honeycrisp apple, cored and thinly sliced • ½ small red onion, thinly sliced • ¼ cup fresh tarragon leaves → In skillet, toast pecans over medium, stirring often, until fragrant, 2 minutes; let cool. In bowl, whisk EVOO, lemon juice and mustard; season. Toss in all remaining ingredients; season. Serves 4.



5. Garam Masala Lentils

1 yellow onion, chopped • 3 tbsp. olive oil • 2 cans (15 to 15.5 oz. each) lentils, drained • 2 tsp. garam masala • 1 tsp. crushed red pepper • 1 tsp. turmeric • ½ cup yogurt • ¼ cup chopped red onion → In skillet, cook yellow onion in oil over medium-high, 10 minutes; season. Stir in next 4 ingredients. Cook until lentils are heated through, about 3 minutes; transfer to bowls. Top with yogurt and red onion. Serves 4.

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The whole package

Bundle your pesto with dried pasta, olive oil and a wedge of cheese for a Pasta Night kit.

3. Winter Pesto

2 cups (packed) parsley with tender stems • 1 cup grated Parmesan • 1 cup walnuts, toasted • 1/2 tsp. lemon zest and 1 tbsp. juice • 1 clove garlic, chopped • 1 cup EVOO → In food processor, pulse parsley, cheese, walnuts, lemon zest and juice, garlic and 2 tbsp. water until finely chopped. With machine running, gradually add EVOO; season. Cover and refrigerate. Makes 2 cups.



6. Holiday Nachos

2 onions, sliced • 1/4 cup olive oil • 2 cups shredded cooked chicken • 1/2 cup chipotle sauce • 8 oz. tortilla chips • 1 1/2 cups grated white cheddar • pomegranate seeds and cilantro, for garnish → In skillet, brown onions in oil over medium-high, stirring, 15 minutes. Mix in chicken and chipotle. In baking dish, layer half the chips, half the chicken and half the cheese; repeat. Broil until cheese melts, 7 minutes; garnish. Serves 6.



7. Ranch Chicken Bake

4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (2 lbs. total) • 1 lb. red potatoes, chopped into 1-inch pieces • 2 tbsp. olive oil • 1 package (1 oz.) ranch dip mix • 1/2 cup torn fresh dill • 1/4 cup chopped fresh chives • 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice → On baking sheet, toss first 4 ingredients. Arrange in an even layer; season. Roast at 450° until chicken is cooked through, about 25 minutes. Top with remaining ingredients. Serves 4.

8. Homemade Olive Oil Crackers

2 cups flour • 1 tsp. sugar
 • 3 tbsp. olive oil, plus more for brushing • flaky sea salt →
 In processor, blend flour, sugar and $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. fine salt. Add 3 tbsp. oil and 8 to 9 tbsp. water; pulse until dough forms. Divide in half. On a floured surface, roll out each half very thinly. Cut into 1-by-3-inch strips and place on parchment-lined baking sheets; brush with oil. Sprinkle with sea salt and pepper. Bake at 425° until browned at edges, about 13 minutes; let cool. Store airtight at room temperature. Makes about 2 dozen.

9. Herbed Cheese Spread

2 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese, at room temperature • 2 sticks butter, at room temperature
 • 2 cloves garlic, chopped
 • 2 tsp. Italian seasoning →
 In food processor, blend all ingredients until smooth; season. Transfer to jars; refrigerate. Serve at room temperature. Makes 3 cups.

Box score

Line a gift box or tin with a pretty dish towel so your delicate crackers don't shatter.



10. Kale Poppers

1 lb. kale, stemmed • 8 oz. ricotta • 2 large eggs • ¼ cup flour • 1½ cups panko • ½ cup olive oil • 1 cup sour cream • 3 tbsp. refrigerated pesto → In salted, boiling water, cook kale until wilted, 5 minutes. Drain, let cool and squeeze dry; chop. In medium bowl, mix kale, ricotta, eggs and flour with ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper. Form into 1½-inch balls; roll in panko. In skillet, heat oil over medium-high. Fry balls, turning often, until golden all over, about 4 minutes. In small bowl, mix sour cream and pesto for dip. Makes 32.

11. Spiced Fruitcake Cider

¼ cup brown sugar • 1 tbsp. dried allspice berries • 1 cinnamon stick • 8 oz. fresh apple cider • 2 oz. fresh lemon juice • 2 oz. tart cherry juice • ¾ tsp. almond extract • 4 dashes bitters • ice cubes • maraschino cherries and candied orange peel, for garnish → In saucepan, bring sugar, allspice, cinnamon and ¼ cup water to a boil; let cool. Strain into cocktail shaker; shake with next 6 ingredients. Strain into 4 coupe glasses; garnish. Makes 4.



Bottle it up

To give the cider as a gift, mix together everything but the ice cubes and deliver it refrigerated.



12. Italian Gnocchi Soup

1 onion, chopped • 2 carrots, chopped • 2 tbsp. olive oil • 1 tbsp. Italian seasoning • 6 cups chicken stock • 1 lb. gnocchi • 5 oz. spinach • ¼ cup diced pancetta → In saucepan, cook onion and carrots in oil over medium-high until tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in seasoning, then stock; simmer 15 minutes, stirring gnocchi and spinach into soup during last 2 minutes of cooking. In nonstick skillet, crisp pancetta over medium, stirring, about 8 minutes. Top soup with pancetta. Serves 4.



13. Mini Mediterranean Frittatas

¾ cup grated Gruyère • ½ cup finely chopped store-bought roasted red bell peppers • ⅓ cup finely chopped fresh parsley • ¼ cup sliced pitted Kalamata olives • 12 eggs • ½ cup heavy cream → In bowl, mix cheese, peppers, parsley and olives. Divide among 12 paper-lined muffin cups. In bowl, beat eggs, cream, ¾ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper; pour into cups. Bake at 375° until puffed, 15 to 20 minutes. Makes 12.