

Entertaining Products, Recipes, and Techniques

by [Kate Heyhoe - Septmeber, 2006](#)

Sometimes we need quick and easy recipes, but the dedicated home cook often wants a taste of something more challenging. As we head into fall and the ensuing season of entertaining, the recipes below, gathered from the past decade of cookbook publishing, may help you sharpen your kitchen skills, without going head first into the classroom. But you don't need formal training to make these recipes. Just a little experience and a love for good food will do.

You'll also find great tips on baked goods, as well as cookies and the baker's most seductive ingredient: vanilla. (Next month we feature pies, both sweet and savory.)

I've recently run across a few nifty products to liven up your cooking and make entertaining more festive and flashy. For instance...

Morning Glory Old Fashioned Coffee Syrup

You may have lived a few decades without "coffee syrup" in your pantry, but this stuff is as gourmet as it gets, and one spoonful leads to the next. Start the holidays buzzing with several bottles: You'll want some for yourself, and it makes a swell gift for cooks and non-cooks alike. (Instead of wine as a hostess gift, think coffee syrup—you'll be invited back for sure.) Thick and sweet (but not overly), it's the essence of handcrafted, concentrated coffee in a jar. Lovers of hard coffee candies will thrill at this pourable version, and eagerly drizzle it over ice cream, sponge cake, and into all manner of cold and hot drinks (coffee cocktail, anyone?). It comes in both caffeinated and decaf versions.

morningglorysyrup.com

Torino Designer Pasta

Plain pasta gets a rainbow makeover with this festive line from Italy. Shapes include the jagged Mother In Law's Tongue, bowtie-like Farfalla, and sheets of Lasagna that look fancier than most stationary. The striped hats, corkscrews, seashells, and calamari-shapes are pretty enough to display in a glass jar or bowl. Not only do they look good enough to eat, they taste great, too. Sauce them with garlic and oil, or a light marinara sauce, to let their true colors shine through. pasta.com

Olivado Avocado Oil

Just a few drops of this award-winning, health-packed oil delights the senses. The rich, dark green hue lends itself well to artistic dotting and drizzling, and the flavor is as concentrated as the color. Use it as a finishing sauce, dipping oil, or as part of a dressing. (I poured avocado oil, fresh lime juice and honey over sliced cucumbers and cilantro last night—perfect!) It comes in regular and also in rosemary-, basil-, chili- and lemon-infused varieties. You'll find plenty of ways to enjoy them all: Drizzle a little on seafood or a warm tomato soup, for instance. olivado.com

Black and Green's Hot Chocolate and Cocoa Powders

Regular readers will know by now that I'm nuts for Black and Green's Organic Chocolates. With cold weather (and Halloween) approaching, their luscious cocoa mixes will warm the tummy and the soul. Try the Dark and Maya Gold Hot Chocolate varieties (the latter is laced with oranges and spices); just add hot milk, then swoon. Stuff a baker's stocking this year with their ultra-rich Cocoa Powder, and just hope you get to eat the results. Don't skip their company's dark chocolate bars, especially the one with bits of crystallized ginger; I've yet to find chocolate of better quality (and I like that their products are rainforest grown, fair trade, and completely eco-friendly).

greenandblacks.com

Napkins with a Twist

Set the holiday table with the same old napkins, or brand new ones, but not in the same old way. This book's colorful photos and clear instructions detail festive folds, ties, and techniques. Shape them into clown hats, flowers, sailboats, and even tie them neatly around small gift boxes. Got kids, houseguests, or a mate available to help? Give them the book and a pile of napkins and voila! Constructive entertainment, while you tend to more pressing matters in the kitchen. But those with a strong Martha Stewart gene may have a hard time sharing this book with others—after all, why take away your fun? To be the host with the most, or if you dare to add flair, seek out this book (from Artisan) for your permanent collection. [Buy the Book!](#)

Don't wait until the season starts to polish up your cooking skills. Now's the time to experiment and refine, before the holiday stress kicks in. I'll have more holiday recipes and gift ideas in a few weeks, but it's not too early to start ordering online and giving Santa a head start. After all, when was the last time you said, "I can't believe the holidays are already here!"?

P.S.—Go Shopping!

We've handpicked a few holiday helpers as your gourmet resources: Appetizers to Go sells fresh-tasting, bake 'n' serve treats. Serve them as nibbles or skip the main course and host an entire appetizer party of luscious little bites. Stonewall Kitchens lets you pour it on with style—salad dressings, jams, sauces, and syrups (and even wreaths). What to serve with them? Pfaelzer Brothers premium streaks, lamb, shrimp and turkey come both ready to cook and pre-cooked. Wow your guests with turducken, spiral-sliced hams, ostrich, game, lobster, and complete dinners with all the trimmings. For more entertaining and gift options, visit our [Shopping](#) page.

Tips and Techniques

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