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## Instant Entertaining

How did December get here so quickly? With Christmas and New Year's right around the corner, it seems like the list of shopping, cooking, and parties is never-ending. Even though you make lists, plan out every detail, and think you are prepared for everything, it never fails that you have unexpected guests drop by or get in a time-crunch trying to prepare holiday meals.

This week I want to share with you a few ideas to be ready for whatever the holiday season brings your way. Here are a few items to keep on hand for those unexpected guests:

- \* Have a stock of extra beverages, such as flavored coffees, hot chocolate, and soft drinks. Add a dollop of whipped cream and chocolate shavings on top of your hot beverages for a festive touch.
- \* Keep ready to eat vegetables, such as carrots, celery sticks, and broccoli florets in the refrigerator. Pair it with a bottle of Ranch salad dressing or vegetable dip and you have an instant appetizer.
- \* Cream cheese topped with salsa or preserves make a great spread served with crackers.
- \* Bake muffins and cookies ahead of time and freeze them. Pop them into the microwave to reheat them. They are best if not stored in the freezer for more than one month.
- \* Freeze a homemade or store-bought cheesecake. Make sure it is wrapped in heavy-duty plastic wrap or airtight container. Once it is thawed, top it with fresh fruit, chocolate shavings, or candied nuts.
- \* Keep a few sugar-free treats available for those who are diabetic.

Instead of including a recipe this week, I wanted to give you a new twist on an old familiar recipe. Make your favorite Red Velvet Cake batter and bake it in greased muffin pans to make individual cupcakes (do not use paper liners). Frost each individual cupcake with cream cheese frosting and then sprinkle the top with shredded coconut. Then serve them on a festive pedestal cake plate. It will make a beautiful, edible centerpiece for your table!

If you have any questions about these topics, please give me a call at the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office at 903/473-5000, ext. 157.

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