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Plan Ahead Preparations for the Holidays

It is November and officially time to get into “full-blown” holiday preparations! The key to an enjoyable, stress-free holiday season is being prepared ahead of time for all aspects of the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Hopefully, the tips in this article will get you thinking about how to spend more time with your family and friends and less time working.

First, plan your menus for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. Then make a list of all the ingredients you need and post it on the refrigerator. Check your weekly grocery advertisements and pick up your ingredients as they go on sale. Hopefully, by the time the holiday rolls around you have already purchased most of your items and saved money in the process! Go ahead and prepare the dishes that can be frozen, that will save you time later. Cookies, unfrosted cakes, and casseroles freeze very well. Sometimes fresh cranberries are hard to find, so pick them up early, they also freeze well.

Next, do a pantry check and make sure you have all the staples you need on hand. A well-stocked cupboard should include assorted coffees, teas, soft drinks, sweetened condensed milk, white, brown, and powdered sugars, baking soda, baking powder, flour, vanilla extract, flaked coconut, ground cinnamon, allspice, ginger, cloves, assorted nuts, semisweet chocolate morsels, butter, whipping cream, cranberries, frozen pie shells, eggnog, canned pumpkin, frozen/refrigerated bread dough, and any other items that your special recipes require.

While you are taking care of the cooking essentials, also pick up greeting cards, stamps, wrapping paper, tissue paper, extra lights for the tree, bows, ribbons, gift bags, candles, tape, and gift tags. Also, look for non-seasonal, inexpensive items to have on hand when you need an unexpected, last minute gift. If you don't use them you will have them for gifts throughout the year.

These are just a few ways you can save yourself lots of time, expense, and stress during the holiday season. If you need additional information on this or other topics, please feel free to contact the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office at 903/473-5000, ext. 157.

Try this recipe for a twist on the traditional cheesecake!

Pecan Cheesecake Pie

1 – 15 oz. refrigerated pie crusts (the ones that you roll out)
1 – 8 oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened
4 – eggs
¾ cup sugar, divided
2 tsps. vanilla extract, divided
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup finely chopped pecans

1 cup light corn syrup
2 – tablespoons butter, melted

Unfold the pie crusts and place them on top of one another. Gently press them together and fit them into a 9 inch pie plate, crimp the edges, and bake according to package directions. Let cool.

Beat the cream cheese, 1 egg, ½ cup sugar, 1 teaspoon of vanilla, and salt with an electric mixer until smooth. Pour into the pie crust and sprinkle with pecans.

Stir together the corn syrup, butter, 3 eggs, ¼ cup sugar, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and pour over the pecans. Bake at 350 degrees for 50 to 55 minutes or until set. Cool before cutting.

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