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**Christmas Dinner Made More Festive**

**By Susan Dunn**

**Christmas Dinner Made More Festive by Susan Dunn, MA, Personal Life Coach**

"But Susan," you say, "Why would I be worried about making Christmas dinner more 'festive'? It's a family tradition my kids are sick on Christmas, my in-laws are staying with us for a week, I have to work Christmas Eve, and I've promised the maid the week off, ha ha. What I'm worried about is getting it to the table at all."

Oh, for many reasons, I reply. Because of the memories, because it's soothing and fun, if you work it right (read on), because it looks so nice and is so appreciated it can make up for other things you could let slip. There are many reasons.

So hang on, here we go. All these tips are sort of like "sleight of hand." They're things you can do while you have to be in the kitchen anyway type of things. They're relaxing even. Trust me!

And the "oohs" and "aahs" will be oh-so-energizing. They're affordable, too. This Christmas-tree shaped butter ( <http://www.webstrategies.cc/breakfast.jpg> ) cost a couple of bucks at the grocery and who's going to notice what's sitting next to it?

Here are some ways to dress up the traditional Christmas table.

**PIE CRUST**

Make your usual pie crust, 2-crust version. OK, who am I kidding. Buy the frozen ones. Thaw them and dump them out of their original tins, combine several (they're too skimpy I think), roll them out, begin all over again.

Line the pie tin, put in the filling, then roll out the second crust and cut shapes using cookie cutters, or cut out shapes free-form with a sharp knife. First one doesn't work? Pie dough is very forgiving. Roll it up and start again. Your "second chances" are infinite. You could also use something from a child's coloring book for a pattern.

## Christmas Dinner Made More Festive

If you don't have cookie cutters, cut out 3 rounds for holly berries using a bottle cap, and cut out some spiky holly leaves with a knife.

If you have the time and the inclination, when the pie is baked and cooled, then use frosting to decorate your crust. Of course this is frosting from a can or tube you bought. On another planet, in another lifetime, you'll make the frosting. Buy the plastic tips and plastic pastry bag so you can just throw them away.

Repeat after me — if it's pretty, it, like the well-chosen dress, can hide a multitude of sins. Get some candies 'n' stuff, like licorice for Santa's belt. I'd come home from working the Christmas Eve church service, you know a bit weary, and my sons would come in the kitchen to watch and "help out." It was cozy. Memories.

Any kind of liquor goes well with any kind of fruit pie, so splash a little um in the pumpkin pie, or a little cognac in the cherry.

Or do the usual-only-very-different. Make a frozen pumpkin chiffon pie. The virtue of that is — you guessed it —it can be done so far ahead of time. Then at serving time, crumble candy canes and sprinkle them on top. Don't know who helps you at your house, but I had sons, and they loved to put the canes in waxed paper and then whack it with the rolling pin. Festive Family Fun at the Dunn household. Me 'n' the boys.

I hope by now you're beginning to see that we are playing and enjoying ourselves as much as anything.

### CANDY CANES

Candy canes go so well with chocolate. You can make a chocolate dessert, like that instant pudding concoction with dream whip that kids like so much. Email me if you don't have that recipe. Then sprinkle candy canes atop.

### SWEET POTATOES

Mash canned yams and place in Pyrex. Then whip up meringue nice and stiff, with lots of sugar. Beating things is therapeutic as well, and the kids are fascinated by the process. ("Is it ready yet?")

Circle the bowl with the meringue, and then make dollops on top with peaks. Then you can (1) sprinkle it with colored sprinkles, or (2) in the center put 3 maraschino cherries and some pineapple leaves, like holly. Or put marshmallows around the rim and decoration in the middle. In your next reincarnation you will make Martha's homemade marshmallows and put them on top.

### BOULE DE NIEGE

Simple, cheap, elegant-looking, quick, do-ahead treat. Yay!

## Christmas Dinner Made More Festive

Use seasonal ice cream — peppermint, coconut, eggnog, pistachio. Let the ice cream soften and scoop it into a round Pyrex® that you've greased lightly with Pam®. Put it in the freezer until well frozen again. (Don't you love the things you can do in stages? Maybe at this point you'll need to run the dog to the vet because it ate 2' of tinsel, like I did one Christmas, oh yes.)

Later ... take it out, soak the dish briefly in larger bowl of warm water till you see the ice cream melting on the edges, turn it over on a pretty serving platter, and out it comes in a dome. Tear strips of waxed paper and place them all around the plate, under the ice cream. Now whip cream till stiff, put it in pastry bag, use a tip such as Wilton 2D and pipe, pipe, pipe, little shaped blobs, each one next to the other till the mound is completely covered. Gently remove the waxed paper, wipe the serving platter with a wet rag, and place the ball back in the freezer till frozen. Once it's frozen, cover it with a bowl or wrap until ready to serve. "Boule de neige" is French for "snowball"!

If you want to use Redi-whip, you must do it right before serving because it doesn't last. How do I know? Well, it was a very sad "learning experience" involving a Christmas luncheon for my bridge group and I'll leave it at that.

Want it even easier? There's an ice cream baking kit available here:  
<http://www.thecompletegourmet.com/merchandise.htm> .

### BEEF WELLINGTON

Make a mixture of Dijon mustard red, green and white peppercorns (available here:  
<http://www.famousfoods.com/71996.html> ). Coat the beef with this before you encrust it. Put cut-out shapes on the crust as well.

### MASHED POTATOES

Mash them and put them in a serving bowl. Then sprinkle just enough cayenne and parsley flakes for color. Wait a minute, I forgot we've let the maid have the week off. Use mashed potato mix, plump it into those festive individual ramekins (Williams-Sonoma has some pretty bright red ones) and bingo! Oh wait, place a star-shaped pat of butter atop each one.

### SIMPLE CAKE

Bake your cake in a springform pan with a Christmas base - Christmas tree and holly patterns are available here:  
<http://www.happycookers.com/wc.dll/products/divulge/1-16451.html>

### PARFAITS

Super easy, cheap, eye-candy, and doaheadable.

X-rated Version: Fill fluted glasses with any ice cream. Drizzle green crème de menthe and chocolate over it. Add maraschino cherry - red or green. If you use red cherry, add green mint leaf.

GP-rated Version: Drizzle with hot fudge sauce and sprinkle crumbled candy cane on top.

## TRIFLE

Trifle is the original LOW MAINTENANCE dessert. There are as many recipes as there are people making it. We love it because it's like that old "dump cake" recipe, remember? It just doesn't matter that much. Soak that cake in amaretto or schnapps, add what you like, layer it ... it's got cheap ingredients, it's retro-new, and the presentation! It's so NOT FRAGILE. Put it in a huge brandy snifter type container. Or put it in a Christmas tureen and smooth a layer of whipped cream on the top (use warm wet flat spatula). This makes it look like a lid and people will keep trying to pick it up and there will be finger prints all over it (and lots of laughs).

## VEGIES

Put chopped red peppers in among the peas, Brussels sprouts or broccoli; stuff tomatoes with hamburger, cheese, green peppers, parsley. Cut stars out of processed cheese slices and place atop casserole.

## MORE GOOD NEWS

If you did even 3 of these things, it would be "gilding the lily." Choose one or two. That's all!

I'm sure you can tell my philosophy has always been 'if I'm going to have to do it, I'm doing to make a party out of it.'

Enjoy!

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## **Ideas For Your Interior Christmas Decorating**

**By Adam Peters**

There are many different ideas for interior Christmas decorating. Interior Christmas decorating is an important part of most people's holiday festivities. For many people, the interior decorations are what defines the season of Christmas. Your home will feel warm with the proper interior Christmas decorating scheme. There are a variety of decorating ideas on the market today, but the best way to complete your interior Christmas decorating is to make the items yourself or with your family. The holiday season is about spending time together, and making things to warm your home will only help signify that to your family. There are several great ideas for your interior Christmas decorating needs.

Make yours the perfect holiday home with interior Christmas decorating

## Christmas Dinner Made More Festive

· First, create a diorama of bears or dolls dressed in festive seasonal clothes. You could put a small tree with little presents in your display. This is a great way to get your kids involved in the decorating process. Just be sure you don't use a favorite security object, as it might prove difficult to disassemble the diorama throughout the course of the season.

· Second, meet your interior Christmas decorating needs by creating bows from Christmas print ribbon and putting them in various places around your house including your curtains. · Third, hang stockings throughout your house, even if you know they aren't your stuffing stockings. It offers a festive feel to your home.

Next, use fabric paint and a traditional white table cloth to make a holiday patterned table cloth. This is another great activity to do with your little ones. Just be sure to express to them that they are not allowed to paint on the tablecloth on a year round basis. Next, dress your bathroom for the holidays by attaching ornaments and other decorations(of the unbreakable type) to a clear shower curtain with a hot glue gun. Another decorating idea is to get your houseplants into the swing of the season by hanging ornaments on them after you decorate your tree. For a quick ornament idea, try hanging a cookie cutter with a bit of Christmas ribbon. To help with your decoration as well as your Christmas trivia knowledge, place a basket of seasonal books on your coffee table or end table. It will look festive, and it may just help you win a quick family game sometime.

Interior Christmas decorating does not have to be difficult or expensive with ideas like these.

Adam Peters writes regularly for

. Peters contributes adding

reviews very often on decorating and design topics. You can also reach interesting articles on easter and christmas decorations at his site (

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