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**Holiday Baking – The Easy Way**

**By Arleen M. Kaptur**

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Baking to many of us is fun and form of therapy. Many frustrations have been worked out kneading and pushing that dough around. But to others, it may be difficult, or they are not sure of themselves around cookies, cakes, breads, rolls, etc.

One quick-word of advice – just dive right in – its fun, and the more you bake, the better you become at it. With Christmas and get-togethers coming in bloom, sharing baking can be a fun event. Early in the Season, family, friends, neighbors, and offices and factories everywhere should have a Cookie Exchange – its not a lot of work – in fact, you only have to bake one kind of cookie – if there are ten guests, you will have an assortment of ten delicious treats to use for the Holidays. The more guests, the more of an assortment.

There will be a lot of laughter, and no one will be counting calories.

Ask each guest to bake one type of Christmas cookie – a family favorite, or one that they found while surfing the net, or reading their favorite magazine. They can be drop cookies, filled cookies, or special ethnic treasures.

Your invitations should be small index-size booklets, with several blank cards inside, tied together with a festive ribbon. This way if your guests write out their recipes on – say six to eight cards, depending on how many guests you are inviting, everyone can get a recipe and keep it in their booklet not only to check back when they want to bake, but as a wonderful memento of a fun time.

If a lot of people are included in your cookie exchange, then printing the recipes for everyone to cut and paste in their booklets might just be a lot easier.

The decor for your party should be Holiday oriented, of course, but with a slant toward baking. Garlands of scented gingerpeople could hang from arches and doorways and a centerpiece could include miniature baking utensils found in toy stores. Tiny cake boxes, spoons, measuring cups, etc. add a whimsical touch.

To serve your cookies, divide a large table into sections with ribbons that have wooden spoons attached to the ends so that the ribbons are weighted down and don't move as people encircle the

table.

You could ask your guests to pre-package their cookies in individual wrap so that everyone can take just one – or in small packages as they see fit – just make sure that there are enough of each type of cookie so everyone gets to take some home.

Keep your menu simple and informal. You could provide decorative canisters or paper bags that you have enhanced with Holiday cheer for taking home all those goodies.

A cookie exchange is a wonderful way to get your Holiday baking started – and you get a wonderful array of cookies to serve to your family and friends or just to munch on as you sit by a fire or watch the snow fall and the cold winds blow.

ENJOY!

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Arleen has written numerous books and articles – subscribe to her Holiday newsletters at:  
<http://www.Arleens-RusticLiving.com> <http://www.arleensite.com>

### **Baking Tips - Easy As Pie**

**By News Canada**

(NC)—The old saying goes "easy as pie", so why are so many of us reluctant to try baking our own? Most of us just don't have the time to spend hours shopping for ingredients, making the pastry from scratch and preparing the filling, especially during the holidays.

Some recognized brand names are making it easy. You can now get, for example, two lines of frozen, unbaked pies - Oven Fresh and the Signature Selections by Sara Lee - that are ready to pop into the oven. Here are some additional hints from Sara Lee for baking all kinds of pies:

- If you make pumpkin pie, watch it carefully. When properly baked, the outer edges of the filling will be firmly set and slightly brown. The four- to six-inch centre circle should have a soft set and shake like gelatine.
- Avoid baking your holiday pie with your turkey or ham. Pies require a higher temperature, so try to bake your pies the night before.
- For a golden brown crust, brush the top of the pie with milk or egg before you put it in the oven. (To avoid burning, be careful not to brush the crimped edge of the crust.)
- To keep edges from burning, place aluminum foil strips around the edges of the pie prior to baking. Remove foil for the last 15 minutes.
- For a high-gloss finish, brush apricot preserves on top of your pie just after baking.

## Holiday Baking – The Easy Way

· Always preheat the oven for about 15 minutes at 350° to 375° F, depending on your oven.

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