

Delicious and Healthy Holiday Gift Ideas

December is here, Santa has arrived in the shopping malls and the pressure is on to finish buying holiday gifts. Why not ease the pressure and beat the crowds by giving homemade food as gifts? Holiday baking is a popular gift, but let's face it, some popular baked goods can be high in fat and sugar. In light of the rising obesity rates in Canada, maybe it is time to consider giving healthier goodies to the people we care about.

Instead of giving truffles and Nanaimo bars, why not bake a loaf of homemade whole wheat bread wrapped with a festive ribbon? Try drying fruit, such as apples and apricots and layering the pieces in a decorative bag for festive flare. Fruit baskets and homemade salsas also make great gifts.

Here are two of my favorite healthy gift recipes that are guaranteed to be a hit!

Mixed Bean Soup in a Jar

Layer ingredients in the order listed in a 1 quart, wide mouth canning jar:

- ¾ cup dried kidney beans
- ¾ cup dried great northern beans
- ¾ cup split peas
- ¾ cup red lentils
- ¾ cup dried black beans

In a small plastic bag add these seasonings:

- 2 tablespoons dried minced onion
- 2 tablespoons beef bouillon granules
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes
- 2 teaspoons dried basil
- 1.5 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

Put the plastic bag in the jar on top of the beans and put a lid on the jar. A piece of fabric over the lid with ribbon tied around it makes the gift complete. Attach a gift card with the following instructions:

- Remove the seasoning package from the jar and rinse the beans.
- Place the beans in a microwavable container, add water until it is 1-2 inches over top of the beans, and cover the container loosely with plastic
- Microwave on high for 15 minutes.
- Drain and rinse beans well, and add them to a large soup pot
- Add 8 cups of water, cover the pot and bring it to a boil
- Lower heat and simmer for 1 hour until beans are tender, stirring occasionally
- Add 1-28 ounce can of crushed tomatoes and the seasoning package and simmer for ½ hour - serve and enjoy!

Delicious and Healthy Holiday Gift Ideas (second recipe)

Heart Smart Muffins in a Jar

Layer ingredients in the order listed in a 1 quart, wide mouth canning jar:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup of whole-wheat flour
- 1.5 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2/3 cup brown sugar
- ½ cup raisins, currents or walnuts

Put a lid on the jar with a piece of fabric over the lid. Tie a ribbon around it to make the gift complete. Attach a gift card with the following instructions:

- Preheat the oven to 350°F
- Add 1 jar Heart Smart Muffin mix to a large bowl
- Add ¾ cup buttermilk, ¾ cup applesauce, 1 egg slightly beaten, 1.5 tablespoons vegetable oil and 1 teaspoon vanilla to the muffin mix. Add ½ cup fresh or frozen blueberries or raspberries if desired
- Stir until just blended, making sure not to over mix
- Spoon mixture into greased muffin tins until 2/3 to ¾ full
- Bake 18-20 minutes or until golden brown
- Cool for 10 minutes before removing from tin

Have a happy and healthy holiday season!

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