

## Some Simple Food Ideas for a Jolly Holiday Season

It's difficult to believe that the holidays are upon us once again, but it's time to start the preparations. You can make this year's festive season stress-free and memorable with some simple food ideas.

The holiday season should be about having a good time with your friends and family and not about feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Take some pressure off your gatherings by preparing dishes ahead of time that only need to be reheated before serving.

Do you have friends and family who also like to cook? Ask them to bring an appetizer or side dish to give you more time to prepare an impressive main course.

One idea is to cook a 10-to-12-pound baked ham in the oven, baste it with a mixture of ½ cup brown sugar and six tablespoons Dijon mustard. Brush the mixture on about every 20 minutes.

For an irresistible dessert, boil two cans of condensed milk in a pot of water for two to three hours. Carefully remove and cool. When you open the cans you'll have homemade milk caramel that can be spread between layers of chocolate cake or used as a dip for fruit or brownies.

Your home will smell like the holidays with this mixture simmering during your gatherings: cinnamon sticks, bay leaves, cloves, lemon slices, orange slices and always enough water to cover.

Take a deep breath and allow all your senses to enjoy this holiday season.

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In a competitive real estate market, it pays to do as much as you can to help your house sell.

Discover how to make your home attractive to buyers by requesting my free guide, **"50 Essential Tips to Prepare Your Home for a Speedy, Top-Price Sale."**

Call me at **(604) 808-9661** or email [robinmcinnis@shaw.ca](mailto:robinmcinnis@shaw.ca) and I'll send it right out to you.

## Want Your New Year's Resolutions To Stick? Get A Head Start

Most years, I come up with my New Year's resolutions on...well...New Year's Eve. This year, I'm getting a head start. No more last minute ideas which are doomed to fail.

Generally, my New Year's resolutions run the gamut of addressing various aspects of my life: family, health, career, self-improvement, community and service. Some have been easy to follow through on and others, not as much - seriously, what was I thinking when I vowed to learn a martial art and a new language in the same year??

Starting the planning process in advance however, is a good idea and a great way to ensure that your resolution is a solid one. One with purpose. One with realistic goals attached. And most importantly, one that has a 'roadmap' to make it happen.

We've all read that it takes twenty-one days to break or form a new habit so by implementing your new resolution three weeks before the end of the year, you'll have a far greater chance for success.

Great, you say, but how do I do that? What, with all the temptations around this time of year, it's almost a guarantee that you'll derail your own efforts before even starting. Simple! Start small. Vow to do one thing in the next three weeks that you'll carry into the new year. Even if it's as easy as cutting back to half a teaspoon of sugar in your coffee or eating as soon as you wake up, start something today.

Once you've succeeded at something small, move onto the next thing and keep going!

# Cool iPhone Apps for Kids

Everyone knows about Angry Birds and Fruit Ninja but did you know about these other fun apps that will keep kids entertained while you pick up groceries?

**Cut The Rope** – a package has arrived and the little monster inside has only one request – CANDY! Combining logic and physics, it will help your kids learn to plan in advance.

**Cover Orange** – another logic game that your kids will love. Figure out how to cover the oranges so they don't get hit by the hail cloud overhead.

**Memory Planet** – an old school memory game, where players flip cards to match items. Play with someone or against the computer. Great for building memory skills!

**Chicken & Egg** – players must match and “hatch” eggs by getting them through mazes, ramps, spikes and other hazards. Be careful though, you get a limited amount of shots, so plan carefully!

**Crack the Code** – iPhone selects a sequence of colours and players must guess the sequence in a limited amount of turns. If you liked MasterMind, you'll love this game!

**TanZen** – choose a puzzle to solve and try to fit all seven game pieces within the shaded puzzle area without overlapping. Mindbending but fun!

**Math Magic** – your child can get a big jump on learning math while loving every second of it. Teaches in a way that is encouraging and tons of fun!

## Quick Quiz

Each month I'll give you a new question.

Email [robinmcinnis@shaw.ca](mailto:robinmcinnis@shaw.ca) or call (604) 808-9661 for the answer.

Where did Christmas originate?

## Why Not Pass Me to a Friend?

If you've enjoyed this newsletter and found its information useful, please pass it to a neighbour, friend or co-worker.

And if you have any comments about it, don't forget to give me a call or send me an email!

## Wondering How Much Your Home Is Worth?

How has the price of your home changed in today's market? How much are other homes in your neighbourhood selling for?

If you're wondering what's happening to prices in your area, or you're thinking about selling your house, I'll be able to help.

Just give me a call for a no-fuss, professional evaluation.

I'll give you the most current market data about your home and its value.

Maybe I'll also give you the "inside scoop" on what's happening in the housing market where you live!

Call me today at (604) 808-9661 to arrange an appointment.

## Worth Reading

### 72 Years Together: The Couple Who Died Holding Hands

*From The Week*

The heart-warming story of a couple who believed in marriage, pledging they would be there for each other until the end. Then, 72 years after they married, a car accident put them in intensive care. Here's what happened.

**More:** <http://tinyurl.com/3h5ej4h>

### Q&A: What We Learned Skipping Supermarkets and Restaurants for a Year

*By Brad Tuttle, Time Moneyland*

It was quite the learning experience for Rachel Hoff and Tom Ferguson, who lived for 12 months on non-processed food, eschewing the pleasures of supermarkets and restaurants. The results: Rachel now hates cooking and the weather played havoc with dessert making.

**More:** <http://tinyurl.com/3jkqjoc>

### The Perils of a Wandering Mind

*By Maria Konnikova, Big Think*

Perils indeed. Harvard University psychiatrists have found that wandering minds correlate to unhappiness, even when they wander into pleasanter pastures. Or is it guilt at not focusing on the issues at hand?

**More:** <http://tinyurl.com/4yfhfve>

### The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

*By Mark Haddon*

A laugh-out-loud-funny novel of a 15 year old boy with Asperger's who overnight becomes a “detective” when the neighbour's dog ends up dead. His search for its killer, leads him to uncover a secret his father has been keeping from him. Very refreshing perspective!

# Happy Holidays? Sure, Why Not!

The holidays have a way of bringing out the crazy in all of us, so here are a few tips to help get you through them.

**You can't please everyone so please yourself.** Decide early on where you are going and plan what you will wear or bring. Make a short gift list of people who are very special to you. Or decide if you want not to give gifts at all. Make it about what you can realistically do instead of what everyone wants/expects you to do. Do what takes care of you and let the rest of them eat (fruit)cake.

**Make a budget. And stick to it.** Be realistic. No point setting a high budget that is out of line for your fiscal resources. If you really want to have fun at Christmas, being creative and finding a really meaningful but

inexpensive gift can mean the difference between a near-panic attack every time you put something in your shopping cart and anxiety that lasts all year when the bills just keep coming. Or decide if you want not to give gifts at all.

**Be physically active.** Do something. Anything. Walking requires comfortable shoes and clothes, that's it. You can do situps and pushups during the commercials of your favorite TV show. Take dance lessons you can show off at your holiday parties. To keep the calm on track take some yoga or Pilates so you'll look great in your outfit and be the model of calm.

**Sleep.** Much of the challenge of the holidays is the onslaught of social activities that leave us sleep-deprived.

Sleep deprivation increases the likelihood of irritability, getting physically ill (because of suppressed immunity) and anxiety. Keep to a bedtime routine and set a time to leave the party and stick to it.

**Start early.** Planning. Buying. Planning outfits etc. Buy some index cards and write down your plans so you have something to refer to when things get a little crazy. (And they will). This way as the anxiety ramps up, you can sit in calm as the chaos swirls around you. If possible, start before December. Once December arrives you're not early anymore.

**Enjoy your food and drink!** But take it easy. Our bodies let us know when we're having too much so slow it down and be aware of how much food and drink you're taking in

**Most of all, try to have fun. It's Christmas!!**

## Perfect Presents for Difficult People

It happens every holiday season. You have to buy a present for someone who's fussy or has everything.

It's never easy, but it can be manageable, if you follow some simple steps. For example:

1. Psych out your friend. Is the friend practical or flighty? Is eclectic your friend's middle name? Buy for the personality.
2. Figure out in advance what you are prepared to spend. This focuses you and helps prevent last-minute panic buying, which can be expensive.
3. What's changed? Has your friend moved or signed up for an exciting trip? A travel diary or a housecleaning service gift certificate might be appreciated.
4. Give the gift of you. Offer to sew curtains or cook a special dinner. A photo album with pictures of the two of you or a special event or trip is thoughtful.
5. Don't overlook donations. Many people with everything would appreciate a donation in their name to a favourite charity.

## Some Tech Tips for the Average Joe - or Jane

Following are some tech tips for the holiday season:

If you're purchasing gifts from Amazon.com, use their "gift organizer" tool to keep track of what you have bought and for whom.

Planning on buying a video gaming system for someone? Buy soon. These items tend to sell out first.

Make personalized Christmas cards at Costco. Visit Costco's online photo center to design your cards and place your order.

[www.costco.ca](http://www.costco.ca)

Use personal finance tracker Mint.com to set, follow and track shopping budgets. The service connects to your bank and credit card accounts.

## Ask the Agent: This Month's Question

**How do I find out how much my home is worth?**

The value of your home is the **single most important factor** in pricing to sell. If you get it wrong the first time, buyers may be wary even if you later reduce the price.

Your real estate agent will look at homes listed in the past six months in your area that have similar square footage and are of similar age and condition to yours.

The agent will then add in factors that may have a unique appeal to target buyers, such as whether your home is located next door to a school or if there's a view to die for from the master bedroom. Much depends on the local real estate market.

In a sellers' market, for example, your agent may suggest adding 10% to the average price of similar homes sold recently.

In a buyers' market, you may want to list very close to the comparables and be prepared to settle for somewhat less.

# NEWS YOU CAN USE

Robin McInnis  
(604) 808-9661

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**Sudoku instructions:** Complete the 9x9 grid so that each row, each column and each of the nine 3x3 boxes contains the digits 1 through 9. Contact me for the solution!

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## Snowflake Cookies

3/4 cup unsalted butter  
3/4 cup packed brown sugar  
1/4 cup granulated sugar  
1 egg  
1-1/2 tsp finely grated orange zest  
1-1/2 tsp finely grated lemon zest  
1/2 tsp vanilla  
2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1/2 tsp baking powder  
1/2 tsp salt

In large bowl, beat butter with brown and granulated sugars until fluffy. Beat in egg, orange, lemon zest, and vanilla.

Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt stir into butter mixture.

Divide in half; wrap each and refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour.

On lightly floured surface or between waxed paper, roll out dough to scant 1/4-inch thickness. Using floured 3-inch snowflake cutter, cut out shapes, rerolling and cutting scraps. Arrange, 1 inch apart, on parchment paper-lined baking sheets; refrigerate until firm, about 15 minutes.

Bake in top and bottom thirds of 350°F (180°C) oven, switching and rotating pans halfway through, until golden on bottoms and edges, about 12 minutes. Transfer to racks; let cool completely.

News You Can Use is brought to you free by:

**Robin McInnis**  
**Sutton Group – West Coast Realty**

#200-5511 West Boulevard  
Vancouver, BC V6M 3W6  
(604) 808-9661

[robinmcinnis@shaw.ca](mailto:robinmcinnis@shaw.ca)  
[www.robinmcinnis.com](http://www.robinmcinnis.com)



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