

HOLIDAY TREATS FOR teacher

By Danielle Neal

HOMEMADE COCOA MIX

Place a cellophane bag inside a holiday mug and fill with your homemade hot chocolate mix. Print instructions on a brightly colored card. Tie the bag with festive ribbon, attaching the gift card and a cinnamon stick.



As teachers everywhere deck the school halls for this year's holiday celebrations, don't let your child forget to acknowledge his favorite teacher with a thoughtful and scrumptious treat. How do you say thank you to the person who's given your child the gift of reading, writing and arithmetic? A tasty homemade treat – using recipes from the Food Network Kitchens – is an excellent way to wish your child's teacher a holly jolly holiday season.

With a little time, creativity and a quick trip to the grocery store, you can create clever and festive gifts that teachers will enjoy. Best of all, they're as easy as A-B-C, so kids can lend a hand. Here are five simple ways to fill your favorite teacher's holiday school days with cheer and make your child the apple of her teacher's eye.

HOLIDAY COCOA MIX

From Food Network Kitchens

1-pound box confectioners' sugar, plus ½ cup
1 (8.8-ounce) box Dutch process cocoa powder
2 tablespoons ground ginger
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves

Whisk together the confectioners' sugar, cocoa, ginger, cinnamon and cloves.

Stir ¼ cup of cocoa mix into 1 cup (8 ounces) hot milk until combined. Serve.

Package 1 cup of cocoa into small tins or food-safe gift bags for an easy holiday gift.

Make sure to include mixing instructions. Each gift will make 4 cups of delicious homemade cocoa.

Yield: about 8 cups

SWEET AND SPICY MIXED NUTS

From Food Network Kitchens Cookbook, Meredith, 2003

1 large egg white
3 tablespoons dark brown sugar
1 tablespoon kosher salt
2 teaspoons dried oregano
¾ teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground cumin
¼ heaping teaspoon cayenne pepper
Pinch ground cloves
2 cups unsalted mixed nuts

Preheat the oven to 250° F. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil or parchment paper.

Whisk the egg white, brown sugar, salt, oregano, coriander, cumin, cayenne and cloves in a medium bowl until thoroughly blended and slightly foamy. Add nuts, and toss to coat evenly. Spread nuts on the prepared baking sheet and roast, stirring every 15 minutes, for 45 minutes. Nuts will be fragrant and slightly darker but still a bit moist (they crisp as they cool). Cool completely on pan, and serve at room temperature. Store in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

Yield: 2 cups

SWEET & SPICY BAG OF NUTS

Scoop your cooled mixed nuts into a cellophane bag that fits inside a paper lunch bag. Fold the top to close it. Use a hole punch to make two holes side by side in the center of the fold. Insert decorative ribbon through the holes and make a bow, attaching a gift tag to the ribbon.



FRUIT OATMEAL CRUMBLE

From Food Network Kitchens Hot to Boil Water, Meredith, 2006

Crumble Topping:

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup rolled oats
- ¾ cup packed light brown sugar
- Pinch fine salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ¾ cup chopped nuts, such as walnuts, almonds or pecans

FRUIT:

- 2 pounds baking pears or apples or stone fruit such as peaches, apricots or plums
- 2 to 4 tablespoons light brown or granulated sugar, depending on the sweetness of the fruit
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Freshly grated nutmeg
- Pinch ground cinnamon
- Pinch fine salt
- Ice cream or sweetened whipped cream, for serving, optional

Preheat oven to 375 F.

For the crumble: Whisk the flour, oats, brown sugar and salt in a medium bowl. Melt the butter, covered in the microwave or in a small saucepan. Add the melted butter to the flour and oats, and toss together with a fork until evenly moistened; stir in the nuts. Squeeze handfuls of the crumble mixture together, and drop them onto a cookie sheet, to get a good proportion of large and small crumbs. Freeze for 10 minutes while you prepare the fruit.

For the fruit: Halve, core and slice the fruit, and put in a large bowl. Toss the fruit with the sugar, flour, vanilla, nutmeg, cinnamon and salt. Transfer to an 8-by-8-inch glass baking dish.

Evenly sprinkle the crumble mixture over the fruit, and pack down lightly. Bake the crumble until the topping is golden brown and the fruit is juicy and bubbly, about 40 to 45 minutes. Let sit for 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Serve warm with ice cream or whipped cream, if desired.

Upgrade: Add ¼ cup dried cranberries to sliced pears to make a holiday pear crumble.

Yield: 6 servings



FRUIT CRUMBLE KIT

Fill a small jar with the mixed ingredients for the crumble topping. Place the jar in a baking dish along with the remaining ingredients for the crumble, minus the ice cream, and include the recipe so your teacher can mix, bake and enjoy.

Mash the bananas with a fork in a medium bowl. Beat the egg in a small bowl with a fork or a whisk, then mix into the bananas. Mix in the yogurt, vanilla and butter. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients until just combined. Stir in the chocolate chips and walnuts just as the batter comes together. Do not overmix the batter, or your bread will be dense and tough; the batter will be wet, sticky, and a little lumpy. Scoop the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean, 65 to 70 minutes. The bread should rise in the middle to a crown, feel springy when touched and pull away from sides of the pan. Cool in the pan on a rack for at least 20 minutes before running a knife along the sides, unmolding, and slicing.

Yield: 1 loaf, about 9 slices



DINNER AND A MOVIE

Fill a basket with your teacher's favorite pasta, a jar of marinara sauce, a wedge of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and a gift certificate from your local movie theater. For an extra special touch, wrap the basket in colorful shrink wrap and ask Mom or Dad to help you blow-dry the basket to "shrink" the cellophane.

CHOCOLATE CHIP BANANA BREAD

Wrap your Chocolate Chip Banana Bread in plastic wrap and place it in a new loaf pan. Decorate the pan with a ribbon or a wide strip of construction paper personalized with holiday wishes for your teacher.

Tuck a recipe card inside the loaf pan for a final touch.

CHOCOLATE CHIP BANANA BREAD

From Food Network Kitchens Hot to Boil Water, Meredith, 2006

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, plus more for the pan
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for the pan
- ½ cup sugar
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon fine salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 3 very ripe bananas
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 1/3 cup plain yogurt, whole or low-fat
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 6 ounces chocolate chips
- ¾ cup walnut pieces

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350° F.

Butter and flour a 9-by-5-by-3-inch metal loaf pan.

Melt the butter in a small saucepan over medium heat or covered in a microwave-safe bowl or measuring cup in the microwave. Cool slightly.

Whisk the flour, sugar, baking soda, salt and cinnamon together in a large bowl.

