



Holiday Tips from Martha Stewart

Holiday Preparation

Wrap presents early; add ribbons, bows, and tags later. Label gifts with sticky notes so you don't forget who gets what. Unadorned boxes are easy to store and transport. At my home, I decorate trees in white lights and giant silver ornaments. I wrap garlands around the doorway, my porch railings and the fences.

Holiday Entertaining

The first thing I do is my guest list. I have a basic list of friends, then people I've added throughout the year. I send a Save-the-Date; then send an e-mail invitation embedded in my e-mail so it opens immediately.

What can you prepare in advance? Make a checklist of ingredients you need. Shop a few days before the event to avoid a stressful rush. The day of, set the table in the morning so any unforeseen events won't slow things down. Right before guests arrive, dim lights, light candles, and pour yourself a glass of wine.

Use fresh-squeezed citrus juices and fresh purees for cocktails. Don't be afraid to mix things up on the table. Wine doesn't have to go in wine glasses. Serve it in cordial glasses or even water glasses if your meal is casual.

Mini Rum Bundt Cakes

Photo Above

The Cakes

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, room temperature; add more for pans
- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for pans
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon coarse salt
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons dark rum
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 5 large eggs

The Glaze

- 2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 tablespoon rum, plus up to 1 1/2 teaspoons more, if needed
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 1/2 teaspoons milk

#1. Make The Cakes: Preheat oven to 325°F. Generously butter 9-1-cup mini Bundt pans; dust with flour, tap out excess. Sift flour, baking powder and salt together in a medium bowl. Combine buttermilk and rum in a glass measuring cup.

#2. With electric mixer on high, beat butter, brown sugar and granulated sugar until pale and fluffy (3 min). Reduce speed to medium. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beat after each addition. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture in 2 batches, alternating with buttermilk mixture; begin/end with the flour; beat until combined.

#3. Fill each pan with 1/2 cup batter; tap pan on counter. Bake until tops spring back when lightly touched, edges begin to pull away from pan, and a cake tester comes out clean, 18 to 25 minutes. Transfer pans to a wire rack to cool 10 minutes; turn out cakes onto rack to cool completely. (Cakes can be stored at room temperature, wrapped in plastic, up to 3 days.)

#4. The glaze: Whisk confectioners' sugar, 1 tablespoon rum, and milk until smooth, add more rum for desired consistency. Set cakes on wire rack over a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle 1 1/2 tablespoons glaze on cakes.

Gingerbread Cheesecake

Photo Above

With spices and molasses in the crust and filling and gingerbread men on top, this cake is for any winter celebration. The cheesecake pictured has two types of gingerbread for color variation. You can make cookies from the dough used for the crust. Serves 10

All-purpose flour for dusting

1/2 recipe Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (recipe follows; use remaining dough to make gingerbread men or reserve for another use)

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 2 pounds (four 8-ounce bars) cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 1/4 cup unsulfured molasses
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 6 Gingerbread Men (instructions below)

#1. Preheat oven to 350°F. On a generously floured piece of parchment, roll dough to a 13-by-10-inch rectangle (1/4 inch thick). Brush off excess flour. Slide dough and parchment onto a baking sheet. Bake until firm and golden brown (14 min). Transfer sheet to a wire rack

to cool completely. Break into large pieces, pulse in a food processor until finely ground.

#2. Combine butter, 1/4 cup sugar, 2 cups cookie crumbs in a bowl. Press mixture firmly and evenly into bottom and 1/3 of the way up side of springform pan. Bake until set (10 min) then transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely.

#3. Reduce oven temperature to 325°F. Wrap exterior of a 9-inch springform pan with double layer of foil. Set water to a boil. With electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream cheese until fluffy (3 min). Beat in remaining 1 1/2 cups sugar and vanilla. Reduce speed to low. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beat well after each; scrape sides of bowl. Beat in molasses, salt, spices, and zest. Pour filling into cooled crust.

#4. Set springform pan in a large, shallow roasting pan. Carefully pour boiling water into roasting pan to reach halfway up side of springform pan. Bake cheesecake until set but still slightly wobbly in center, 60 to 65 min. Transfer springform pan to a wire rack; cool completely. Refrigerate, uncovered, at least 8 hours (preferably overnight).

#5. Before serving, run a knife around edge of cheesecake to loosen; remove sides of pan. Arrange gingerbread cookies on the cake.

Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough

Only half the cheesecake recipe is needed for the cake; use remaining dough for cookie cutouts or another use; it will freeze up to one month. For a honey gingerbread variation (pictured on the cheesecake) replace 1/2 cup of the molasses with 1/2 cup honey; substitute granulated sugar for brown sugar.

- 2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1/2 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 3/4 cup unsulfured molasses

#1. Whisk together flour, baking soda, salt, and spices in a medium bowl.

#2. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat butter and brown sugar until fluffy. Add egg, beat well. Beat in molasses.

Reduce speed to low. Slowly add flour mixture; beat until just combined. Divide dough into 2 portions; wrap each in plastic. Refrigerate until ready to use, at least 1 hour.

Gingerbread-Men Variation

Preheat oven to 350°F. On a generously floured piece of parchment, roll dough to a scant 1/4 inch thick. Freeze 15 minutes. Cut out gingerbread men with 2-inch cookie cutter. Freeze shapes on parchment-lined baking sheets 15 min. Bake 6 min. Remove sheets from oven; tap firmly on counter. Return to oven; bake until crisp, 6-8 min. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool. If desired, pipe buttons onto cookies with Royal Icing (the recipe follows).



Martha Stewart's New Book

Royal Icing

Makes about 2 1/2 cups

- 1 pound (4 cups) confectioners' sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon meringue powder
- Scant 1/2 cup water, plus more as needed

With an electric mixer on low speed, beat all ingredients until smooth, about 7 minutes. If icing is too thick, add more water, a little at a time, beating until icing holds a ribbon on the surface for a few seconds when beater is lifted; if too thin, continue mixing 2-3 minutes more. Use immediately, or refrigerate in an airtight container up to 1 week; stir well with a flexible spatula before using. •