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Around the Table for Friday
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October 3rd

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November 7th

Tapas & Finger Food

December 5th

French Bistro Cooking

January 9th

French Country Cooking

February 6th

Moroccan Feast

March 6th

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April 3rd

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Contact Susan Nye at

susannye@tds.net

or 603/526 7319

More information the web at

www.susannye.com

When I was little the holiday season began when we picked our Secret Santas. Sometime after Thanksgiving, I lined up with my classmates at Fiske School and picked a name from the hat. In the days leading up to Christmas vacation we would surprise each other with small gifts. It was never anything elaborate. You might discover a fresh baked Christmas cookie or a Hershey's kiss hidden in your desk after recess. At the end of the school day when you bundled up to head home, there might be some Play-Doh or a yoyo tucked in your coat pocket.

This tradition of leaving small, anonymous gifts is part of the legacy and legend of Saint Nicholas. (Say it three times fast and Saint Nicholas begins to sound like Santa Claus!) And yes there really is a Saint Nicholas. He lived about 1,700 years ago in what is now Turkey. The son of wealthy Greeks, he became a Christian bishop and dedicated his life and his fortune to helping others.

Known to some as Saint Nicholas the Wonder Worker, his long list of miracles includes raising children from the dead and saving sailors from stormy seas. He is renowned for his generosity. Never wanting to embarrass struggling families, the good bishop secretly dropped coins into children's shoes during the night. It is rumored that he surreptitiously supplied dowries for at least three poor damsels. The bags of gold saved the girls from a life of spinsterhood and destitution.

But Saint Nicholas doesn't limit his protection to children and sailors. He is also the patron saint of merchants, archers and pawn brokers. Who could have guessed that pawn brokers needed a patron saint? Greece and Russia hold him dear. Cities as diverse as Amsterdam, Liverpool and Beit Jala on the West Bank have adopted Nicholas as their patron saint.

Saint Nicholas Day, December 6th, is celebrated in more than thirty countries around the world. Children leave their boots or shoes out in anticipation of little gifts and treats. It is a fun time for families with a festive dinner and lots of cheer. While Saint Nicholas Day starts the yuletide season with a little family fun, the spirit of Saint Nicholas is cause for celebration all year long. On almost any given day we can find wonderful examples of kindness and generosity, from the grandest gestures to the simplest acts.

Last year I discovered a sweet way to celebrate the spirit of Saint Nicholas and spread a little holiday cheer. Cookies, yes, cookies. Far from grand or grandiose, Christmas cookies are one of life's little pleasures and a cheerful sign of the season. Five or six years ago a woman in Rhode Island came up with a simple idea: bake up a big batch of cookies and invite people to stop by and help decorate them. Then unlike your typical cookie swap or party, the cookies are donated to a local food pantry, emergency shelter or senior center. From the first get-together in Rhode Island the concept quickly spread and Drop In & Decorate® cookie parties* have sprouted up all around country.

A cheery reminder of Christmas' past, cookies are a sweet way to give a little something to the community. A cookie party is wonderful excuse to spend some time with family and friends. I held my first cookie party last year and hope to make it one of my annual traditions. In spite of all the hustle and bustle of the holidays, I'm juggling my calendar to set a date and do it again this year.

The holiday season is a great time to practice small acts of kindness. Whether you choose to donate to your favorite charity, volunteer your time to a worthy cause or lend a friend a helping hand or listening ear, the need has never been greater. Enjoy Saint Nicholas Day and the spirit of giving,

Bon appétit! – Susan

**For more information on cookie parties visit the Drop In & Decorate® website at www.dropinanddecorate.org.*



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Macadamia Nut Shortbread

Shortbread is one of my favorite holiday cookies. For more treats, check the recipe archives on my website www.susannye.com. You'll find spicy gingerbread cookies, chocolate almond brittle, peanut butter brownies and much more. Enjoy!

1 cup butter
1/2 cup sugar
2 tablespoons milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups all purpose flour
7-8 ounces macadamia nuts; finely chopped
White chocolate ganache (recipe follows)

1. Beat butter and sugar in a large bowl at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes.
2. Add milk, vanilla and salt; beat until just combined. Gradually add the flour and macadamia nuts. Mix on low speed until fully combined.
3. Divide dough into 3 or 4 pieces. Shape each piece into a log about 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Wrap logs in plastic wrap and refrigerate until firm, about 2 hours.
4. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
5. Using a sharp knife, cut the logs into 1/4-inch thick slices. Arrange the cookies on un-greased baking sheets, about 1 inch apart. Bake until edges are golden, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.
6. When the cookies have cooled, frost with warm white chocolate ganache. The cookies can be stored for up to 2 weeks in a single layer in an airtight container.

White Chocolate Ganache

6 ounces white chocolate
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1/3 cup sifted confectioner's sugar

1. Melt the chocolate and butter in a heavy sauce pan over low heat. Add the cream and confectioner's sugar. Whisk until smooth. Cool for a few minutes before frosting the cookies.