

GIFTS FROM RITA'S HOLIDAY KITCHEN
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It's that time of year again when we gather in my kitchen making edibles for homemade gifts. Remember, a gift from the hands is a gift from the heart, so I hope you enjoy these favorites. From my book *GIFTS WITHOUT RIBBONS and CULINARY HERBS THAT HEAL BODY AND SOUL* available in **NATURAL FOODS! Keep checking out this web page, tune in to Channel 9 and check out my own web page www.abouteating.com for more Jungle Jim's favorites from my home to yours!**

DECADENT CHOCOLATE TRUFFLE SAUCE

Wonderful over ice cream, as a fondue for fruit, chilled and spread between ladyfingers, etc.

1 cup whipping cream

2 cups chocolate chips

1 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 teaspoon vanilla or 1/2 teaspoon almond extract or splash of favorite liqueur

3/4 cups chopped toasted/sliced almonds (opt)

Bring whipping cream to a boil. Add chips and butter. Turn heat down and cook until smooth, stirring constantly. Add flavorings and nuts. Cool and store in refrigerator. Warm before serving if desired.

Pretty candy cane peppermint sauce

For the Montgomery mom who needs something for her kids to give coaches and teachers. Oh my gosh, is this ever good. Now every time I make it I wind up with a small amount of candies that won't melt at the bottom of the pan. So if that happens to you, don't worry – just dump that bit out. Wonderful over ice cream, frozen yogurt or cake.

1 to 1-1/2 cups crushed peppermint candy

1-1/2 cups whipping cream

1 jar, 7 oz., marshmallow crème

Combine all ingredients in saucepan and cook over medium heat until smooth, stirring constantly. Most of the peppermint will melt. Let cool a bit. Pour into containers and store in the frig.

HEARTY LENTIL & BARLEY SOUP WITH SUN DRIED TOMATO

Put in a soup pot available at the culinary store at Jungle's (whenever I teach classes at the cooking school at Jungle Jims, I recommend all the wonderful cutlery, gadgets, etc. available at Bee's culinary store) and also pack along some of Jungle's fine bakery breads or crackers.

1 cup brown lentils

1/4 cup red lentils

1/4 cup plain sun dried tomatoes, diced (measure after dicing)

2 tablespoons dried vegetable flakes from Knorr-Swiss vegetable soup & dip mix***

1 tablespoon dried onion flakes

1 tablespoon chicken bouillon granules

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1/2 teaspoon dried minced garlic

1 teaspoon cumin

1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
1/2 cup quick cooking barley flakes

** Place vegetable soup mix in a colander or sieve, shaking to allow the powdered bouillon/flavoring to be removed. You will get enough dried vegetables for 2 batches of soup (4 tablespoons in all).

Layer lentils, sun dried tomatoes, vegetable flakes, onion flakes, bouillon granules, oregano, garlic, cumin and red pepper flakes in a pint food storage jar with lid.

For gift tag: In large pot, place contents of jar, 8 cups chicken broth (if you're short a bit of broth, add water to make 8 cups) and 1 can, 14.5 oz, stewed tomatoes with green pepper, celery and onions. Bring to a boil. Lower to a simmer and cook, uncovered, for 40-50 minutes, or until lentils are tender. If necessary, add more broth or water, 1/2 cup at a time to reach desired consistency. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve with a generous helping of Parmesan cheese. Makes approx. 2 quarts and serves 8-10.

To make sausage lentil soup: add 8 oz. smoked sausage, cut into 1/2" slices, to soup at beginning of cooking time.

TIPS FROM RITA'S KITCHEN: FLAVORING OILS

If using flavored oils, like oil of cinnamon, cloves, etc. instead of the dry form of the spice, remember that these oils are very strong and should be used exactly as the recipe states, usually in small amounts. Avoid getting these on your skin, as well. These oils make wonderful liquid potpourri – try mixing a few drops of cinnamon, cloves and orange oil together in a small amount of water on the stove. You'll smell Christmas!