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### ***LAST MINUTE – GIFTS FROM YOUR KITCHEN***

It's almost here! The children are home from school and there is still a long list of things to get done. Wouldn't it be nice to have some packages under the tree for the neighbor who stops by, your son's friend who always seems to be passing through, or the mailman as he/she pushes letters through your slot on the door? Here are some "recipes" for spreading holiday cheer while you entertain the children, **and** you'll have some gifts ready for any unexpected surprises!!!

Every year it's exciting to think about ways you can give gifts from your kitchen. To most people it means more when you've made something for them yourself, and it's easier on your budget! I try to focus on a healthy twist, a fun activity, an economical gift, and all are made from items that you probably already have in your kitchen. A few years ago at the Frederick County Homemakers' Holiday Event there was a wonderful gift idea made from hot cocoa mix. I've included a recipe below to make the cocoa **or** you can purchase your favorite hot chocolate mix and package it as follows. It's a perfect recipe to turn over to your middle school children.

#### **HOT CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM CONES**

1. You need clear plastic disposable pastry cones. (You know the ones you put icing in to decorate cakes.) These can be purchased anywhere cake decorating supplies are sold.
2. Measure enough hot chocolate mix to make 2 or 3 mugs of cocoa into the decorator cone. (This makes the "cone" of the ice cream cone.)
3. Top with mini-marshmallows – about 1/3 to 1/2 cup. (This represents the ice cream)
4. Then sprinkle with colored sprinkles – about 1 tablespoon. (You can use chocolate jimmies or red and green sprinkles or multi-colored sprinkles.)
5. Twist the end of the clear plastic cone and tie off with a red ribbon.

You have a perfect, quick and easy gift for any of the children who stop by **OR** for the youngster who shovels your sidewalk!

Need a hostess gift or something for the man on your list, or maybe a Super Bowl party item. This recipe for Holiday Onion Rings is a hit at family parties when cooking beef on the grill. With just three ingredients you can have delicious "pickled" onions in a little more than 24 hours. Only about an hour of actual preparation is needed, and the hardest part of the prep is thinly slicing the onions; the rest of the time is for the onions to absorb the flavor.

## **HOLIDAY ONION RINGS**

3 pounds Spanish onions  
3 cups granulated sugar  
2 cups red wine vinegar (can substitute apple cider vinegar)

Peel onions and cut into very thin slices. Place in a large non-reactive bowl (can also use a glass 9 x 13 inch pan) and separate slices into rings. Mix sugar and vinegar together in a separate bowl and pour over onion rings. Mix thoroughly. Cover with plastic wrap and let steep at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours, stirring occasionally. The bulk of the raw onions will reduce as they wilt and soften. Transfer onions and liquid into decorative jars, cover tightly and refrigerate for up to 3 months. Excellent in salads, sandwiches, or atop a bagel with cream cheese. Makes about 5 cups.

I'm sure you have a favorite quick bread recipe – banana bread, cranberry bread, pumpkin bread, or try my chocolate chip walnut bread recipe below. Make mini loaves for gift giving. Use mini loaf pans, mini bundt pans or use clean, empty one pound vegetable cans or soup cans. Roll the baked, cooled loaves, or individual muffins in colored plastic wrap and tie off each end with curly ribbon. You'll have tasty gifts – depending upon the recipe.

## **WALNUT-CHOCOLATE QUICK BREAD**

1 1/2 cups milk  
1 cup sugar  
1/3 cup vegetable oil  
1 egg, beaten  
1 tablespoon molasses  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
3 cups all-purpose flour  
3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder  
2 teaspoons baking soda  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 cup chocolate chips  
1/2 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease four 5x3-inch loaf pans; set aside.

Combine milk, sugar, oil, egg, molasses and vanilla in medium bowl. Stir until sugar is dissolved; set aside.

Whisk together flour, cocoa, baking soda, baking powder and salt in large bowl. Add chocolate chips, nuts and sugar mixture; stir just until combined. Pour into prepared pans.

Bake 30 minutes or until toothpick inserted near center of loaf comes out clean. Cool in pan 15 minutes. Remove from pan and cool on wire rack. Makes 4 loaves

*Muffin Variation:* Preheat oven to 375°F. Spoon batter into 12 greased muffin cups. Bake 20 minutes or until toothpick inserted near center of muffin comes out clean.

## **INSTANT COCOA MIX**

8 cups instant non-fat dry milk

2 1/2 cups or more sugar

1 1/2 cups unsweetened cocoa

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 cup miniature marshmallows (do not add at this time if using the ice cream cone method of packaging)

Combine and stir well. Store in tightly covered container in cool, dry place. To make, mix 3 1/2 tablespoons mix to 1 cup boiling water.

Have a safe and happy holiday season. Enjoy sharing your bounty with others!

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