December 4, 2014  
**Release Date:** December 10, 2014

Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, FAND  
Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences

**MAKE IT A HASSLE FREE HOLIDAY SEASON**

It’s the most wonderful time of the year! Hopefully that phrase brings a smile to your face rather than panic. Exhaustion was never the reason for the season, so trim the list and focus on what is really important. Can anyone even remember the gifts they received a year ago? What they can recall are the memories of being together.

Decades ago I learned this, when my oldest child woke up with chicken pox the morning of the holiday party. This was before a vaccine and meant cancelling the celebration so other children wouldn’t be exposed. I was not pleased having spent hours cleaning house and buying and preparing food. I looked forward to showing off our new baby boy and my visions of sugarplums were now sour grapes! A week later, I had a much bigger emergency- my husband had chicken pox. With a very sick husband, new baby, and toddler in tow, the Christmas list did not even get started, much less checked twice. It was a valuable lesson and you can have a very Merry Christmas without the fancy meals, cards, or sparkly gifts under the tree.

So, as you make your holiday plans….make them simple! The reason for celebrations is to be together, not to spend hours in the kitchen or break the budget on expensive ingredients. When you send out the invitations be it mail, text, tweet, social media or personal call, ask everyone to bring an item. Typically guests are delighted to have a reason to share a favorite dish or try a new recipe. Friends may love to bake but avoid it so they won’t be tempted to eat the entire cheesecake. Your request to bring dessert is there excuse to get messy and break out the rolling pin. For some inspiration visit one of my favorite sites [http://themessybakerblog.com](http://themessybakerblog.com)

One of the best parties I ever gave, was a group effort with everyone bringing a food or beverage that paired well with ham. Invitees came forward with scrumptious salads, sweet potatoes, vegetable casseroles, apple cider and a yummy cranberry dessert. All I had to do was buy a spiral ham and set the table.

Try these time tested tips for making the holiday’s fun without all the fuss:

1. Purchase your turkey already prepared. Smoked turkeys can be ordered on-line and delivered to your home or you can order locally from supermarkets and selected restaurants. What better

---

The University of Maryland Extension programs are open to any person and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, and gender identity or expression.
way to support local!

2. Try a cold ham and cheese platter which can be assembled ahead of time. Add some store prepared salads and you have a meal.

3. Purchase an already prepared veggie or fruit tray and/or salads.

4. Skip the sauces and serve simple dishes made from fresh ingredients like steamed or roasted veggies, corn, baked potatoes (sweet or white).

5. Splurge on good condiments like bread & butter pickles, Kalamata olives, pickled beets and peaches, which add a bit of crunch, salt, or sweet to round out the flavors on the plate.

6. Offer good bread or rolls making sure you have plenty if you have hungry teenage boys or picky eaters who may need something to fill up on.

7. Set up a drink bar area so your guests can help themselves. A crock pot works well for serving hot drinks like hot chocolate, cider, or chai tea. Break out the bubbly…..champagne, sparkling cider, sparkling grape juice or mix your favorite juice with ginger ale.

8. Put the kids in charge of dessert. Bake cupcakes (red velvet is a favorite) and give them frostings and toppings to decorate. Another option is an ice cream sundae bar. I have never met a child who was disappointed to have this on the menu.

9. Don’t forget to use your crockpot and other convenient appliances to make your party prep simple and easy.

Last of all, be sure to have fun, take lots of photos and if someone invites you to a holiday festivity take the time to say thanks. These celebrations do not happen by themselves. A thank you note via snail mail will surely get you invited back next year!

CINNAMON DIP

2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, softened
1/4 cup low-fat milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1/4 cup brown sugar
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Combine all ingredients and beat until smooth. Serve with fruit slices or vanilla wafer cookies. Store in airtight container in refrigerator. Makes about 2 cups.
**EASY PARTY MEATBALLS**

1 (12-ounce) bottle chili sauce  
1 (14-ounce) can jellied cranberry sauce  
1 bag (2-3 pounds) frozen, pre-cooked meatballs  

Combine sauces in a pan and cook on medium, stirring until sauce is smooth and very warm. Microwave meatballs until hot and place in a crockpot. Pour sauce over meatballs, stir gently and keep on low. NOTE: You can also follow the directions on the meatball package.

For more information about the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County Office check out our website http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county  
University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all persons and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, or national origin, marital status, genetic information, or political affiliation, or gender identity and expression.  

Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, FAND, is a licensed Registered Dietitian, Fellow of the Academy of Nutrition Dietetics, and Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences.

DHR:ls