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Warm and wow guests with homemade hot mulled apple cider.

When hosting friends and family at home, it's understandable that hosts direct so much of their focus to the foods they plan to serve. The main course is often the focal point and most memorable aspect of a dinner party, and that's true whether the get-together is a backyard barbecue, a holiday meal with the family or a formal affair with colleagues.

Food might be a focal point, but guests also will need something to drink. Traditional spirits like wine and cocktails are the standard, but hosts who want to get a little creative should not hesitate to do so. When choosing a special beverage, timing is everything. Guests will want to cool down on warm summer evenings, so something cold and refreshing can make for the perfect signature cocktail. When hosting on nights when the mercury has dropped, a warm beverage can heat up guests in a matter of minutes. On such nights, hosts can serve this version of

"Hot Mulled (Sherried) Apple Cider" courtesy of Laurey Masterton's "The Fresh Honey Cookbook" (Storey). One added benefit to Masterton's recipe is it can produce a welcoming winter aroma, helping hosts establish a warm ambiance for the festivities.

Hot Mulled (Sherried) Apple Cider Serves 16

- 1 gallon apple cider
- 1 orange, unpeeled, cut into slices
- 1/4 cup whole cloves
- 4 sticks cinnamon
- 1/4 cup honey, preferably cranberry honey
- 1 cup sherry (optional)

1. Combine the cider, orange slices, cloves, cinnamon, and honey in a large pot over medium heat. If you are picky about things floating in your cider, make a little bundle out of cheesecloth and place the cinnamon and cloves

inside before adding to the cider. I like to chew on cloves, so I just toss everything in. Bring to a boil, and then reduce to a simmer over low heat for an hour or so to spread these lovely winter aromas around your home.

2. If you're serving it to adults, add the sherry. It might make everyone want to go sledding!



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Tips and tricks for cutting out cookies.

Baking is a holiday tradition in many households. The aroma of freshly baked cakes, pies and cookies wafts through the air of many homes this time of year, and that makes the holiday season even more special.

Cookies are a tradition passed down through the ages. In medieval Europe, small, spiced cookies were exchanged as treats, and people still bake and share gingerbread cookies today.

Cut cookies are some of the most popular cookies to make during the holiday season. Some families may have their share of favorite cookie cutter shapes and dough recipes. Certain techniques can make holiday baking sessions easier and ensure consistent results.

- Work on a lightly floured, cool surface, such as a cutting board or stone counter top. Never work on a warm surface, which can cause dough to spread and stick.
- Roll out the dough between two sheets of baking or parchment paper. Betty Crocker recommends a thickness of about 1/8 inch, unless noted in the recipe. This prevents the dough from

sticking, and parchment enables you to easily transfer rolled-out dough to a refrigerator or elsewhere.

- When rolling out dough, portion it out into a few smaller amounts to roll out more easily. This will also help it to chill more readily.
- Cookies cut most easily when the dough is chilled. Refrigerate the dough for as long as possible, ideally an hour or more — even overnight. The more chilled, the firmer the dough will be.

Certain techniques can make holiday baking sessions easier and ensure consistent results.

- Rubber rolling pin rings that slip onto each side of the rolling pin can help ensure that the dough is being rolled out to a uniform thickness.
- Dip cookie cutters into flour with each cut. Work from the center and move out to the edges when cutting out your designs. Try to maximize space and avoid scraps and rerolling.
- Some expert bakers say that metal

cookie cutters cut cleaner than plastic ones. Whichever cutter you use, cut the cookie by pressing straight down; try not to twist or jiggle the cookie cutter when using it. Doughs with a high butter content can help, as the extra grease helps separate the dough from the cutters.

- If cut cookies have gotten warmer, place them in the freezer for a few minutes to firm up again and then cook. This will guarantee the cookies will not spread or distort while baking. Extra steps may seem like they will take a lot of time. However, the extra effort and attention to detail will help produce cookies that win rave reviews.

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Holiday Happenings

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9

Holiday Luncheon – Join the Village of Patchogue Parks & Rec Dept. to start off the holiday season with laughter and cheer at Sunset Harbor, 90 Colonial Dr., E. Patchogue, noon to 3 p.m. Cost: \$30 payable by check or money order at the Rec Dept., 380 Bay Ave., Patchogue. Call 631-475-4302.

Gift Wrapping – Sayville Library's Teen Central is turning into Gift Wrapping Central on Thursday, Dec. 9 and 16, 5-8 p.m. Teens who volunteer will receive community service hours. Complimentary snacks and drinks available. Sign up online at www.sayvillelibrary.org.

MoCA Lights: Merry & Bright – Patchogue Arts Council's holiday projection art experience along Main Street Patchogue, Thursday, Dec. 9 to Sunday, Dec. 12.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10

Tree Lighting at Holtsville Ecology – Kick

off the holiday season at the annual tree lighting at Holtsville Ecology Site, 249 Buckley Rd., Holtsville, 6 p.m. Arrive early.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11

Holiday Gift Fair – Finish your holiday shopping at Farmingville Residents Associates' Gabino Hall, 2005 Route 112, Medford, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free admission. Chinese auction, 50/50, Santa visit, and food available. Call 631-260-7411.

Holiday Baking – Join East Islip Library and Chef Rob on Facebook Live for family-friendly cookie baking, 1 p.m. Cookie recipes demonstrated: Chocolate Crackle, White Chocolate Blizzard, and Sprinkle Batter Cookies. To register, visit www.eipl.org.

Holiday Pet Charity – Get into the holiday spirit with Team Zeranti Real Estate to take care of homeless animals in the community at the Town of Islip Animal Shelter. Donations needed: towels, blankets, canned cat & dog food, Purina dry foods, and toys. Donations can be dropped

off at real estate office, 1215 Montauk Hwy., Oakdale, noon to 2 p.m. Call 631-834-0770.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12

Holiday Fair – Find wonderful ideas for everyone on your holiday gift list at Medford Chamber of Commerce's vendor/craft fair, Medford VFW Hall, 507 Long Island Ave., Medford, 1-6 p.m.

Holiday Train Display – Free weeklong holiday viewing at the Longwood Estate, corner of Longwood and Smith roads, Ridge, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Participate in a "I Spy" game to find all the hidden items within the display. Call 631-924-1820.

Choral Concert – SōLI, Singers of Long Island choir will perform "Cantate Domino!" choral music for Advent & Christmas at St. John's Lutheran Church, 48 Greene Ave., Sayville, 3 p.m. Suggested donation: general admission, \$15; students and

See **HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS** on page 16

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Holiday Happenings

seniors, \$10. Covid vaccination, mask, and reservation required. To reserve seating, visit <https://bit.ly/SoLlSings> or call 631-589-3202.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15

Kris Kringle Fundraiser – Head down to Harbor Crab Co. Restaurant, 116 Division St., Patchogue, and ignite your holiday spirit by donating to annual holiday drive for families in need, 6 p.m. Raffles, food, drinks. To donate online, visit www.patchoguerotary.org.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17

Holiday Spectacular on Ice – Capture the magic of the season as The Gateway incredibly transforms Patchogue Theatre's stage into an ice rink for Holiday Spectacular On Ice, 7 p.m. For tickets call 631-207-1313 or visit www.patchoguetheatre.org.

Food Donations – Bay Shore-Brightwaters Library is collecting food donations for Island Harvest through Dec. 15. Please donate low-sodium canned vegetables, soups, canned fruit, canned meat, whole

wheat pasta, cereal, Boost, Ensure, and personal care items. For more information, call 631-665-4350.

Mitten Tree – Through Dec. 27, Bay Shore-Brightwaters Library is collecting new or hand made items such as mittens gloves, hats and scarves to hang on their Mitten Tree located in the Children's Department. Donations will be given to a local agency that can distribute the items to those in need. For more information, call 631-665-4350.

Mitten Tree – Sayville Library is collecting donations of new mittens, hats, scarves, and gloves to give to local charitable organizations, through Dec. 31. Collection box in the library lobby. Call 631-589-4440.

Coat & Toy Drive – Gifts of the Season Holiday Toy & Coat Drive now through Dec. 16. Donations accepted at Sen. Alexis Weik's office, 90B W. Main St., Patchogue, weekdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 631-360-3356.

Coat Drive – The Sayville Village Improvement Society is collecting gently used and

new winters coats in all sizes. Drop off location: Sayville Library through Dec. 31.

'Elf The Musical' – Live holiday show at the Argyle Theatre, 34 W. Main St., Babylon, now through Jan. 2. For tickets and showtimes, visit www.argletheatre.com/elf or call the box office at 844-631-5483.

Magic of Lights Drive-Thru Show – The Magic of Lights drive-thru spectacular returns to Jones Beach, through Jan. 2. View LED lighting displays and digital animations. The show runs Sunday-Thursday, 5-10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 5-11 p.m. Closed on Dec. 31. Tickets purchased online can be redeemed for any show date. Visit www.magicoflights.com/events/jonesbeach/.

Smith Point Light Show – Girl Scouts of Suffolk County sponsored holiday light show at Smith Point County Park, Nov. 27 through Jan. 9. Save and buy tickets during presale event. Visit www.gssc.us/en/event/holidaylightshow.html. Find them on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/SmithPointLightShow/.

Holiday Light Show – Show open evenings beginning at 5 p.m. at 2549 Splish Splash Dr., Calverton, through Dec. 30. To buy tickets, visit www.holidaylightshow.com/riverheadticketcard.

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Tips to ensure holiday road trips are safe & stress-free.

After a 2020 holiday season in which the pandemic forced the postponement or cancellation of festivities, families are planning to get together once again in 2021. Many people will head home for the holidays this year, and the vast majority will take to the highway to do so.

The U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics says the Thanksgiving and Christmas/New Year's holiday periods are among the busiest for long-distance travel. The highways will be busy with motorists criss-crossing the country to visit loved ones. Holiday travel may require covering a long distance in a limited amount of time. Finding ways to be efficient in regard to time management can reduce stress and improve safety.

Travel at night

If you can safely manage it, you may experience considerably less traffic in the evening hours than during other times of day. In addition, if kids are in tow, they may sleep much of the way, helping to reduce the number of times they ask, "Are we there yet?" Share driving responsibilities with another person so that each driver can take a break to prevent drowsy driving.

Get a vehicle maintenance check

No one wants to get stranded on the side of the road with a car filled with gifts and treats. It's well worth the investment to have a mechanic give a vehicle a checkup prior to leaving. Get an oil change even if it's a little early to do so. Look at tire tread wear and ensure that you have the right tires for the road conditions where you'll be headed.

Planning and preparation are essential to getting home safely this holiday season.

Plan your route

People often rely on mobile phone or dashboard GPS systems to get where they need to go. However, it helps to have a general idea of the route so that if service drops out you can still find your way. Scout out rest stops or acceptable restaurants online prior to leaving so you have a plan for making stops in safe areas.

Stock the car

While presents may be taking up valuable real estate, pack a cooler with snacks and beverages to help reduce

how many times you need to get off the highway. Also, games or other forms of entertainment can keep children occupied on long trips.

Slow down in inclement weather

The holiday meal can be reheated if you're late, so don't feel compelled to speed or drive erratically when the weather is stormy. It's not worth the risk of getting into an accident that can cause serious injuries. Travelers United, a nonprofit organization that represents all travelers, also warns that quick storms that pop up after a long dry spell can immediately make road surfaces extremely slippery. Use caution.



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Holiday Menu



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STARTERS

DELICATA SQUASH AND GOAT CHEESE SALAD \$45

Swiss Chard, Spinach, Oranges, Pumpkin seeds

KALE CAESAR SALAD \$45

Red onion, garlic bread crumb, manchego Cheese

POTATO LEEK SOUP \$20 Qrt

SWEET & SPICY MEATBALLS \$50

Fig, roasted tomatoes, chili flake

STUFFED MUSHROOMS \$50

Tomato, spinach, garlic, olives, tomato, herbs, parmigiana

STUFFED PEPPERS \$55

Rice, house-made sausage, onions, tomato sauce

SQUASH ARANCINI BITES \$55

Butternut squash risotto, panchetta cream sauce

CHICKEN CORDON BLEU BITES \$55

Honey Mustard

TRUFFLE MORTADELLA GRILLED CHEESE \$50

Square bites, Tomato sauce, honey drizzle

HORSERADISH STEAK CROSTINIS \$55

caramelized onion, balsamic glaze, herbs

ENTREES

COQ AU VIN (CLASSIC FRENCH BRAISED CHICKEN) \$75

Red wine brined and braised served over root vegetables

HORSERADISH CARAMELIZED ONION SLICED STEAK \$85

Tri- tip beef, rosemary roasted potatoes, carrots, brussel, au

poirve demi

RED WINE BRAISED SHORT RIBS \$85

Farro, squash, herbs, apples, pecans

SLOW COOKED PORK SHANKS \$80

Braised white beans, toasted garlic breadcrumbs, onions, rosemary, bacon

BUTCHER BOLOGNESE \$75

Cavatelli pasta, ground beef, pork and veal, ricotta, parmesan

SAUSAGE & PEPPERS \$65

House made italian sausage, bell peppers, onions

LEMON GRILLED CHICKEN \$65

Grilled chicken breast, lemon glaze, herbs

SIDES

FARRO SALAD \$50

Squash, herbs, apples, pecans

GARLIC MASHED POTATOES \$50

BRAISED WHITE BEANS \$50

Garlic breadcrumbs, rosemary, bacon

APPLE VANILLA GLAZED BRUSSELS \$50

MAC & CHEESE \$50

Bacon breadcrumbs

PARMIGIANA GARLIC BROCCOLI RABE \$50

Garlic oil, parmesan, black pepper

HONEY GLAZED SQUASH \$50

Acorn squash, chili flake, honey glaze

SWEET POTATO MASH \$50



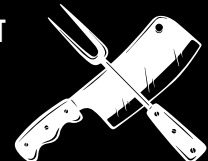
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