

Gifts that satisfy your friends' food cravings

PICTURE YOURSELF doing all your Christmas shopping in a few hours and in only five stores. Imagine assembling 50 unique personal gift packages in 50 minutes without wrapping anything. Think of pleasing all the recipients immensely, without overspending.

"It's not only possible, it's incredibly easy," said Ron Solovitz, president of the Gourmet Group Ltd., manufacturers of Perfect Endings cakes.

"Since I'm in the specialty food business, I decided to get everyone food-related gifts last Christmas," he said. "But I didn't have a lot of time. So I made the usual Christmas list and next to each name I wrote that person's particular food passion. This formed the basis for a shopping scheme that yielded amazingly varied gifts tailored to the special cravings of each recipient."

HERE'S HOW you can do the same:

- List each person's favorite non-perishable food or flavor. Your list might include almonds, apricots, chocolate, cheese, coffee, hot peppers and spices, oranges, pasta, raspberries, walnuts and so on.

- Go to a local specialty food shop and pile a basket with gourmet goodies that include the preferred flavors — Jordan almonds, imported spiced apricots, Cointreau-soaked chocolate cake, Stilton cheese, decaffeinated mocha espresso, raspberry vinegar, dried jalapeno peppers, whole nutmegs.

- Head for the kitchen gadget section of your nearest department store. Look for items that in themselves would not make great gifts — slotted berry spoons, nutmeg graters, spice grinders and oversize coffee mugs — but would be wonderful additions to the food portion of each gift.

- Stop at a bookstore and pick up related cookbooks for those who might want to experiment further with their favorite food. Mexican cookbooks for the spice lovers, cheese-serving guides for the cheese aficionados and the latest chocolate cookbook for those who simply can't resist that craving.

- For more expensive gift packages, pick up some cordials and liqueurs from a liquor store. Some liquor stores will deliver, so you may be able to eliminate this step from your shopping spree.



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