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Most cookies, brownies and breads will freeze beautifully. Bring out your special holiday treats to fill with your homemade sweets as great gifts for guests!

Day 7 - Grocery Shopping. Beat the last minute grocery store frenzy and pick up all your dry goods such as paper products, coffee, tea, and canned and frozen items. Purchase items you may need for your table.

Day 8 - Table Display. Plan your holiday tabletop presentation. Arrange risers on the buffet table covered with additional pieces of festive holiday linen, thus creating different levels as a stage for your platters and bowls.

You can utilize phone books or boxes turned upside down on top of your base linen tablecloth to achieve this professional look. Empty boxes wrapped in holiday paper also may be used as risers or incorporated into centerpiece ideas.

Give some thought to your centerpiece. Will you need fresh flowers or prefer a holiday decoration? A beautiful glass bowl filled with ornaments is always quick, inexpensive and festive centerpiece. How about some fresh pine branches placed between risers with holiday rib-

bon cascaded about? Candles are always a nice touch, just be sure they are far away from the fresh pine and never left unattended.

Colors and textures will lend to your festive holiday tables. Think of your table as the stage and the food as the actors. Don't forget serving platters. Do you have enough of the proper sizes?

Day 5 - Cleaning. Gather your china, serving pieces and linen. Double check for cleanliness and don't forget to polish the silver. This is also a good day for starting some cleaning, and to find your favorite Christmas cards, cassettes and records.

Day 4 - Produce Shopping. The last place you want to be stuck on Christmas Eve is the grocery store. Go today and buy your fresh produce and dairy products. Don't forget the egg nog and cinnamon.

Day 3 - Special Order Shopping. Pick up your fresh meats and double check on any special orders for special items that you may have placed. Start processing vegetables, pick your green beans, cut your carrots and parsnips.

If you peel apples or potatoes in advance, make sure you store them in water with a little lemon juice to eliminate discoloration.

■ Clean and prep your roasts and turkey. Season and rub meats with your favorite herbs and spices so they will be oven ready.

Day 2 - Let's Get Cooking! Get all your side dishes ready to go. Go ahead and blanch your vegetables and place them in reheating pans with a little salt, pepper and butter so that on Christmas Day all you need to do is reheat them in the oven or microwave and serve. You could also put a little water in the bottom of the pan and steam the veggies on the stove top for a few seconds. Boil, mash, stir and bake.

If you can make sauces ahead of time - go for it! Clean lettuce and greens and store with a wet towel covering them. Clean and prep your roasts and turkey. Season and rub meats with your favorite herbs and spices so they will be oven ready. Set the table and don't forget to be creative with some festive recent linen or pine branches.

Day 1 - Merry Christmas!

Because you were a planner, you can leisurely roll out of bed to enjoy the spirit of Christmas. It's really not about food - it's about enjoying your family and close ones. Your table is set; your side dishes are ready to go; your silver is clean, plates set out, beverages all ready to be iced one hour before.

The only thing left to chance is to meet with family, and coordinate your meat preparation with mealtime so that all runs smoothly. Make sure children and non-kitchen participants do the clean up, as you should get time out for masterminding the entire successful holiday gathering.

The families of 2 Unique and Aunt Olive's Good Food 2 Go wish you health, happiness, prosperity, tranquility and kindred spirit for the New Year. And to all a good night!

Chef Kelli L. Leuton is owner of 2 Unique Caterers and Event Planners in Bloomfield Hills and Aunt Olive's Good Food 2 Go in Birmingham. Leuton is a graduate of Schoolcraft College's Culinary Arts program. Look for her column in Taste on the second Sunday of the month. See recipes inside.

Enjoy squash stuffed with rice and almonds

STUFFED SQUASH

- 4 squash, such as acorn, sweet dumpling or delicate
- 1 cup long-grain rice
- 1 1/3 3/4-ounce can chicken broth
- 1/4 cup water
- 4 tablespoons butter or margarine, divided
- 1 large leek, coarsely chopped
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 350° F. With a French chef knife, cut each squash in half (lengthwise) and remove seeds and membranes. Fill a large roasting pan with about 1/2 inch water. Place squash in water, cut-side down; cover pan with foil. Bake 45 minutes or until squash is soft and tender. Remove squash from water to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, in 2-quart saucepan over high heat, heat rice, chicken broth and water to boiling. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer 20 minutes or until rice is tender. In 10-inch skillet over medium heat, melt 1 tablespoon butter or margarine. Add leek; cook until ten-

der; stirring occasionally. Melt remaining 3 tablespoons butter.

With large spoon, scoop squash out of two squash halves; coarsely chop with a large paring knife. In large bowl combine cooked rice, remaining melted butter, leek mixture, chopped squash, almonds, salt and pepper. Toss to mix well. Fill remaining squash halves with rice mixture. Serve six.

Great Lakes Stuffed Squash: Substitute one 8-ounce box long grain and wild rice mix for rice above. Sauté 1 medium zucchini, chopped in remaining butter. Add mixture to above.

Texarkana Stuffed Squash: In remaining butter, cook 1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and chopped and 1 medium green bell pepper, seeded and chopped until tender. Stir into rice mixture with 1/2 pound hot Italian sausages, cooked and crumbled. Substitute toasted chopped pecans for almonds.

Pacific Northwest Stuffed Squash: Sauté 1 large cooking-apple, cored and chopped in remaining butter. Add to mixture above with 1/2 cup dried cherries. Substitute toasted chopped walnut for almonds.

Recipe courtesy of Cutsco.

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