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BudgeFree for Life!

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February 2009: Gifts for all Seasons and Reasons



Gift giving, in this country, is a social norm and therefore a social need in our hierarchy. We've all received gifts for which we have little or no use. Unknowingly, we may have given gifts like this as well. For many of us gifting can be time consuming and expensive. With the holidays behind us, now is the perfect time to get this year's gifting in order – GivingGrinch style.

Imaging always having the perfect gift – something personal that anyone would appreciate – on hand for just about any season or reason. I have three gift ideas you can make today, but first the criteria I came up with:

1. Something personal (preferably homemade)
2. Something anyone can use
3. Ability to make and store in bulk
4. Economical to make, but now something others will find cheap
5. Long shelf life

Spices and Rubs

There are tons of spice and rub recipes available on the web. One you can buy at the store is Emeril's Essence. Instead, make your own and "spice it up" as a gift. Mr. Lagasse provides this recipe on his website, <http://www.emerils.com/>. Adjust the ratios to make in bulk.

- 5 tablespoons sweet paprika
- 1/4 cup salt
- 1/4 cup garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons onion powder
- 2 tablespoons cayenne
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 2 tablespoons dried thyme

Shelf life: Dried leafy herb mixes will last 1-3 years, ground or powdered herbs retain freshness up to a year.

Homemade Herb Infused Olive Oil (for drizzling or dipping)

1. Choose your herbs. Popular choices are rosemary, basil, mint, tarragon, thyme or marjoram. Another option, whole garlic.

2. Wash and thoroughly dry the herbs. Slightly tear or bruise the herbs so that they release their aroma and flavors.
3. Heat olive oil over a low flame until warm (not hot). Use a pot or pan with a wide base, like a sauce pan, to evenly warm the oil.
4. Stuff herbs into bottles. A little goes a long way.
5. Pour oil into bottles.
6. Let the bottles sit for a while until cool.
7. Place cork or rubber top on bottle and set in a cool dark place for about a week. If you use garlic, refrigerate the oil to avoid botulism.
8. Strain out herbs or garlic and you're ready to consume or gift.

Storage: Cool, dark place

Homemade Jam

My family picks berries every year to make jam. I asked my Mom to send me a starter recipe. Here is her No Cook Strawberry Freezer Jam Recipe:

1. Measure 1 1/2 cups sugar into bowl.
2. Add contents of one Ball Company Fruit Jell Freezer Jam Pectin pouch (available at large grocery stores)
3. Stir until mixed
4. Crush fruits, 4 cups (crushed) and add to pectin mixture.
5. Stir 3 minutes
6. Ladle jam into clean jars leaving half inch headspace; apply lids.
7. Let stand until thickened (about 30 min.)

Yield: Five 8 ounce jars. Refrigerate up to 3 weeks or freeze for longer storage - up to one year.

So there you have it - gifts with personality and utility without tasking your mind or breaking your bank.

We have a winner: Congrats to P. Wadhwa of Houston, TX. He found two grammar errors in my January newsletter. First person to find two or more errors in this letter will win a drink - a 2 oz pack of coffee. Email me advice@givinggrinch.com with corrections. Include your name and address.

Reader Tip: Fill a brand name prescription medication for free. Even with insurance, brand name drugs are expensive. In order to get people to try their medicine, pharmaceutical companies often offer a free or discounted trial. The best place to check is their website. For example, Vesicare has a free 30-day prescription form you can print out. If you prefer, they can mail you the form.

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