



CELEBRATING WINTER SOLSTICE

December is a time for lights and celebrations and families.

Did you know that many of our modern traditions began way back in time? Ancient peoples all over the world watched the skies anxiously in December. They wondered why the days were growing shorter and the sun seemed to be sinking in the sky. All kinds of magical stories were told to explain things. Rituals and practices sprang up to help the light win out over the darkness. When the sun did come back and begin to grow strong again, there were always joyful celebrations with music and food and gift-giving.

Each year, my family celebrates the solstice and the winter holidays with a party.

Below you'll find some ideas for throwing your own.

—Amy Herrick, author of *The Time Fetch*



Plan Your Own Winter Solstice Party

Invitations adorned with seasonal images and leaf prints will help you gather your friends and family together. Decorate using acorns, twigs, pine boughs, and other items found in nature. Wreaths and evergreen arrangements are meant to keep the dark spirits out. Homemade candleholders, lanterns, and suncatchers will help you welcome the sun back to earth.

The telling of ghost stories was traditional in some places at this time of year, as well as the reciting of folktales. Ask guests to bring a story to the party, and then share these out loud with the lights dimmed low. Mumming, charades, playacting, and caroling are all fun traditions you might have your group try. And, since food and drink are the life force of any party, try out some of the old recipes: wassail, eggnog, pumpkin pie, pfeffernusse cookies, tang yuan rice balls, St. Lucia buns, black fruitcake. The list goes on and on! Happy solstice!

Solstice Crafts and Recipes



Leaf Peeper Wreath

What you need:

Scissors • Pencil • Markers (optional) • ½" circle hole punch • Glue
Scraps of paper (at least 3" to 4") in a variety of colors and patterns



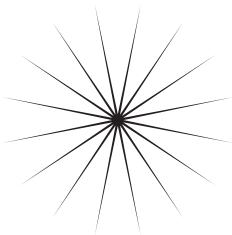
- Draw leaf shapes and branches using a pencil (or print, cut out, and trace these leaf and branch templates: workman.com/features/papermade/dl/98_print.pdf) on various papers. You'll need to trace or draw about forty leaves.
- Cut out the leaves.
- Use different colored markers to draw vein details onto approximately ten leaves. You can also trace the vein details from the template (or draw them using a pencil and your imagination) on different colored papers, and cut them out.
- Use the hole punch to make about eighteen berries from one of the colored papers.
- Arrange the leaves in a circle, overlapping them in layers. Glue the leaves in place and add branches as desired.
- Arrange the berries in groups of three and glue them around the wreath, and over the leaves and branches.

Adapted from *Paper Made!* by Kayte Terry (Workman). Copyright © 2012.



Winter Solstice Ornaments

- Cut two pipe cleaners into fourths (eight pieces) and twist them together into a sun shape. The best color of pipe cleaner to use is gold, though anything works.
- String orange and yellow beads onto each "ray," about five beads per section.
- Use wire cutters or another tool to turn down the ends of the pipe cleaners.



Falling Leaves Garland: 6thstreetdesignschool.blogspot.com/2013/10/diy-falling-leaves-garland.html

Winter Solstice Lantern: redrecliner.wordpress.com/2009/10/26/how-to-make-a-winter-solstice-lantern

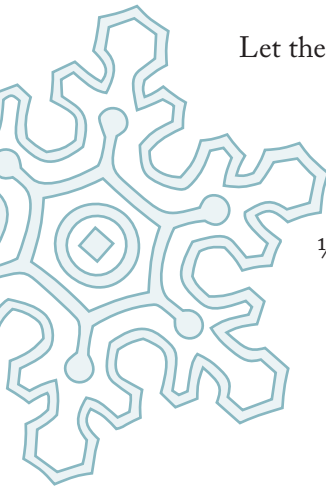
Citrus Pomanders: marthastewart.com/264637/pomanders



WINTER SOLSTICE COOKIES

Let the sun shine through the translucent amber caramels of these fine, crunchy chocolate cookies. They make pretty Christmas tree ornaments as well.
Makes about twenty-four 2½-inch cookies.

INGREDIENTS



1 cup all-purpose flour	8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, Dutch process or natural	½ cup (packed) brown sugar, lump free
½ teaspoon baking soda	½ cup granulated sugar
½ teaspoon baking powder	1 egg
⅛ teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
	Basic Caramel (see below)

EQUIPMENT

Cookie sheets, lined with parchment paper or foil
1-inch round cookie cutter

To make the cookies, in a medium bowl, mix the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder, and salt together thoroughly with a whisk or fork. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, beat the butter, brown sugar, and granulated sugar with the back of a spoon or a mixer until smooth and creamy but not fluffy (less than 1½ minutes with an electric mixer). Mix in the egg and vanilla. Add the flour mixture and mix just until incorporated. Form the dough into a log about 6 inches long and 2½ inches in diameter. Chill for at least 3 hours, preferably overnight.

Position the racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Using a sharp knife, cut the log into slices ¼ inch thick. Place the slices 1½ inches apart on the lined cookie sheets. Bake until the cookies have puffed up and settled down again, rotating the cookie sheets from top to bottom and front to back halfway through the baking, 10 to 12 minutes.

Do not detach the cookies. Cool for 3 to 5 minutes, then cut and remove a 1-inch circle from the center of each one. Slide the parchment onto cooling racks or set the cookie sheet itself on a rack to cool completely. Transfer the cooled cookies to a clean sheet of parchment paper.

Make the caramel, and immediately plunge the saucepan into a pan of ice water for 20 seconds to stop the cooking. Spoon a little caramel carefully into the center of each cookie. Set aside to cool and harden. Store cookies in an airtight container.

BASIC CARAMEL

INGREDIENTS

½ cup sugar
¼ cup water
⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar

In a 3- to 4-cup saucepan, combine the sugar, water, and cream of tartar. Stir gently (do not whisk) over medium heat until most of the sugar looks dissolved. Stop stirring and bring the mixture to a simmer. Cover and simmer for 2 to 3 minutes to dissolve the sugar. Uncover and wash down the insides of the pot with a wet pastry brush or wet paper towels. Continue to simmer until the syrup begins to color. Swirl the pot rather than stirring if the syrup seems to be coloring unevenly. Use a skewer to drop a bead of syrup onto a white plate. Pay close attention when a drop of syrup looks pale amber on the plate. Continue to cook and test drops of syrup until they are darkened to a slightly reddish amber color.

PFEFFERNUSSE COOKIES

Aunt Kit always makes these German treats at the start of the winter season. Cookies without butter last for months, so you'll be able to enjoy these throughout the winter. They're perfect to make ahead for sharing and shipping.

INGREDIENTS

Cookies:

3 cups all-purpose flour	⅛ teaspoon white pepper	½ cup finely chopped almonds
¼ teaspoon baking powder	1 teaspoon cinnamon	3 large eggs
¼ teaspoon salt	⅛ teaspoon ground cloves	1 cup granulated sugar

Spiced Sugar:

1 cup confectioners' sugar	1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon	½ teaspoon nutmeg

In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, pepper, cinnamon, and cloves. In another bowl, beat eggs and granulated sugar together until thick and light in color. Add almonds and stir until blended. Gradually beat in the flour mixture until just incorporated.

Place dough on plastic wrap and wrap the plastic around it tightly. Refrigerate for up to one hour.

Roll out dough to ¼ inch thickness. Cut with a one-inch cookie cutter or form balls approximately one inch in diameter. Place cookies about ½ inch apart on baking sheets. Place sheets in a 350°F oven for 8 minutes, then rotate the baking sheets and leave in the oven for another 7 minutes, or until the cookies are lightly browned. When baked, transfer the cookies to wire racks to cool.

Put confectioners' sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg in a sealable bag. Add cooled cookies a few at a time to the bag, seal them, and shake to coat. Store dusted cookies in an airtight container. The lack of butter in these cookies makes it so they will keep for many months.



THE TIME FETCH

by AMY HERRICK

As small as a stone. As bright as an ember. The key to the world between dimensions.

Edward thought he had picked up a rock. He didn't know it was a sleeping Time Fetch—and touching it would alter the entire fabric of time and space.