

Prepping for the Holidays: Cooking in Advance



Canadian Thanksgiving has already come and gone, but Americans are patiently awaiting the day when they'll get to enjoy turkey, stuffing, and all the delicious sides. Other holidays are around the corner, too. Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannukah, and New Years, all coming in hot. Are you already stressing about your next family gathering? Whether you're the host who's fretting about what to put on the table or you're worried about what to contribute to the tablescape as a guest, there's no shortage of anxiety around the holidays. There's certainly enough stress to go around! In the summer, the bounty of the garden makes it easy to whip up last minute salads and pasta dishes. In the fall and winter, when the garden has closed down for the year, pickings are slim. So what's a gardener to do to impress?

As soon as Halloween has come and gone, I tuck away the spooky decor and autumn motifs. I lug out the big plastic bin from under the stairs and pick out a few wintry decorations to adorn the credenza. I also start to think about cozier food fare. In the kitchen, I cook up soups and stews. I swap t-shirts for sweaters and always have the perfect candle burning (right now, it's a delicious cranberry one).

I also find myself prepping more foods. I batch cook and freeze leftover portions because it's not always easy to muster up the desire to chop, stir, and cook during the cold months. I love to cook, don't get me wrong! But winter is also my favorite time for reading, and I sometimes find it hard to pry myself away from a good story.

November and December have me thinking about upcoming festivities. I wonder not only about what I can bring to the dinner, party, or gathering. I'm also thinking about how I can show others I care. It's not always easy when you're on a tight budget. Cooking and baking is one of the easiest ways to spread joy and bring people together. A tin of homemade cookies is a truly heartfelt gift. A jar of homemade jam is one of my favorite gifts to receive. At this time of year, I love creating goodies for loved ones in my kitchen. I also love to learn and try new things. This year, it's making pies.

A plan: making dough ahead of time

I'm part of a cookbook club and our book this month is all about baking. Pies specifically. I don't love sweets, but I'm eager to learn new skills and find new ways to combine delicious flavors. Pies, though, are intimidating to the novice baker. My plan to tackle the myriad of recipes is to cut the steps up into pieces. Making the dough in advance, freezing it, and saving the assembly part for another day. I don't really like pies all that much. I'm not much of a sweets person. But I figure I'll be all set for the holidays if my freezer is packed to the brim with premade dough and pies.

Here's the [recipe for the pie crust](#) I'll be trying. Join me in a pie-making adventure this November. Tell me about your trials, tribulations, and successes.

What's a non-gardening winter activity that helps you cope with the months away from regular gardening duties? I can't be the only gardener who seeks to fill the void in winter by trying out other unexplored hobbies and activities.