

Thanksgiving and Christmas Together

Written by Marcia Humphrey

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Leaving church this past Sunday, I stopped to hug Nicole and wish her a happy thanksgiving. “You cooking, right?” I asked. I’ve been told by many church-folks that she “throws down” in the kitchen, although I have yet to find out first-hand. In her usual, tell-it-like-it-is style, she responded, “Yes, girl, and I’m making enough for Christmas, too! There’s no sense of doing all that work twice!” She explained how she doubles up on her dressing and sweet potato recipes, sticks half, uncooked, in the freezer and the other half in the oven. Then for Christmas, two of the main essentials are oven-ready. Sounds great, right? Although I’m a little too far into my Thanksgiving 2010 planning to double up, it definitely will be on my to-do list for Thanksgiving/Christmas ’11.

Want to save cooking time and stress during the holidays, or any other time of year? Be like Nicole and tackle two (or more) meals at once by planning menus in advance and preparing certain items to go right into the freezer. Here are a few tips to get you started.

What To Freeze – While it’s true that not everything freezes well, a few holiday staples, dressing, sweet potatoes, and corn casserole, are great choices. In addition, yeast rolls, and most baked goods are great candidates for freezing. I learned a couple of things the hard way; 1. The texture of some things change when placed in the freezer and 2. Just because an item is sold frozen in stores, it doesn’t mean my at-home freezing will yield similar results (they add extra stuff to keep it stable). Another tip to remember is that the flavors of herbs, onions, and celery are stronger after freezing, so adjust your recipes accordingly.

How To Freeze/How To Package – As soon as the cooked food has cooled to room temperature, place it in the freezer; if it’s too hot, it could defrost other frozen food. Disposable aluminum foil containers, misted with cooking spray work well for dressing, sweet potatoes, and corn casseroles. By tightly wrapping food items with plastic wrap and then heavy-duty foil, you’ll

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help maintain the food's flavor, color, and texture. Freezer bags work well too. Simply store it flat, so that food thaws evenly. Finally, the best way to defrost food is s-l-o-w-l-y in the refrigerator rather than attempting to do it under water or in the microwave.

I am learning more and more about how the freezer can help to save time and money in the kitchen. You can even be prepared for the unexpected visitor by baking sweets in advance and tucking them away in the back of the freezer (just don't eat them all yourself). One of my favorite memories involves a special "tucked-away" sweet treat. Around the time of our one-year anniversary, my husband and I drove from Minnesota to Michigan to spend time with our families during the holidays. We marked our anniversary by digging out the top layer of our wedding cake from my aunt's freezer. After unwrapping the ten, no twenty layers of aluminum foil that protected the cake, we all dug in. It tasted just as good as it did the day we were married. At the end of December, we will celebrate twenty years of marriage. Since my husband no longer eats sweets and I still do, I think I'll grab his piece of the twentieth-anniversary celebration cake, wrap it thoroughly, toss it in the freezer, and ENJOY it next year.

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at low costs. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.