

# THIS 'N THAT

Williams County Extension Homemakers Newsletter

DECEMBER 2009

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*Merry Christmas to everyone.  
I hope that this holiday season  
brings you together with friends  
and family as you celebrate the  
glory of Christmas.*

*Mary!*

## PLAN A COOKIE EXCHANGE

Everybody loves cookies, so why not plan a "Cookie Exchange"? This can be a group of good friends just gathering together for coffee and conversation along with cookies, or a very small communal baking party in which several cooks actually prepare their cookies together and then share the fruits of their labor.

Whichever type of cookie exchange you plan make sure that all the ingredients are in place:

Invite guests well in advance, and tell them what is expected. They need to know if they will be swapping recipes, too. Make sure they understand that in order to be fair to all participants, the cookies they bring need to be "from scratch".

If people are to bring already prepared cookies, specify how many each guest should bring. For a group less than six, each person might supply enough to swap a dozen with everyone. For a larger group simply ask each person to bring six dozen-plus extra for sampling! For a communal baking party remind participants to bring the ingredients needed, and maybe a baking sheet or two, for making their own recipe.

Remember to provide plenty of cookie take-home containers for your guests. You can use sturdy paper plates and foil to cover them or cellophane bags with ribbon or twist ties. Have several containers for each guest so that they don't have to mix spicy and mild cookies together, and to keep crispy and gooey ones apart.

To add to the exchange you can have each guest point out their cookies and tell where they got the recipe or why they like it.

## CALENDAR

- **Dec. 24 Office  
Closes at noon**
- **Dec 25  
Office closed**
- **Jan 1, 2010  
Happy New Year!**
- **Feb 1-3 Hard  
Spring Wheat Show**

## CHRISTMAS TREE SAFETY TIPS

For many people, decorating the Christmas tree is a favorite part of the holiday. The National Safety Council offers some safety tips to make sure a mishap doesn't spoil your holiday season.

### Christmas Trees

Natural and artificial Christmas trees start an average of 250 home structure fires each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association. These fires cause approximately 14 deaths, 26 injuries and \$13.8 million in property damage yearly.

Try to select a fresh tree by looking for one that is green. The needles of pines and spruces should bend and not break and should be hard to pull off the branches. On fir species, a needle pulled from a fresh tree will snap when bent, much like a fresh carrot. Also, look for a trunk sticky with sap.

Cut off about two inches of the trunk and put the tree in a sturdy, water-holding stand. Keep the stand filled with water so the tree does not dry out quickly.

Stand your tree away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources. Make sure the tree does not block foot traffic or doorways.

If you use an artificial tree, choose one that is tested and labeled as fire resistant. Artificial trees with built-in electrical systems should have the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.

Line-voltage holiday or decorative lights start an average of 170 home structure fires each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association. These fires cause approximately 7 deaths, 7 injuries and \$7.9 million in property damage yearly.

### Tree lights

Only use indoor lights indoors (and outdoor lights only outdoors). Look for the UL label. Check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Replace or repair any damaged light sets.

Also, use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord. Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs.

Turn off all lights on trees and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.

### Tree ornaments

Always use the proper step stool or ladder to reach high places.



**Holiday plants to watch out for include: mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry, and amaryllis. Keep all of these plants out of children's reach. They can cause severe stomach problems.**



## SNOW SHOVELING TIPS



While shoveling snow can be good exercise, it can also be dangerous for optimistic shovelers who take on more than they can handle. The National Safety Council offers the following tips to help you get a handle on safe shoveling:

- Individuals over the age of 40, or those who are relatively inactive, should be especially careful.
- If you have a history of heart trouble, do not shovel without a doctor's permission.
- Do not shovel after eating or while smoking.
- Take it slow! Shoveling (like lifting weights) can raise your heart rate and blood pressure dramatically; so pace yourself. Be sure to stretch out and warm up before taking on the task.
- Shovel only fresh snow. Freshly fallen, powdery snow is easier to shovel than the wet, packed-down variety.
- Push the snow as you shovel. It's easier on your back than lifting the snow out of the way.
- Don't pick up too much at once. Use a small shovel, or fill only one-fourth or one-half of a large one.
- Lift with your legs bent, not your back. Keep your back straight. By bending and "sitting" into the movement, you'll keep your spine upright and less stressed. Your shoulders, torso and thighs can do the work for you.
- Do not work to the point of exhaustion. If you run out of breath, take a break. If you feel tightness in your chest, stop immediately.
- Dress warmly. Remember that extremities, such as the nose, ears, hands and feet, need extra attention during winter's cold. Wear a turtleneck sweater, cap, scarf, face protection, mittens, wool socks and waterproof boots.



**Cold air makes it harder to work and breathe, which adds extra strain on your body.**

**Did you know?  
Shoveling heavy snow requires as much energy as running nine miles per hour.**

## FALL COUNCIL MEETING

The Williams County Homemakers held their fall council meeting on November 30, 2009 at the 2nd floor conference room of the Williams County Courthouse. Officer elections were held, with all of the 2009 officers being re-elected to their positions. President: Cheryl Haugenoe, Vice President: Cheryl Landro, Secretary: Vera Bergstrom, and Treasurer: Gloria Twete. Roll call was a favorite Christmas cookie recipe, and copies of everyone's recipes were made and distributed to those in attendance.

The spring council meeting and potluck supper will be held on Monday, April 19, 2010 at the James Memorial Library. The Parkway Gals will plan the entertainment for the evening.

## PECAN PIE BARS

Yield: 24 bars

Prep Time: 25 minutes

Bake: 40 minutes

1- 1/4 c. flour

1 c. chopped pecans

1/2 c. powdered sugar

1/2 c. packed brown sugar

1/4 tsp salt

1/2 c. light colored corn syrup

1/2 c. butter

2 Tbl butter, melted

2 eggs, slightly beaten

1 tsp vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. For crust, in a medium bowl combine flour, powdered sugar, and salt. Using a pastry blender, cut in the 1/2 c. butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Pat crumb mixture into an ungreased 11 X 7 X 2 inch baking pan. Bake for 20 minutes or until lightly browned.

Meanwhile, for filling, in a medium bowl stir together eggs, pecans, 1/2 c. brown sugar, the corn syrup, 2 Tbl melted butter, and vanilla. Pour over the baked crust, spreading evenly.

Bake for 20 minutes more or until the filling is set. Cool completely in pan on a wire rack. Cut into bars. Cover and store in refrigerator.

Trade pecan pie for pecan pie bars. Get the heart benefit and the crunch of pecans with less corn syrup and butter. You get the same traditional sweet taste with fewer calories and fat in the smaller bar than a large slice of pie.



### New Brochure Available:

'Now Serving: Recipe Makeovers!' FN-1447

Learn how to update and revitalize your family favorites.

### Giving Gift Cards for the Holidays? Some Have Strings Attached

MADISON, Wis.--Starting in mid-2010, consumers will benefit from new regulations designed to restrict the ability of gift card issuers to impose excessive fees and expiration dates. But those rules don't affect cards purchased this year, so shoppers need to make sure they read the fine print to protect themselves from hidden costs.

If you're buying gift cards, opt for "open loop" cards, says J. Michael Collins, Cooperative Extension family and consumer economics specialist and assistant professor at the UW-Madison School of Human Ecology. "The major credit card issuers—American Express, MasterCard, Discover and Visa—all offer gift cards." These types of cards are available at retail stores and even online. They may be used for any purchase where credit or debit cards are accepted.

Visa gift cards typically expire after one year and MasterCard gift cards after 24 months, according to Bankrate.com's annual survey of gift cards.

American Express gift cards have no expiration date, but impose a \$2 monthly service fee after 12 months. The service fee is deducted from the balance on the card. "Be sure to let the recipient of any card know they need to use it before it expires—or they forget they even have the card at all," says Collins.

"Most 'open-loop' issuers also charge a fee to buy their cards," says Collins. "The fees can range from \$3.95 to \$4.95 per card, depending on the bank that's issuing it. If you're buying gift cards for a large number of people, those fees can add up."

Many mall operators also offer gift cards that can be used in all—or most—of the stores in the mall. But they also may contain more restrictions than gift cards issued by individual retailers or open-loop cards, including reducing the amount available on the card over time. "As with all cards, be sure to read the fine print. And then read it again," says Collins.

If you're buying a gift card for an individual store, be mindful that the retailer might go out of business. "Gift card holders have few rights when a retailer files for bankruptcy," says Collins. "And with retail bankruptcies expected to rise next year, that's a real concern."

If you receive a gift card, check to see if it can be redeemed online, Collins advises. And don't delay in using it. Americans spent \$88.4 billion on gift cards in 2008, but left \$6.4 billion unused, according to TowerGroup, a consulting firm.

Until the new legislation overhauling credit card practices goes into effect next summer, the key word for shoppers this holiday season is still "buyer beware."



In 2008 there was \$6.4 billion spent on unused gift cards