**recipe corner**

**Edible gifts go down a treat**

Anyone can give a DVD or a pair of socks for a Christmas gift but handmade individual presents are something special and much appreciated, says **DEBORAH NICHOLAS**, who suggests some ideas from her new book, Gifts From Your Kitchen.

**Peanut Brittle**

Makes enough to cover 30 sq cm before it is broken into pieces

**Ingredients**
- 200g caster sugar
- 60ml water
- 2 tbsp strongly flavoured honey
- 150g golden syrup
- 150g salted peanuts
- 1½ tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 25g soft butter
- 1½ tsp bicarbonate of soda

**Method**

1. Take out a large sheet of baking parchment and set it beside the stove ready to receive the brittle once it is ready to pour.
2. Add the sugar, water, honey and syrup to a pan and gently bring to the boil. Turn the heat up and let it boil for 10 minutes. It will be smoking by then so stand over it all the time to make sure it does not catch fire. Be careful, as the sugar will be seriously hot.
3. Take the pan off the heat and, with a wooden spoon, stir in the nuts, followed by the vanilla, cinnamon, butter and bicarbonate of soda. You will have a golden, frothy, hot and gooey mix.
4. Pour this quickly on to the baking sheet and, using an oiled wooden spoon, coax and pull it to make a nut-studded sheet, paddle-shaped rather than heaped.
5. Leave it to cool, then break into pieces and store in an airtight container in the fridge. Eat within 14 days.

**Top tip:** Peanut brittle is best presented in either greaseproof bags or glass jars. You can buy glassine bags, which look fabulously with a printed label topper and ribbon fastening. Glass jars keep the air from the brittle, allowing it to last a little longer. Add your own decorative label and fasten with a colourful ribbon for a simple homemade gift.

**Fruit and Nut Buttons** (Makes 24)

**Ingredients**
- 200g good-quality dark chocolate
- 150g freeze-dried fruits
- 100g chopped mixed nuts

**Method**

1. Place the chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a pan of boiling water. Do not allow the bowl to touch the water. Stir until melted.
2. Remove from heat and stir in half the freeze-dried fruit and three-quarters of the mixed nuts.
3. Stir until all the fruit and nuts are covered in chocolate and spoon into button or sweet moulds.
4. While the chocolate is still wet, sprinkle the remaining fruit and nuts over the top of each button.
5. Allow to set completely before removing from the button tray.

**Top tip:** Drop a handful of the buttons into a gift bag and embellish with a customised label and a colourful ribbon.

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**profile**

**An American in Ruislip for a world premiere**

EMMY award winner Rita Abrams, one half of the writing team behind Pride and Prejudice: The Musical, could not be happier that Britain – and Ruislip Operatic Society in particular – got to stage her Austen musical first. She does, however, admit she had to look Ruislip up on a map from her home in Mill Valley, northern California, when her agent called to tell her that a director in the UK had come a-knocking.

“It did seem that being the UK it was very synchronistic to have the premiere here,” she said. “To have the world premiere here is very exciting.”

“Our agent (shared with co-author Josie Brown, below) approached us very reluctantly when [director] Helen Bailey emailed to me, and left it very much in our hands.”

Ruislip Operatic Society veteran director Bailey had been looking frantically for a winter show after her first choice had been scuppered.

Mass emails, frantic calls and some fast reworking later, the deal was done and “P&P” was on its way across the Atlantic.

“We had to get all the materials prepared very quickly and get them to them,” said Abrams, a former primary school teacher whose life took a completely new direction when she wrote for her class back in 1998, in the town in which she still lives, was picked up by a Warner Bros music producer. It became a hit.

“Forty-three years of musical theatre, children’s music, and film and TV soundtracks later, she said she was “reading Pride and Prejudice for the umpteenth time (when) I was struck that the story really should be a musical”.

Up stepped Josie Brown, a nearish neighbour from the San Francisco bay area, whose husband had collaborated with Abrams on another project, Pride and Prejudice: The Musical, like a blushing debutante, was keen to show a little ankle. And the London season beckoned.

Mass emails, frantic calls and some fast reworking later, the deal was done and “P&P” was on its way across the Atlantic.

“All of that is confidant. It needs tweaking and fine-tuning, but Abrams is grateful for the chance to “lab test” it, and says there is no reason why a British company should not be second and even third in line to give it a try, and she is open to the offer.

For Ruislip Operatic Society, if nothing else, it ensures them there place in musical theatre history.

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**Alan Hayes**

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**Crossword**

1. Had a meal at the hotel - it’s natural (6)
2. Lucky charm for a mare at the racecourse (6)
3. Viennese writer of note (6,7)
4. Concerning a property contract that’s free (7)
5. About to get a spool and a wickerwork basket (5)
6. When the man has a cricket trophy (5)
7. Steals over to get a seat (5)
8. An age to find a Muse (5)
9. Substitute two materials (7)
10. Proverbial value of two bushlits (4,2,3,4)
11. Finishing with gin Den mixed (6)
12. More heated conflict on the French sea (6)
13. Damage in panel (6)
14. Like an-in-panel(6)
15. Weight of silver returned to the Friendly Islands (6)
16. Possibly rip coat with fruit (7)
17. Threat of burglary (5,3,5)
18. Let us out of the fight (6)
19. Like a writer’s tree (5)
20. Note the return of a boy - one from public school (5)
21. Return the Spanish meat - it’s inadequate (8)
22. Runs to the left-wingers (5)
23. Offer to be gentle (6)
24. Tape up a religious picture (5)

**Quick clues**

1. Rashness (13)
2. Guarantee (6)
3. Throat (6)
4. Headwear (8)
5. Law (13)
6. Bioderma (7)
7. Dull (6)
8. Clandestine (13)
9. Rope fibre (5)
10. In earshot (7)
11. Hassled (3,3,2,5)
12. Attractive (6)
13. Beyond (7)
14. Locometer (6)
15. Jet (5)
16. Cupboard (6)
17. Upshift (5)

**Solutions**

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**Cryptic clues**

ACROSS

1. 21. Rashness (13)
2. 22. Guarantee (6)
3. 23. Headwear (8)
4. 24. Law (13)
5. 25. Bioderma (7)
6. 26. Dull (6)
7. 27. Clandestine (13)
8. 28. Rope fibre (5)
9. 29. In earshot (7)

DOWN

1. 21. Rashness (13)
2. 22. Guarantee (6)
3. 23. Headwear (8)
4. 24. Law (13)
5. 25. Bioderma (7)
6. 26. Dull (6)
7. 27. Clandestine (13)
8. 28. Rope fibre (5)
9. 29. In earshot (7)

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**LEISURE**

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