

LEISURE

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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 up the heat and let it boil seriously 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 parchment and, using an oiled wooden spoon, coax and pull it to make a nut-studded sheet, puddle-shaped rather than heaped.

5) Leave it to cool, then break into pieces and store in an airtight



SWEET CHOICE:

Fruit and Nut Buttons make a great stocking filler or even a Christmas tree decoration. Featured in *Gifts From Your Kitchen* by Deborah Nicholas, published by Spring Hill at £14.99 Photo PA

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 fabulous with a printed label topper and ribbon fastening. Glass jars keep the air away 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.

profile

Rita Abrams

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 synchronicous 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 rationally when (director) Helen (Bailey) emailed to him, 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 a song she wrote for her class back in 1969, 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



■ **EXCITED:** *Pride and Prejudice* co-writer Jane Abrams Contributed

Abrams on another project. *Pride and Prejudice: The Musical*, like a blushing debutante, was ready to show a little ankle. And the London season beckoned.

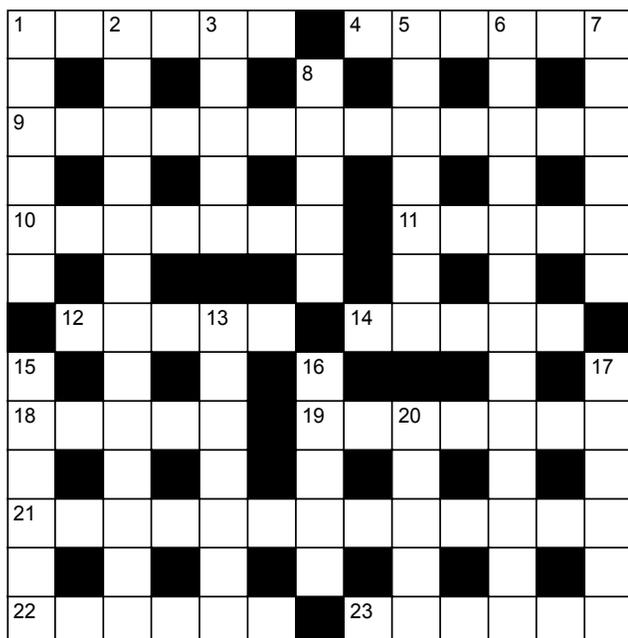
“It’s like having a child to give it up for adoption, then coming across the world to see how it is getting on,” Abrams said. “Last night (Wednesday last week, the second night of the run), I was sitting there watching it and for the first time I could relax and have confidence. I was very nervous before the first performance.”

Rita Abrams is still loving the Ruislip life, last week enjoying walks around the neighbourhood between performances at The Winston Churchill Hall and the friendly welcome from local people. She is now hoping to take in a West End show or two.

P&P will go on to greater things, of that she is confident. 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 offers.

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

Crossword



Cryptic clues

ACROSS

1. Had a meal at the hotel - it's natural (6)
4. Lucky charm for a mare at the racecourse (6)
9. Viennese writer of note (6,7)
10. Concerning a property contract that's free (7)
11. About to get a spool and a wickerwork basket (5)
12. When the man has a cricket trophy (5)
14. Steals over to get a seat (5)
18. An age to find a Muse (5)
19. Substitute two materials (7)
21. Proverbial value of two bushtits (4,2,3,4)
22. Finishing with gin Den mixed (6)
23. More heated conflict on the French sea (6)

DOWN

1. Damage in panel (6)
2. Like all-in wrestling on an open freighter? (2,5,6)
3. Weight of silver returned to the Friendly Islands (5)
5. Possibly rip coat with fruit (7)
6. The threat of burglary? (5,3,5)
7. Lets us out of the fight (6)
8. Like a writer's tree (5)
13. Note the return of a boy - one from public school (7)
15. Return the Spanish meat - it's inadequate (6)
16. Runs to the left-wingers (5)
17. Offer to be gentle (6)
20. I tape up a religious picture (5)

Quick clues

ACROSS

1. Help (6)
4. Thrash (6)
9. Law (13)
10. Bloated (7)
11. Dull (5)
12. Cram (5)
14. Broom (5)
18. Change (5)
19. Reading (7)

DOWN

21. Rashness (13)
22. Guarantee (6)
23. Headwear (6)
6. Tire (3,3,2,5)
7. Attractive (6)
8. Degree (5)
13. Beyond (7)
15. Bewilder (6)
16. Jet (5)
17. Cupboard (6)
20. Uplift (5)

SOLUTIONS

CRYPTIC - ACROSS: 1 Mascarot; 4 Mascot; 9 Johann Strauss; 10 Release; 11 Creel; 12 Ashes; 14 Stool; 18 Erato; 19 Replace; 21 Bird in the hand; 22 Enring; 23 Warner. **DOWN:** 1 Injury; 2 No holds barred; 3 Tonga; 5 Apricot; 6 Cause for alarm; 7 Tussle; 8 Aspen; 13 Etonian; 15 Feeble; 16 Trot; 17 Tender; 20 Pieta.

QUICK - ACROSS: 1 Assist; 4 Larrup; 9 Jurisprudence; 10 Swelled; 11 Blunt; 12 Stuff; 14 Besom; 18 Alter; 19 Perusal; 21 Foolhardiness.

DOWN: 1 Run out of steam; 2 Surreptitious; 3 Sisal; 4 Grade; 8 Pretty; 9 Further; 13 Further; 15 Baffle; 16 Spurt; 17 Closet; 20 Raise.