**Christmas Checklist**

**Christmas Cookies**

* ***Gingerbread:*** For some families, gingerbread -- be it cookies or a house -- is essential.
* ***Spritz:*** Other clans require masses of spritz cookies. (If you're not among them: A spritz is a cookie press. Using one soft cookie dough and a variety of disks, you can create different cookie shapes.)
* ***Thumbprints:*** Thumbprint cookies are another favorite.
* ***Sugar cookies:*** For many of us, Christmas is a time to make sugar cookies in all manner of seasonal shapes. It’s when the cookie cutter reigns supreme and sparkly or frosted trees, stars, snowmen, and snowflakes abound.
* ***Compile your ingredients list:*** Read your recipes well and tally up all the ingredients you need. Be sure your baking powder and baking soda are fresh. Ditto spices -- don't use last year's ground cloves or cardamom.
* ***Refresh your cookie-decorating kit:*** Decorating isn't only for kids. Some cookies need maybe just a dusting of powdered sugar, others a sprinkle of colored sanding sugar, and some icing or more. This is the time to refresh your supply of sprinkles and gel colors.
* ***Gather your little helpers:*** If you will be working with kids, you'll want to tailor your selection to suit small hands. Plan out who is doing what before you start, and be sure everyone is clad in an apron and has washed their hands.
* ***Consider your packaging:*** If you’re planning to give your cookies as gifts, be sure to pack them creatively -- and carefully.
* ***Sharing is caring:*** If you’re planning or attending a cookie exchange, here's what you need to know.
* ***Get ready to bake:*** To get in the making mind-set, read our cookie-baking tips. Then get rolling (or dropping, cutting-out, sandwiching, spritzing, and decorating).

**Holiday Drinks**

**Eggnog**

Just a few ingredients -- egg yolks, sugar, milk, cream, and nutmeg -- create the wonderfully distinctive flavor of this favorite holiday drink.

Eggnog recipes can be spiked to your liking with rum, bourbon, or brandy, or enjoyed in nonalcoholic form by guests of all ages.

Eggnog is delicious straight from the glass, but we’ve also used it to create flavorful holiday desserts -- including cheesecake bars and panna cotta. Try a splash in your morning coffee, or swap it in for the heavy cream in your favorite bread pudding or baked oatmeal recipe. You can even turn it into French toast!

**Fruity and Festive**

Steeping wine with fragrant additions like cinnamon, cloves, citrus, and peppercorns -- with a dash of brandy thrown in too -- makes a warming wintery take on sangria that’s easy to serve to a crowd.

A bowl of sweet, strong holiday punch lends a festive air to any occasion. Trade standard mixers for seasonal fruits like blood orange, cranberry, and pomegranate.

A signature cocktail is just the thing to rouse the holiday spirit. See recipes for candy-cane cocktails, eggnog martinis, and more.

**Rich and Chocolaty**

Which is bliss: ignorance, or a mug of homemade hot chocolate? We’d vote for the latter, as would anyone who’s swapped store-bought packets for stove-top potions from scratch. Minty or nutty, spicy or spiked, extra-creamy or dairy-free

When it comes to finishing touches, marshmallows and whipped cream each have their devotees. In the end, it comes down to what you’d like to add: a sweet, sticky cap, or a creamy swirl that infiltrates every sip.

A bring-your-own-mug hot chocolate bar makes an easy, fun party idea. Pour a big batch of cocoa into a heat-proof dispenser, and let guests load up with chopped candies, chocolate shavings, sprinkles, and -- of course -- whipped cream and marshmallows.