A Holiday Sampler

Discover. Try. Enjoy.

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Introduction

Christmas has a way of becoming a little bit of everything. There are plans to make, gifts to buy, things to bake, projects to finish, places to go, and traditions we want to hold onto somewhere in the middle of it all.

That's what **The Holiday Sampler** is about.

A Holiday Sampler is a small collection of useful things for the Christmas season. Inside, you'll find a little planning help, a way to keep an eye on your Christmas spending, something to make, something sweet to bake, and an idea for adding a little more Christmas spirit to the season.

Use what helps. Skip what doesn't. Print the pages you want to use again. Change things to suit your own Christmas. There is no right way to do any of it.

My hope is simply that somewhere in these pages you'll find an idea that makes Christmas a little easier, a little more meaningful, or simply a little more fun.

So pour yourself something warm—or, if you're like me, a glass of sweet tea—and have a look around. You might find something worth trying.

Discover. Try. Enjoy.

Christmas at a Glance

Things to Do

Things to Buy

Things to Make

Places to Go

Place	Date	Time

Don't Forget!

The Holiday Budget

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	COST
Food		
Decorations		
Gift Wrapping		
Handmade Gift Supplies		
Purchased Gifts		
Christmas Cards		
Postage / Shipping		
	TOTAL	

Hello, Dollies

This recipe was handed down to me by one of my favorite women at church. I was around 8 years old, and she wanted to encourage my love of cooking, so we often exchanged recipes. Hello, Dollies is a rich, sweet dessert that we often made for the holidays.

You will notice the recipe says - and repeats - one thing; DO NOT STIR! As a baker, stirring is an automatic gesture in most recipes, but you want to put away your wooden spoon for this one. When you take your first bite, you will be so glad you DID NOT STIR!

Ingredients

- 1 stick butter
- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 1 cup shredded coconut
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup chopped nuts
- 1 can Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk

Directions

Heat oven to 350°F.

Melt the butter in a 9 x 9-inch pan. Pour graham cracker crumbs over the butter. DO NOT STIR! Spread shredded coconut over the crumbs. DO NOT STIR! Sprinkle the chocolate chips over the coconut. DO NOT STIR! Spread the chopped nuts over the chocolate chips—and DO NOT STIR! Pour the sweetened condensed milk over everything—and again, DO NOT STIR!

Bake for 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool. Cut into squares.

Knit or Crochet Garland

This project is perfect for anyone learning to knit or crochet. Keep the stitches simple or get creative as your skill level allows!

Supplies:

At least three colors of Christmas yarn. Try solids, self-striping, or sparkly yarn for variety.
Knitting needles and/or crochet hook appropriate for your yarn.

Directions:

Knitted Version:

Cast on enough stitches to make the strip about 1-1/2" wide. I cast on five stitches, leaving a tail of at least 6". Knit until the strip measures about 7", then cast off. Use a simple knit stitch or experiment with other stitches and patterns.

Crochet Version:

Chain enough stitches to make the strip about 1-1/2" wide. I chained six. Work in single crochet until the strip measures about 7". You can also experiment with half-double crochet, double crochet, or another stitch you enjoy. Leave a tail for joining.

To Assemble the Chain

Bring the ends of one strip together and use the yarn tail to sew them securely into a loop. Trim the excess and turn the seam to the inside.

Thread the next strip through the first loop, join its ends, and continue until the garland reaches the length you want.

My small tree takes about 75 loops. As a starting point, allow roughly five loops per foot of garland, adjusting for the size of your loops.

For even more variety, alternate knit and crocheted loops. It's a fun way to practice either craft while making something for Christmas.

Christmas Spirit in a Jar

"I wish we could put up some of the Christmas spirit in jars and open a jar of it every month." – Harlan Miller

Christmas spirit isn't something we can actually put in a jar. If we could, it would probably be a little like putting vinegar and baking soda together, screwing on the lid, and waiting. Eventually, something is going to escape. True Christmas spirit has a way of doing the same thing.

It isn't simply about buying gifts or decorating a tree. Christmas spirit is an attitude of the heart—a smile, a kind word, a thoughtful gesture, a helping hand. For me, it also comes from the hope we were given through the birth of Christ.

The problem is that even during Christmas, it's easy to become so busy with our own lists and plans that we forget to look beyond them.

That's where Christmas Spirit in a Jar comes in.

Fill a jar with small ways to share Christmas spirit—with someone else, with the people you love, or simply by taking a little time to remember what Christmas means to you.

Bake something for a neighbor. Call someone who might be lonely. Leave a kind note. Help someone with a chore. Give something away. Offer encouragement.

The actions don't need to be large. That's rather the point.

A little Christmas spirit has a way of spreading.

Make Your Own Christmas Spirit in a Jar

Use any jar or container with a lid. Decorate it if you'd like, or keep it simple.

Then make a list of small ways you can share Christmas spirit—with someone else, with the people you love, or simply by taking a little time to remember what Christmas means to you. Write each idea on a small slip of paper, fold it, and place it in the jar.

Pull one out each week—or anytime your Christmas could use a little more spirit.

Need a little inspiration? Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Bake a treat for a lonely neighbor
- Buy a tree/gift for someone in need
- Read a Christmas story to a child
- Make treats for the birds
- Create small gifts for stocking stuffers
- Make a wreath for a friend or neighbor
- Take a walk and reflect
- Read Luke 2:1–20
- Make Christmas cards
- Bake Christmas cookies to share
- Make homemade ornaments to give away
- Create a Christmas memory book with someone you love

A Little More Christmas

Christmas doesn't have to be complicated to be meaningful. Sometimes a simple plan makes the season easier. A budget takes away a little worry. Something made by hand becomes a gift someone treasures. A favorite recipe brings everyone into the kitchen. And a small tradition becomes part of the Christmases we remember.

I hope you've found a little of each in this Sampler—and, more importantly, something you'll actually use.

Try the recipe. Make the garland. Fill your Christmas Spirit Jar. Print the pages that help you. Change the ideas to fit your own family and your own Christmas. And enjoy it.

If you'd like a little more, each of the ideas you've sampled here has a bigger home in my Christmas collection:

The Holiday Budget helps you plan your Christmas spending before it gets away from you.

A Simple Christmas Plan helps you organize the season without filling every minute of it.

The Christmas Kitchen is filled with recipes, ideas, and practical help for the food that brings us together at Christmas.

A Handmade Christmas is for slowing down, making something with your own hands, and giving gifts with a little of yourself tucked inside.

Christmas Traditions is about the things that make Christmas feel like Christmas—the traditions we keep, create, change, share, and carry forward.

You'll find all five at **Books & Porches.**

But whether you stop here or keep exploring, I hope your Christmas has room for the things that matter most to you.

Merry Christmas,

julie