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Wondering what gift to give your friends for Christmas that's both tasteful and useful?

Try a batch of your favorite holiday cookies and the recipes you used to bake them. And don't just package them up in pretty tins and drop them by the house, invite everyone to your house and have them bring their favorite cookies and the recipes they used to bake them. It's called a Cookie Exchange, and it's a party with a purpose.

That's what Cissy Thompson did with members of her Marsh Hens Supper Club.

For women who don't like to bake or who have little time on their hands to do so, the Cookie Exchange is a fun way to get lots of good cookies to nibble on at home, and pick up some new ones and have fun reminiscing with friends.

Marsh Hen Ginger Watson says its perfect for her because, "I don't bake. I'm a great cook, but I just don't bake."

Sue Sayer, Lisa Hamil and Julie Altman agreed that the cookie exchange is a great opportunity to try out cookies you've never had, especially new tastes from different cultures. In short, it's just a fun way to find your new favorite cookie!

### Hosting the Cookie Exchange:

Ask each guest to prepare a half dozen or dozen cookies per participant, plus a dozen for the party. You can provide guidelines or suggest cookie types to each participant to avoid duplicates, such

as rolled cookies, decorated cookies, or bar cookies. The "cookie" definition can be expanded to include candy, fudge, nut brittles and other homemade holiday confections.

Make sure that guests bring containers in which to take home their cookies and copies of their recipe to share. Large sealable plastic bags may be good for some cookies, but decorated and more delicate cookies should be placed in tins or plastic containers with parchment or waxed paper.

At the exchange, invite your guests to share their cookie stories. Many recipes may be family recipes with a history. Others may want to share baking anecdotes. For an added twist, make this a cookie decorating party by supplying undecorated sugar or gingerbread cookies in holiday shapes with a variety of icings, colored sugars, sprinkles and

decorations and invite guests to decorate their own to take home.

A cookie exchange works at any time of the day. You can prepare overnight egg casseroles, fruit and muffins, and have a breakfast brunch for moms and children. You can hold an early afternoon swap to precede a holiday shopping trip. An evening swap can be accompanied by a Secret Santa gift exchange or a game of cards. A nice way to commemorate the exchange is to assemble all the recipes provided into a book for each guest. Add photos for an even more personal touch.

