



Recipe for Joy

Add a Little Preparation with a Lot of Awareness and Top Off with Freedom

My first Christmas in Chicago, I hosted my boyfriend's parents. Despite also working and going to school, I set out to make the complete Christmas dinner from Martha Stewart's magazine including a *bûche de Noël*, a dish it takes days to make. The house also needed to be flawless so I cleaned from top to bottom. Offers were made to bring a dish to dinner, but I refused. When my boyfriend offered to help scrub the toilets, I told him no.

Only I could do things perfectly. (There may have been some lingering fantasy of being the whirling dervish in the kitchen my mom had been.)

While trying to make meringue mushrooms, I cried. My cake turned out like a lump of I don't know what rather than a lovely fallen log. By the time dinner came around, I was stressed out, anxious, and short-tempered. Gracious had left the building.

After that Christmas, I made myself a promise to do things differently next time around. I wanted to spend time with family and friends instead of pressuring myself to have the perfect home and perfect meal—fun for no one!



Recognizing that being in control did not make my life any better, I started letting people help. A friend brought dessert to my next party. Guess what? The world didn't end. Then I threw caution to the wind and asked a friend to handle appetizers. Finally, I hosted a potluck without controlling what people brought to eat and people had a good time with good food. Especially me.

Letting go of perfectionism was a multi-step process; however, in losing full control, I gained freedom in return. Now I spend time with my guests—laughing, drinking, and eating—instead of hovering over a hot stove (never mind a filthy toilet!). At my last dinner party, a friend told me he felt genuinely at home and I made everything seem so effortless. Rather than remind him of my perfectionist tendencies, I smiled, enjoying the moment of high praise. After all, I am a great hostess.

Kandy Christenson is a creator, maker, dreamer, photographer, traveler and Certified Interior Decorator. She believes design should be sustainable and transformative. Each space she designs is unique because she uses upcycled, handmade, vintage and local materials. She can be found trying out new ideas at meanderingdesign.com.

more holiday tips continued on next page



Stock Your Pantry

In addition to puff pastry in the freezer and a jar of olives in the fridge, I also keep the following recipes stocked:



Sugar Cookies

([recipe from A Spicy Perspective](#))

Red Lentil & Chickpea Soup

([recipe adapted from The Full Helping](#))

Spaghetti w/ Canned Tomato Sauce

([recipe adapted from The Naked Kitchen](#))

