



As the festive season fast approaches it's time to turn our thoughts to simple, stylish, easy and inexpensive solutions for a glamorous party season ahead. This is one time of the year when we can let our imaginations run wild and have fun. I have settled on gold as my theme this year, whether for gift wrapping delicacies for friends and family, glamorous party make-up, candles or for the festive table.

Going for gold - make-up & style

As the party season approaches it's worth sparing a thought to make-up. Following on with the gold theme, make-up artist Joanne Jewitt suggests using her technique of light shades above the eyelid and below the brow, dark in the socket, to create the big-eyed look. Don't forget to define your brows to frame your eyes. Introduce subtle shades of gold above the lashes then team with dark plum on the outer edge and purple mascara (YSL do a dramatic violet mascara). Apply a shimmer shadow above the cheek bone to highlight and a shimmer pink blusher for a healthy glow. Lipstick should follow the make-up colour scheme and your skin tone. For more make-up ideas see www.beautifultruth.co.uk

Christmas outfit:
Young Ideas,
Ashbourne
Photography: Red
Square
redsquaregallery@mac.com



Chocolate Orange and Pistachio Truffles

I like to take homemade gifts to friends over the festive season and my particular favourites are chocolate orange and pistachio truffles (recipe below). Placed in gold petit four cases and arranged in lovely gold embossed cellophane bags gathered with ribbons, they not only look wonderful but taste out of this world. (makes 12)

- 75ml (3 fl oz) double cream
- 10g (½ oz) unsalted butter
- 1 x 100g bar of luxury Belgian dark chocolate, broken into chunks
- 25g (1oz) shelled unsalted pistachio nuts, finely chopped
- 1 rounded tablespoon cocoa powder
- A little grated orange zest or a drizzle of orange oil
- 12 gold petit four cases

1. Heat the cream and butter over a low heat in a small non-stick pan until the butter has melted. Remove from heat and stir in the chocolate until melted. Mix in the nuts and orange zest and pour on to a dinner plate, then put it in the fridge, uncovered, for about 1 hour.
2. Remove the mixture from the fridge 20 mins before you want to shape the truffles. Sieve most of the cocoa powder onto a plate, dip a teaspoon into boiling water, dry it, then pull it across the chocolate to make a loose curl.

3. Toss in the cocoa and shake gently before removing to a serving dish. Repeat until all the mixture has been used up, dipping your spoon in the water and drying it between each curl. Cover with cling film and chill until ready to use.
4. Just before you serve dust with the remaining cocoa powder and then place in petit four cases before gathering up with a gold doyley or tissue paper and gold cellophane.

I like to serve these after supper instead of a dessert with vanilla ice-cream and a sprig of mint as a tasty little morsel for the chocoholics in my family! If you are giving these as a gift it is nice to place them in their cases on either a glass etched plate or vintage saucer (available from most antique shops, Ikea or local charity shops) or simply wrapped in a gold square of tissue paper placed on some embossed gold cellophane. Visit www.ruddmoncrieff.com for more festive recipes, gift wrapping solutions and floral suggestions.



An Elegant Festive Centrepiece

Simple and stylish candle and flower centrepieces make the festive table shine. Use candle wax to attach a small floral frog to the centre of a shallow bowl. Push a taper into the centre to secure. Pour water into the bowl. Clip amaryllis blooms (or other large flowers like poinsettias) and arrange around the candle.



Festive and flattering

Another gift idea we all adore that offers a simple way of creating a Christmassy atmosphere is a festive candle. The five-wick cream ceramic trough candle from On a Wick and a Prayer, the candle workshop at Tissington (www.onawick.co.uk) not only makes a great dining table centrepiece, but is a truly special gift – with the added benefit of coming gift wrapped.

