

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Healthy Holiday Gifts

By [Lisa Franzen-Castle](#), UNL Extension Nutrition Specialist



Homemade food and cooking ingredients can be great gifts for friends and family this holiday season. It is also the time of year when local food pantries need additional food items. This season try giving health-related gifts and providing healthier food donations. The possibilities are endless, but here are a few ideas to help get started.

Tips for Healthy Holiday Gifts and Donations

- Fruit and vegetable bouquet. Try giving a colorful selection of fruits and vegetables, keeping them at optimum quality by assembling the basket shortly before giving it. Examples of items to include are green and red grapes, apples, oranges, peppers, broccoli, or zucchini.
- Holiday snack jar. Select a clear, covered container and fill it with healthy snacks such as little boxes of raisins, trail mix, 100-calorie packs of various crackers, dried fruit, baked chips and pretzels. Decorate the lid and/or jar with holiday cheer.
- Spice up your gifts. Zest up gifts by giving an assortment of herbs and spices. Examples that are effective in replacing the taste of salt include black pepper, minced garlic or garlic powder, minced onion or onion powder, basil, oregano, curry powder, and ginger. Examples of sweet-tasting spices that help reduce the need for sugar in certain foods are cinnamon, allspice, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, cardamom and anise.
- Mailing holiday food gifts. Food is a popular holiday gift and can be mailed safely if carefully chosen, well packaged and delivered in a timely manner. Coffee blends are easy to pack into decorative plastic or metal containers. Dried foods, nuts and dry mixes such as spiced teas, herb blends and party mixes, are also good choices.

- Gift certificate from your kitchen: Give a homemade “gift certificate” for fresh, healthy treats from your kitchen. You might promise to cook a complete meal for six people or to bake one fresh loaf of bread per month for the next year.
- Donating fruit and vegetable items. Help your local food pantry improve the quality of the food it distributes by donating fruit items such as canned fruit in water or its own juices, no-sugar-added applesauce, dried fruits, or 100 percent canned or boxed juices. Examples of vegetable items include low-sodium or “no-salt-added” canned vegetables and soups.
- Donating grains, protein, and dairy foods. Examples of grain items include brown rice, whole grain cereal, dry noodles and pastas, popcorn, and low-fat graham crackers. Protein items could include canned chicken, turkey or tuna, canned or dried beans, unsalted nuts such as peanuts, almonds or walnuts, and peanut butter. Examples of dairy items include powdered milk, shelf-stable milk or soy milk (in a box), and evaporated milk.

Make this holiday season the gift of healthier food for yourself, family, friends, and when donating. For more food, nutrition, and health information related to helpful winter holiday food preparation, food safety, and healthy eating links go to [UNL Food, Nutrition and Health](#).