

Homemade Gifts Infused with Flavor!

A Holiday Gift to You

from Northwest Kidney Centers Nutrition and Fitness Department

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Weather got you stuck at home? Worried about finishing your holiday shopping? No problem. You can make some great healthy gifts from ingredients you probably have at home. Or take a quick trip to your nearest grocery store instead of fighting your way to the malls.

If you are working during this busy season, you'll appreciate that making your own gifts is faster, easier, and more fun than shopping. And if you have young children at home, most of these gifts are simple enough and safe for them to help with, given some adult supervision.

Homemade gifts will save you money and tell the recipient you really care about their health. This collection relies on the cooking technique of infusion, in which ingredients are soaked or steeped in a liquid. The process is similar to making tea.

Infused oils, honey, vinegars, extracts, alcohols and simple syrups can build big, bold flavor so you don't need—and don't miss—the extra salt that is a killer. These items make great gifts for anyone watching their salt intake. That should include everyone, even you!

Infusions transfer saturated flavors to your tongue that make you feel satisfied and lose the salt craving. Infusions extract flavors from herbs, spices, citrus or fruits and release them into oils, vinegars, honey, extracts, milk, cheese or alcohol.

To bottle up these beautiful and tasty treats, keep a stash of old salad dressing bottles, jam jars and wine bottles. Save the lids, rinse and soak off the labels and you have gracious containers to fill with your homemade flavor infusions.

If you are short on glass bottles, ask your family and friends to save them for you. In no time you'll have a good supply. A trip to the thrift store can net you beautiful vinegar carafes or oil dispensers for pennies. Grocery stores often carry inexpensive vinegar and oil dispensers in their cookware sections.

Recipes for all these homemade, healthy, and “less-expensive-than-store-bought” goodies are below.

Infused Oils

For big, bold flavor, try infusing olive oil. You can buy a 5-liter jug of olive oil. Get the cheapest type you can find. The flavor will come from the other ingredients so don't waste money on extra virgin oil.

You can buy olive oil at most discount supermarkets, like Costco, Sam's Club, Cash & Carry, or Wal-Mart. The bulk departments at “fancy” grocery stores are also good

choices. Try Central Market, Trader Joe's, Manna Mills and PCC. If you bring your own containers and buy in bulk, you'll pay substantially less.

Once you've got containers and oil, try our basil-flavored olive oil, ([recipe here](#)), for a bountiful flavor, try sun dried tomato and garlic ([recipe here](#)), which makes a great dipping oil. Want another unusual flavor? Try rosemary and range dipping oil. ([recipe here](#)) Rosemary looks like the holidays, and the citrus adds a great zing!

Gourmet roasted peppers in olive oil are fast, fun, and a wonderful hostess gift. ([recipe here](#)). Or try infusing goat cheese in herbed olive oil for a great holiday appetizer. ([recipe here](#)). Goat cheese is often somewhat expensive, but again, purchasing a larger quantity at a discount store will decrease the cost significantly.

For fun, pair up these flavored oils with a flavored vinegar. Put them in a thrift store basket along with a loaf of nice French bread. Voila, a wonderful gift for under \$4!

Infused Vinegars

Holiday vinegars? These can add a tart, springy zest to winter salads, and make great meat marinades. Or sprinkle them over oven-roasted vegetables, ([Recipe on NKC Web site](#)). Try winter fruits in season, like pomegranate and tarragon, ([recipe here](#)) or cranberry orange vinegar, ([recipe here](#)). For a dark, savory alternative to balsamic vinegar, try our infused mushroom extract, ([recipe here](#)).

When you give these vinegars as gifts, you can print out our recipe brochure for flavored vinegars and attach it to your bottle for great ways on how to use flavored vinegars. ([Vinegar Brochure on NKC Web site](#))

These vinegars and oils "mixed" make great marinades and salad dressings as well as dips for bread.

Flavored Honey

Herbs (like lavender) and citrus peels ([recipe here](#)) are great for holiday honeys, and nothing will brighten up a dark winter morning like a homemade waffle with cinnamon honey! ([recipe here](#)) Again, buy a big quantity, infuse it, and split it up into pretty jars with nice labels for a gift your friends will talk about for years.

Try making up a batch of our low-salt "Master Mix," ([Recipe on NKC Web site](#)) add a printed recipe for homemade pancakes or scones, put in a thrift store basket with your honey and a cute wooden honey spoon or dipper, and you have another great gift for under \$3.

Simple Syrups and Flavored Sugars

Herbed simple syrups are amazingly flavorful! Basil simple syrup is a cool, gourmet gift, ([recipe here](#)). Try using it on poached pears or baked apples, or in basil lemonade ([recipe here](#)). Or try cardamom pear syrup, ([recipe here](#)), which is fantastic added to coffee, chai or tea, or a great base for a quick homemade sorbet.

You can also flavor sugar with lavender or cinnamon or vanilla beans. Flavored sugars are wonderful stirred into coffee, tea or chai, or sprinkled over holiday cookies and

desserts. ([recipe here](#)). These gifts take only a few minutes to prepare and cost only pennies, but they show you care about good food and the good health of the recipient.

Extracts

You can make your own vanilla extract, bottle it and give a tasty gift everyone will use. ([recipe here](#)). You can also make cinnamon extract, ([recipe here](#)) or anise extract, or any other spice flavors you enjoy. Alcohol extracts the essential oils that enhance flavors. Include some of our low-sodium cookie recipes, ([on NKC web site](#)), a jar of low-sodium baking powder (Ask for Ener-G foods brand, made here in Seattle), a pretty wooden spoon, and you have another great gift for under \$4.

Cocktails

You can use flavored vodkas, rums or brandies to make beautiful and unique holiday drinks and gifts. They will be light on your pocketbook too; you can use much lower grades since you are adding pungent flavors.

Try soaking one or two whole vanilla beans in a quart of vodka. When the vanilla is soft, remove it, scrape the pod, and add the seeds and pod back into the vodka bottle. Let stand a week or two, then strain through a coffee filter and put in a pretty bottle along with our recipe so your recipient can make more. ([recipe here](#))

To get the most out of your vanilla bean, you can “recycle” it after making the extract. Use it in this delicious vanilla bean dessert sauce, ([recipe here](#)). Or put it in a pretty jar filled with brown, large crystal, or Turbino sugar and you’ll have vanilla sugar for a fraction of the ready-made cost! ([recipe here](#)) It’s great in tea, chai or coffee, or sprinkled on cookies or desserts.

You can also make cinnamon vodka, ([recipe here](#)) pear tequila, ([recipe here](#)) or a great citrus drink the Italians love, limoncello. ([recipe here](#)). You can make it into a great holiday drink when mixed with Champagne ([recipe here](#)). And recycle the leftover fruit and peel into a great lemonade for summertime. Freeze the fruit and pulp ’til it gets warm enough for lemonade ([recipe here](#)). Try making raspberry ([recipe here](#)), apricot, or cherry brandy or vodka, ([recipe here](#)). Not only is the brandy great, but you can serve the alcohol-infused fruits over ice cream for a fantastic, easy dessert. For fruit liquors that remind you of the warmth of the summer sun, try black currant or berry cassis or blackberry mure, ([recipe here](#)).

For non-alcohol drinkers, try an infusion of ginger with cranberry juice and lime for a beautiful crimson punch. ([recipe here](#))

On these wintry days, it is fun to make homemade gifts like these. And it is a great way to save money while giving a gift that is both thoughtful and healthful.

Instead of “infusing” loved ones with salt or breaking the budget with shopping, try a gift that shows your creativity and concern. Happy holidays!

Recipes, see below:

Vanilla or Cinnamon Infused Sugar

1-2 vanilla beans or
2 sticks cinnamon
1 cup sugar, white, brown, or Turbino (coarse brown sugar)
Or sugar substitute like Splenda or Sweet'n Low.

Put sugar or sugar substitute in pretty container. Split vanilla bean in half, lengthwise. Poke vanilla bean or cinnamon sticks down into sugar until covered. Wait 1-2 weeks, shaking occasionally. Use in tea, chai or coffee, or on holiday cookies or desserts.

Hot Ginger Cranberry Punch (Nonalcoholic)

1 quart cranberry juice
¼ cup fresh ginger, peeled, sliced thin
1/3 cup lime juice
1/3 cup sugar

Bring juice and ginger to a simmer in a large pan. Cook over medium heat to infuse flavor, about 20 minutes. Add lime juice and sugar, stir until dissolved. Strain and serve.

Berry Cassis or Mure

2 cups blackberries, froz.en or 2 cups black currants (harder to find)
1 cup sugar
2 cups brandy or cognac

Mash the fruit in a saucepan. Add sugar and 1 cup water, cook until sugar dissolves and fruit has released juices, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, let cool. Stir in brandy and transfer to glass jar. Refrigerate one week. Pour through a sieve lined with cheesecloth into a recycled wine bottle. Put a new cork in the top, make a pretty label and give as a great gift!

Raspberry Almond Vodka or Brandy

1 quart vodka or brandy
2-4 cups raspberries
½ cup sugar (adjust to sweetness of berries)
2 Tbsp. whole almonds

Mash berries with sugar. Pour the alcohol over them and add the nuts. Put into a wide-mouthed jar and put the lid on. Turn or shake the jar daily for the first month. Then strain the liquor, saving the fruit to serve over ice cream or dessert. Pour liquid through coffee filters until it is clear. Store in dark place in corked bottle. Wonderful as an aperitif, as a cocktail ingredient, or served over ice and mixed with cream.

Apricot or Cherry Brandy

1 cup dried apricots, or 2 cups of froz.en cherries
1 cup sugar
2 cups brandy or cognac

Put apricots in medium saucepan. Add sugar and 1 cup water. Cook until sugar dissolves and fruit has released juices, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, let cool. Stir in brandy

and transfer to glass jar. Refrigerate one week. Pour through a sieve lined with cheesecloth into a recycled wine bottle. Put a new cork in the top, make a pretty label and give as a great gift!

Cinnamon Vodka

1 shot (1.5 oz.) cinnamon flavored vodka
Add to 8 oz. cup of hot cider. Can also add to eggnog.
Garnish with cinnamon stick.

Vanilla Cherry Vodka

1 shot (1.5 oz.) vanilla flavored vodka
Ice
Coke or 7UP
Pour vodka over ice, and then fill the glass with soda. Garnish with a cherry.

Limoncello (lemon liqueur)

Recipe courtesy of Nives Rigodanzo, RN

1 quart vodka or 90 proof alcohol, or a 50-50 mixture.
Peel of 12 lemons (Try not to get the white pith. Grating or zesting works.)
3-4 kefir lime leaves (Optional. Find them at Asian specialty produce markets.)

Put the peel and leaves in the alcohol and store in a dark place for 12-15 days. Then, boil 1 quart of water with 3 cups of sugar for 10 minutes. Remove the lemon peel from the alcohol, and toss it in the water and sugar, continuing to boil for 30 minutes. Remove the peels, filter the syrup through a coffee filter or cheesecloth and mix with the alcohol when cool. Store in the freezer in a pretty bottle and use in the cocktail below for a sunny taste of summer in midwinter.

Limoncello Champagne Cocktail

1 shot (1.5 oz.) limoncello (see recipe)
½ oz. Cointreau
Champagne
Ice

Mix limoncello and Cointreau in a shaker with ice cubes. Strain into chilled glass, fill to top with champagne and serve with a twist of lemon or a mint leaf.

Basil Syrup

4 cups water
4 cups sugar
1 bunch fresh basil

Bring sugar and water to a boil. Meanwhile, chop basil finely in food processor or with knife. Do not puree. When syrup is boiling, remove from heat, stir in basil, cover and let sit about 20 minutes. Strain through coffee filter or cheesecloth and chill. Use to poach pears, add to baked apples, use in cocktails to replace any fruit syrup, and mix with lemon juice to make lemonade.

Cardamom-Pear Syrup

2 cups water
2 cups sugar
1 pear (Bartlett or Comice), peeled
1 tsp. cardamom seeds

Bring sugar and water to a boil. Meanwhile, grind cardamom in food processor, mortar and pestle or pepper mill. When syrup is boiling, remove from heat, stir in cardamom, chop and add pear quickly, so it does not turn brown. Cover and let sit about 20 minutes. Strain through coffee filter or cheesecloth and chill. This syrup can be used to poach fruits, or added to tea to make a great chai. It can be made into a lovely sherbet as well.

Pear Tequila

4 pears
1 cactus pear (optional, but gives a beautiful magenta color)
1 Granny Smith apple
4 cloves
Cinnamon stick
1 quart tequila

Chop fruit coarsely. Place in glass jar or bowl. Cover with tequila. Add spices. Store in dark place for about a week, stirring occasionally. Strain out fruit and refrigerate the tequila.

Vanilla Bean Extract

2-3 vanilla beans (try several different varieties for fun!)
12-16 ounces of vodka or rum
One or two glass bottles

Split beans in half, lengthwise. Put beans in bottles and fill with vodka, covering beans. Store in a cool, dark place for one or two months, shaking occasionally. After two months, remove beans, (save them) and strain liquid through a coffee filter, return to bottle. Use this extract in any recipe calling for vanilla; it is at least twice as flavorful. Use the beans to make vanilla sugar ([recipe here](#)) or simple vanilla cream sauce ([recipe here](#)).

Simple Vanilla Cream Sauce or Pudding

This is so good, you might want to double the recipe! Keeps 2-3 days.

1-2 vanilla beans, cut in half lengthwise
1½ cups milk (nonfat, 2% or whole)
3 egg yolks
3 Tbsp. sugar
2 tsp. cornstarch for thinner sauce OR 2 Tbsp. for thicker pudding
2 Tbsp. brandy, Kahlua or Frangelico (optional)

If you are “recycling” vanilla beans from another recipe, use two beans. Scrape out any beans remaining on the pods with a sharp knife and put in small saucepan with the pods. (The pods actually have most of the vanilla flavor). Bring milk to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Do not boil. Remove from heat and let sit about 20 minutes,

until mixture is cool. Discard beans, or recycle them again, by putting in a container of sugar, to make vanilla sugar. (see recipe)

Whisk into milk the egg yolks, sugar and cornstarch. Bring to a boil over high heat, whisking constantly. When mixture is boiling, check for thickening by putting a metal spoon into the mixture. If it coats the back of the spoon, and you can draw across the back of it with your finger, it is done.

Quickly put the sauce into a ceramic or metal bowl and let cool, stirring occasionally, until mixture reaches room temperature. As cream cools, add liquor if desired. This sauce is great over warm gingerbread, pumpkin pie or ice cream. Or serve as a fluffy, light pudding.

Cinnamon Extract

3-4 sticks cinnamon
12-16 ounces of vodka or rum
One or two glass bottles

Break up cinnamon sticks into one-inch pieces. Put in bottles. Fill bottles with vodka or rum. Store in a cool, dark place for one or two months, shaking occasionally. After two months, remove cinnamon sticks (save them) and strain liquid through a coffee filter, return to bottle. Use this extract in any recipe calling for cinnamon. This is two to three times more flavorful. Great when added to hot tea, hot chai tea or hot apple cider.

Basil or Pear Lemonade

½ cup simple basil or pear cardamom syrup (see recipes)
½ cup fresh or lemon juice concentrate
4 cups water

Mix until dissolved. Taste. You may need to add more syrup or lemon, depending on the sweetness or sourness of your lemons and your own taste preferences.

Limoncello Lemonade

What to do with all the great lemon peel and lemon you have left over from making your limoncello? Try this recipe! You can freeze the peel and pulp and save them for the summer months.

1-2 leftover peel from limoncello (see recipe)
1 cup lemon pulp from limoncello (frozen or fresh)
4 cups cold water
½ cup sugar

Add sugar to water, stir until dissolved. Add peel and lemon pulp. Let sit in refrigerator for 4-6 hours. Strain and return to pitcher, adding more sugar if needed.

Mushroom Infusion

This is a great substitute for soy sauce, adding a wonderful, robust flavor to foods

2-4 pounds mushrooms, any kind
4 cups red wine vinegar

2 cloves garlic
½ tsp. ground ginger
½ tsp. ground allspice or Chinese five-spice
½ tsp. mace or nutmeg
¼ tsp. ground black pepper
2-4 Tbsp. red or white wine
2 Tbsp. brandy (optional)

Put mushrooms, spices, vinegar and garlic in large pan. Simmer slowly about 1 hour, stirring once in a while. Strain through cheesecloth. Add wine and brandy. Pour into bottles. Cork and refrigerate. Keeps about 6 months.

Infused Olive Oil (Basil, Sun-Dried Tomato and Garlic, or Rosemary-Orange)

1 quart olive oil (the least expensive you can find)
1 bunch basil, rosemary, or your favorite herb
1 package dried tomatoes
2 cloves garlic
Lemon peel or orange peel (optional)

Whir basil in food processor, or coarsely chop with knife. If using rosemary, coarsely chop. Add to oil in heavy large saucepan. Watch oil continuously; do not leave the stove while it is on the burner. Add herbs and/or tomatoes to oil. Heat on medium to about 165 degrees on a cooking thermometer, when small bubbles appear but the oil is not boiling. ****Oil temperature is important to kill any botulism spores which may be in the foods you are adding.**** Set aside for an hour or until cooled to room temperature. Strain through cheesecloth or jelly bag. Pour into bottles. Store in refrigerator if not using immediately. Will keep 1 year in refrigerator. To use, remove from refrigerator and let rest at room temperature until the oil liquefies, usually about an hour. Olive oil at room temperature keeps for about 1-2 months.

Roasted Peppers in Olive Oil

Red or other sweet peppers
2 Tbsp. peppercorns (optional)
2 Tbsp. mustard seeds (optional)
Plain or flavored olive oil (see recipe)

You can use red, yellow, orange and purple peppers for a beautiful mix, or just use red. Green peppers are not sweet enough for this recipe.

Heat broiler to 450 degrees. Wash peppers and put them on baking sheet. Roast, turning over once, until skin is just charred in several places. Put hot peppers into a paper or plastic bag for 15 minutes to “sweat.” Remove and peel off skins. Slice into strips, remove pith and seeds, and layer into jars. Fill with olive oil, being sure all peppers are covered. Store in a cool place. Will keep 1 month on the shelf, 6 months in the refrigerator. The olive oil will set in the fridge, so remove 1 hour before you plan to serve.

Herb Oil Goat Cheese

1 quart olive oil

2 cloves garlic
Rosemary
Thyme
Marjoram
Bay leaf
1 tsp. peppercorns
1 tsp. celery seed
1 tsp mustard seed
Dried chili pepper (optional)
Goat cheese slices

Put oil and spices in wide-mouthed jar or bowl with a lid. Cut rounds from log of goat cheese and drop into oil. Be sure each is covered with oil; you may need to put a saucer on top to hold them down into the oil. Store at room temperature for 24 hours, then move to refrigerator. Use in 2-3 days. Remove from refrigerator 1-2 hours before serving, as oil will set in refrigerator. You can reuse the oil for new cheeses up to three times, heating oil in between batches.

Cranberry Orange Vinegar

1 bag cranberries.
1 gallon white vinegar
Grated rind of one orange
1½ cups sugar

Pour cranberries into saucepan. Add 2-4 cups vinegar. Add sugar. Add orange peel. Cook on medium heat for 10-15 minutes, until skin on berries begins to split. Pour back into the original container and another bottle or bowl. Let sit 2-4 days. Strain out berries and put into decorative bottles.

Pomegranate-, Blueberry- or Raspberry-Tarragon Vinegar

1 gallon white vinegar
1-2 cups pomegranate seeds, blueberries or raspberries (frozen is fine)
Dried or fresh tarragon

Take out 1-2 cups of vinegar (so the berries will fit in the gallon bottle). Drop the berries in. Add the dried or fresh tarragon, or any herb you like. Let sit for a few days, shaking occasionally. Strain out fruit and put into glass bottles. Save about \$10 a bottle! Give as a gift with flavored oils (see recipe) for a great salad dressing, or meat or poultry marinade.

Infused Honey

1 jar honey (1-2 cups)
2-3 sticks cinnamon OR
Fine grated orange peel from one orange OR
Dried, food-grade lavender flowers

Put honey and flavoring in glass or ceramic bowl. Microwave for 30 seconds to one minute, until honey is quite warm, but not boiling. Let set until cool. Put into bottles and store in cool dark place.