

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**No Time for Fancy Desserts?**

Are you caught in the time crunch of potluck holiday parties with no time to make the fancy desserts you'd love to show off? If you can't bear the thought of bringing cupcakes bought from the local bakery, don't despair. There are plenty of ideas for easily prepared, delicious and in some cases positively healthy desserts for the holiday season. Instead of my usual single recipe, I thought I'd give you a selection to choose from this week. So here we go, take your pick of one or several to impress your friends and family.

Glorified Pears: This one requires no advance preparation other than putting the plates together when you're ready to serve. You'll need canned pears, either plain or spiced, vanilla ice cream or frozen low fat yogurt, and chocolate sauce. For extra special, look for a dark bittersweet sauce. In each plate or dessert bowl, place half a pear, cut side up. On top of each pear put a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Or use a melon ball scoop to make tiny balls and pile 3 or 4 balls. Then drizzle fine lines of chocolate sauce across the pears and ice cream. A fabulous presentation in a few minutes! If you absolutely must be fancier, add a sprinkle of toasted almond slices.

Trifle: The only special thing you'll need for this non-traditional version is a clear glass serving bowl, preferably one with straight sides. This one you make in advance, at least several hours. That gives you time to dress to your best while it chills. You could use ladyfingers. Those were the original choice. But a purchased or made from mix pound or angel food cake works well too. Cut the cake into 1 inch cubes or strips.

You'll need 3 or more packages of prepared vanilla pudding. Use regular or sugar free, instant or cooked, depending on who you will be serving. If you make the cooked pudding be sure to let it cool. And you will need 2 bags of thawed frozen fruit, your choice of colors and flavors. Sweet cherries are lovely, but strawberries are holiday red as well. If you really want red and green, some diced honeydew melon or sliced fresh kiwi would be green choices. The original trifles usually included sherry, but you could choose to omit that. Once you have the ingredients and display bowl, just layer them in. Start with a layer of ladyfingers or pieces of cake. Use about half the cake. Then add half the fruit in a layer. Sprinkle some of the fruit juice on too, to moisten the cake. Arrange some of the fruit to show around the edges of the bowl. Now spread half the pudding over the fruit. Repeat with the rest of the cake, fruit and its juices and pudding. Be sure the fruit shows its true colors around the sides of the bowl! Refrigerate for several hours to allow the pudding and juices to soak into the cake pieces. For a special garnish you could top with whipped cream or whipped topping and a few perfect pieces of fruit.

Parfaits: These are similar to the trifle, but can be prepared as individual servings. Instead of a large glass bowl clear plastic cups, glass dessert dishes or even wine glasses can be used. Again, layer a dollop of pudding and a layer of fruit in each cup or glass. You can use diced cake pieces for the next layer, but crushed cookies or graham crackers are great too. Repeat the layers for a pretty presentation. End with a final dollop of pudding or whipped cream and top with a whole cookie, a sprinkle of toasted nuts or coconut, or a perfect piece of fruit. Some great combinations might be a layer of chocolate pudding, banana, vanilla wafer crumbs, then vanilla pudding,

strawberries, and crushed chocolate cookies. Or, for holiday colors, use pistachio pudding, red raspberries and vanilla cookies. Top with a whole berry and a sprinkle of pistachio nuts. Use your imagination!

Of course you can simply dress up, or as my Grandmother used to say “gussie up” a fruit salad to make it worthy of a holiday party. Use a mixture of fresh and canned fruit. Be sure to mix the colors too: canned peaches, pears or mandarin orange segments, frozen cherries or raspberries, fresh melon or citrus sections, some kiwi and strawberries or maraschino cherries for the season. It can be served plain, or dressed with plain yogurt sweetened with a little honey or sweetener and balanced with a touch of lemon juice. Add texture with chopped walnuts or pecans, and toasted coconut on top. Add the nuts just before serving so that they stay crunchy. A few mint leaves tucked in the edges will make it extra special.

Now, take a deep breath and enjoy the holidays!