

Stress free festive entertaining



Whether you're organising a Christmas drinks party for family and friends or just traditional Christmas lunch, the secret lies in forward planning and preparation, says Alex Ware



FIRST and foremost, make it your event and keep it simple. As with most things in life "less can often be more". Make a list, in advance, saving much time and repeated trips to the shops. Write it in the order in which you think of things and decide on recipes. Then sort into types of goods - meat, dairy, fruit, veg etc.

We are blessed in this area with traditional butchers, fishmongers and farmers markets - make the most of them. Make a diary or calendar note, when you are to collect!

Make sure that you buy, now, all those items, which will disappear off the shelves at the time you normally need them - ready made pastry, cranberry sauce, good quality mincemeat, cheese biscuits and so on.

Preparing food ahead and freezing can also save time and stress. Sausage rolls can be made in advance and frozen raw. Defrost, on the day, at room temperature and bake as normal. Bake mini quiches and tarts, defrosted and warmed through, they are ideal for handing around with drinks.

Once you've got your food sorted, it's time to get decorating. Festive home decoration can seem daunting. Why not keep the house 'Christmas clutter' free? Just go with some Christmas bunting plus plenty of candles. And nothing beats a festive wreath on the front door to welcome your guests.

As the day approaches, it's time to delegate! Tell other members of the household what to do, and write it on large 'post-it notes' where they will be able to find them. Laying the table, sorting and polishing the glasses and vegetable preparation are good ones.

The best advice is - do not put too much pressure on yourself and keep things simple. Enjoy your Christmas!

• **Alex Ware is co-owner of Norfolk Concierge, in Dersingham, whose services include organising events from a dinner party or afternoon tea to a themed event. Norfolk Concierge 01485 540245 www.norfolkconcierge.co.uk**



Delicious decorations!



Our young baking columnist, Henie Lewin, shares her recipe for Christmas tree biscuits (with a little help from her Mummy, Lisa)

I enjoyed making these and decorating them with icing pens and snowflakes. Mummy and I will be making more for our Christmas tree at home, and leaving some out for Santa.

Ingredients

- 90g soft butter
- 100g caster sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon of ground ginger, cinnamon or vanilla
- 200g plain flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon of fine salt
- clean hands



Makes 10 small to medium Christmas shapes

1. In a big bowl mix the butter and sugar together with a wooden spoon.
2. Add the egg and flavouring (ginger, cinnamon or vanilla). Beat well.
3. Stir in the salt and baking powder.
4. Gradually add the flour until it forms a soft dough.
5. Wrap in cling film and pop in the fridge for half an hour. You can also freeze the dough for up to three months.
6. Roll out onto a floured surface with a rolling pin. Cut into Christmas shapes and place on a baking tray. Make a hole to thread the ribbon through, if you want to hang them on your Christmas tree.
7. Bake at 180 °C, gas mark 4 for 8 to 12 minutes.
8. Allow to cool before decorating with royal icing or fondant icing.

Happy Christmas!

Norfolk Concierge at your service!

We all need a bit of extra help at times. Life can be hectic, and no one can be in two places at once, or do two things at once. Step forward Alex and Nick Ware of Norfolk Concierge

Whether you're up against it at work, but have a party of 12 to cook for or you're away, but need to find someone to fix your roof, Norfolk Concierge will probably have the answer. And if they don't, they'll most likely know someone who does, through their network of contacts in the area.

Retired lawyers, Alex and Nick offer a discreet and professional service, and aim says Alex to 'take the pressure off, allowing our clients to make the most of their time in North Norfolk, whether they live here, are a second homeowner, or just visiting.'

Let's start with their key holder service. This can include organizing and supervising regular maintenance, repairs, cleaning and gardening (they have a team of experts on speed dial) as well as receiving deliveries.

They can make bad weather checks (they'll even turn the heating on for you) and make vacant property checks to comply with your



home insurance policy.

If your time is split between different places or you're coming up on holiday, their concierge service could be the answer. They can get everything ready for your arrival,

including making dinner and other reservations (after consulting their packed Little Black Book).

If you fancy eating in, they can have a meal waiting and pick up your shopping too. They'll even take care of the flowers!

Entertaining is also one of Alex and Nick's great passions. 'Both our sets of parents were great entertainers,' says Alex. 'I love organizing events and cooking, helping people to entertain in their own homes. Whether it's an intimate family lunch, an afternoon tea or large themed



Michael Fysh Photography.

event, we can help.'

Norfolk Concierge can assist with everything, from organizing the invitations and table plans, to sourcing food and drink, and supervising

decoration. They both love the theatre and, if required, can provide a bit of drama at your event. Nick is a great actor, says Alex, and plays a very good butler - Downton Abbey fans take note!

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