



Over-the-Top COOKIE SWAP

SWEETEN UP AN AFTERNOON FOR
SPECIAL FRIENDS WITH THIS TAKE
ON A HOLIDAY CLASSIC

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: An edible box of cookies; Evelyn Peña; a cookie tree; Elizabeth Garza; Ann Ryan; napkins with cookie recipes ironed on with transfers.

*A few close friends
and an abundance of
delicious décor are
the key ingredients
that give this party
its unique flavor.*

The sign simply reads, "Welcome." But it's written in frosting on an oversized gingerbread cookie that greets guests at the front door. It's clear from the outset that this is no cookie-cutter event.

I wanted to ring in the holidays with a singular occasion that would make my closest friends feel special. My goal was to take a classic tradition—the cookie swap—and completely turn it on end. A dollop of the divine mixed with a bit of surprise, and I'd soon have an event that guests would never forget.

I had little concern about what my grand plan might require in the kitchen.

As a pastry chef and former bakery owner, I'm constantly experimenting with new recipes and ingredients. However, I knew my appetite for fussing with party décor and other details wasn't what it needed to be. With just two weeks to whip up this extravaganza, I needed some help. With a phone call to my dear friend and interior designer Elizabeth Garza, I found the solution. The owner of Elizabeth House, a European-style home furnishings boutique in Maplewood,



the menu

Anise-Laced Sugar Cookies
with Royal Icing

•

Old-Fashioned Rolled
Gingerbread Cookies

•

Cranberry-Hazelnut Biscotti
Pignoli Cookies

•

Hot Mulled Cider Truffles

•

Lavender Shortbread

•

Champagne Punch,
Coffee and Tea

green, and the combination of antique and new pieces gives the party a comfortable elegance without being too stuffy," says Garza. The soft glimmer from scattered sugar beads and tinsel-wrapped packages also keeps the look festive.

What guests can't take in, they fortunately get to take home. Pastry blenders outfitted with recipe cards and gingerbread boxes filled with leftover cookies are the icing on this over-the-top swap.

If these party trappings seem too elaborate for the typical hostess in the usual holiday rush, here's some advice. First, keep the guest list to a minimum. A tight-knit group always fosters a feeling of intimacy, but it also leaves extra time to focus on distinctive touches for each guest.

Second, join forces when you can. It was a relief to know Elizabeth had the décor under control. My only concern was the food. And talk about holiday cheer: There's no better way to experience the season's joy than planning a party with a good friend. [h](#)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
An edible forest; the take-home
boxes; Nicole Fedoravicius



OUT OF THE BOX.

Why send leftovers home on a boring paper plate? Opt for an innovative container instead. Crafted with nothing more than gingerbread and Royal Icing, these boxes are both practical and delicious.