

# Gifts for your food friend

There's no shortage of gift ideas for the food obsessed this festive season

Sarina Talip and Kirsten Lawson

**Y**ou only need to look at the success of reality television cooking shows and the cooking comedy *Julie and Julia* to see that cooking is back in fashion. And if your foodie is new to the scene, a voucher for a cooking class could keep them inspired.

If you want to throw your foodie in the deep end, the Council of Italian Restaurants in Australia offers cooking classes with the cream of Sydney's serious Italian restaurateurs, including Armando Percuoco. Classes range from kids' classes, to learning how to cook northern Italian food, to pizza making. At Casa Barilla in Annandale (\$75 for a demonstration; \$115 hands on; gift certificates at [cira@cira.com.au](mailto:cira@cira.com.au)).

Closer to home, go rustic and learn to make sourdough bread with Paddy Murray in Bundanoon. The day-long course includes a culture to start making sourdough at home. The next class is on February 6 (4883 7830).

Even closer to home, Podfood at Pialligo has classes on Wednesday and Thursday nights. And best of all a friend or partner can arrive just before the end of the class, be greeted with a glass of wine, then sit down to the meal you've cooked. Summer salads on February 24, "Thai me up", not as wild as it sounds if you ignore the chilli, on April 7 (\$135. 6257 3388).

If your foodie can already cook, then he or she would probably like to entertain. And for a foodie there is nothing more mortifying than having guests arrive and realising that the



A Deruta olive oil pourer, left, the Gefu cherry pitter, the Kinderkitchen dog knife, and Christofle silver cutlery.

household mice have spirited away two forks and a spoon from your one good cutlery set, and remembering that your best friend's three-year-old son smashed a plate from your once complete crockery set. But there is hope, and thank goodness for the French.

From Country House in Manuka you can pick up some gorgeous Frenchy items. At the top of the range is the celebrated Parisian Christofle cutlery (a seven-piece setting for one place is \$1060 silver-plated and \$2420 sterling silver).

It also sells funky Laguiole cutlery, which our columnist Diana Lampe has nominated on her Christmas wish list. You can make up a set of the French-made resin and stainless steel cutlery in

different colours – the likes of blue, ivory, lime, orange and fuschia – or get them all in one colour. You can buy a 24-piece set (\$395) or individual pieces (\$25 each). Also at Tutto Continental in Mawson (you can see them at [www.rmhall.com.au](http://www.rmhall.com.au)).

If you want to add still more colour, Shaw Vineyard in Murrumbateman has a range of hand-painted Italian ceramics from the Ranocchia family in the small Umbrian town of Deruta. Shaw imports them directly. Jugs cost from \$38 to \$90, an olive-oil pourer \$50-\$65, an antipasto plate \$100; a cake stand, \$160, and a wine stopper, \$14 (6227 5865)

British brand Zeal has a bright range of

silicone kitchen stuff for little kitchen gifts. Like a long cooking spoon (\$14.95), garlic peelers (not sure they are strictly necessary, \$6.50), baker's sheets \$23.99, or an apple cutter that segments and cores apples in one movement (\$9.90). You can buy Zeal at Your Habitat, Habitat Housewares, Whisk Kitchenware, Cooking Coordinates, and Essential Ingredient.

For the kids, Swiss kitchenware brand Kuhn Rikon has a Kinderkitchen range. A white rabbit apron with tasting spoon is \$19.50. The Dog Knife knife with teeth looks unnervingly like a dog, but it's more bark than bite – the Japanese carbon steel serrated knife is sharp enough to cut soft food but not small fingers (\$15.90). And of course, what does every child like to do but make cookies? Cookie cutters come in star, heart and flower shapes (\$13.95 each). If you're a gadget junkie, Kuhn Rikon has a cherry putter to destone cherries – with clamps, a splash guard and a stone "collecting area" to minimise mess (\$58.90. 1800 650 602).

Tim Wilson at the Essential Ingredient is selling Rosler trolleys to take with you to the markets. These funky Spanish-made trolley bags will place you in at the elite and green end of the shopping crowd, but you're at the markets, after all. Wilson says they're the originals, strong, waterproof and lightweight, as well as looking good. In lime, red, blue and black (\$99).

He also likes the Riedel "Party Tube" set of four red-wine glasses (\$99), made in Germany. They're not crystal like the other Riedels also stocked at Essential Ingredient and other outlets for about \$45 a glass.

Kirsten Lawson

**I**n keeping with my clear-it-out and size-it-down lifestyle, well suited to the 2000 and teens, I don't want anyone to get me stuff for Christmas. Other than a refrigerated bench-top ice-cream maker that doesn't need freezer space to make it work. And that little 16cm frypan that continues to elude me. And a new loving family to look after the lizard, which apart from smelling truly horrible, now costs us more than a small dog to feed each week by the time it chomps its way aggressively though a \$10 pack of what are euphemistically called "woodies" every two days. Every time one scuttles its way out of its container direct to the dragon's jaws, the hairs at the back of my head stand on end.

But other than that, what I really want for Christmas is consumables. Which is also what I've giving for Christmas.

Homeleigh Grove extra-virgin olive oils (at the Exhibition Park markets, and at Choku Bai Jo in North Lyneham, about \$15 for 500ml) are good gifts. These olive oils are fairly robust with a pronounced bitterness this year, and in my view not as versatile as previous harvests. But they're still a staple, since they're fresh and local, and so many miles ahead of almost all of what you find at the supermarket.

If you're checking out the ceramics at Shaw Vineyard (see above), you'll also find olive oils here from La Barre at Yass, including infused oils with the likes of chilli and garlic; or orange and lemon (500ml, \$16, as well as a blood-plum vinegar 250ml, \$14), and from Wollundry Grove at Wagga (500ml, \$17.50). These oils are not for keeping. They should be used now while they're fresh, every day.

I've also bought half a dozen little tins of Anthea Cahill's Real Chai, which she makes here in Canberra and sells at the markets, online (\$10 for a 50g tin, [www.realchai.com](http://www.realchai.com)), and through stores. She also has cup warmers for \$15 and teapot warmers for \$30. Cahill's chai is the nearest we've found to "real" chai, packed with little chunks of ginger and cinnamon and cardamom pods. She suggests infusing it on the stove with milk and serving it strained with honey. But we just throw a big pinch into the teapot and drink it as black tea. Great.

I'm giving away Green Grove Organics as gifts. It's made at Junee and it's really good. At Choku Bai Jo at North Lyneham shops (250g, \$6.50), and to tart up the gift a bit you could buy one of the chocolate-coated products (you'll find



Clockwise from top left, Koko Black's chocolate snowmen; a Curious Chocolatier Christmas gift; Anthea Cahill's Real Chai; Ortiz anchovies; and Tetsuya Wakuda's truffle salsa.



them at [www.greengroveorganics.com.au](http://www.greengroveorganics.com.au)).

Chocolate is an obvious option, especially since we have makers of beautiful and gorgeously packaged chocolates in Canberra. Heidi Ross, whose label is the Curious Chocolatier, makes adventurous chocolates in retro-lovely packaging. She's made Christmas chocolate blocks in milk or dark chocolate with spices, pecan and cranberries, wrapped in Italian Christmas paper (100g, \$8, at the Kitchen Cabinet).

Lindsay and Edmunds organic chocolate is also made in Canberra and sold at the markets and stores. Peter Edmunds has made a Christmas gift box – wooden boxes from Holland, with a glass lid, containing six (\$18.50), 12 (\$26.50) or 24 (\$69.50) chocolates, in flavours of coffee and kahlua; cassis and cranberry; and lubeca marzipan.

We bought little gifts from a non-local chocolatier since the philosophy of Melbourne's Loving Earth really appeals. Loving Earth does organic and "wildcrafted" functional foods, minimally processed, sugar, dairy and gluten-free, and in their "optimal nutritional state". It

sells chocolate butters (another great gift) and chocolate bars using raw cacao, and so-called superfoods like purple corn, goji berries, and camu camu berries, and "activated" almonds. This is the kind of chocolate that encourages over-explanation. You can check it out for yourself at [www.raw-chocolate.net](http://www.raw-chocolate.net) and buy it from the Allergy Centre and health-food shops.

And then there's Koko Black, in Bunda Street, which has super-luxe gift packs, packaged in book-style boxes (in four sizes, \$26.50 to \$150), all of it great chocolate. Koko Black also has a children's box (\$8.50), which a 34 per cent milk-chocolate Christmas Tree, a snowman chocolate, and a raspberry ganache.

The food pack that appeals most is unfortunately in London, not Australia. This is the River Cottage's charcuterie pack, a box of cured meats. But this gave us the idea of putting together our own charcuterie gift box from Eco Meats, the organic butcher at the Belconnen markets. A couple of his cabanossi sticks (about 200g, \$3), a hunk of smoked rabbit (\$37.50 a kg) or smoked emu (\$58.50 a kg), smoked trout pate (\$5.25). I'd love to receive this kind of gift, but

I have to concede it's a fairly niche option.

Or you can buy your friend a Fergus Henderson "pig T-shirt" with the St John pig on a Fair Trade cotton shirt (\$14.50 plus postage).

Balsamic vinegar is another great thing to receive as a gift since it's so damned expensive to buy. But be careful with balsamics, since when we tasted a range of these priced up to about \$40 earlier in the year, we found many that we really disliked, even from the posh food shops. If you buy a "tradizionale" balsamic, you can be sure of your ground, but you'll generally be a couple of hundred dollars poorer for it. Otherwise, the most reliable balsamics in our tasting were the Fattorie Giacobazzi range from Essential Ingredient. These start cheap and work their way all the way to the tradizionale in price and quality.

If you're after other food ideas, check out Simon Johnson's website (I'd thank you with tears in my eyes for a little can of Ortiz anchovies – 110g, \$31.50 plus postage), and Tetsuya Wakuda's site, also ([www.tetsuyas.com](http://www.tetsuyas.com)). If you have the kind of friend who would use Wakuda's truffle salsa to stir through pasta or make truffled butter (80g, \$23.95) or truffled salt (100g, \$28.50), they're also good options. Now we're there, suddenly the best gift of all presents itself – a gift voucher to eat at Tetsuya's. Give it to your special friend, then you benefit from this one as well.

Wakuda also has dressings on his website, but as someone who never uses salad dressings or meat dressings, I find these kinds of gifts a bit irritating. They would sit in my cupboard unused. I feel a bit the same about jams and relishes, which are often a bit twee. The thing with food gifts is that you must tailor them to the person quite carefully, since we're such habitual creatures when it comes to our diets. There's no point in buying someone chai if they're hooked on English breakfast tea in the morning and don't drink tea at night. There's no point in buying great olive oil unless you can persuade your friend to use it every day like normal oil.

I learned this lesson earlier in the year when I gave a friend a little food pack which included Himalayan pink salt for his 40th birthday. He thought it was some kind of joke, and when he realised I was serious, he declared it the strangest gift he had ever received. So that one fell flat, and I'm sure the Himalayan pink salt is still sitting lovingly but unloved on a shelf in his cupboard.