

Local traditional holiday treats

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Shopping locally for quality and value

From giving the perfect gift to festive decorations, it isn't easy to stay within a budget during the holiday season. When it comes to meal preparation, however, staying "in the black" is easier if you follow a few simple steps.

For each meal that you plan, list the number of adults, children, and ravenous teenagers who will be at your table. Then, pull out your cookbooks or fall back on your family traditions and preferences to make a list of what you would like to serve for each meal. With that information, and some help from sources listed below, you will be able to estimate how much of each item you will need.

Check your pantry, so you don't end up with an extra 10-pound bag of potatoes, and create your shopping list. Finally, when you go to the market, do your best to stick with what's on your list.

Although "one-stop-shopping" may be convenient, you will find that buying "local" will fill your belly with fresh and delicious regional favorites, and your heart and soul with the pleasure of greeting familiar faces as you go about your errands, satisfied in knowing that you are supporting locally-owned businesses.

With careful planning, and taking the time to ask questions at each stop, you may even discover that it can be just as easy to stay within a budget by shopping locally.

For your "main dish," Douglas Doyer, the meat department manager at Bourque's in Lewiston, recommended a holiday ham. Beef roasts, bone-in rib roasts and boneless pork roasts with apple cranberry stuffing, are very popular items at Bourque's. The prices of each cut of meat varies, so ask for help with choosing the cut that will fit your budget and will be substantial enough to satisfy all of your guests.

On Sabattus Street, just a few doors down from Bourque's, you will find Grant's Bakery where Doug Grant can help you plan your pastry trays and finger sandwiches for less formal gatherings, and supply you with an assortment of fragrant, soft, and fresh dinner rolls, biscuits, and sweet breads to complement a more formal meal.

Grant's Bakery is well known for its amazing tourtiere, a traditional meat pie and a regional favorite with roots in the rich French-Canadian heritage of Central Maine. Though tourtiere is often a side dish, it makes a wonderful main dish as well.

The Italian Bakery, on Bartlett Street in Lewiston, also offers a wide array of sandwiches, calzones, pizza, fresh salads, and traditional "petite pastries" for large gatherings or lighter meals, as well as a variety of breads including herb foccacia and Italian bread.

For local fresh vegetables, the place to shop is Blackie's on Minot Avenue in Auburn. Matt Manson or Blackie himself can help you select your vegetable side dishes from Blackie's bountiful harvest. From acorn squash to native corn, sweet potatoes to cabbage, pumpkins to onions, and cranberries to Macintosh apples, you can lay your table with the finest fruits and vegetables that the good Maine earth has to offer. In addition to several varieties of squash and potato, you can also pick up locally made butter at Blackie's.

To round out your meal with a fine beverage, Roopers on Minot Avenue will help you select a wine that will be affordable and will compliment your food offerings perfectly. If you are serving ham or pork, Carrie Bell, Roopers' store manager, recommended a Reisling by Chateau St. Michelle.

"Reisling is a sweet tasting wine [that is] easy on the palate and will compliment the saltiness of pork." With a poultry dish, she suggested a Firesteed Pinot Noir, a "fruit based" wine. A pinot noir is "more delicate than most red wines, and heftier than whites," and will also go well with beef and fish.

Both of these wines are made here in the United States and will fit nicely into your budget. For most of us, selecting the perfect wine is a mysterious and daunting task, but our friends at Roopers are happy to help you choose the right beverage to enhance any meal.

No holiday meal would be complete without a delicious, sweet dessert. For sweet treats you can pick up a beautiful decorative cake, a raspberry swirl cheesecake, or a cream, pecan, or apple pie while you are at Grant's, or you can visit the Italian Bakery for "European style" cookies and whoopie pies, a local favorite, as well as more ethnically diverse items such as Baklava and Tiramisu.

The Italian Bakery has a large variety of filled pastries, including bismarks, eclairs and the heavenly cannoli with its creamy sweet ricotta filling, all of which will send your family to bed on Christmas eve with sweet dreams dancing in their heads. On Christmas morning, you can wake up to the Italian Bakery's delicious hand-cut donuts.

Whatever you choose to serve this holiday season, remember to plan ahead, make lists, and talk with local experts for assistance with making selections

that will satisfy both your taste buds and your budget.