The 2018 Faculty of ALES holiday letter

You’ve probably received at least one in your life: the family holiday letter. The one that updates friends and family about who did what throughout the year. Well, this year we’re doing a version with the ALES family and instead of updates we’re sharing tips, treats and traditions from faculty members. Consider it our gift to you this holiday season. Enjoy.
Gingery gingersnap recipe
The Pure Prairie Eating Plan authors Catherine Chan and Rhonda Bell
shared this festive cookie recipe

Betty’s Gingersnaps
makes 32 cookies

Ingredients:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canola oil</td>
<td>½ cup – 125 mL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Granulated sugar</td>
<td>1 cup – 250 mL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large egg</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Molasses</td>
<td>¼ cup – 60 mL</td>
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<tr>
<td>All-purpose flour</td>
<td>1 ¾ cups – 425 mL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ground cinnamon</td>
<td>1 tsp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baking powder and baking soda</td>
<td>1 tsp – 5 mL each</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>2 tsp – 10 mL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>½ tsp</td>
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Directions:
1. Preheat oven to 375 F (190 C)
2. In a mixing bowl, beat canola oil with 1 cup sugar. Beat in egg and molasses. Add flour, ginger, cinnamon, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Stir until dough is moist. The dough can be quite sticky.
3. Using 1 tsp (5 mL) per cookie, shape dough into balls. Roll in sugar. Place on lightly oiled baking sheet and flatten with palm of your hand. Bake for 12-15 minutes.
4. Let cool on cookie sheets or racks
Making yogurt is healthy and uses less plastic

Catherine Chan

I make my own yogurt to avoid a cupboard full of plastic containers. Here’s how:

Heat 750 mL of milk in a saucepan until steaming, then continue to heat for two to three more minutes. Don’t boil.

Cool until you can hold a finger in the milk while counting to 10.

Pour into a glass bowl or jar. A one-litre canning jar is good.

Add 30-50 mL of yogurt (from a previous batch or from a commercial plain yogurt, one with as few additives as possible).

Wrap in towels and let stand on the counter for about five hours.

Cover and store in the refrigerator.
A reusable, real Christmas tree is possible

Patricia Dolez
I bought a Norfolk pine tree 16 years ago to use as a Christmas tree when I was in Québec. I’m not especially fond of plastic trees and winters in Québec are too cold to buy a live pine (with roots) as a Christmas tree and transfer it into the ground in your yard on Jan. 2 (like I did in France). It was one-and-a-half feet tall when I bought it, and it’s now taller than I am.

The tree has survived two moves, including one between Beloeil, Que., and Edmonton that involved spending 10 days in a moving truck (nicely wrapped in plastic sheets to try to keep all moisture inside during the trip).

Since I bought it, I’ve used the Norfolk every year as a Christmas tree. Any other indoor plant can be used (I put Christmas decorations on other indoor plants).
I’m from Louisiana, and my southern traditions include reading *The Cajun Night Before Christmas* to my nephews and having an outdoor party with raw oysters on Christmas Eve.

In Canada, the Foote/Krogman household always does a fondue meal on Christmas Eve, takes an LRT ride to the legislature for a walk through the lights and then returns for eggnog around the fire and the opening one gift before Christmas day.

As part of living sustainably, my alternative wrapping paper is the colorful comics section of the *Edmonton Journal*. On Saturdays, there are two full pages of comics that make a large wrapping sheet.
Real candles on a real tree

Megan Strickfaden
I have family traditions with roots in the Netherlands and Germany. We use real candles on a live tree and no electric lights. The candles are nestled in tiny candleholders that clip on sturdy tree limbs and are placed in areas where there is space above them to avoid burning the needles too intensely.

A candle is lit for each person there, and we begin by quietly contemplating the year. Then visitors are invited to make a private wish for the coming year followed by each person blowing out one of the candles. The candles will inevitably singe a few of the pine needles, which gives off a lovely incense-type smell. Cautious guests are encouraged to hold a pitcher of water should they have concerns about fire.

Over my lifetime, my family has never had a tree catch fire. Of course, we never leave the candles unattended, even for a second. Throughout the holiday season we light the candles at least a half a dozen times to celebrate St. Nicolaas Day.

Our second family tradition is to celebrate St. Nicolaas Day. It typically takes place Dec. 5-6, but in Canada we don't stick to the correct day. Our St. Nicolaas celebrations mark the beginning of the holiday season and involve having a get-together with close friends. We always eat cheese fondue with bread and apples followed by chocolate fondue with seasonal fruit.
At the end of the evening we light the candles on the tree and give each guest a gift of food (generally something silly and exotic that is suited to the personality of the guest). The food gift is wrapped and from St. Nicolaas, representing a wish for each guest to have abundance for the coming year.

My sustainability tip is to use academic posters from conferences to wrap gifts. In previous years I’ve printed academic posters on fabric (which is way easier to transport) and have made carrier bags out of them for gifts. The fabric bags are particularly nice to give to students when their names are printed on the poster.
Happy holidays from Murphy, the ALES therapy dog!