

25 Gourmet Gifts

We taste-tested our way through a mountain of goodies and found 25 top treats that should be on any holiday gifting list. →

(BY DENIS JENSEN)

There's a reason why Americans spend nearly \$23 billion on food gifts every year: They're a tasty, crowd-pleasing option. Our editors grabbed their knives and forks and taste-tested treats in five popular food categories – fruit and nuts; baked goods; chocolates and candy; entrees; and assorted baskets – and came up with a list of 25 top treats. Put these on your holiday list and let the gourmet gift-giving begin.



Fruit And Nuts

1 STRAIGHT FROM THE TREE

This sumptuous fruit tower features sweet pears, apples and oranges along with almonds, cheese, summer sausage and hot and sweet mustard. Available from asi/43464.

* **Taste Test:** The large oranges were as juicy as they looked. And the country herb almonds had a spicy – and pleasing – onion flavor.

* **Presentation Options:** The tower is accompanied by your choice of holiday cards (which can be personalized). You also have the option to add your own imprinted mugs, pens or brochures to the tower.

* **Gifting Tip:** This is ideal for health nuts or sales reps who spend too much time on the road eating junk food.



2 GO NUTS!

Nut-lovers will go gaga for this round canister filled with two pounds of southern butter-roasted pecans. Available from asi/88358.

* **Taste Test:** We found the butter pecans fresh, firm and crunchy with just the right amount of salt.

* **Presentation Options:** The canister can be personalized with a vibrant silk-screen imprint or engraving. Message cards add additional cachet.

* **Gifting Tip:** Present this to valued clients or employees several weeks before the holidays so they can have it at the ready when they entertain.



3 FOR BACKPACKERS

This Rainforest snack mix features a variety of dry-roasted nuts, dried fruit and honey-roasted peanuts. Available from asi/79975.

* **Taste Test:** This trail mix was crunchy, and the dried fruit offered just the right amount of sweetness.

* **Presentation Options:** Packaged in a cardboard bag that can be decorated in vibrant shades of blue, green or purple and personalized with your private label.

* **Gifting Tip:** Try this one for clients who like to hike or backpack. They'll think of you when they get hungry at the trailhead.



4 TASTY TINS

Giant cashews and large pistachios hold sway over this tall mixed nuts collection. The three-tin round tower is available from asi/41590.

* **Taste Test:** All of the nuts were fresh and crunchy, but the pistachios were a huge crowd favorite.

* **Presentation Options:** The three tower tins come stacked and adorned with high-quality bows. Add seasonal imprints and greeting cards for additional emphasis or personalize with glass containers or festive burlap bags.

* **Gifting Tip:** This is the ideal gift for a small group of people to share.



5 SOMETIMES YOU FEEL LIKE A NUT. . .

This eclectic nut mix includes macadamia nuts, honey-roasted cashews, yogurt-covered cranberries, roasted almonds and assorted goodies. Available from asi/90392.

- * **Taste Test:** The sweet-but-tart yogurt-covered cranberries were especially palate-pleasing.
- * **Presentation Options:** Personalize this gift with designer gift packaging including holiday gift tins and gift boxes and a full assortment of wooden collectables, canvas totebags and glass jars.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Want to wow a whole office full of people? This is the gift to give.



Baked Goods

6 "C" IS FOR COOKIE

This gourmet cookie assortment features five each of four all-time favorites including chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, double chip and crystal sugar. Available from asi/55439.

- * **Taste Test:** All of the cookies had the perfect crunch-to-chewy ratio. Our favorite: oatmeal raisin.
- * **Presentation Options:** Four-color art processes are available to create special "collector" cookie tins that can be updated each holiday season.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Present custom tins to special customers or valued associates you see on a continuing basis. They'll hold on to these tins year after year.



7 FOR CHOCOLATE LOVERS

The 16 scratch-baked brownies featured in this selection were named a "connoisseur's nirvana" by *USA Today*. The four decadent flavors include caramel pecan, chocolate chunk, walnut fudge and chocolate peppermint fudge. Available from asi/48310.

- * **Taste Test:** The peppermint brownies were our favorite; soft and crunchy, but not gooey with a just-right infusion of peppermint.
- * **Presentation Options:** Cheerfully packaged in a keepsake wooden shaker box with space for logos and messaging. You can also personalize with labels or handtags or take advantage of concierge labeling services for customized holiday presentations.
- * **Gifting Tip:** If giving this to salespeople, use the message area of the box to spell out top reps' achievements for the year.



8 SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

In this assortment, shortbread cookies coexist with death-by-chocolate brownies, apricot-cranberry bars, almond crunch toffee, pecan-pie bars and chocolate graham crackers. Available from asi/67820.

- * **Taste Test:** The brownies were extra chocolatey; the apricot-cranberry bars were loaded with natural fruit flavors.
- * **Presentation Options:** Treats are encased in a two-fold box, sealed with a medallion that can be die-stamped or labeled. An embossed or labeled ribbon can be added for additional holiday cheer.
- * **Gifting Tip:** The perfect item for office managers, executive secretaries, departmental assistants and other office personnel who've assisted you over the past year.



9 LET THEM EAT CAKE

In addition to the pound cake, this selection includes fresh baked brownies, milk chocolate foils and gourmet coffee. Available from asi/79894.

- * **Taste Test:** The marbled pound cake was extremely moist and was a perfect complement to the smooth coffee.
- * **Presentation Options:** Comes in an elegant gift basket that can be customized via imprinted cello packs, customized ribbons, hang tags and cards.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Bring this to customers' break rooms with a note thanking the team.



10 CELEBRATE YOUR GOOD FORTUNE

24 deluxe vanilla fortune cookies in an ornamental pail, decorated for the holidays with hand-dipped Belgian chocolate and candy sprinkles. Available from asi/66050.

- * **Taste Test:** The Belgian chocolate is so rich you'll never want to eat generic fortune cookies again.
- * **Presentation Options:** Dozens of packaging options include baskets, boxes, organza packaging, custom labeling, ribbons and custom hang tags. Direct cookie imprints are another option.
- * **Gifting Tip:** This is the perfect item to drop off at a hot prospect's office – along with a message that you predict a great partnership in the near future.

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Chocolates & Candy

11 A COLORFUL MIX

This large, see-through plastic tube is filled with signature peppermints, spearmints, chocolate-covered espresso beans and a variety of other candies. Available from asi/31516.

* **Taste Test:** The peppermints had an unexpected kick; the chocolate-covered espresso beans were rich and smooth.

* **Presentation Options:** High-gloss laminated full-color and full-bleed magazine printing makes for a gorgeous holiday presentation. Choose additional bright candy colors to augment the tube's appearance.

* **Gifting Tip:** High visibility makes this an excellent front-office gift. Set it out and watch the candy disappear!



12 WISH UPON A STAR

A cleverly crafted basket featuring a celestial assortment of sweets including milk, mint and dark chocolate bars as well as double chocolate cocoa. Available from asi/38979.

* **Taste Test:** Milk, mint or dark chocolate? We kept munching to determine which was the most delectable, but we ran out of chocolate before we could decide.

* **Presentation Options:** The woven star-shaped gift basket makes an excellent holiday impression on its own, but you can make it even merrier with a decorated ribbon and an enclosure card.

* **Gifting Tip:** This is a natural for all the rock stars on your team.

13 JUMBO JELLIES

President Reagan introduced Jelly Belly jelly beans to the White House and Air Force One. Now your team members and clients can enjoy them too in this elegant 50-flavor gourmet collection. Available from asi/74390.

* **Taste Test:** Yes, there really are 50 flavors. We liked the tangy taste of Very Cherry and Wild Blackberry. Keep a glass of water handy if you decide to sample the Jalapeño.

* **Presentation Options:** The deluxe red and gold gift box is elegant enough for most festive occasions, but it won't hurt to add a cheery imprinted ribbon or an optional decal. Other options include personalized gift packs and baskets.

* **Gifting Tip:** CEOs and other top dogs will enjoy keeping these on their desk and offering them to the ranks.

14 GOOD FOR THE PLANET

Environmentally conscious recipients will find comfort in the fact these yummy organic delicacies are good for both them and the planet. Available from asi/82445.

* **Taste Test:** When we bit into the ganache centers of these European-inspired confections, we were treated to the some of the creamiest chocolate flavors we've ever tasted.

* **Presentation Options:** Packaged in a fancy lacquered box that can be augmented with imprinted ribbons.

* **Gifting Tip:** Great for environmentally conscious executives or those involved in eco-friendly causes or industries.



15 BUTTER 'EM UP

This elegant British selection of gourmet toffee is a classic – and tasty – gift. Available from asi/66224.

* **Taste Test:** Just enough chocolate coating to melt in your mouth.

* **Presentation Options:** Comes in an embossed gold box with options that can be paired with imprinted ribbons in colors ranging from emerald to burgundy.

* **Gifting Tip:** This is a classy item for anyone who regularly entertains.



Entrées

16 FOR MEAT LOVERS

Your recipients won't need a knife when you reward them with these tender and juicy grain-fed Omaha Steak tenderloins. Available from asi/75040.

* **Taste Test:** These ultra-thick filets were as tender as promised.

* **Presentation Options:** Options include customized text greetings or messages, personalized cards and custom insert pieces.

* **Gifting Tip:** Send these items straight to recipients' homes so they can enjoy a nice dinner with their families.

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17 GOBBLE GOBBLE

This juicy turkey is slow-cooked over applewood timbers for a full 24 hours to retain its natural juices. Available from asi/68680.

- * **Taste Test:** Smoking gives this gobbler a pleasing aroma.
- * **Presentation Options:** Packaged with a black walnut and maple cutting board that can be firebranded with an imprint or logo.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Makes a great take-home employee gift or a memorable holiday treat for that special customer.

18 SOMETHING'S FISHY

This smoked Sockeye salmon comes packaged in an attractive 19" x 8 1/2" x 2" cedar box. Available from asi/40903.

- * **Taste Test:** We loved the salmon's marvelous texture and wonderful smoked aroma.
- * **Presentation Options:** The cedar box can be laser-engraved with a custom logo or special holiday message.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Looking to get the attention of a new prospect or client? This unique item will stand out from the pack.

19 HAM IT UP

This seven- to nine-pound spiral-sliced ham is slow-maple cured, smoked and glazed with honey to enhance the natural flavor. Available from asi/52507.

- * **Taste Test:** The sweet (but not too sweet) honey glaze is what makes this ham special.
- * **Presentation Options:** Available in festive gift boxes with applied greetings or logos in a variety of colors and sizes. Gift cards are another option.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Give this to employees who have put in overtime over the holidays; it'll help them jumpstart their holiday dinners.

20 MAMA MIA!

This Italian specialty basket features pasta and sauce, capers, olive oil and gourmet chocolates. It includes forks and napkins. Available from asi/38740.

- * **Taste Test:** We particularly liked the tangy marinara sauce.
- * **Presentation Options:** Packaged in a stainless-steel strainer with available logo or straight imprint ribbons, or outer-wrap logo sticker.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Add a bottle of vino to this gift and you've got a gourmet dinner for a favorite employee or client.

Assortments

21 TOWER POWER

This delicious assortment includes honey-roasted peanuts, jumbo pistachios, gourmet cookies and a host of other munchies. Available from asi/71685.

- * **Taste Test:** The cheddar popcorn was the tastiest treat.
- * **Presentation Options:** The tower is tied together with a decorated ribbon that can be hot-stamped or imprinted to make a holiday impression.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Bring on the "merry" when you open up this huge gourmet selection and set it out in the middle of your client's office.



22 LITTLE NIBBLERS

This sampler assortment contains fresh-from-the-oven bite-sized cookies, brownie bites and mini muffins. Available from asi/71750.

- * **Taste Test:** Although the brownie bites were small in size, they packed in a big chocolate-y flavor.
- * **Presentation Options:** Take advantage of this supplier's Gold Member packing services, which include no-cost inserts like business cards, handwritten holiday messages and colorful imprinted ribbons.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Pair this item with an engraved silver tray and the recipient has a beautiful selection of treats for his or her next party.



23 GOOD MORNING!

Help customers start their day with this delicious selection of gourmet breakfast treats including buttermilk pancake mix, Brown's Family maple syrup, almond hazelnut biscotti, French vanilla coffee, foccacia crisps and gourmet cookies. Available from asi/93098.

- * **Taste Test:** It took just minutes to whip up light, tasty pancakes from the mix. We were also captivated by the aroma of the French Vanilla coffee.
- * **Presentation Options:** Comes in a unique breakfast-style serving tray that you can customize by adding gift cards and imprinted ribbons.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Search out valued clients who will be spending the holidays at home and personalize this gift by dropping it off at their door.



24 THE GOLD STANDARD

This luscious assortment includes Angelina's sweet butter cookies, cinnamon apple organic teas, Ghirardelli chocolate raspberry coffee and café latte biscotti. Available from asi/84495.

- * **Taste Test:** The chocolate raspberry coffee made our taste buds zing and it went well with the sweet butter cookies and biscotti.
- * **Presentation Options:** Customize the tray with screen imprints, hang tags and colorful ribbons.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Hold an end-of-year celebratory tea and pass the tray around so everyone can enjoy their favorite treat.

25 SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

This gift basket will satisfy everyone in the office with selections ranging from smoked Pacific salmon, pasta culinero, Columbian coffee, chocolate cashew popcorn, honey-mustard pretzels, Chocolate truffles and other assorted delicacies. Available from asi/90667.

- * **Taste Test:** The Columbian coffee was both smooth and wonderfully aromatic.
- * **Presentation Options:** This supplier's Ribbon Program features a variety of holiday-friendly ribbon colors, imprints and foil stamps that enable customization and personalization of the cello wrapped basket.
- * **Gifting Tip:** Not sure what to give? This assortment has so many varied treats, you can't go wrong.

