North Pole cocoa

A warm mug for a chilly evening, with a little room for everyone’s favorite topping.

Ingredients

- 4 cups milk or a suitable dairy-free alternative

- 3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

- 3 tablespoons sugar, adjusted to taste

- ½ teaspoon vanilla and a small pinch of salt

Make it together

1. Whisk cocoa, sugar, salt, and a splash of milk in a saucepan until smooth.

2. Add the remaining milk. A grown-up should heat gently over medium-low heat, stirring, until steaming; do not boil.

3. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Let cool to a comfortable sipping temperature before serving.

Make it festive: Dust with cinnamon or add a small spoonful of whipped cream.

Grown-ups handle heat and knives. Check allergens; use age-appropriate foods.

Santa’s buttery shortbread

Simple little cookies for sharing, gifting, or setting beside Santa’s cocoa.

Ingredients

- ½ cup softened unsalted butter

- ¼ cup powdered sugar

- 1 cup all-purpose flour

- ½ teaspoon vanilla and a pinch of salt

Make it together

1. A grown-up preheats the oven to 325°F (165°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment.

2. Mix butter and sugar until smooth. Stir in vanilla, salt, and flour to form a soft dough. If sticky, chill for 15 minutes.

3. Shape into 16 small balls, place on the tray, and gently flatten with a fork.

4. Bake for 16–20 minutes, until the edges are just lightly golden. Cool on the tray for 10 minutes before moving.

Little helper job: Count the cookies and decorate a paper gift bag while a grown-up handles the oven.

Grown-ups handle heat and knives. Check allergens; use age-appropriate foods.

A merry little snack board

Build a bright sharing plate with foods your family already enjoys.

- Choose crackers, cheese or a suitable alternative, and washed fruit.

- Use cucumber slices and soft fruit pieces for green and red accents.

- Arrange food in the outline of a tree, with a cracker trunk.

- Serve promptly and return perishable ingredients to the refrigerator.

For younger children: A grown-up should prepare age-appropriate pieces; cut grapes lengthwise into quarters and avoid hard or round choking hazards.

Grown-ups handle heat and knives. Check allergens; use age-appropriate foods.

Set up a cozy cocoa corner

1. Set out sturdy mugs, napkins, and teaspoons on a clear surface.

2. Put one or two optional toppings in small bowls and check their ingredient labels.

3. Keep the hot pan and kettle with a grown-up, away from counter edges.

4. Let each person name their cocoa creation and share a kind thing they noticed that day.

No fancy equipment needed. A table, a warm drink, and ten minutes together are plenty.

Grown-ups handle heat and knives. Check allergens; use age-appropriate foods.