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Sure, it’s our November/December issue, but let’s be honest: November is no December.

Thanksgiving is just a primer—a walk-through—for Christmas. So, admittedly, this issue of Radish is heavy on the December, light on the November.

First, we send you away.

Need holiday cookies? We take you to four area small-town bakeries to pick up their (now your) baked holiday specialties.

Need to get in the holiday spirit? We send you to get Nordic in Decorah, Iowa (home of a Norwegian-American Museum and Christmas at Luther). Need to go get a Christmas tree? We give you the top tips to picking a perfect evergreen.

Then we bring you back home for what it’s all about: Spending the holidays with family and friends.

Oh, and eating.
Think about how you feel when you open the mailbox, and in the midst of the bills and junk mail you find a diamond in the rough. It’s a handwritten note that you’re eager to open. Little nuggets like these bring so much joy to our day, so why not pay-it-forward? Crafting a handwritten thank you note is a simple gesture of gratitude that only takes a few minutes, and it demonstrates good character. Kristi Nelson, Executive Director of A Network for Grateful Living, says, “The act of writing slows us down, and it’s good for the nervous system. Writing is a meaningful ritual, so take the time to make it a practice, to sit and consider the person because it shows deep appreciation for them.”

Streamline the Process
Lack of time and resources are limitations that keep us from the physical act of writing. To help counteract these limitations, purchase beautiful stationery or notecards in bulk. Find a pen you like to write with and pick up a book of “forever” stamps.

When you have the necessary tools, Nelson recommends creating a sacred space to keep everything. Decorate a “gratitude or love box” and keep it stocked for the next occasion. Create a document on your computer with addresses so there are no excuses to keep you from writing the note.

Good Quality Penmanship
Poor penmanship is another excuse to send a quick text or email to thank someone. If you invest a few minutes to slow down and consider each letter and word as it rolls off the tip of the pen, your handwriting will improve. Nelson believes the main reason penmanship has become illegible is because we are always in a hurry.

When writing, she says to give details and share the nuances of each thing we are grateful for and what we appreciate. A thank you note is an opportunity to say we’ve noticed something about another person. And noticing is vital for slowing down and showing gratitude. Colleen Dunneghan, board member for A Network of Grateful Living, says it’s good practice to include a “forward-looking statement.” Make mention of seeing the person again or how you will use the gift or service you received from the person.

Gesture of Gratitude
Nelson says, “There’s no expiration date on appreciation.” Feel the gratitude and express gratitude without it feeling like a formality. “We may cheapen the interaction by trying to meet a deadline,” says Nelson. Receiving a thank you, no matter how many days or weeks have passed, is still a meaningful experience, but it’s not an excuse to let it slip to the back of your mind and never to return. Sending a gesture of gratitude is not limited to one particular thing. Dunneghan tells us to send a note of thanks when you receive a gift or as a follow up from a job interview. Send a thank you when someone hosts you in their home, does you a favor, guides you personally or professionally, or when someone supports you through grief or loss. She encourages everyone to view writing a thank you as a way to brighten someone’s day, not check something off of a “to do” list.

A Tangible Reminder
“Words on paper are more powerful than words on your tiny phone screen,” Dunneghan says. Texts and emails are often lost, deleted, and forgotten whereas handwritten notes can be a keepsake. “There’s something to be said for giving a tangible reminder that someone can tuck away and pull out years later to reread again for closer connection.”

Nicole L. Czarnomski is a regular Radish contributor.
Imagine a grocery store where you could sample every item, savory to sweet, before deciding what to buy.

That’s exactly what you’ll find at the Fifth Annual FEAST! Local Foods Marketplace (held Saturday, December 1, 10am-4pm at the Mayo Civic Center). The event features hundreds of artisan-made foods and beverages from all over the upper Midwest under one roof. Been to FEAST! before? Then be sure to revisit favorites and check out this year’s additions. For 2018, more than a dozen new exhibitors will showcase original products, everything from black garlic marinade to cold-press coffee to tasty popped lotus seed snacks (similar to popcorn). Here’s a peek at three new vendors offering specialty flavors—a culinary journey of cultural traditions—all with the try-before-you-buy bonus.
ZEN FUSION

First stop? Dynamic Indian fusion food producer, Infuzn Foods (India + Fusion + Zen = Infuzn), featuring vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free versions of Indian favorites.

“When people think of Indian foods, they think of spicy,” says Anantha Kollengode, one of Infuzn’s three founders, “but people love the variety of flavor notes that come out in our dishes, and that the spice is not overpowering. We’re not 100 percent authentic, but a fusion, a confluence, to bring the best of both worlds, to achieve the zen, the perfect harmony.”

At FEAST!, Infuzn will be sampling things like three different chutneys, dried bean paneer, a tomato mint spread and a rutabaga spread, as well as their Indian roti breads with vegetable pulau, lemony noodles with an Asian influence, and smoothies with guava, mango, and other exotic fruits, all with a healthier twist.

“We take a traditional Indian recipe, maintain the essence of the food, and make it more healthy,” explains Anantha. “We strive to be conscious of allergens that are problematic for some people, like gluten, nuts, and eggs. We price our foods to be reasonable and attainable. Our vision is customer-centric.”

AZTEC GOLD

Another FEAST! newcomer is Ancient Energy Granola, an amaranth-based product rich in protein, minerals, antioxidants, and naturally gluten-free. A grain once worshiped by pre-Columbian Aztecs, amaranth has made a slow return to fame. Owner and Iowa entrepreneur Ashley Fahey encountered it on a trip to Mexico and became determined to promote this powerhouse food. For Fahey, making her granola has been a labor of love, and she enjoys her customer’s feedback.

“People like that it’s not overly sweet and that they can add sweetener of their choice if they want,” Fahey says. “The texture of the puffed amaranth is also nice. It’s not hard, so kids can eat it easily. I was surprised when a 3-year-old wanted to try it, but liked it, and moms have been happy to buy it for their kids because it’s healthy.”

Ancient Energy is nutrient dense, with less sugar, more protein, and healthy fats. And it tastes great with FEAST! perennial favorite Country View Dairy yogurt.

SOULFUL SAUCE

Sharon Richards-Noel of West Indies Soul Food makes barbecue, hot pepper, and jerk sauces that are spicy and full of heart, soul, and Caribbean flavor.

“People love the sauce,” she says. “The barbecue is my favorite because it’s not as sweet as the other ones I’ve tasted. It has a kick to it.”

All her sauces are great for dipping, basting, and marinating. The hot pepper also enhances soups and rice, and the barbecue or jerk works well in a crock pot.

She first served her specialties from a food truck—14 years running at the Minnesota State Fair—before she began bottling it three years ago. And now, when she’s not serving kids in the high school kitchen where she works, she’s busy getting her sauces onto store shelves. She’s still amazed at how many people love it.

“About 80 percent of the kids at the school cafeteria want to try the hot sauce,” she says, “but at the beginning they didn’t even know what it was. I warn them it’s hot and they’re like, ‘No, we can take it, we can take it.’”

Richards-Noel sees her sauces as a pathway to doing something for others: “The vision with the sauces was to start a nonprofit to help kids and young adults learn life skills, to lift themselves up.”

The plan is slowly coming together. As sales progress, she aims to purchase a building and offer transitional housing to support young moms, helping young adults become strong and self-sustaining, just like her.

Whether it’s your first trip to FEAST! (or your fifth), a day at the Marketplace is sure to feed your curiosity about local food. Tickets are available at the door for $8. For more information, visit local-feast.org.

Elena Byrne is Tradeshow and Communications Coordinator for FEAST, with a background in nutrition. She loves talking with food entrepreneurs and hearing about their passion.
The home of about 8,000 residents and another 2,000 college students, Decorah, Iowa, is not only a tourist attraction with stunning bluffs and great music, but a haven for artists, small businesses, farmers, and sustainable food advocates.

Oh, and did we mention the eagles? The Decorah Eagle Camera, just south of town near the fish hatchery, is an initiative of the Raptor Resource Project. More than 50,000 people like the project’s Facebook page. The camera has been in place for several years and, each winter and spring, thousands of viewers get front-row seats to see bald eagle parents raising their chicks. It’s the way many people know about Decorah. But this town has a lot more to offer.

CHRISTMAS AT LUTHER

Of all the holiday cheer you’ll find in Decorah, the best-known event is Christmas at Luther. The annual program at the Luther College Center for Faith and Life (CFL) features six choirs, the Symphony Orchestra, the Luther Ringers handbell choir, college organist Gregory Peterson and various other faculty and student soloists. This is a true "surround sound" experience — at several points in the program, all of the choirs sing together, with the orchestra and organ, and the singers are placed all around the CFL. There’s also audience participation, with Christmas hymns you know. You can learn more and get tickets at tickets.luther.edu — get them soon, they go fast! This year’s Christmas at Luther takes place Nov. 29-Dec. 2.

NORWEGIAN PRIDE

You can get your Scandinavian fix any time of year by visiting the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum on Water Street. The 33,000 artifacts comprise the most comprehensive collection of Norwegian-American items in the world. They’ve saved old houses in which the first Norwegian immigrants to the Decorah area lived. You can also view a version of the ships these immigrants traveled on to America. Then stop by the gift shop for a Norwegian sweater. There are some special happenings at the Vesterheim during the Christmas at Luther weekend — the museum will host a Norwegian Christmas on Saturday, Dec. 1, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with Christmas songs, art projects, and tales of Christmas in Norway. Not to mention, Norwegian food!

ENJOY THE SNOW

Decorah’s unique landscape is a sight to see any time of year. But you don’t want to miss it when there’s snow on the ground. As one of the hotspots of the Driftless area, which includes Southeast Minnesota, Northeast Iowa, Southwest Wisconsin and Northwest Illinois, Decorah is marked by bluffs and rolling hills — a contrast to the flatness you might think of when you think of Iowa. City parks are open for cross-country skiing during the winter.
You can also bring your snowshoes for walks in the crisp air. Plus you can warm up afterward with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate on Water Street at Java John’s, Magpie, or Impact.

SMALL BUSINESSES AND ARTS

The presence of a liberal arts college in town boosts the accessibility of fine art in Decorah. Not only can you attend shows and recitals on campus for low or no cost, the city has its own community orchestra and chorale. And it values visual art too. Local artists can get their work featured at the Agora Arts shop, or teach classes at Arthaus. Small businesses line Water Street. Trendy clothing store Modish has become a staple in town. Staff from there post new items on Instagram multiple times a week. There’s a quilt store, a knitting store, a drugstore and an independent bookstore, to name a few. There’s plenty of good food to be had, too. College students frequent T-Bock’s Sports Bar for evening happy hours or late-night gatherings. For something more sophisticated, visit Rubaiyat across the street, or get sushi at Koreana. Pizza at Mabe’s is also an option. Local music ensembles can be found performing many nights. While class is in session at Luther College, the school’s music faculty and students put on free recitals on campus. Luther also holds the Center Stage Series, a selection of shows representing many types of performing arts. From gospel music to ukuleles, there’s something for everyone.

SUSTAINABLE FOOD

Environmental stewardship is something Luther College prides itself on. That has spread to the citizens of Decorah, too. Being right in the middle of the Driftless Area’s fertile farmland, there are plenty of farmers not too far away to supply the community with local food. One of the leaders in Decorah’s sustainable food movement is the Oneota Community Food Co-op. The co-op sources food locally, and hosts cooking and nutrition classes several times a month. The sitting area near the big front window provides a place for studying and discussion, while customers eat a meal from the Water Street Cafe within the store.

For its natural beauty, local culture and historic treasures, Decorah is the perfect place to celebrate the holiday season, or just enjoy a winter weekend.
Holiday Markets at Graham Park
9:00 - 12:00
NOVEMBER 17
DECEMBER
08 | 15 | 22
Mindful Eating? During the Holidays?
Oh, it's possible. Here's how.

By Nicole L. Czarnomski

For many families, it's a holiday tradition to overindulge during the main meal, gorge on protein and unhealthy dishes, drink empty calories, and then snooze throughout the evening.

Here are six ways to turn the traditional Thanksgiving and Christmas day meals into a mindful and healthy experience.

Sample Lots of Side Dishes
Make vegetable and whole grain side dishes the main focus of the meal because they are easier to digest than meat. "Roasted potatoes are a delicious substitute to mashed potatoes, and you pile fewer roasted potatoes on your plate," says Denise Stegall, a Happy Living Coach based in Rochester. "When food is in individual pieces, people are more thoughtful about what they are piling on their plate."

If you can't avoid the sweet potato dish with marshmallows, for example, there are a few substitutes to create a healthier version. "My husband loves the marshmallows on this dish, so I found a vegan version of marshmallows," Stegall says. "And I don't use the whole bag. I use about a quarter of the bag." She also substitutes stevia and cinnamon and clove essential oils instead of brown sugar.

Quinoa is whole grain and is packed full of protein, essential amino acids, fiber, and iron. Stegall says it's not a traditional side dish for the holidays, but there are a few additions you can make to create a holiday version. Cook quinoa in a veggie stock and add butternut squash and red peppers.

Don't Skip Meals
It's important to eat throughout the day so you don't overindulge during the one meal you are eating. Skipping meals can cause your blood sugar to drop, leaving you with a headache or a crabby demeanor. "Skipping meals can cause you to eat more than three times what you would normally eat," Stegall says.

Eat a healthy breakfast. Old-fashioned oatmeal is a great start to the day. It's filling and rich in antioxidants. For lunch, create a colorful salad customized with all your favorite fruits and veggies. Avoid high fat cheeses and creamy dressing. Add an avocado and sprinkle some olive oil and balsamic vinegar on top.

Portion Control
Portion control is the most difficult part of eating during the holidays. If there are several dishes, take small scoops of each and don't let the food touch each other. For dessert, especially pie, it's difficult to tell what an actual serving is. Many people tend to cut larger slices of cakes and pies than they need. Cookies are easier to control and you can freeze any leftovers.

Hydration
Most of us don't drink enough water from day to day. The rule of thumb, Stegall says, is to take your body weight (in pounds) and divide that number in half. Then drink that number of ounces of water per day. This is especially important over the holidays. Many of us have beer, wine, creamy liqueurs, and ciders stocked for a festive occasion. This can leave the body dehydrated. Counteract dehydration by filling your body with adequate amounts of water. This will also keep you full and help you to avoid overeating.

Enjoy Family Time
The holidays are a special time, but they can be a stressful time. Remember to take time out to enjoy the people you are with. Get outside and take a walk together. Have board games, like Rollick, on hand. It's a hilarious, fast-paced game of team charades. Or, at the end of a long day go and explore your town for a festive holiday light display.

Nicole L. Czarnomski is a regular Radish contributor.
For millions of families, it's not the holiday season until the Christmas tree is up. The aroma itself puts a layer of calm in the house while at the same time injecting a sense of excitement.

Of course, there are dozens of different kinds of evergreen trees that become Christmas trees. Here are the top five choices, according to the National Christmas Tree Association.

- **FRASER FIR**
  - The branches turn slightly upward, which can be beneficial for lights and ornaments. Needles are dark green needles and up to 1 inch long. Nicely scented.

- **BALSAM FIR**
  - A beautiful pyramidal tree with a slender spire-like tip. The needles are dark green, short, flat and long-lasting. The tree is very fragrant.

- **DOUGLAS FIR**
  - Tree grows naturally into a cone shape. The blue-green needles, up to 1 1/2 inches long, are soft to the touch and radiate in all directions from the branch. Crushed needles give off a sweet fragrance.

- **BLUE SPRUCE**
  - Often sold as a "living Christmas tree" which includes the root ball so the tree can be planted after the holidays. The tree is green to powdery blue and the needles are sharp. The needles have a bad odor when crushed.

- **SCOTCH PINE**
  - The bright green needles do not drop even when the tree is dry. The aroma is long-lasting and lingers through the entire holiday season. The branches are stiff, perfect for holding heavy ornaments.

Oh, Christmas tree MAGIC, WONDER, MEMORIES ALL WRAPPED UP IN TREE
8 tips to get the right Christmas tree...and keep it fresh

1. Do a branch test for freshness. Run a branch through your closed hand. The needles shouldn't come off easily. Bend the outer branches to see if they are pliable. The tree is too dry if branches break easily.

2. Some species have more open foliage, stiffer branches or longer needles, so know what type of tree you want.

3. Consider what kind of ornaments will be used.

4. When you get your tree, cut an inch off the base to make it easier for it to take up water.

5. If you don't put the tree up immediately, place it in a bucket of warm water and stand it in an unheated garage or porch.

6. When you put the tree up use a stand that holds at least 1 gallon of water.

7. Keep the tree well-watered. Not only does adequate water prevent needles from dropping, it helps maintain the tree's fragrance.

8. Don't add anything to the water. Some people add aspirin, soft drinks, bleach, salt or sugar to keep the tree fresher longer. Plain water and lots of it is the best solution.

DID YOU KNOW?

• Before Christmas trees, the pagans honored evergreens as symbols of eternal life and rebirth. Mistletoe was sacred to the Norse, Druids and Native Americans because it remained green through winter. Druids thought the plant could cure infertility and nervous diseases and fight off evil.

• The first known decorated Christmas tree is believed to have originated in Riga, Latvia, in 1510.

• It takes a Christmas tree about 15 years to grow to 8 feet.

• Legend holds that Protestant reformer Martin Luther was the first person to decorate a Christmas tree after he was overwhelmed by the beauty of the stars shining between branches of a fir tree.

• President Franklin Pierce put up the first Christmas tree in the White House.

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Bakeries can be magical places this time of year—cookies in every size and shape from cut-outs to spritz, specialty breads, fruitcakes, candies, all lined up in glass cases. A feast for the senses.

Some of the more unique goodies are found in those bakeries that are a little out-of-the way or in towns we may not pass through on a regular basis. Here are a few that are definitely worth seeking out.
WHERE TO GO FOR GOODIES

Ellie Gail’s Bakery, 410 Minn. 60, Elysian elliegails.com; 507-267-4480
Otto’s Bakery, 513 Frontage Road NW, Byron 507-775-2778
Bluebird Cakery, 318 Central Ave., Faribault bluebirdcakerymn.com; 507-573-2253
Bloedow’s Bakery, 451 E Broadway St., Winona Bloedows.com; 507-452-3682

Ellie Gail’s Bakery
Ellie Gail’s Bakery in Elysian goes all out for the holidays. Located between Mankato and Faribault on Highway 60, customers come from all around, especially for the shop’s annual cookie walk. This unique event, now in its 13th year, is held the two Saturdays before Christmas, with customers lining up outside the bakery well before opening at 8 a.m. With containers in hand, folks choose between 25 different varieties of cookies, as many as they want. Cookie-laden containers are then weighed and charged according to weight. Cost is $10.25 a pound.

“We are usually sold out by noon,” says Dawn Nygren, owner and baker extraordinaire. “I literally make hundreds and hundreds of dozens. I do add new varieties, but always make sure to have the old favorites. Many long-time customers would be unhappy if I didn’t have peanut butter blossoms and date pinwheels.”

While the cookie walk is definitely a must-go-to event, all through December, Nygren will have close to 70 different cookies available. She also has yule log cakes, Buche De Noels, as well as a selection of special breads. The bakery is also part of a restaurant where almost everything is made from scratch. What is Nygren’s favorite cookie? “Frosted cut-outs,” she says. “They bring back such happy memories when I was a child. It’s a simple cookie, but I can’t have Christmas without them.”

Otto’s Bakery
Otto’s Bakery has been a fixture in Byron for more than 40 years. Known for a variety of baked goods, especially doughnuts, the focus changes a bit this time of year. It’s all about their rosettes and fruitcakes, which have been for sale since the end of September.

Ann Hemmah (who owns the store with her husband Otto) explains that once summer’s high humidity level is gone, they start making rosettes. “Even starting that early, we sell out,” she says.

They start making fruitcakes that early as well. “Ours are especially delicious — lots of nuts and fruit, but no citron,” says Ann. “If people turn up their noses at fruitcake it’s because they haven’t had ours. I’ve already had customers come back to pick up two, three more since they’ve already eaten what they had.”

In addition to a wide selection of cookies, they also make candy including peanut brittle, anise (a hard candy), and almond bark.

Bloedow’s Bakery
Bloedow’s Bakery in Winona is known for its variety of cut-out cookies. That’s their specialty and what they do, year-round. The shapes may vary by the season and the holiday, but the deliciousness is always there.

This may be the year to start a tasty tradition of your own: Take a friend and go visit one, two or all of the places mentioned. Pick up a few of their specialties to add to your cookie plates. I’ve been assured that, as long as it’s the holidays, everything is calorie free.

The Bluebird Cakery
The Bluebird Cakery in Faribault adds a little extra sweet magic to the holidays and hosts several special events for youngsters. On designated days in November and December, kids are invited to decorate gingerbread men—“a very popular activity,” says manager Elena Palmer. A holiday specialty at the Cakery are cupcakes in a variety of flavors like peppermint hot chocolate and mint truffle. And if kids come in and buy a cupcake, they can have a complimentary photo taken with Santa. (Call 507-573-2253 for specifics).

You’ll also find cut-out cookies, precisely decorated. While they don’t do fruitcakes or holiday breads, the Cakery is known for its pies—pumpkin, pecan, and apple. If you have a special request, say for a cherry pie, they will bake that for you. As Palmer puts it, “starting in November for bakeries it is go time—bake, bake, bake.”

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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2018 Radish 15
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- Sarah