



TASTY *Holiday Gifts* from the Mitten

m

BY TAI ALEXANDER

My favorite holiday tradition is giving the gift of Michigan to family and friends. The catalog of “Made in Michigan” products is growing daily,

providing countless opportunities to find that perfect gift for everyone on your list. Giving always makes me smile...but giving a gift crafted by one of the dedicated people of Michigan just means so much more.

As we head into the holiday season (and even beyond, for birthdays, anniversaries and other special events), consider these “Made in Michigan” items...most of which (as you will read) are to be savored!

BEER, WINE & SPIRITS:

Michigan is home to more than 75 microbreweries, more than 75 wineries and nearly a dozen distilleries. Consider the “Naughty Red & Nice Red” available from Chateau Chantal (sold individually or in a special duo-pack). The True North Vodka, Wheat Vodka and Natural Cherry Vodka from Grand Traverse Distillery are also classic choices.

“Cabin Fever” is a cozy-looking beer from New Holland Brewing in Holland, dubbed a comforting companion for long, mind-bending winters. For a bigger gift – or a family get-together – get in touch with Saugatuck Brewing in Saugatuck and Kuhnenn Brewing in Warren which both offer a chance to make your own beer!

The Michigan Brewers Guild and Michigan Wine Council also

offer “memberships” for their respective programs (MBG Enthusiasts and Vintage Michigan, respectively). Log onto www.MichiganBrewers-Guild.org or www.MichiganWines.com for more information.

COFFEE & TEA:

If you stop by my house for coffee, you’ll likely be served Blend Six from Leelanau Coffee in Glen Arbor. When it comes to tea, I always

look to Light of Day Organics in Traverse City – where the Creamy Earl Grey is my favorite. Can’t choose on a blend? The 3-and 4-pack tea mini samplers make a great holiday selection. If you want to give an experience this holiday season, look to the Midwest Barista School in Holland for information on one of their classes.

NATURALLY WONDERFUL:

These aren’t your grandparent’s fruit baskets. Robinette’s Apple Haus in Grand Rapids can put together a great apple-themed gift pack, which includes things like Michigan maple syrup, caramel corn and, of course, apples. At Cherry Republic in Glen Arbor, it’s all about the cherries. Trail mix, cookies, chocolate covered cherries, dried cherries and more are part of



this huge mail-order operation.

SWEET TREATS:

Another one of my favorite gifts to give is the amazing truffles (some infused with local wines) made at Grocer’s Daughter in Empire. They



also offer chocolate bars, puddles, bon bons and a variety of boxed sets at their quaint shop in the heart of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Marshall's Fudge in Mackinaw City offers a mouth-watering "Fudge of the Month" club, with two slabs of a variety of flavors delivered for 12 full months. Who wouldn't love to get that give every month?

BAKED GOODS:

I love the smell of fresh-baked bread, but I don't often take the time to make it at home. The next best thing is the variety of organic whole grain breads made by Stone House Bread in Leland and Traverse City. Distributed around the state, I am fortunate to be able to pick up their goodies at my local grocery store. My favorites? The Asiago Cheese and Kalamata Olive Loaf.

SAUCES & SALSAS:

Of course, if you're going to give bread you must also give jam. Food for Thought in Honor makes all their jams (and salsas) organically. My favorites are the preserves infused with wine like the Blackberry Shiraz, Apricot Chardonnay and Cherry Cabernet.

Way up in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the monks at Holy Transfiguration Skete – Society of St. John have been quietly crafting preserves and fruitcakes at their Monastery operation (Jampot) near the Keweenaw Peninsula. This is a Michigan-made fruitcake that is well worth giving...and receiving!

DELICACIES & CULINARY TREATS:

Another great pairing with fresh-baked bread are the oils and vinegars from Fustini's (Traverse City, Petoskey, Ann Arbor and Kerrytown). You can stop into one of the locations to do a bit of taste-testing before you make your final selection and have it bottled for you.

Beyond the Shaker salts are premium gourmet, unrefined, natural sea salts and blends which have been hand crafted with a focus on organic and sustainable ingredients. You can order sample packets or 2-ounce jars from nearly two dozen flavors. Gift packs are also available.

You will find dozens of flavors of rubs, spices, seasoning blends, sweeteners and even dried mushrooms at Great Lakes Tea & Spice in Glen Arbor. Of course, they also have a selection of loose teas, flowering teas and accessories as well.

Sauces, rubs, salsas, jams, mixes, salad dressings, fondue sauces, dessert toppings and so much more are waiting to be packaged and sent off to loved ones for the holidays from Seasons Harvest in Harbert, in the heart of Southwest Michigan's Harbor Country.

Earthy Delights out of DeWitt is a great resource for gourmet foodie items like dried mushrooms, fruits, salts, caviar, garlic, seasonings and so much more. This is my source for dried morel mushrooms, which I add to the hollandaise sauce on my traditional Christmas morning eggs Benedict (served with either a Michigan mimosa or a Michigan Bloody Mary, of course).

It's hard to classify Zingerman's in Ann Arbor into ONE category...because they offer up everything from baked goods to cheeses to olive oils and vinegars to chocolates and sweets. Perhaps the best thing on their menu is a membership in the "Culinary Adventure Society" for the true foodie on your shopping list. With this program, the member receives a big box of eight to 10 food surprises (four times a year) and all items are selected exclusively for the members. All members also receive a free copy of Zingerman's Guide to Good Eating with their first shipment.

GIFT PACKS:

The Michigan Peddler in Suttons Bay (and also Mackinac Island, during the summer season) is a great one-stop shopping destination for great Michigan gift packs. You will find everything from grilling sauces and spices, jams, peanut butter, honey, maple syrup, bread and pancake mixes, condiments, salsas, dried fruits, candies, wine and much more – all made in the Great Lakes State. Candles, jewelry and glassware can also be incorporated into the gift box sets.

Of course, this list is just a small sampling of the Michigan made food products available for your gift-giving needs. You can find everything from books, CDs and movies, home décor and accessories, clothing and jewelry, calendars and artistic prints, pottery and furniture, floor coverings and candles, stained glass and light fixtures, and SO much more without ever leaving the boundaries of the state.

You can also give experiences, like gift cards to locally-owned restaurants, shops and galleries or season passes to a local sports team or an annual membership to a local museum or performing arts center. Or, how about an annual subscription to Michigan HOME & Lifestyle Magazine...now there's a great idea!

The opportunities truly are, endless. The joy of the season is finding the perfect pairing selected from the hundreds – thousands – of options out there. □

FOR MORE IDEAS:

Buy Michigan Now: www.BuyMichiganNow.com

Buy Michigan First: www.BuyMichFirst.com

Buy Michigan Products: www.BuyMichiganProducts.com

Share your favorite Michigan gift ideas with us. Log on to www.michiganhomeandlifestyle.com and share now.