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Bake 'Em, Pack 'Em, Ship 'Em

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A care package from home is always appreciated by troops stationed abroad, especially during the holidays. However, for security reasons, soldiers are told not to accept any homemade baked goods that are not from people they know. To ensure that the package meets military regulations and arrives in good condition, here are some tips:

Check out the Web site <http://www.anysoldier.com/> . Based in La Plata, the site contains useful information and advice on how to send care packages to someone in the military. Marine mom Reeah Parker of Germantown recommends it for information on customs labels, the proper way to address packages and important guidelines on what (and what not) to include in your package.

Customs documentation is required for all packages being sent to a military address (APO/FPO Zip codes). Custom forms are available at all post offices or online at <http://www.usps.com/> . The AnySoldier site also contains links for the forms. Keep in mind that packages can take two to three weeks to arrive.

Do not mix food items in the same package with nonfood items that contain chemicals of any kind. For example, items such as toiletries, soap or bug repellent should not be packed in the same box with cookies, no matter how well-sealed the nonfood items seem to be.

Sturdy, but lightweight, plastic containers are good for packing cookies. Place wax paper between each layer of cookies in the container, packing the cookies snugly so they don't slide around. Limit each

container to one kind of cookie, so flavors don't mingle.

Be careful about sending chocolate treats, especially if the recipient is stationed in a hot climate.

Place the plastic containers inside a stiff cardboard box and use a thick layer of bubble wrap or newspapers or both to further insulate the containers from damage. "The good thing about newspapers is that it gives them something to read as well," says Parker.

-- Candy Sagon

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