



Christmas Recipes

Welcome to this short selection of Christmastime recipes, most of which are very traditional in my home country of Ireland. While the recipes may change over time, or vary from one region to the next, one thing you can always be sure of is that Christmas is the most important period in the Irish culinary calendar. Already in October, people are making their Christmas cakes, making sure to drizzle whiskey or brandy over them every ten days until the second week of December. After this, we make the marzipan icing layer which is put on the each cake and one week later we make the white icing. The final touch is when we decorate the cakes with Christmas figurines and finally, they are served for dessert on December 25th, after the Gargantuan Christmas dinner, which is usual in Ireland. Of course, these cakes are quite heavy, so only one or two small slices per person on Christmas Day means that there will always be leftovers, but these cakes are robust and can keep for up to three months if stored properly wrapped in baking paper and tinfoil in an airtight cake tin or box.

As the week before Christmas approaches and the winter solstice on December 21st adds to the general air of the festive period, Irish kitchens become a hive of activity. This lasts right up to Christmas Day itself, with vegetables being prepared, the turkey being stuffed, hams being boiled, roasted and glazed, Christmas puddings being steamed, and starters, sauces and soups also being made. The combination of the different smells of the various dishes always remind me of my childhood and these delicious aromas and the Irish Christmas atmosphere are things I make sure to recreate every year in my home here in Germany.

Many of these recipes have been in my family for generations; some have been updated or modified for one reason or another and some are inspired by many of my favourite contemporary cooks. Although I have included some photos of the Christmas cakes I baked for Christmas last year, I have not included the recipe, given that by the time this booklet goes on the HSN website's Advent calendar, it would not be possible for you to make them in time for Christmas this year. Also, though people have asked me if I have a good recipe for Christmas pudding, I have to be truthful and say no, as I usually get one from my sister, and to date I have never made one myself.

However, I hope that the recipes I have included will at least be enough to make you consider incorporating SOME of these specialities into your own Christmas menu, and I wish you lots of fun cooking them. You certainly have all you need for the traditional turkey main course with all the trimmings, so what are you waiting for?

Merry Christmas, or as we say in Ireland, Nollaig Shona,

Maurice Roche

Beetroot Soup Recipe.

As the Christmas meal consists of quite a large quantity of food, a light but hearty soup as a starter is a good idea, and this is one of the fastest, easiest and tastiest soups I know.

INGREDIENTS

1 kg beetroot (vacuum packed, pre-cooked)

One large onion, roughly chopped

1,800ml of cold water

8 teaspoons of vegetable stock powder

The juice of 2 lemons and 2 heaped tablespoons of brown sugar

Salt and pepper

Sour cream and chives.

What you do

Get a big saucepan and grate 1 kilo of beetroot into it. (Note: This is 2 packets of the steam cooked beetroots you can buy in any supermarket. You COULD try it with fresh beetroot if you like, but to be honest, life is too short to waste time peeling and washing the fresh beetroots ;)). Roughly chop one very large onion and put it in the pot. Add 1800ml of cold water. Stir in 8 teaspoons of vegetable stock powder (Maggi or any other is fine). Bring the pot to the boil, then half cover it with a lid and let it simmer for about 30 minutes. Take pot away from the heat. Puree the mixture until it is of the correct consistency. Add the juice of 2 small lemons and 2 heaped tablespoons of brown sugar. Stir in well. Now add salt and pepper to taste. Bring the soup back to boiling point and then serve in bowls. Add a generous spoon of sour cream and some chopped chives (or dill if you prefer). Tip: this is really nice served with a slice of Irish soda bread with butter.



Chestnut, coconut milk and spicy orange soup

This is somewhat exotic, though very tasty, as soups go. I found this in a recipe magazine and adapted some of the ingredients. Admittedly, it is a strange mix, though it tastes very nice. It is quite filling, so if you serve this as a starter to a Christmas lunch, small portions are recommended. This recipe makes 6 to 8 modest size bowlfuls.

INGREDIENTS

2 medium onions, roughly chopped

300g precooked chestnuts (either vacuum packed, or from a tin), roughly chopped

1 tablespoon butter and 1 tablespoon olive oil

1 bay leaf

1 cinnamon stick

200ml freshly squeezed orange juice

200ml liquid cream

200ml hot vegetable stock

200ml coconut milk

The zest and juice of one organic lemon

A few branches of chives snipped finely

Salt and pepper

How to make it

Gently melt the butter in a large saucepan and add the olive oil. Add the onions and chestnuts and turn the heat up slightly until it starts to sizzle slightly. Fry for about 5 minutes, stirring from time to time, until the onions soften. Then add the bay leaf, orange juice, cream and the hot stock and let the soup simmer gently for about 15 minutes. You should add the coconut milk ten minutes into the cooking.

When the time is up, remove the cinnamon stick and the bay leaf and use a food mixer to blend the soup into a fine puree. Season with a little salt, a few twists of freshly ground black pepper and some lemon juice (add a little at a time and taste after each addition until you think you have got the seasoning right). Serve in small bowls with some chives and lemon zest sprinkled on top. For a little extra colour, sprinkle on a few red peppercorns. Serve hot.





Roast Stuffed Turkey Fillet in Bacon.

In Ireland, most families look forward to the traditional roast turkey dinner on the afternoon of December 25th (as for us, the 25th is the main day to start the festivities). In my family, we always had the full turkey, which was sometimes so big that by the time it was stuffed and ready to cook, it was hard to get it into our small oven. This recipe is simpler to make, and it is also much faster to prepare. Not only that, but there is the added advantage about not having to worry about what to do with the carcass once all the meat has been eaten, because this is a recipe in which everything can be eaten.

Some people complain that turkey meat can be dry and stringy, but this recipe is guaranteed to make sure that it is succulent and tender and very, very tasty. This recipe is also much faster to make than you might think, and if you prepare it a day in advance, the turkey meat absorbs a lot of the stuffing flavours before you cook it.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE MASHED POTATO STUFFING

1kg of potatoes, which are good for mashing, peeled and rinsed well.

80g butter

3 teaspoons of fresh thyme leaves (you can use dried if you want, but fresh definitely improves the taste)

150 ml milk

Freshly ground black pepper

A pinch of salt (but not more)

To make the stuffing, boil the potatoes in salted water for 30 minutes. When they are cooked through, drain off the water and add the butter, thyme, milk, pepper and salt to the potatoes in the pot. Mash everything thoroughly until you have a nice crumbly mix. It should not be too smooth. Leave the mash to cool for about an hour (or until it is hot enough to handle). While the mashed potato cools, make the pork stuffing.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE PORK STUFFING.

600g good quality minced pork (without garlic)

3 teaspoonfuls of dried sage

A few twists of freshly milled black pepper

One large onion, very finely chopped.

One to two heaped tablespoons of breadcrumbs

One beaten egg.

To make the stuffing, put the pork in a bowl, crumble over the dried sage and then add all of the other ingredients. With your hands, mix everything well until you have a smooth ball of stuffing. If it is too moist and sticky, add a little more breadcrumbs.

Roll the stuffing into a long sausage, approximately 30 centimetres in length. Cover with foil and put it in the fridge for about 60 to 90 minutes.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE TURKEY

1 large turkey fillet (between 800g and 1.2 kg, depending on how many people you are feeding. 1.2 kg should be enough for six to 8 people, depending on how hungry they are).

About 40 strips of streaky bacon.

PREPARING THE TURKEY

This could not be easier. Get a very large oven dish and cover the base with strips of bacon.

Get your turkey fillet and with a long sharp knife, cut a cavity in the base, working your way up to the top. Try not to let the knife cut through the sides though, otherwise the pork stuffing will ooze out of it, which is what you want to avoid. If this DOES happen, however, it's not the end of the world.

Cut the pork stuffing in 4 and with a spoon, push each quarter into the cavity in the turkey fillet. It should be packed in fairly tightly, but not so tightly that it bursts through the meat and comes out the other side.

Place the turkey fillet on the bacon strips in the oven dish and with your hands, pat the masked potatoes down on the top of the turkey joint, pressing it firmly on top and down the sides.

Cover the potatoes with the remaining strips of bacon, making sure to cover the top and as much of the sides as possible..

HOW TO COOK IT

Again, this is very simple. Preheat your oven to 180°C/Gas mark 4. When the oven is hot, put the turkey in and leave it cook for an hour. Then take it out of the oven and check that the bacon is cooking, but not burning. What you are aiming for is crispy but not burnt bacon. If it DOES happen that the bacon is blackening, place a buttered sheet of tinfoil over the bacon and continue to cook the turkey for another 45 to 60 minutes (depending on the size).

Remove from the oven and let the joint rest for 20 to 30 minutes before carving it in slices to serve. The picture on the following page shows how it looks when sliced.



For the real, traditional Irish Christmas lunch, you will serve it with all the trimmings: crunch roast potatoes, mashed carrots and parsnips, Brussels sprouts, a sauce for the turkey, some cranberry sauce and some braised red cabbage. In my region of Ireland, we also serve this dish with a few slices of boiled ham with a glaze of honey, mustard, cloves and maple syrup. Of course, no Christmas lunch would be complete without a delicious sauce for the turkey, and the recipes for all of these are in this booklet.

A simple sauce for turkey: When you lift the turkey out of the oven tray, spoon off as much of the fat as you can from the tin juices. Then scrape the remaining juices into a small saucepan which you then put on a low heat and add a little flour and mix well. Keep whisking it and add 200ml hot chicken stock and 200ml of dry white wine, whisking all the time until the sauce thickens and comes to a very bare simmer. If the sauce is too liquid, let it simmer uncovered on very low heat until it reduces, then taste to see if you need to add salt and pepper. Serve hot over the turkey. If you fancy something more ambitious, see the gravy recipe on the next page.

Christmas gravy

This recipe makes about 570ml of gravy and it is really delicious.

INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons of oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 teaspoon of freshly milled black pepper
55g finely chopped mushrooms
2 medium tomatoes, finely chopped
1 tablespoon plain flour
140ml milk
285ml vegetable stock
140 – 180 ml red wine (depending on how thick you like your gravy)

How to make it

1. Heat the oil in a saucepan. Sauté the onions over low heat until they begin to caramelise (this takes about 20 minutes).
2. Add pepper, mushrooms and tomatoes. Stir well and then cover the saucepan and keep it over low heat for about 15 minutes. Be sure to stir it a few times during this time. If the mixture begins to stick to the pan (although normally it shouldn't), just add a tablespoon or two of water.
3. Sprinkle over the flour and then stir it well. Add the milk, a little at a time and stir well after each addition of milk. When all the milk has been added, pour in the vegetable stock and stir again. At this point, turn the heat up to medium.
4. Now stir all the time as the gravy thickens, then add in the wine. Stir it well until the wine is mixed in and take the pan off the heat. Serve this poured over the curried nut roast.

Tip: If you make double the quantity of this, it can be put into a Tupperware box and put in the freezer for up to three months. When you need it just take it out and defrost it and heat it up in a pot. This gravy can be served with many other dishes.



Crunchy Roast Potatoes.

INGREDIENTS

1,5 kg of peeled potatoes (if large, then cut them in half)

125g of clarified butter (ghee, or in Germany, use Butaris).

What you do:

Pre-heat your oven to gas mark 7 and put a large oven tray containing the clarified butter into the oven for 15 minutes until the clarified butter gets sizzling hot.

Put the potatoes into a large pot of water to which some salt has been added, bring the pot to the boil and let the potatoes boil for 8 to 10 minutes, depending on the size. They should not cook through, but should just be “half cooked” for this recipe.

After having drained off the water from the potatoes, return them to the pot in which you cooked them and then put a lid on the pot. Holding the lid on the pot tightly with both hands, shake the potatoes hard. The idea is to get the surface of the potatoes to go all floury and this is the secret to the perfect roast potato!

Take the tray out of the oven and you need to work fast here. Add the potatoes to the hot clarified butter, rolling them around in it to get them completely coated. If the fat cools down while you are doing this, then keep the temperature up by lighting the hot plate on your cooker and putting the dish on that while you add the potatoes. The essential thing is that the oil stays as hot as possible.

Put the dish into the oven and after 30 minutes turn the potatoes and then cook for another 30 minutes, by which time they will be all crunchy and crispy on the outside and soft and tender in the middle, which is just the way the perfect roast potato should be.



Brussels sprouts with chestnuts and bacon

This is a more upmarket version of the traditional sprouts we usually serve with Christmas lunch. If you want an easier version, just peel 1 kg of sprouts and cut a cross into the base of each as described below, then boil then in salted water for 8 minutes, drain and serve on the side.

INGREDIENTS

1 kg of fresh Brussels sprouts, with the outer leaves peeled off and a cross cut into the base of each sprout.

400g of vacuum packed chestnuts prepared according to instructions on packet and cut them in half

300g smoked bacon cut into tiny cubes (lardons)

Pinch of brown sugar

30g of butter

Salt and pepper

What you do:

Put the sprouts into a large cooking pot, cover them with water, add salt and bring them to boiling point. Put the lid half on the pot, turn the heat down low (the sprouts should just be simmering) and leave for 10 minutes. When the time is up, taste one with a fork to make sure they are cooked enough.

In a large frying pan, fry the bacon cubes. Don't add oil as the bacon releases enough fat of its own. When they are cooked all over, add the butter and let it melt, then add the chestnuts and stir fry for 2 minutes. Finally, stir in the brown sugar.

Drain the water from the sprouts, add the sprouts to the frying pan and add salt and pepper to taste. Mix well and serve.



Ham in cider with mustard, honey, maple syrup and clove glaze.

This sounds like a lot of work, but in fact, it can be prepared two days in advance, and it really is fast to prepare it. The boiled ham is a really important component of the Irish Christmas lunch for most families, and Christmas would not be Christmas without it!

INGREDIENTS

1,5 to 2 kg of boiling ham with the fat layer on it

1,5 to 2 litres dry cider

20 to 30 cloves

2 teaspoons mustard

2 teaspoons maple syrup

2 teaspoons honey

How to cook it

With a sharp knife cut a diamond pattern into the fat layer of the ham joint. Do not cut down into the meat.

Place the ham joint into a large pot, add 1.5 litres of cider, bring to the boil, then cover and let it simmer at the lowest setting for 3 hours. After the first hour, check every 30 minutes and add more cider if you need to. After 3 hours, remove the pan from the heat, leave it covered and out it in a cool place overnight. Be sure to leave the remaining cider in the pot.

The next day, preheat your oven to 100°C /gas mark 2. Remove the meat from the pot and place it in an ovenproof roasting dish. Stud the top of the fat layer with cloves, sticking one well down into every intersection on the diamond pattern (see photo below). Mix the other ingredients well in a small bowl, then with a pastry brush, apply the glaze all over the joint.

Place the dish in the oven for 60 to 90 minutes until the meat has warmed through, but if the glaze starts to burn, turn down the heat a bit. You really need to keep an eye on the pork once it has been in the oven for 45 minutes.

Remove the dish from the oven, let it rest for 15 minutes, then carve into thin slices and serve.

Note: If you have any of the glaze left over, just spoon a little over each individual portion of the ham when you plate it up for your guests.



Buttered Carrots and Parsnips.

This is also an essential part of the Irish Christmas lunch, and it is fast and easy to make. If you make it a day in advance, then put it into an oven dish, you can just reheat it before serving lunch. If you have any left over, it freezes quite nicely for up to three months in a freezer box.

Note: Some people prefer to use celery root instead of parsnips. Whichever you choose, the end result will be delicious, I promise you.

INGREDIENTS

800g carrots, peeled and chopped into small cubes.

800g parsnips, peeled and cut into small cubes

70g butter

Salt and pepper

How to cook it

Put the carrots and parsnips into a large saucepan. Cover with water, add a little salt and bring the pan to the boil. When the pot starts to boil, put on a lid and simmer on low heat for 12 minutes.

When cooked, drain off all of the water and add the butter, a little salt and plenty of freshly ground black pepper. Mix well, and if you prefer, you can also make a purée of this. Serve and enjoy.



Cranberry and Orange Relish

Cranberry sauce has been a staple of Christmas lunch in the UK and Ireland for many years, and it is easy to make. If you make a large quantity, you can also put some in sterilized glass jars and store them for up to 6 months in a cool place, or else give them to friends as Christmas gifts.

INGREDIENTS

900g fresh cranberries, chopped in a food blender

The rind and juice of 2 large oranges

2 heaped teaspoonfuls of freshly grated ginger

150g sugar

2 pieces of cinnamon stick, each 4 cm long

8 cloves

5 or 6 tablespoons of port.

How to prepare it

Place the chopped cranberries in a saucepan, then use a zester to peel the orange skin into very thin strips (don't pare off the white pith under the zest of the oranges, as this will make your relish very bitter). Chop the orange zests very finely and add them to the cranberries, along with the juice of the oranges. Then add the ginger, sugar, cloves and cinnamon. Bring the pot to the boil, cover with a lid and simmer on very gentle heat for 5 to 6 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat, add the port, stir well and when cool, put it into a serving dish, or store it in sterilized glass jars. Serve a teaspoonful or two with the roast turkey at Christmas dinner.



Braised red cabbage

There are so many good brands of ready-made or frozen red cabbage available, that if you want to make less work for yourself at this busy time of the year, you could opt for one of these. However, if you really have your heart set on home-made red cabbage (and it IS the best!), try the recipe below.

INGREDIENTS

1 kg red cabbage, remove outer leaves and stalk, then shred the cabbage in thin strips

450 onions, finely chopped

450g cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped small

1 crushed clove garlic

¼ teaspoon of freshly ground nutmeg

174 teaspoon of ground cloves

1 cinnamon stick (optional, and remember to remove it before serving)

3 tablespoons of brown sugar

3 tablespoons of red wine vinegar

15g butter

Salt and pepper

How to make it

Preheat your oven to gas mark 2 (150°C). Get a large ovenproof casserole dish (one with a lid) and put a layer of cabbage into it (just enough to cover the base), then add a little salt and pepper, then some chopped onions, some chopped apples and the garlic, spices and sugar. Then add another layer of cabbage, some onions, some apples and keep doing this in layers until they are all in the dish. Now pour in the wine vinegar and add some flecks of butter on top.

Put a tight lid on the casserole and let it cook for two to two and a half hours, stirring every 45 minutes or so to make sure that all the ingredients get mixed well. Serve with a few halved segments of lemon on top. Not only does this reheat very easily, it is also suitable for freezing, if you find you have made too much.



Solstice paté of potted pork.

In some areas of Ireland and the UK, this is made on December 21st, which is the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. However, in recent years, many people I know tend to make this more than once over the Christmas season, as it is the perfect “ready-to-go” dish for any unexpected visitors to whom you might like to serve a light supper or just a snack. Although traditionally served with a marmalade of apples, shallots and raisins, it also goes well with the chutney and savoury jam recipes below. What is important here is to have an ovenproof pudding dish in which to make the paté, and unlike many patés, this is quite condensed, so it is served in thin slices on toast. It is not like traditional French patés which spread easily, but it is the chunky texture of this paté which makes it so delicious. The quantity below is enough to fill a 1.2 litre pudding basin, but you can also use a 600ml basin and halve the ingredients.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE PATÉ

800g good quality minced pork

100g lean smoked lardons of bacon cut in very small cubes and fried until crispy

2 crushed cloves of garlic

Half a teaspoonful of ground mace (in German, this is called Piment)

2 heaped teaspoons of fresh chopped thyme

16 juniper berries

1 teaspoon of whole black peppercorns

3 tablespoons brandy

Some extra sprigs of thyme and juniper berries to garnish.

How to prepare it

Preheat the oven to 150°C/gas mark 2.

Place the pork, the lardons, garlic, mace and thyme into a mixing bowl.

In a mortar and pestle, crush the juniper berries and the peppercorns, though not TOO finely.

Add the crushed juniper berries and the peppercorns to the bowl and mix everything really thoroughly. Then pack the mixture as tightly as you can into the pudding basin. Press the remaining thyme sprigs and juniper berries on top and cover the basin with a double layer of tinfoil. Place the basin in an oven dish, because the meat juices might run and it is good to have the dish there to catch any of these juices which can make it difficult to clean your oven afterwards,

Place the dish in the oven for 2 hours, then remove it from the oven and place some heavy weights on top of the pork to push it down and make it as compact as possible (I use a flat plate which I then pile with heavy jars and tins of fruit and vegetables – it does not matter what you use as long as it pushes the meat down. Place the weighted dish in a cold place (in winter if it is very cold, I place this on my balcony, because usually at Christmas my fridge is quite full), and leave it for at least 12 hours. Serve in thin wedges or slices on triangles of freshly toasted bread,

or on slices of Irish soda bread, with a spoonful of the marmalade (or chutney or savoury jam of your choice) on top,



Marmalade of apples, shallots and raisins

This is one of those savoury marmalades which goes well with so many things – patés, strong cheeses, cold cuts, even in sandwiches. It keeps for up to six months if you put it in sterilized glass jars which you then store in a cool, dry place. It is an absolute must for the solstice pate in the previous recipe.

INGREDIENTS

700g of apples (e.g. Cox's), unpeeled

500g shallots, peeled and whole (though for larger ones, you can halve them)

100g raisins

¼ teaspoon of cloves

¼ teaspoon of freshly grated nutmeg

550ml of strong dry cider

110ml cider vinegar

50g dark brown sugar (muscovado is best, but any brown sugar will do)

How to prepare it

Core the apples, then cut each apple into 12 segments. Place them in a large –sized saucepan and add all of the other ingredients.

Bring the pan to a gentle simmer and leave it to cook very, very gently for about one hour. Do not cover the pot. After the cooking time is up, the liquid should have reduced a lot and you are left with a sticky and shiny mixture. Serve warm or cold with the solstice paté.



Onion chutney.

This is one of those chutneys which can be eaten cold or warmed up on almost everything – cheese, steaks, with cold cuts and even in sandwiches.

INGREDIENTS

6 large onions, chopped.

A large frying pan with 4 tablespoons of olive oil and 30g of butter in it.

5 crushed cloves of garlic

1 heaped tablespoon of mild chili powder

1 ½ tablespoons of Worcester sauce

8 spoons of tomato ketchup

Salt and pepper.

What you do:

Turn the heat on under the pan until the butter has melted and the oil is quite hot.

Add the onions, stir them around for 2 minutes to get them nicely coated with the oil and butter, then turn the heat to low and let the onions sweat for 10 minutes. Then stir in the garlic, chili powder, Worcester sauce, ketchup and some salt and pepper. Mix everything well and cook for about 3 minutes, stirring all the time. The chutney is now ready to eat, though you can also put it into sterilized glass jars and it will keep for up to a year in storage. It can be eaten hot or cold.



Sweet onion jam

Another savoury jam which goes well with a variety of meat or cheese dishes, as well as in sandwiches.

INGREDIENTS

6 tablespoons of olive oil

300g brown sugar

400ml mild white wine vinegar

4 bay leaves

1,2kg large onions, chopped roughly

What you do:

Get the largest saucepan you have and heat the olive oil in it. Add the onions, stir well to get them coated in the oil and leave them fry for 10 minutes until they soften.

Add half a teaspoonful of salt, 4 bay leaves and stir well. Then add the sugar, mix well and let the sauce bubble for about 8 minutes, until caramelized. During this time, you need to keep stirring all the time.

Add the vinegar, turn up the heat and bring the pot to boiling pot, stirring all the time. Leave the pan to bubble away on low to medium heat (depending on your cooker) for about 40 minutes until the jam starts to thicken and go a dark brown-yellow colour. Stir from time to time. After 40 minutes, remove the bay leaves and put the jam into prepared sterilized jars. This jam keeps for up to 8 weeks. Serve with anything, whether spread thickly on a beefsteak or as in the illustration just with cheese on toast.



Winter steamed potato salad with mustard and herb dressing

This is a very nice side dish if served warm, but you can also serve it with cold cuts as a light evening meal during the days after Christmas when everyone has eaten so much heavy food in the previous days that just a light meal is enough

INGREDIENTS

1 kg of fresh baby potatoes, unpeeled and steamed for 15 to 20 minutes in water with a little salt added.

1 tablespoon hot wholegrain mustard

1 tablespoon honey mustard

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

2 tablespoons good quality olive oil

1 tablespoon each of fresh chopped parsley and fresh chopped chives

2 large spring onions cut in thin rings (and cut as much of the green parts as you can as well)

How to make it

Make the dressing while the potatoes are cooling. To do this, just use a fork to whisk the two mustards, vinegar and olive oil together in a salad bowl. When the potatoes have cooled, add them to the dressing and toss well until the potatoes are nicely coated with the sauce. Just before serving, sprinkle on the parsley, chives and spring onions. This salad is nice served while the potatoes are still quite warm, but it can also be served cold as part of a buffet or even for a picnic during the warmer months of the year.



Baked apples in white caramel

The rum and spices fill your kitchen with a beautiful Christmassy smell as these cook, and they definitely taste seasonal, if you are looking for the perfect seasonal dessert.

INGREDIENTS

20 grams of raisins and 20 grams of currants together in a small bowl with 2 tablespoons of rum poured over one hour before you start to make this recipe.

100g white sugar

20g unsalted butter

2 organic lemons

200 ml of cream

One sweet red apple, peeled, cored and grated into a large mixing bowl

1 teaspoonful of powdered cinnamon

1 extra tablespoon of rum

4 large sweet red apples

Whipped cream

What you do:

Use a lemon zester to scrape off the zest of the lemons. Put the zest into a small bowl, then cut the lemons in half and squeeze the juice into a bowl.

In a large mixing bowl, pour two tablespoons of the lemon juice and add the grated apple. Stir well. Also drain the rum off the raisins and currants.

Now we make the white caramel. Get a non-stick frying pan and melt the butter in it. When the butter has melted, stir in the sugar, mix well and bit by bit add the cream. Stir all the time until the pan comes to boiling point. As soon as the first bubble appears on the surface, remove the pan from the heat. Let it go fully cold.

Now add the cinnamon to the grated apple and lemon juice, add the raisins and currants and add one more tablespoon of rum. Mix everything well. Get an oven dish large enough to take all four apples and line the base with greaseproof paper.

Add the lemon zest to the mixing bowl and add HALF of the white caramel as soon as it is cold. Mix well and at this point preheat your oven to gas mark 4 (180°C).

In another mixing bowl, add the remaining lemon juice, then take the four red apples, peel them (leaving the stalks on them, if possible) and then cut a lid off each apple about one centimeter from the top. Use a melon baller or a spoon to scrape out the seeds. Then one by one roll the apples around in the lemon juice to prevent them from oxidizing. Be sure to get some of the lemon juice into the hollow you scraped out as well and also on the "lids" you cut off.

Put the apples in the baking tray and spoon the apple and rum mixture into the core part of each apple. Don't worry if some of the caramel runs down the sides – this will actually make them tastier! Put the tray in the oven for 30 minutes (do not put the lids on the apples at this point), after which you take it out of the oven, then put the lids on and spoon the remaining white caramel over them. Return the dish to the oven for a further 15 minutes. Sprinkle over a light dusting of cinnamon and serve with some whipped cream.



Pear and blue cheese pastries with lemon sorbet in cider

Although not strictly a Christmas dessert, this is one of those unusual combinations of ingredients which taste good at any time of the year. Ready-rolled puff pastry from your local supermarket tastes just as good as home-made and it certainly saves time, and there are many very good brands of lemon sorbet available in shops nowadays, so no need to make extra work for yourself by making your own sorbet.

INGREDIENTS

300ml dry cider

Sheet of ready-rolled puff pastry

4 teaspoons of mustard with honey

2 large pears (not too soft)

4 slices of mild blue cheese

1 tablespoon pistachio nuts (without their shells)

1 tablespoon fresh pomegranate seeds

4 scoops of lemon sorbet

4 fresh mint leaves

What you do:

Peel the pears and cut them in half lengthways, then remove the cores. Put 100ml of the cider into a large saucepan, bring it to boiling point, add the pears cut side down and leave to simmer gently for 10 minutes. Next, get a large ovenproof tray and place a sheet of greaseproof paper on it. Get your roll of pastry and cut 12 squares of 12 cm X 12 cm and place them on the greaseproof paper. Make sure that they do not touch each other. Place a teaspoonful of the honey mustard on each square and use the back of a spoon to smooth it evenly over the surface of each pastry square. Then chop the pistachio nuts very finely.

After 10 minutes, turn the pears over and gently simmer for another five minutes. Then remove them from the cider, let them cool and place half of a pear on each square of the pastry. Use a knife to make incisions along the surface of each pear at about half-centimetre intervals. Use a pastry brush to brush on a tiny amount of the honey mustard on the pear surfaces, sprinkle over the pistachios and put the tray into an oven which has been preheated to gas mark 6 (200°C) for ten minutes.

After 10 minutes remove the dish from the oven and transfer each pastry to an individual serving plate. While still very hot place a slice of the mild blue cheese on each pear.

Put a scoop of lemon sorbet into a drinking glass and pour 50 ml of cider over it. Put a mint leaf on top of each sorbet to garnish it and serve with the pomegranate seeds on the side for a touch of colour.



Traditional Irish whiskey hot toddies.

Irish hot toddies are world famous, and they are enjoyed especially in the colder months of the year. They are really delicious to round off a meal, and they are especially good if you have a bad cough or cold which might prevent you from getting to sleep at night. Just be sure that you drink just one of these if it is for medicinal purposes and if you are taking other medication, make sure that it is safe to consume alcohol. For a really stubborn head or chest cold, add a few thin slices of unpeeled ginger before you add the boiling water. This is really effective against colds.

INGREDIENTS (for one toddy)

1 tea mug or tea glass.

2 to 3 cl Irish whiskey

1 teaspoonful sugar

One slice of lemon from the middle, studded around the edge with 10 to 12 whole cloves

One metal teaspoon.

How to make it

Start by putting the sugar into the cup or tea glass. Then put the metal teaspoon in the cup, add the whiskey and pour in the boiling water. It is important to have a metal spoon in the glass or cup, as without this, the boiling water might cause the glass to break. Fill the water up to about 1 cm from the edge of the cup and then add the lemon slice studded with cloves. Stir very gently to dissolve the sugar, but not so vigorously that the cloves fall out of the lemon slice. Drink as hot as you dare!



Irish soda bread

This is about as traditional a bread as you will get in Ireland. We eat it all year round, but it is especially nice to have it at Christmas. Whether you have it toasted with butter for breakfast, or served at Christmas parties as snacks with thinly-sliced smoked salmon, or with a nice festive soup, it always goes down well.

INGREDIENTS

275g wholemeal flour

75g plain flour, plus a little extra for dusting the rolling surface

30g each of pinhead oatmeal and rolled oats

1 teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon sugar

1 egg, beaten

285ml buttermilk

A little milk

1 tablespoon each of rolled oats and pinhead oatmeal to sprinkle over the bread before it goes into the oven.

How to make it

Start by preheating your oven to gas mark 5 (190°C). Place all of the dry ingredients (except the rolled oats) in a large mixing bowl. Grease an oven tray with butter.

Next, beat the egg together with the buttermilk and add to the bowl. Mix well (I start by using a fork to do this and I finish it off by rolling it by hand). On a lightly floured chopping board, form a 30cm long oval with the dough. (The less you knead it, the tastier the bread will be, by the way).

Now put the dough onto the buttered baking tray. Use a pastry brush to brush the top and sides with some milk, then sprinkle on the rolled oats and pinhead oatmeal you have reserved. Then using the back of a bread knife, make about 8 equally-spaced diagonal indentations across the top of the bread.

Put the tray in the oven and bake the bread for 50 to 60 minutes. You know it is baked through when you turn it out onto a wire rack and it sounds hollow when you tap on the base of the bread with your knuckles. Once cool, it is ready to serve.



Some Irish Christmas Cooking Photos









