

Taste



Eating in

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TRADITION: Roast turkey is a rich and wonderful Christmas tradition.

Share the love with festive food



FINALE: Have a break between eating the main meal and starting on your pudding.

Sour cherry sauce

This savoury sauce is great with any poultry or baked kassler or baked ham

½ cup port (tawny)

½ cup lemon juice

1 cup redcurrant jelly

½ cup chopped onion

1 tsp dry mustard

½ tsp ground ginger

Few drops of Tabasco sauce

1 tbsp arrowroot mixed with ¼ cup orange juice

2 cups Kentish cherries, pitted OR 1 large jar of sour pitted cherries, plus ¾ cup of the liquid

Combine the port, lemon juice, jelly, onion, mustard, ginger and Tabasco in a pan. Bring to the boil, stirring occasionally. Strain the sauce to remove the onion. Place the strained sauce back in the saucepan. Add the cherries and cook gently for about 5 minutes. Stir in the arrowroot mixture and, stirring constantly, cook over a low heat until slightly thickened. Do not boil. Serve hot or cold. It keeps in the refrigerator for about three weeks.

Fruit stuffing

This is suitable for chicken, turkey, goose or quail.

Family favourite

KASSLER is a family favourite and, if there is any left, it is delicious cold or can be cut into chops and pan fried.

Serve it with a sour cherry sauce, which also works well with poultry.

The vegetable base to bake the kassler produces a robustly flavoured foundation for gravy.

The recipe can successfully be reduced or increased.

30g butter

1 medium onion, finely diced

1 large cooking apple, peeled, cored and diced

1 tsp sugar

1 tsp fresh sage, chopped OR ¼ tsp dried sage

¼ tsp ground cloves

125g dried apricots, cut into small pieces

60g raisins

3 tbsp poultry stock

4 tbsp apple juice

3 cups soft breadcrumbs

1 large egg

Soften the onion in the butter (about 10 minutes). Add the apple and sugar and cook for a further 5 minutes until the apple is tender but not mushy. Stir in the remaining ingredients, except the egg and breadcrumbs. Reduce the heat and cover the pan tightly. Simmer until all the liquid is absorbed (about 5 minutes); stir once. Allow to cool, then mix in the egg and breadcrumbs.

THERE'S real pleasure in helping to make Christmas Day special and to celebrate with a delicious meal. Food becomes the language of love, care, celebration, appreciation and pleasure.

Preparing and sharing food with others is almost an essential part of my life, so I'm quite happy for my home to be the nominated place for Christmas dinner. The joy is even greater if there are happy helpers in the kitchen and the chatting and fun that goes with the organising is one of the most enjoyable parts.

As the years have passed I have limited the choices on the menu and prepare dishes that are favourites with the family. (Some years ago, following a theme of red, white and green for Christmas and carrying it through all the food, one of the dishes was ox tongue, for the red bit, and I was most indignant when some of my brothers refused to eat it. They wanted the traditional food they were comfortable with and looked forward to.)

Also, I consider the quantity of food: if we have a starter, I make it light and imagine how we will feel after eating our way through the entirety of the meal. Sometimes it means a break between the main course and the pudding. The result is that, instead of everyone nodding off to sleep and leaving the dishes to the last person standing, there is a mood of vitality.

Plan dishes you know you can serve without too much stress. This will vary depending on how many you are feeding and the space you have to work in. Make sure you have serving dishes and utensils at hand and the crockery required for the meal organised.

Wangling oven space can be a problem if you're roasting a turkey and maybe a joint of meat and, of course, the roasted vegetables.

To deal with the space situation start the roasted vegetables, then, when the turkey is cooked, remove it from the oven and cover it with foil (shiny side in) and finish off the vegetables on a high heat. The turkey will benefit from resting and will retain its heat for at least half an hour or so.

The pudding will take up one of the hotplates and then there are the vegetables, the gravy, maybe the custard sauce for the oven top. The microwave is a good option for cooking such vegetables as carrots and peas or can be used as a last-minute boost to any of the components that may have cooled during the wait to be served.

For plate warming, a wet Chux cloth layered between plates works very well in the microwave. Similarly, a few drops of water in serving dishes, then a minute or so in the microwave is an easy and effective way to heat them. If you have a lot of components in the meal, it's important to have the plates warm so the food doesn't get cold.

One change I've made is to have a joint of kassler instead of a leg of ham.

Baked kassler

1 joint of kassler, about 2kg

12 crushed juniper berries

2 tbsp Dijon mustard

1 tbsp brown sugar

1 large brown onion, diced

2 carrots, diced

2 parsnips, diced

1 tbsp butter

1 cup water

Preheat the oven to 175C. In a baking dish melt the butter and add the diced vegetables. Sauté the vegetables briefly, then add the water and half the juniper berries and simmer 2-3 minutes. Combine the mustard, juniper berries and sugar and rub over the kassler. Sit the meat on the bed of vegetables. Bake for about 1½ hours. (You may need to top up the water if it evaporates.) Puree the vegetable mixture and add more water if necessary. If you wish to thicken this mixture, mix 1 tablespoon of cornflour to a paste with a little cold water; stir it into the vegetable puree and bring to the boil to thicken.