

# Taste

# Easter specials



Eating in

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**A**S the trees turn their autumnal colours we are preparing to celebrate Easter, a major religious festival for those of the Christian faith.

History tells us this celebration was actually based on the arrival of spring after dark, cold winters in Europe and that with the coming of Christianity and the Resurrection of Christ the two celebrations melded into one.

Many of us carry on the tradition and, even though the religious significance is relevant for believers anywhere in the world, it seems a little weird that we have adopted the celebratory spring food connected with Easter. I expect it's not much different from the roast Christmas dinner and hot plum pudding during summer.

Lamb is the traditional dish in the majority of countries that mark the Resurrection of Christ. This is partly due to Christ being known as the "Lamb of God" but primarily to celebrate new life and the beginning of spring with — spring lamb.

Fortunately, lamb in Tasmania is good all year round and will make a delicious feast for a traditional Easter Sunday lunch.

The recipe today is one that is easy to cook and serve if you are entertaining. For the best result, choose a cooking dish that can be used on hotplates and in the oven. It's important to have a well fitting lid to prevent moisture loss so, if you see steam escaping, put a piece of baking paper or foil under the lid.

This lamb is delicious served with mushrooms and lightly cooked zucchini strips with a squeeze of lemon and snipped chives added.

If you're expecting a crowd for lunch, add a few more vegies to the pot. I sometimes add a few of the last of the season's tomatoes, which contribute to a delicious sauce. You may wish to cook some potatoes separately as the ones from the pot roast probably will have lost their shape and contribute well to a "rough" sauce or puree. Roll freshly cooked potatoes in a touch of butter and freshly torn mint.

Pride of place on the table could be a Simnel cake. This has a layer of marzipan through the centre of rich fruitcake, which melts gloriously through the fruit. It originated in Lancashire and is thought of as "the" cake for Easter, even though it was traditionally known for Mothering Sunday, the day when young girls in service visited their homes during Lent.

The typical Easter decoration is a ring of 11 marzipan balls around the cake, depicting the faithful disciples. The 12th ball, Judas, sits on the base of the cake. It's a great celebration cake for birthday or Christmas — without the marzipan balls, of course.

## Stuffed, pot-roasted lamb

Give your butcher some notice to bone the leg of lamb. (Ask for the bones to make some stock or a treat for the dog.)

**2kg boned leg of lamb, trimmed of fat**

**1 large onion, peeled and sliced**

**750g small new potatoes, scrubbed**

**10 small carrots, scraped**

**2 cloves garlic**



**SIMNEL CAKE:** Decorated with 11 marzipan balls, depicting the faithful disciples

**2 tbsp oil**

**½ cup of wine or chicken stock**

**Salt and freshly ground pepper**

**5cm stick fresh rosemary, optional**

### STUFFING

**250g sausage mince**

**¼ cup chopped parsley**

**½ cup fresh breadcrumbs**

**1 medium onion, diced**

**1 clove garlic, crushed with salt**

**2 tsp fresh oregano**

**½ cup of walnuts or pistachios**

**1 tsp butter**

**Pinch nutmeg**

**Freshly ground pepper**

Soften the onion and garlic in the butter. I find the microwave good for this.

Add the softened onion and garlic to the remaining stuffing ingredients and combine well.

Stuff the lamb with the filling and secure with strings or skewers.

Select a large casserole and heat the oil. Put the lamb into the pan and brown well on all sides. Add the vegetables, seasonings and stock or wine and bring to the boil.

Cover tightly, lower the heat and cook very slowly until tender, about 2 hours, or cook at 170C for a similar time. The vegetables will be VERY cooked and can be served as they are or

made into a puree to serve with the lamb.

Check and correct seasoning before serving. A dash of wine into the sauce just before serving will give it a lift.

## Simnel cake

The word simnel is now associated with this cake but it also means "fine flour" and I expect that the addition of rice flour has a bearing on its name.

I use Odense brand marzipan for this; it comes in a log shape.

**250g plain flour**

**Pinch salt**

**¼ tsp baking powder**

**¼ tsp each of nutmeg and cinnamon**

**60g rice flour**

**400g sultanas**

**250g currants**

**125g glace cherries, halved**

**60g candied peel, finely chopped**

**Finely grated rind of 2 lemons**

**250g butter**

**4 eggs, separated**

**250g caster sugar**

**1 tsp vanilla essence**

**750g good quality marzipan or almond paste**

**1 extra egg white, lightly beaten**

Prepare a deep 20cm cake tin by greasing and lining thoroughly with baking paper. Heat the oven to 170C.

Sift together the flours, salt, spices and baking powder. Mix together the fruit.

In a large bowl beat the butter with the lemon rind until the butter is soft. Add the sugar and continue creaming until the mixture is light and fluffy, then beat in the egg yolks.

Whip the egg whites until stiff.

Fold a third of the flour into the butter mixture and then alternately fold in the remaining flour and fruit and egg whites.

Place half the mixture in the tin, spreading a little up the sides.

Roll one third of the marzipan in a smooth round the size of the tin. Put it in the tin and then top with the remaining cake mixture.

Bake for 2 hours then reduce the temperature to 130C and cover the top of the cake with a double thickness of baking paper. Continue cooking for a further 30 minutes or until a skewer comes out without batter on it. The marzipan will make the skewer sticky.

Remove from the oven and let the cake cool in the tin for 30 minutes or so.

Remove from the tin and place on a cooler.

When completely cool roll half the remaining marzipan into a round to just fit the top of the cake.

Cut a circle from the middle about 8-9cm in diameter. Remove the inner circle and use it and the remaining marzipan to form 11 even-sized balls.

Brush the top of the cake with some of the extra egg white and place the marzipan circle evenly on top.

Sit the balls around the edge; they should be just touching and surround the cake completely.

Brush all the top again with egg white and either place the cake under a heated grill to slightly brown and bubble the top or put it in the oven at 180C for 5 or so minutes.

When the cake is completely cool, decorate with some chicks and small Easter eggs.

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