

Stress-free festive food



Eating in

JUDITH SWEET

FOR those who like things to have a festive feel at Christmas but don't have the time or inclination for time-consuming recipes, here are a few quick, simple and effective ideas.

The recipe for the fruit and nut topping for a fruitcake looks and tastes great.

There are some good quality fruitcakes available commercially, which will save making one yourself.

It does take some committed time to properly prepare the tins, organise the fruit a week or so prior, stir it regularly, actually make the cake and stay around for the long cooking time.

I made both my cakes and puddings and had a huge mixture and quite a messy kitchen by the time the cakes were cooking and puddings in their pots.

The puddings bubbled away with the upturned saucer in the bottom of each pot letting me know the water was still on the boil and preventing the pudding basin from touching the bottom of the pot.

The cakes were protected by masses of newspaper pinned in place and I could smell the cake mingled with warm paper as they cooked.

The recipe for a Fruit mince jalousie is absolutely simple to make and looks effective and tastes great. "Jalousie" means venetian blind and the tart has slats like one.

Use ready-rolled, butter puff pastry.

You can be inventive and cut the pastry into the shape of a Christmas bell or Christmas tree. This is best served hot with custard sauce or vanilla ice cream.

The Yule log uses a chocolate roll filled with cream; they are readily available commercially. This makes a good alternative to a rich fruitcake as a special cake for Christmas.

If you don't like glace fruit, you could use toasted chopped hazelnuts instead.

If the hazelnuts still have their skins on, roll them in a tea towel after toasting them and rub firmly.

The skins should come off quite readily. Chop them after the skins are removed.



DELIGHTFUL: Yule log uses a chocolate roll filled with cream and makes a good alternative to a rich fruit cake for Christmas.

Easy Yule log

1 filled chocolate Swiss roll

2/3 cup finely chopped glace or candied fruit
1/2 cup chopped glace cherries

icing sugar to decorate.

2 cups butter cream icing

holly etc for decoration

BUTTER CREAM ICING:

125g unsalted butter, softened but not melted

250g icing sugar

3 level tbsp cocoa powder

few drops vanilla essence

a little milk

little rum or brandy if desired

Beat the butter until creamy and pale. Sift together the icing sugar and cocoa and gradually add to the butter. Add vanilla and a little milk to achieve a spreading consistency. You may wish to add a little brandy or rum.

For the Yule log:

Using a sharp knife, cut a small piece diagonally off one end on the roll about 3.5cm wide at the widest end.

Place the cut piece on the roll (and attach with icing) to resemble a branch or a knot on a log. Place the roll on a serving plate. Add the chopped fruits or nuts to the chocolate butter cream. Spread the icing all over the cake, including the ends.

Use a skewer or fork to mark a bark pattern over the log. Sift icing sugar over the log to resemble snow and decorate with holly. I put a little red robin on the branch.

Refrigerate before serving.

Fruit mince jalousie

Use a quality fruit mince in this recipe.

1 sheet ready-rolled butter puff pastry

6 tbsp fruit mince

125g seedless green grapes OR

1 peeled cooking apple, finely sliced

1 tsp apricot jam

1 egg white

2 tsp castor sugar

Heat the oven to 220C. Cut the pastry almost in half lengthwise — make 1 piece slightly wider than the other. Place the narrowest piece on a greased oven tray.

Combine the grapes and fruit mince. Spread down the centre of the pastry leaving a 1.5cm border all round. Brush the border with a little apricot jam. Gently fold the wider piece of pastry in half lengthwise and, leaving a 1.5cm border all round, slash cuts 1cm apart down the length of the pastry. Unfold and cover the fruit mince

and press the moistened borders together.

Cook for 10 minutes, then remove from the oven. Reduce the temperature to 180C.

Quickly brush the top of the pastry with the egg white and sprinkle with the castor sugar.

Return to the oven and cook for a further 10 minutes or until the pastry is crisp.



TRADITION: A Christmas fruit cake.

Glace fruit topping for a rich fruitcake

125g glace pineapple

125g glace apricot

375g red cherries

125g walnuts and/or

Brazil nuts

225g apricot jam

2 tbsp lemon juice

Gently heat together the jam and lemon juice. Push it through a sieve to make an apricot glaze. Brush the top of the cake with the glaze. Arrange the fruit and nuts attractively on the cake. Brush again with the glaze.

Allow the glaze to cool completely before storing in an airtight container in a cool place. To serve, tie a wide ribbon around the cake. I usually place a strip of foil or silicon paper behind the ribbon to prevent the moisture of the cake discolouring the ribbon.

Brazilian yuppies hooked on pub grub

FANCY a plate of rooster testicles? How about a bowl of cow-foot cartilage soup?

The new eating fad in Sao Paulo, Brazil, a city with a reputation as one of the great epicurean centres of the Americas, is the food traditionally cooked up by Brazil's poor and humble. Piraja, a boteco or old-style bar in the fashionable Alto dos Pinheiros neighbourhood,

opened a Temple to Low Gastronomy in July. Waiters serve up plates of ox-tail, jerked beef stuffed inside fried pumpkin balls and sauteed frogs.

Dozens of other botecos are also offering up such pub grub and chefs are putting new twists on the fare for the palates of urban yuppies in South America's biggest city.

The upmarket beer company Bohemia sponsored a cook-off

among about 30 bars recently that offered up their best peasant dishes, which tend to be hearty and fatty.

It invited Alex Atala, whose contemporary cuisine can cost diners hundreds of dollars each, along with a dozen other top chefs to teach classes on how to make finer boteco food.

The elevation of lowly food mirrors the story of Brazil's national dish of feijoada, a stew of meat boiled in black beans

and served with rice. It was originally created by slaves from the cuts discarded by their masters. Saturday feijoada lunches are now a tradition among Brazilians of all classes.

Similarly the distilled sugar cane drink cachaca was once the tippie of workers and peasants, became popular across the range of Brazilian society and is now the rage in bars from London to New York.

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