amNewYork

EATING

A proper English yuletide dessert

Christmas pudding is a sweet treat that's steeped in tradition

BY LUCY COHEN BLATTER
lucy.blatter@am-ny.com

First, let's clear up a common misconception: English puddings bear no resemblance to the creamy, custard-like, lunchbox staples popular in this country.

In the U.K., puddings are more cake-like, and are often steamed or boiled rather than baked, making them more moist than most cakes.

"A lot of people will order our Christmas pudding and expect to get something with a rice pudding consistency. We always educate our staff to explain it," said Eben Leonard, chef at The Libertine. His English-style restaurant serves sticky date pudding all year long and Christmas pudding during the holidays.

Josh Emett, chef de cuisine of Gordon Ramsay at The London, says Christmas pudding is a must. (DIANA DELUCIA)

Rescue Chef Danny Boome (FOOD NETWORK)

The basics

Christmas pudding is a dessert steeped in tradition – and alcohol. The cake, which is very dense and sweet, features candied fruits, almonds and citrus peel, and is soaked in brandy.

Traditionally, it features suet (a mutton or beef fat), which adds a moisture and dark richness not found in the American-style fruitcake.

Today, many chefs substitute suet with vegetable shortening. Others, like Jeff Baruch of London Lennie's in Rego Park, Queens, choose to go the more traditional route with suet.

"It's sort of cool, because it's so different," Baruch said.

The pudding traditionally contains 13 ingredients, representing Jesus and the 12 apostles.

It is also often covered with holly – to represent Jesus' crown of thorns.

Finally, the brandy-soaked dessert is set aflame to represent Jesus passion.

Preparing pudding

Christmas pudding is certainly not a last-minute dessert. "I know quite a few people who begin preparing the next year's pudding the year before. It's something they nurture all year," said Josh Emett, chef de cuisine of Gordon Ramsay at The London.

After the dough is prepared, it is left to rest for up to a day and steamed for up to eight hours to ensure its moist taste.

It can actually sit in the fridge for up to a year, where it's constantly doused with brandy or, in some cases, stout.

Mixed reviews

At Gordon Ramsay at the London, Christmas pudding is a must. "We can't not serve Christmas pudding on the holiday. I don't think people like it every day, but on Christmas, definitely," Emett said.

"Personally, I absolutely hate Christmas pudding," said Danny Boome, the British-born host of Food Network's "Rescue Chef." "It always reminds me of burnt fruit. I like fruitcake better because it's sweeter."

RECIPE

CLASSIC CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Ingredients:

- ¾ cup currants
- 1 cup seedless raisins
- 1 cup white raisins
- ½ cup candied mixed fruit peel
- ½ cup candied cherries, chopped
- ½ cup blanched slivered almonds
- ½ cup dark brown sugar
- ½ tsp. allspice
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 med. chopped apple
- 1 sm. carrot, scraped and chopped
- 1 ½ tbsp. orange peel
- 1 tsp. lemon peel
- ¼ lb. chopped beef suet
- 1 cup flour
- 2 cup fresh, soft white bread crumbs, shredded with a fork
- 3 eggs
- ½c. brandy
- ¼ cup fresh orange juice
- ¼ cup lemon juice

Directions:

1. Combine the currants, raisins, candied fruit peel, almonds, apple, carrot, orange and lemon peel and beef suet, tossing them about with a spoon or your hands until well mixed. Stir in flour, bread crumbs, brown sugar and spices.

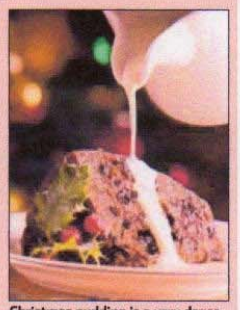
2. In another bowl beat eggs until frothy. Stir in brandy, orange and lemon juice and pour this mixture over fruit mixture. Knead vigorously with both hands, then beat with wooden spoon until all ingredients are blended.

3. Drape a dampened kitchen towel over the bowl and refrigerate for at least 12 hours. Spoon mixture into 2-quart pudding mold and cover with tight cover or a strip of buttered foil.

4. Place mold in a large pot and pour in enough boiling water to come about 3/4 of the way up side of mold. Bring water to boil; cover pot tightly and reduce heat to its lowest point. Steam pudding for 8 hours. As water boils away, replenish it.

5. Remove pudding from pot and cool to room temperature. Refrigerate pudding for at least 3 weeks before serving. Plum pudding may be kept up to a year in the refrigerator or other cool place. Unmold and serve warm with hot butter sauce.

Courtesy of Eben Leonard at The Libertine



Christmas pudding is a very dense and sweet dessert. (ISTOCKPHOTO)

Other options

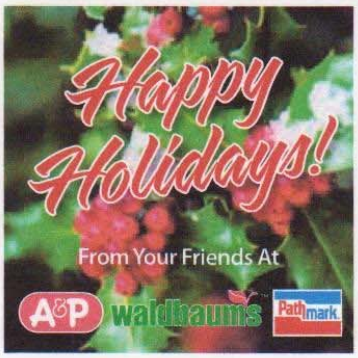
As a traditional English alternative to Christmas pudding, Boome recommends spotted dick, a sponge cake with raisins, served with custard on top.

For an entirely different dessert, he suggests a mince pie – shortcrust pastry filled with marinated spiced raisins, oranges and plums that are often dried out and marinated throughout the year. "The longer it takes, the better it tastes," Boome said.

You've got to hand it to the British – they know how to plan in advance.

Boome's mince pie recipe is available at www.amny.com.

Mince pie, which used to be made with minced meat, is now a sweet dessert. (ISTOCKPHOTO)



Home Cooking. Food is Love.
Come Feel the Love at
CAFE FRESH
1241 Amsterdam Avenue
@ 121st Street
212-222-6340
Catering Available. Corporate Accounts WELCOME!
15% OFF
New Accounts

Regan communications group
PIERCE COTÉ ADVERTISING