

Friends International - Dundee

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

(Also known as plum pudding or figgy pudding)

This is a Victorian recipe. Many other recipes do not include the potatoes, carrots and apple. Adding them makes the pudding a little lighter and less rich tasting. The Victorians would have made the puddings in cloths but most people today use pudding basins. If you use a pudding basin you will be able to keep the pudding for a few days to allow the flavour to improve.

The recipe is for very large puddings. If you wish you may halve all the quantities to make less. If you do so, do not halve the cooking times! If you use the selection of fruit I suggest and the quantities I suggest it could be expensive to make the pudding but a cheaper version could be made with larger quantities of raisins, sultanas and currants, missing out the more expensive fruit. The best plan would be to get together a group of friends, all of whom could contribute to the cost. You could make the puddings together now, then eat them together at Christmas. The cost to each person would then be small.

You will need:-

- 2 pounds of dried fruit, for example:
- 4 ounces raisins
- 4 ounces sultanas
- 4 ounces currants
- 4 ounces figs
- 4 ounces dates
- 4 ounces glacé cherries
- 4 ounces apricots
- 4 ounces any other dried fruit you like
- fresh fruit juice
- 2 ounces almonds
- 2 ounces walnuts
- 2 ounces hazelnuts
- 8 ounces potatoes
- 1 pound carrots
- 1 small cooking apple, e.g. Bramley apple with a sharp flavour
- 1 pound plain flour
- 8 ounces shredded suet. This would originally have been beef suet, but vegetarian suet gives puddings of equally good quality. Other softer fats will not work

- 12 ounces dark brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- salt
- ground dry ginger
- ground cinnamon
- grated nutmeg
- **either** two large heat proof pudding basins that are strong enough to stand in boiling water for a long time and will not be corroded by the fruit (e.g. heat proof plastic or Pyrex basins but not glass, ordinary plastic or enamelled metal basins). If you only have one suitable basin then either make half the quantity or cook the pudding in two sessions **or** a large very finely woven cloth such as muslin in which to wrap the pudding for boiling
- large pans that are big enough to hold the pudding basins surrounded by boiling water

Preparation

1. Weigh out all the fruit into a large bowl that will not be corroded by fruit juices. Those fruits that are larger need to be chopped into smaller pieces.
2. Add fresh fruit juice to cover the fruit in the bowl.
3. Leave it to stand for 8 to 12 hours in a cool place.
4. Drain it very thoroughly, so all extra fluid runs off.
5. Peel and boil the potatoes.
6. Mash the potatoes and allow them to cool completely
7. Peel the skin off the carrots. Take a cheese grater and use one of the finer cutting surfaces to finely grate the uncooked carrots
8. Wash the cooking apple. Remove the stem, core and seeds from the centre. Grate the apple. You can add a very little lemon juice to stop it going brown if you wish.
9. Crush the nuts coarsely.
10. If you are using pudding basins, line the basins with greaseproof paper and grease them thoroughly on the inside with margarine so the pudding cannot stick to the basins. Alternatively, if you are using a muslin cloth, wet it and then cover it on the inside with flour.

Mixing

1. Put the plain flour, shredded suet and sugar into a very large mixing bowl and mix them together. If the brown sugar is lumpy, squash any lumps with a spoon so it will mix well.
2. Break the eggs and empty them into a small bowl. Whisk the eggs vigorously until you have a bubbly mixture.
3. Pour the whisked eggs into the dry ingredients and mix them in thoroughly.

4. Stir in the mashed potato, grated carrot and grated apple.
5. Stir in the soaked and drained fruit.
6. Stir in the crushed nuts.
7. Add a little salt and some ground ginger, cinnamon and nutmeg. Stir very thoroughly.

Cooking

Original Victorian method: Place the pudding in a large lump on the floured wet muslin cloth and tie it up securely. Place it at once in a large pan of boiling water deep enough to cover the pudding completely. Boil for 4 hours. Take care, as the pudding will get larger as it cooks, so use a pan that is very big and do not fill it to the top. If you do not have a large enough pan, then cook the pudding in two halves. You must check very frequently that there is still enough water in the pan to cover the pudding. The water can boil away very quickly.

Modern method: If you are using pudding basins instead, divide the mixture between the basins and pack it firmly down into the basins inside the greased greaseproof paper. Make sure there is room at the top of the basins because the pudding will get larger when it is cooking. Cover the top of the basin with at least two layers of greaseproof paper and tie it down securely with string. Stand the basins in pans of boiling water. The water should come high up the sides of each basin but should not be deep enough to make the basin unstable or to allow water to flow into the basin. Place a lid on the pan to keep most of the steam in (but do not seal it in!). Boil for 4-6 hours. You must check very frequently that there is still enough water in the pan. If you make the pudding in basins it is easy to keep it for up to two or three weeks to allow the flavours to develop. If you want to do this then make sure it is thoroughly dry inside the basin, cover up the basin again and keep it in a cold place. If it is warm or if it is not fully cooked mould will grow on it. Move it to a warmer room on Christmas Eve.

Two hours before your meal on Christmas day place it in a pan of boiling water and boil it for two hours, checking constantly that there is still enough water in the pan.

Some people use other quicker methods to cook a Christmas pudding. They can be cooked in a pressure cooker or a microwave oven but I have never tried these methods. The instructions for your microwave or pressure cooker might tell you what to do!

You can serve a Christmas pudding with custard, ice cream or fresh cream, but it is traditionally served with a sauce such as brandy sauce or brandy butter. I strongly recommend my American recipe for apricot butter. This is a hard sauce which is melted onto the pudding when it is served.

APRICOT BUTTER

You will need:-

- 1 cup icing sugar
- 2/3 cup butter (margarine is too soft and does not have the right flavour)
- 1/4 cup fresh double cream
- 2/3 cup very finely chopped, sieved or mashed apricots (possibly from a tin as these are sometimes soft)

Method

1. Remove the butter from the fridge about an hour before preparation to allow it to warm to room temperature.
2. Thoroughly mix the icing sugar and butter to make a smooth paste.
3. Mix in the cream a little at a time.
4. Mix in the apricots.
5. Do not worry if the mixture has a lumpy uneven consistency.
6. Place the mixture in a bowl in the fridge. As the butter cools, the sauce will go hard.
7. Keep it cold until you serve the pudding, then put it on top so that it melts with the heat of the pudding

This sauce cannot be kept for a long period of time.

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CHRISTMAS DINNER

Although the pudding is prepared well in advance, the food for the rest of the meal can only be prepared at the time.

Until recently, many people ate pork for Christmas dinner, but in the last hundred years or so turkey has become the traditional Christmas dish. There is no such thing as a small turkey, so it is best to gather a group of friends for Christmas dinner. I shall describe how to cook a whole turkey for a group of friends, but you can easily buy smaller portions of turkey and cook them in a roasting tin for a shorter time.

Turkey

You can buy turkeys frozen or fresh. Fresh turkeys are slightly more expensive, but you may need to allow more meat per person with a frozen turkey if water has been added during freezing. If you want to get a fresh turkey, order it from a good butcher well in advance and collect it on the morning of Christmas Eve, since the butcher's shop may close early. Sometimes shops even run out of frozen turkeys at the last minute!

If you use a frozen turkey, you must follow the instructions on the packet for defrosting and check that it has completely thawed before you start to cook it. Get the turkey before Christmas day (no shops will be open then in any case) so that you can allow the right number of hours for thawing. If you are not sure that the meat has all thawed right through, then wait.

Check the weight of the bird from the label before you throw away the wrappings.

Check that there is nothing inside the body cavity of the turkey. Some of the parts of the turkey that are used in the cooking may have been kept inside the turkey often in a plastic bag, but these are cooked separately.

Wash the turkey thoroughly inside and out and drain away the water.

Fold the skin over the opening to close the body cavity and pass a piece of string around the legs and the opening to ensure that this stays closed during cooking. This will help prevent it from drying out.

To further prevent the turkey drying out during cooking, the surface is brushed with butter or olive oil. This can be flavoured first with mustard, pepper, crushed

garlic and herbs such as rosemary (which goes very well with turkey) thyme, parsley and a little sage. The mixture can be used both on the outside surface and in the body cavity.

Choose a very large roasting tin with high sides, since a lot of fluid will be produced during roasting. Place the turkey in the tin. The top of the body is thickly covered with the good quality white meat of the pectoral muscles. The underside has more bones. Place the turkey in the tin upside down, (that is meaty side down). This means that during cooking, fluids will drain into the best meat, giving it flavour and keeping it moist. It is not so good if the best meat dries out on top.

Traditionally, the cavity was stuffed with food to give flavour, but this can prevent the bird from cooking properly and the same result can be achieved by placing stuffing in the roasting tin beside the turkey. While the turkey is cooking the herbs in the stuffing give flavour to the meat and the juices from the meat flavour the stuffing. I shall give details of how to prepare stuffing below.

The turkey is a very large bird, so it requires a long time in the oven to cook right through. If it is not completely cooked, bacteria can survive in the meat and make you very ill. Adequate cooking is essential. Rather than cutting down on cooking time:

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protect the meat from drying out with oil or butter
2. cover it with aluminium foil or a close fitting lid while cooking
3. two or three times during cooking, open the oven and spoon the juices from the roasting tin back over the turkey.

Calculate the cooking time according to the instructions on the food label. If the label does not say how long to cook it then this may be a useful guide.

First find the weight of the turkey.

Add to this the weight of the stuffing and any onions or potatoes that you are roasting in with the turkey.

Use this **total** weight to find the cooking time.

Allow 55 minutes for each 1Kg then add on a further 25 minutes.

Time = {(weight of turkey+weight of stuffing etc.) x (55min per Kg)} + 25min

Or allow 25 minutes for each pound then add on a further 25 minutes.

Time = {(weight of turkey + weight of stuffing etc.) x (25 min per pound)} + 25 min.

Cover the roasting tin with aluminium foil.

Make sure the oven has already reached a temperature of 180 degrees centigrade, 350 degrees Fahrenheit, or gas mark 4.

Place the turkey in the oven and cook for the required time at that temperature.

Spoon juices back over the turkey occasionally.

If necessary, uncover the turkey for the last few minutes to allow it to brown. If the turkey is already browning well, this might not be necessary.

When the cooking time is complete, check that the turkey is cooked. To do this, pierce the turkey with a sharp knife in several places. Make sure the knife has gone right in as far as the bone. Make sure you test every part of the bird. The deepest layer of meat is at the leg and meat deep inside the leg or around the leg may not be properly cooked. When you pierce the meat, only clear colourless fluid should come out. If the fluid looks pink then the turkey should have at least another 25 minutes in the hot oven before you check again. When you are cutting the meat up, if you see any blood, or if any of the meat looks a little red or slimy, then the meat is not adequately cooked and must not be eaten until it has been properly cooked.

After the turkey has been fully cooked, allow it to cool. When it is cooler, the meat will crumble less so you can carve it with a very sharp knife. Remove the stuffing from around the turkey. Drain off the juices, but keep them as you will need them. Place the turkey on a board. Remove the legs and wings so they are not in the way. Use the sharp knife to carve the best white meat into slices. Place the stuffing in a heatproof dish. Place the legs and wings and carved meat in a heatproof dish. Pour some of the juices over the carved meat and the legs and wings so they will not dry out during reheating. Cover the meat with foil.

When you want to eat the turkey, heat the oven to 180 degrees centigrade, 350 degrees Fahrenheit or gas mark 4 then place the meat back in the oven until it returns to the correct temperature.

Alternatively you can carve the turkey at the table.

The Trimmings

A number of foods are traditionally served with the turkey. However it is best to eat the vegetables you like best rather than just following tradition.

Gravy

The previous day, keep the water you use to cook your vegetables so you can use it as stock to make the gravy. When you buy a turkey, parts of the bird that are nutritious are often sold with it (heart, liver etc.) These are not roasted with the bird. If you plan to cook the turkey in advance and carve it then reheat on the day, you will also have the bones of the turkey left after the meat has been removed. Place them in the pan together with a carrot and an onion. Add the vegetable stock mentioned above and boil everything for 1-2 hours. Do not allow the pan to boil dry. After that, remove everything from the stock and keep the stock to make your gravy. Once the turkey has been roasted you will use some of the juices to keep the meat moist during reheating, The rest can be added to the stock. During roasting, some of the juices dry on the tin leaving thick brown caramelised deposits. These give the gravy its colour and flavour, so make sure these are washed out of the roasting tin and used in the gravy. Boil everything until the gravy is thick enough. Season with pepper, herbs and a little salt if needed. Serve in a jug at the table to pour over the meat.

Stuffing

The stuffing is placed around the turkey during roasting. The mixture can be prepared in advance. There are many different recipes for stuffing, some made with oatmeal, some made with bread. Some contain meat such as sausages or bacon. Others contain nuts. For a Christmas turkey people often make chestnut stuffing with roasted sweet chestnuts included in the mixture or sage and onion stuffing. If you use the basic mixture, you can add anything you like to it.

This recipe is for sage and onion stuffing with walnuts:-

Peel and chop two large onions. Crush and chop one clove of garlic. Boil them gently in half a pint of vegetable stock, letting excess water boil away. Allow it to cool. Crumble up four ounces of wholemeal bread and put it in the stock. Add one ounce of butter or margarine, salt, pepper and one whisked egg. Add chopped sage leaves or two teaspoons of dried sage. Break up a packet of walnuts and add them too. Mix thoroughly. You may also like to add: peeled new potatoes previously boiled for five minutes, chopped bacon, sausages,

chopped carrots, mustard or mustard seeds, pieces of apricot, other herbs such as parsley, rosemary or thyme.

Bread Sauce

Place one large onion in a pint of milk. Add several cloves and peppercorns, a bay leaf and grated nutmeg. Bring it slowly to the boil. When it boils, remove it from the heat, cover it with a lid and keep it warm for two hours or longer so the flavours can infuse into the milk. When you are ready to eat, remove everything from the milk. Crumble up six ounces of white bread and add them to the milk. Add 2 ounces of butter, salt and pepper. Heat again gently, beating with a wooden spoon. If you want, you can add a little fresh cream. Serve hot in a bowl at the table so people can spoon the sauce on to their turkey.

Roast Potatoes

Peel potatoes and cut into large pieces. Cover them sparingly with mustard, salt, pepper and olive oil. Roast them in the oven for 30 - 45 minutes at 200 degrees centigrade, 400 degrees Fahrenheit, gas mark 6 (the time varies greatly according to the size and variety of the potatoes) until crisp and golden in colour and soft inside. If they are not soft, cook longer. (If you would like a shorter cooking time, part boil the potatoes first for 5 minutes then dry thoroughly before oiling and roasting.)

New potatoes

New potatoes are the small baby potatoes with thin flaky skins. Wash them and place them in boiling salted water. Bring it back to the boil and boil for 20 minutes until they are soft or 15 minutes if they are very small.

Roast Parsnips

Peel the parsnips, remove the ends and cover them very sparingly with a little olive oil, salt and pepper. Place them in the container with the turkey during the last 30 minutes of roasting.

Carrots

Peel the carrots and remove the ends. Cut them into large pieces. Place them in boiling salted water and bring them back to the boil. Continue to boil for 15 minutes. They should not be boiled until they become soft and soggy!

Brussels Sprouts

Green vegetables should be cooked quickly then served. Overcooked, they can be tasteless and slimy instead of crisp and crunchy. On the other hand, undercooked sprouts can be bitter. For the best flavour, choose the smallest sprouts. Cut off the base of the stem, allowing the oldest outer leaves to fall away. If the sprouts are large, cut into the stem at the bottom of the sprouts to allow the hot water to penetrate more quickly. To avoid overcooking, do not start to cook the sprouts until you are almost ready to eat. If you have to keep them warm for a long time after they have been cooked, they will be spoilt. Place the sprouts in boiling, salted water and bring it back to boiling. Boil for 7 - 10 minutes at the most according to the size of the sprouts. Serve quickly.

Enjoy your meal!

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