



Christmas Cooking Tips by Sian Hindle

I was listening to Delia on Radio 2 this week and she was suggesting Braised Turkey legs as an alternative to your Roast Christmas Turkey this December 25th. We may be in the middle of some hard times, but I think that Christmas Day is the one day of the year where families sit down to eat together. We really are in trouble if we can't find the funds for a turkey dinner whether it is an "Organic Bronze" or a frozen turkey from a supermarket.

There are many ways to stretch your food budget this year, all involve extra planning and preparation. If you are having family or friends over on Christmas Day, why not share the cost and preparation of the meal. If you cook the main course for lunch, encourage others to bring the starters, dessert and cheeseboard.

Shopping

Buy local. Buy from markets as opposed to supermarkets. The supermarkets are usually only closed on Christmas Day and maybe Boxing Day. Be realistic in what you need and what you can eat during the one day, maybe two that the shops are closed.

Starters

If you intend serving a starter for Christmas lunch, choose something that can be made in advance and frozen or simply prepared on Christmas Eve. Bear in mind that Christmas lunch is probably one of the largest meals to be eaten in the year – so keep that starter simple. Starters include favourite soups, terrines or pate, prawn cocktails or savoury tarts. I prefer to serve canapés as a starter for when my extended family arrives to nibble when exchanging presents. I serve simple smoked salmon or smoked mackerel pate on crostini – which means you don't need a great deal of it, and it gives the cook extra time for getting the lunch on the table.

Smoked Salmon Pate for Canapés

100g Smoked Salmon
3tbsp Cream Cheese
1-2 tbsp Creamed Horseradish
Salt & White Pepper
1tbsp Lemon Juice
Chopped Parsley
1 French Stick



- Place 250g salmon in the blender and whiz to chop coarsely. Add the cream cheese and horseradish, pulse to combine, Season with the salt, pepper and lemon juice.
- To serve, spread the pate onto thin slices of the French stick. Sprinkle with parsley to give colour.

The Turkey

Fresh Turkey from Cole's at Neath Market is @ £6.00 per Kg. Use guidelines to order the bird to feed your family for lunch with enough left over for sandwiches on Christmas night and a turkey curry on Boxing Day. You can extend and enhance your turkey by making a tasty sausagemeat stuffing for the bird.

Apple & Cranberry Sausagemeat stuffing

50g butter
1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 clove garlic, peeled and finely chopped
75g dried Cranberries
2tsp Parsley, finely chopped
275g Lincolnshire sausagemeat,
1 red apple
Seasoning

- Melt the butter in a pan and gently sauté the onion and garlic. Tip into a bowl and allow to cool. Add the remaining ingredients. Mix together and season well.
- Use to stuff the neck end of the bird only. Or roll into stuffing balls to cook and serve separately.
- You can use this recipe to make lovely sausage rolls for a buffet table too.



Pigs in Blankets (Chipolatas wrapped in bacon)

Pigs in blankets are one of those trimmings that are simple to make and taste far superior to any you can buy. Involve the children in the kitchen by getting them to help you.

Choose your favourite quality sausages from the butcher or supermarket and wrap up with streaky smoked or unsmoked bacon. Prepare these in advance and freeze ahead of time. On Christmas Day I cook these in a disposable foil tray to save on the washing up!

To cook, line a roasting tray with baking parchment. Place sausages into the tray and drizzle with olive oil. Roast in the oven until lightly browned, approximately 15 to 20 minutes, turning occasionally.

The Trimmings

I never buy expensive prepared vegetables. On Christmas Eve, we have a family tradition where we all peel and prepare the vegetables for Christmas lunch. We put the Christmas Eve film on and get into the festive spirit cooking together. This not only teaches the children, but adds to the excitement of Christmas.

I checked with Mark Reynolds at Neath Market on the price of vegetables for Christmas lunch. For roast and boiled potatoes, carrots, parsnips, sprouts and cauliflower, he estimates £7.50 for vegetables for a family of 4, using top quality fresh local produce. M&S has a pack of ready prepared vegetables for 4 servings priced at £14.99.

When cooking the vegetables, keep it simple, roast potatoes and parsnips, boiled sprouts, carrots and maybe cauliflower will be a plateful with the turkey and gravy. If you want to add more colour to the plate, then this recipe for red cabbage is brilliant as it can be made in advance and frozen. This recipe makes quite a lot so divide it up and freeze. It is perfect with Pork and winter casseroles.

Watch Sian preparing Christmas dinner on our blog site

www.lacreme.typepad.co.uk

Braised Red Cabbage with Cranberry



900g Red Cabbage, finely shredded
2.5cm Root Ginger, peeled and finely grated
200g Fresh Cranberries
25ml Olive Oil
150ml Vegetable Stock
Seasoning
40g Butter
30ml Balsamic Vinegar or Red Wine Vinegar
2tsp Muscovado Sugar

- Heat the oil in a large saucepan and sauté the cabbage and ginger over a high heat for 3-4 minutes until reduced in bulk, stirring continuously.
- Add the stock and seasoning, bring to the boil, cover and cook for 20 minutes. Stir occasionally.
- When the cabbage is tender, uncover and bubble down the excess liquid.
- Remove from the heat and stir in the butter and vinegar. Adjust the seasoning and keep warm until serving.
- This recipe is great made in advance and reheated in the microwave.
- It freezes well too.

Dessert

If you are not a fan of the Traditional Christmas Pudding, then I think these recipes for rich chocolate dessert and sherry trifle are better than anything you can buy. Make the mud pie soon and freeze it for Christmas Day. You will only need a thin slice, dusted with icing sugar and drizzled with cream to satisfy your sweet tooth.

Indulgent Baked Chocolate Mud Pie – Serves 8

225g Chocolate Digestive Biscuits
60g Unsalted Butter
180g Plain Chocolate
180g Unsalted Butter
4 large Free Range Eggs
180g Brown Sugar
180ml Double Cream

23cm Springform Tin, well buttered



- To make the base, place the biscuits into a food processor and blend until you have biscuit crumbs, alternately, place the biscuits in a plastic bag and crush with a rolling pin.
- Melt the butter in the microwave and pour over the biscuit crumbs. Using the back of a spoon, press over the base and halfway up the sides of a buttered tin.
- To make the filling, gently melt the chocolate with the butter in the microwave, giving short bursts of heat and stirring well in between, stir gently, then let cool.
- Place the eggs and sugar in a large mixing bowl, using an electric mixer, whisk until thick and foamy. Whisk in the cream and then the melted chocolate mixture. Pour over the biscuit base and bake at 170°C, Gas 4 for 45 minutes until just firm. Leave to cool for a few minutes, then remove from the tin.
- Serve the pie at room temperature with a drizzle of single cream and a dusting of icing sugar. The pie can be made two days in advance and kept in the fridge or made in advance and frozen.

Classic Trifle

300g Madeira Cake, homemade or bought
3 tbsp Strawberry Jam
5tbsp Sweet Sherry
568ml pot of Vanilla Custard
284ml pot Double Cream
White Chocolate Shavings to decorate



- Slice the cake in half horizontally, spread one half with jam and sandwich together.
- Slice into 3cm slices and use to line the base of a glass bowl.
- Drizzle with the sweet sherry.
- Pour over the vanilla custard.
- Whip the double cream until it is softly holding peaks then spoon over the top of the custard.
- Decorate with white chocolate shavings.
- Chill for at least one hour or overnight.
- Remove from the fridge 30 minutes before serving.

To save money on your food shopping this year,

- Buy only what you can realistically eat.
- Plan a shopping list and stick to it.
- Buy local, support your independent traders.
- Don't buy ready prepared foods.
- Get your recipe book out, plan your menu now.
- Encourage all the family to get involved with the preparation.
- Share the catering by encouraging your family to "Cook a Course".
- Cook in advance and freeze to save time on the big day.

For further recipes and Christmas ideas visit our blog site www.lacreme.typepad.co.uk throughout December.