

Karyn Miller's guide to the ultimate connoisseur's Christmas

TURKEY

"Don't buy a frozen supermarket turkey," warns Henrietta Green, connoisseur of speciality foods and organiser of the popular Henrietta Green's Food Lovers' Fairs. "They are reared too quickly, and pumped full of gunk and nastiness. A turkey is a gamebird, and should be hung. The cheaply-produced ones never are, and have all the texture and flavour of cotton wool."

Henrietta recommends the Kelly Bronze turkey. "It boasts a tight, compact flesh and a more generous breast." She recommends two small producers of slow-reared, free-range Kelly Bronze birds: Kelly's (£36.95 for a small turkey, available in the Marchents mailorder catalogue) and Swaddles Green Farm (£9.50 per kg).

Free-range bronze turkeys are also the choice for the useful Turkey Boxes at Bluebird (4), which contain a turkey (£8 per kg), cranberry sauce (£2.50 a pot), roast turkey gravy (£1.95 a pot) and freshly-made stuffing (£1.95 a pot).

GOOSE

When choosing a goose, Henrietta looks for a good meat-to-bone ratio. "The goose isn't a very meaty bird," she explains, "but a well-fed goose has a decent covering of fat and provides plenty of meat." She favours free-range geese fed on grain and grass, as available from Goodman's Geese (£46 for a small goose) and Seldom Seen Farm (£47.95 for a small goose, available from Marchents mailorder catalogue).

Henrietta's top tip for cooking both turkey and goose is to rub the bird with sea salt first. "This produces a good, crisp flavour," she says.

THREE-BIRD ROAST

If you can't decide between turkey and goose, why not have both? The Three Bird Roast is a turkey stuffed with a goose, stuffed with a duck, stuffed with spiced prune and walnut forcemeat. It weighs in at 10 kg and serves 40 of your nearest and dearest relations. You could still be gorging on the leftovers when Christmas rolls around next year. £175 from Swaddles Green Organic Farm.

BREAD SAUCE

The head chef at the Perseverance, Richard McLellan, has kindly revealed to us his bread sauce recipe. Don't leave making it until the last minute as the milk must be infused overnight.

INGREDIENTS: 1 litre of milk; 1 onion, peeled and halved; 10 cloves; 1 star anise; 1 bay leaf; 6 peppercorns; 1/2 sliced white loaf; 1 knob of butter; 1 tablespoon of cream.

METHOD: 1. Put the milk into a pan. 2. Stud the onion halves with the cloves, and add to the milk. 3. Add the star anise, bay leaf, and whole peppercorns. Leave to infuse overnight. 4. The next day, bring the milk to the boil. Don't let it burn. 5. Strain the milk into a different pan to remove the other ingredients. 6. Cut the crusts off the bread and chop it into small pieces, as finely as you can and add them to the milk. 7. Whisk the ingredients until the sauce thickens, and finish with a knob of butter and a tablespoon of cream. Season and serve.

CRANBERRY SAUCE

Make cranberry sauce on Christmas morning

and it will be set to perfection by the afternoon. This is the recipe that Martin Gabler, head chef at the Rib Room and Oyster Bar at the Hyatt-Carlton Tower, swears by. Once the fruit has been zested, the sauce can be rustled up in half an hour.

INGREDIENTS: (serves 10): 1 litre of orange juice; 1kg cranberries; 1 glass port; zest and juice of 1 lemon; zest of 1 orange; 300g granulated sugar; 1 star anise.

METHOD: 1. Reduce the orange juice by half. 2. Add the port, sugar and lemon and orange zests and bring to the boil again. 3. Add the star anise and fresh cranberries and simmer until the cranberries are soft. Leave to cool and serve at room temperature.

VEGETABLES

In a valiant attempt to transform Brussels sprouts into an appealing foodstuff, Sainsbury's has chopped them up and mashed in some cranberries (£1.99 a pack). Red cabbage (5) has been tossed with apple and slathered in cranberry butter (£1.49 a pack). Do note though, that this progressive attitude to Christmas vegetables is guaranteed to annoy the mother-in-law.

GRAVY

A good gravy is hard to come by, but that's no excuse for anointing your goose or turkey with brown slurp made from processed granules. For traditionalists who prefer Christmas dinner unsmudged by the monosodium glutamate content of convenience foods, here is Mrs Beeton's turkey gravy recipe. It comes straight from the Victorian feast table, takes little over an hour to make and, she notes, costs around 4d per pint.

INGREDIENTS: The necks, feet, livers, and gizzards of the fowl; 1 slice of bread, toasted; 1/2 onion; 1 faggot [bundle] of herbs; 1/2 pint of water; thickening of butter and flour; 1 dessertspoonful of ketchup (NB: back then, ketchup was a sauce made from mushrooms - for a passable modern-day equivalent, purée a large mushroom in a blender with a pinch of salt and a drop of brandy.)

METHOD: 1. Wash the feet of the fowl thoroughly clean, and cut them and the neck into small pieces. Put into a stewpan with the bread, onion, herbs, seasoning, livers and gizzards. 2. Pour the water over them and simmer gently for 1 hour. Strain into another pan. 3. Using a pestle, pound the liver into small pieces. Mix into the gravy. 4. Add a thickening of butter and flour, then the ketchup. Boil it up and serve.

Adapted from Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management.

CHRISTMAS PUDDINGS

Selfridges' bestselling pudding (right) is a vegetarian-friendly brandy, port and walnut version. A tip from Fanny Craddock's dusty but hallowed pages is to hose the pudding with vodka, not brandy. Vodka burns for longer - and ignites more easily if given a two-second whirl in the microwave first.

CHRISTMAS CAKES

If Christmas is to be small-scale this year, choose a cake to match (2). Mrs Gill's award-



winning one is only a few inches in diameter but don't judge it on its size. How she manages to cram so much rich fruit into so small a space is a wonder. £8.18 from www.foodndrink.co.uk.

At Konditor & Cook, meanwhile, the Christmas cake has gone highbrow. This cake (6), covered in holographic silver glitter, is based on an artwork at the Tate Modern: *Waterlines*, an abstract depiction of a waterfall through ice by Richard Long. £21.50.

BRANDY BUTTER

Gaudy Christmas packaging must be anathema to trendy minimalists. Thank goodness that Harvey Nichols foodhall's discreet yet stylish packaging extends to its seasonal range. Its brandy butter (11) costs £2.40.

RUM BUTTER

The recipe favoured by Andrew Turner, executive chef at Restaurant 1837, takes 5-10 minutes and can be stored in the fridge. **INGREDIENTS** 150g of freshly shelled sweet almonds; 50ml dark rum; 250g unsalted butter.





METHOD: 1. With a pestle and mortar, grind the almonds into a paste. 2. Add the rum, and mix in the butter. 3. Pass through a sieve.

CRACKERS

The best crackers in town are at Fortnum & Mason (3). The biggest of all is the childrens' one (£35): it's more than twice the size of a normal cracker and is stuffed with toys. The gifts concealed within the ladies' and gentlemen's crackers (£50 each) are silver-plated and tortoiseshell-finished. The Champagne Cracker (£16) contains a quarter bottle of Fortnum & Mason Champagne. It is rather cumbersome to pull, but promises more fun than a key ring and paper hat.

MINCE PIES

Priced at 75p each, these mince pies from Konditor & Cook (8) are more expensive than six from Asda but over 6,000 of them were sold last year. The secret is the pastry: it's made on-site with lashings of fresh butter. The

mince pies are baked on a daily basis, and are usually sold hot.

CANDIES

The prettiest candies come in shiny scarlet Carluccio's boxes (9). In the box of Frutta candita (£19.95), candied star fruit are tucked alongside orange segments, whole clementines, chestnuts, kumquats and strips of ginger. Similarly irresistible is the Cioccolato Varieta (£15.25), a box of figs stuffed with candied orange, grappa chocolates, coffee pralines and scarlet confetti (not the wedding variety, but giant Italian smarties).

The most opulent chocolate box of all must be this one from Fortnum & Mason (7). It is filled with an assortment of hand-made chocolates, is covered in crushed purple velvet and weighs in at a whopping 2.27kg and £120. Will you ever hanker for a box of Terry's All Gold again?

STILTON

Wrap your Stilton tightly in cling film so that it doesn't dry out. For optimum

flavour and texture, remove the Stilton from the fridge a couple of hours before it is required and let it warm to room temperature.

Specialist shop Jeroboams' best-selling Stilton is Cropwell Bishop (10), which is slightly bluer than the Colston Bassett Blue Stilton recommended by the British Cheese Board. Colston Bassett is the second-smallest Stilton dairy in Britain, and the method of manufacture has changed little since it was founded in 1913. It can be ordered direct from the dairy but this year demand is already outstripping supply. Fortunately, the Neal's Yard Dairy shop at Borough Market has plenty in stock. £14 per kg.

CHEESEBOARD

A cheese basket with all the trimmings – straw, grapes and biscuits – has been compiled by the Huge Cheese Company, which supplies the Ritz and the Mirabelle. It boasts a superb selection of English and French cheeses including a delicious little Banon wrapped in chestnut leaves, and Fleur de Maquis, a little-known Corsican ewe's milk cheese infused with herbs and juniper berries.

Pick of the lot, however, is the generous wedge of Montgomery Cheddar. Many 'mature cheddars' are nothing of the sort; an unscrupulous practice prevalent among some food stores is to up the acidity level to fool the palate. The Montgomery, however, is 18 months old – the real thing.

£45 from Huge Cheese Direct

BOXING DAY RELISH

"The ideal accompaniment to cold turkey and ham," reads the label. The contents of Fortnum & Mason's Boxing Day Pickle (1) bear a suspicious resemblance to piccalilli. But when did piccalilli look this appetising? £3.95

PICKLED WALNUTS

Alternatively, serve your cheese with pickled walnuts (12). These ones from Bluebird have been matured with port and will keep for a month – once Christmas is over, serve them with the leftover turkey.

TELEPHONE NUMBERS & MAILORDER DETAILS

Bluebird, 020 7559 1000

Carluccio's, 020 7580 2552 (Christmas deadline 14 December)

Colston Bassett Dairy Limited, 01949 81322,

www.colstonbassettdairy.com

Foodndrink, www.foodndrink.co.uk, (Christmas deadline 10 December)

Fortnum & Mason, 0845 300 1707

www.fortnumandmason.co.uk (Christmas order deadline 12 December)

Jeroboams, 020 7727 9359

Goodman's Geese, 01299 896272. Christmas order deadline 3 December (that's tomorrow!)

Harvey Nichols Foodhall, 020 7201 8538.

Huge Cheese Direct, 020 7819 6099,

www.hugecheese.co.uk (Christmas order deadline 10 December)

Konditor & Cook, 020 7407 5100

Marchents mail order, 0870 60 61 62 3,

www.marchents.com (Christmas order deadline 10am, 17 December)

Neal's Yard Dairy, 020 7645 3555 (Christmas order deadline: 19 December)

The Perseverance, 020 7405 8378

Restaurant 1837 at Brown's Hotel, 020 7408 1837

Rib Room, Hyatt-Carlton Tower, 020 7235 1234

Selfridges Food Hall, 020 7629 1234

Swaddles Green Organic Farm, 01460 234387,

www.swaddles.co.uk. (Christmas order deadline 13 December)