

Yorkshire's Christmas Recipes

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Published by White Rose Content A Division of White Rose Consulting, Inc.

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Yorkshire's Christmas Recipes

ebook ISBN 978-0-9699540-9-5

Yorkshire's Christmas Recipes – Vol. 1

I love food and I love Christmas, so researching this book was as easy as falling off a chocolate log, but twice as much fun. (This is subtitled Volume 1, by the way, because then it leaves the door wide open for me to go and research a lot more Christmassy comestibles for Volume 2, maybe even Volume 3...)

The following recipes come from a weird and wonderful selection of traditional Yorkshire kitchens – large and small, old and even older, painstakingly picky and often free-willed. It's all good stuff, and, together with a few modern tweaks, these recipes are guaranteed to bring cheer and give winter hunger a right good seeing to. They are not guaranteed to help you lose weight or stay slim, but Christmas and the New Year are not the time to worry about that. Moderation is for moderate months, such as January through November.

Obviously, Christmas is an occasion to celebrate, relax the reins of restraint and enjoy the fruits of our labour with good food and drink. But a 21st century Christmas can often make us all so busy we don't think we have time to make all our own festive treats, meals and drink... so we end up buying them. If I can give you anything this Christmas, I'd like it to be the idea that our food and drink is special, and worthy of our attention. It used to be like that. It should come first, and if you don't think homemade pastries taste better than those made many months ago in a factory miles away, possibly China, then you might as well just keep your hands and kitchen sink clean, and stop reading right here.

I spent more than ten years as a food and drink columnist and restaurant reviewer, and I was often asked "Where's your favourite place to eat?" I always replied "My kitchen." It's still my favourite place, even more so when the nights start drawing in. Spending time in the kitchen during the days and nights leading up to Christmas should be an exciting and rewarding time. Fill the air with delicious aromas, good music, conversation and laughter – anything that comes out of all that is surely a bonus.

And don't worry about "getting it right." Many chefs and cooks treat their precious recipes like scientific formulae and insist on following every measurement and instruction to the letter. Poor them. These recipes are not like that. It's quite alright to muck about and add a bit of whatever you fancy. If I say add "some" of whatever, I mean "some" not a lot or a little, just some. Live dangerously, but don't burn yourself! By all means give the recipes your own personal twist and substitute the prescribed ingredients for something different, if you like. The thing that binds them all together is the spirit of Christmas, which should be generously added to everything. If you do "get it right" enjoy the achievement, and if you don't, have laugh and enjoy it anyway!

Where possible, grow your own or buy fresh ingredients and support your local farmers and growers. If you haven't got good company in the kitchen, at least put on some good music, have your favourite festive drink at hand (there's a few recipes for these, too!), and please share whatever comes out of the oven, especially with those less fortunate than you. Eat, drink, and be merry, all year round!

Recipe List

Starters

[Cheerful Cheezy Chunks](#)

[Liver Pâté](#)

[Reindeer Balls](#)

Main Course

[Brilliant Brussels](#)

[Festive Roasties](#)

[Lively Red Cabbage](#)

[Pork Pie \(Growler\)](#)

[Santa's Stuffing](#)

Desserts

[Brack](#)

[Bellringer Brandy Snaps](#)

[Cheerful Chizzuk Cheesecake](#)

[Christmas Cake](#)

[Christmas Pudding](#)

[Curd Tart](#)

[Cut-and-Come-Again Cake](#)

[Festive Fruit Loaf](#)

[Green Man Gingerbread](#)

[Motherlode Mince Pie](#)

[Posh Parkin](#)

[Treacle Tart](#)

Savoury Preserves

[Coleslaw](#)

[Piccalilli](#)

[Pickled Gherkins](#)

[Pickled Onions](#)

[Rhubarb Chutney](#)

Drinks

[Come Quick Ginger Beer](#)

[Merry Old Cow](#)

[Mulled Wine](#)

[Parson's Punch](#)

[Pirate's Punch](#)

[Red Hot Chocolate](#)

[Sinless Cider \(Apple juice\)](#)

[Short Sharp Sherry](#)

Starters

Cheerful Cheezy Chunks

Ingredients

10 oz (280 g) plain flour
4 oz (115 g) cold butter, diced
4 oz (115 g) strong cheddar cheese
1 egg
¼ tsp salt
1 tsp garlic salt
cold water

Method

In a food processor mix the flour, butter, egg and salt, pulsing until it forms crumbs.

Add a drops of chilled water until it forms a ball.

Take the dough out, wrap it in plastic film and chill for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 400F (200C). Roll the dough into a rectangle on a cold, floured surface

Brush half the dough with a water and grate about half the cheese on top of it. Fold over the other half, pressing gently to get rid of big air bubbles. Grate the rest of the cheese on top then cut into sticks. Sprinkle the garlic salt over the sticks then bake on a sheet for 10 minutes or til they're golden brown. Serve warm or cold. I call them Cheerful Cheezy Chunks because they are, but if you want to call them, let's say, Golden Turkey Droppings, or whatever, then please do.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Reindeer Balls

Ingredients

1 lb (450g) sausages (not too fatty)
½ cup (275ml) oil (or lard)
¼ tsp chili powder
¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
¼ tsp ground ginger
½ tsp garlic salt

Method

Cut sausages into ½” (12mm) pieces (or make them about the same length as their width - balls)

Heat oil/lard and fry sausage pieces until cooked through.

Mix all dry ingredients in a plastic Tupperware-type box with lid, place warm sausage balls in box, fasten lid and gently shake until they're all evenly covered with the seasoning. Carefully place them on a serving plate and let cool. Use cocktail sticks for serving. Or use your fingers and feel good about saving a tree.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Main Course

Brilliant Brussels

Ingredients

1 lb (450g) Brussels sprouts, cleaned and trimmed
3 fl oz (90ml) vegetable oil
10 fl oz 300ml vegetable stock
2 tsp wholegrain mustard
¼ tsp salt,
¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
2 tsp clear honey (warmed so it pours)
3 tsp crushed roasted walnuts

Method

Heat the oil in a large pan, add the sprouts and fry for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat, pour in the vegetable stock. Bring to the boil, simmer uncovered for 3-4 minutes until the Brussels sprouts just begin to get tender. Pour off the liquid, add the remaining ingredients and gently stir to coat the sprouts. Don't worry if you make too many as these little green devils also taste good cold, with vinegar and white pepper. And I think they're good for you.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Festive Roasties

Ingredients

3 lb (1.4 kg) floury potatoes, peeled
3 fl oz (90ml) olive oil or duck fat
½ tsp coarse sea salt
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
½ tsp dried parsley

Method

Peel and cut the potatoes into even sized chunks and cook in a pan of salted boiling water for approximately 5 minutes.

Place the oil or duck fat in a heavy based roasting tin and heat in a 400F (200C) oven.

Drain the potatoes in a colander and tip them back into the pan, put the lid on and shake to fluff up the outsides of the potatoes. Tip the potatoes into the roasting pan, sprinkle on the salt, pepper and parsley, turning the potatoes gently to coat them evenly.

Roast for 30-40 minutes at 450F (230C), turning occasionally, until golden brown but soft in the middle. Maybe it's just me, but they taste great with just a dash of mint sauce.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Bellringer Brandy Snaps

Ingredients

2 oz (60g) butter
1 tsp ground ginger
¼ tsp ground cinnamon
2 oz (60g) plain flour
2 oz (60g) brown sugar
1 tsp brandy
3.5 oz (100ml) warm golden syrup
¼ tsp grated lemon rind

Method

Melt the butter in a pan, then stir in the sugar and syrup. Remove from the heat and mix in the other ingredients. Drop teaspoonfuls of the mixture onto a greased baking sheet, about 3 inches apart. It should settle into round, flat shapes (give it a hand, if necessary). Bake for 7-10 minutes in a moderate oven. Remove the sheet from the oven and let it stand for a moment until the biscuits will lift up when a knife is inserted underneath. Roll each biscuit around the handle of a wooden spoon, leave a minute to set, then slide off. If your snaps are a bit more chewy than crisp, don't worry, just fill them with piped whipped cream and leave in the fridge until serving. Ring a bell to let people know they're ready!

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Christmas Pudding

Ingredients (for 6 puddings)

6 lb (2.7kg) flour
4 lb (1.8kg) currants
1 oz (30g) salt
1½ lb (680g) raisins
12 oz (340g) butter
1½ lb (680g) sugar
12 oz (340g) lard
4 oz (115g) candied peel
4 oz (115g) candied orange
1 pint (570ml) milk
8fl oz (240ml) orange juice
grated rind of 1 large lemon
3 eggs
1 tsp grated nutmeg

Method

You really can't go far wrong with this. Place salt, raisins, sugar, peel, candied orange and nutmeg in a bowl and mix well. Add the orange juice and mix again. Warm the milk and beat the eggs into it. Stir in the flour, add the milk and eggs (and add a splash of warm water if it's too thick to stir). Let the mixture sit at room temperature for an hour then spoon it into 6 greased 1lb (450g) oven-proof bowls, cover top with greaseproof paper, then wrap whole bowl tightly in baking foil. Steam for at least six hours or until dark brown. Remove the puddings from the bowls, moisten with dark rum or brandy, and seal in Tupperware or plastic wrap, store in a cool place. Steam before serving.

To flambé – place the hot pudding on a metal serving platter where everyone can see it. Warm 2 fl oz (60g) of rum or brandy, pour it over the pudding, carefully light it then stand back. (Dim the room lights to enjoy the dancing blue flames.) Traditionally, there would be a silver sixpence piece buried deep within the pudding for some lucky diner to find or chip a tooth on. These days, cautious people with health and safety concerns would advise against doing this, but I don't.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Drinks

(Some recipes contain alcohol – imbibe responsibly, and don't drink and drive!)

Come Quick Ginger Beer

Ingredients

2 pint (570ml) bottles of your favourite ale (not too hoppy)
2 oz (60g) candied ginger, finely chopped
1 oz (30g) grated raw ginger root
2 oz (60g) brown sugar

Method

Pour one pint of the beer into a clean saucepan (keep the other pint firmly capped and out of reach for now!). Add the candied ginger, the raw ginger and the brown sugar and stir for at least a minute. Cover the pan and leave it at room temperature for 24 hours. Next day, strain the mixture into a clean pan, carefully pour in the other bottle of beer and stir gently for a few seconds. Carefully pour the beer, trying not to make too much foam, into one or more screw-top bottles. Tighten the tops and store in a cool place (not the fridge – too cool!) until your thirst demands that you open it.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

Merry Old Cow

Ingredients (serves 2)

10 fl oz (275ml) milk
2 fl oz (60ml) dark rum
1 oz (30g) brown sugar (warmed)
4 drops vanilla essence
1/2 tsp cocoa powder
½ tsp ground cinnamon

Method

Warm the milk in a pan (or microwave). In a warm jug, mix the rum, sugar, cocoa and vanilla essence, stirring well. Add the milk, stir well again and when settled sprinkle the ground cinnamon on top, and drink! Makes a good bedtime drink for kids, without the rum, of course.

[Back to Recipe List](#)

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