

An Island Chef

The Perfect
Roast Turkey
Christmas Dinner

Christian Gott

The Perfect Roast Turkey Christmas Dinner

The perfect Christmas roast turkey dinner. Most families in the United Kingdom traditionally sit-down on Christmas afternoon for their festive Christmas Dinner. Today you find the centerpiece is usually a roast Turkey served with stuffing, sausages wrapped in streaky bacon (pigs in blankets), [crisp roast potatoes](#), parsnips, Brussel sprouts and lots of other vegetables, and cranberry sauce. This is followed by [Christmas pudding](#) and brandy sauce, maybe sherry trifle and [mince pies](#). But how have we got here?



The perfect Christmas roast turkey

A bit of Christmas Dinner history

'If he is to get on in life, he must get on umbly, Master Copperfield!' In medieval England, if you were very rich you might have eaten venison for Christmas. Killed in your hunting grounds and the bits or umbles – the heart, lungs, liver, tongue, and kidneys would be chopped, mixed and baked in a pie to be given to the poor. The original [h]umble pie. Down the pecking order (sorry) you might find goose or woodcock covered in butter and saffron and roasted. For dessert, you would find frumerty a thick, spiced porridge. This was made with currents and enriched with egg yolks. Alternatively there might be a boiled plum pudding. The ancestor of today's [Christmas pudding](#) made with suet and dried fruit. It would be flavoured with clove, ginger, and cinnamon. Plum is an old term for raisins.

A boar's head would be the centerpiece of the Christmas feast for a Tudor nobleman. It is believed that the tradition is centuries-old. It came from pagan celebrations of the Norse god of the harvest. If you could not get hold of the highly prized head, you would have a [ham](#) which is now a staple of many Christmas meals. Sugar, spices, and nuts were considered highly exotic and very expensive. Highly decorated marzipan sweetmeats were a sign of your wealth and importance.



Christmas Traditions

'My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know.'

During the 17th century, turkeys started to become part of the Christmas feast. Although goose would remain the most popular roast well into the Victorian era. It was common for goose "Clubs" to be set up, allowing working-class families to save up over the year towards buying a goose. Sherlock Holmes solves a tricky case involving the theft of a precious stone the blue carbuncle when it is found in a Christmas club goose.

Gingerbread has an incredibly long history, near to a thousand years. Originally it was often sold in monasteries, pharmacies, and markets. Gingerbread was prized for its supposed medicinal properties and was used to aid digestion. It became so popular its manufacture was highly regulated in Germany and supervised by a guild. The guild lifted the restrictions on who could bake gingerbread at Easter and Christmas. By Victorian times Gingerbread men were baked and hung on the Christmas tree.

A Dickens of a Christmas

In the 18th and 19th century, Twelfth Night, the fifth of January, was one of the most important dates in the festive calendar. Twelfth Night was the last feast of the Christmas celebrations (Epiphany). The centerpiece of the parties, which involved eating, drinking and playing games was a cake. A forerunner to today's [Christmas cake](#) it evolved from an enriched fruit bread to a more familiar fruit cake decorated with almond and sugar pastes. A dried bean was included in the recipe. Whoever found it was crowned 'Lord of Misrule' or 'King of the Bean' and presided over the festivities.

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When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837, the turkey was still an expensive choice, only for the very rich, for Christmas dinner. A famous Christmas dinner scene appears in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge sends Bob Cratchit a large turkey. In northern England, [roast beef](#) was commonly served on Christmas Day while in London and the south of England, a goose was still the favourite. Those too poor to afford beef or goose made do with rabbit. However, by the end of the 19th century, most people feasted on turkey for Christmas dinner.



Mince Pies

[Mincemeat](#) was from Tudor times, when chopped meat mixed with dried fruits, sugar, and spices. This recipe continued right up to the Victorian era when less and less meat was included in the recipe. The mince tart you eat today is filled entirely with dried fruits, sugar, spices, and suet to keep it moist. Most premade mincemeat mixtures now use vegetable fats rather than the traditional suet in keeping with mincemeats origins.

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Traditional Roast Turkey Dinner

Roast Turkey with Bacon, Apricot and Cranberry Stuffing

You should never put stuffing into a turkey cavity as it will not cook properly and could be a health risk but I do like to stuff the breast end of the bird which helps keep the meat moist.

Prep Time 45 minutes

Cook Time 3 hours 20 minutes

Resting Time 30 minutes

Ingredients

For the Turkey

- 4-4.5 kg Gold standard Turkey
- 6 Rashers Smoked Streaky Bacon
- 150 gram Butter
- 3 medium Onions peeled
- 2 large Carrots peeled
- 1 large Lemon halved
- A small bunch [Thyme](#)
- 3 large pieces [Rosemary](#)
- 2 [Bay Leaves](#)
- Sea salt & freshly ground Black Pepper

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For the Stuffing

- 400 gram Quality minced Pork
- 8 Rashers Smoked Streaky Bacon
- 1 large White Onion peeled and very finely diced
- 2 sticks Celery washed and finely diced
- 2 cloves [Garlic](#) peeled and crushed
- 100 gram dried Apricots chopped
- 50 gram dried Cranberries
- 1 large free-range egg
- 2 teaspoons [fresh Thyme leaves](#)
- 1 large handful fresh Breadcrumbs
- Zest Lemon
- 1 good pinch Grated Nutmeg
- Sea salt & freshly ground Black Pepper
- Olive Oil for frying

For the Turkey Gravy

- 2 tablespoons Plain Flour
- 1 litre quality Chicken Stock
- A large splash Port
- Sea Salt & freshly ground Black Pepper

Instructions

For the Stuffing (Can be made in Advance)

Heat a generous splash of olive oil large frying pan and cook the bacon strips until crisp. Remove and drain on kitchen paper and cut into thin slices when cool. Add the onion, garlic, and celery to the saucepan and sauté for about ten minutes until soft and golden brown. Take the pan off the heat, add the breadcrumbs and stir together, transfer to a large bowl and allow to thoroughly cool. When cool add the pork mince, thyme, dried fruits, lemon zest, nutmeg, egg and lots of salt and pepper, and mix everything together well.

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For the Turkey

Take the turkey out of the fridge a couple of hours before roasting to get up to room temperature. When ready to cook, preheat the oven to 450 F / 230 C / Gas mark 8. Give your turkey a good wipe, inside and out, with kitchen paper, and season the cavity really well.

Next place the turkey on a board, with the neck end towards you. Find the edge of the skin that's covering the turkey's breasts and carefully peel it back. Gently ease your fingers and then your hand under the skin, teasing it away from the meat. You should be able to pull all the skin away from the meat, keeping it attached at the sides. Carefully spoon your prepared stuffing between the skin and the breast, tucking the flap of skin underneath to stop anything seeping out.

Weigh the stuffed turkey and calculate the cooking time allow twenty minutes per every five hundred grams.

Place the lemon halves, one onion, half the thyme and one piece of rosemary inside the turkey cavity. Dab the butter all over the turkey, especially over the breasts, season generously and then cover with the streaky bacon.

Place the turkey on a large roasting tray, and add the chopped carrots, onions, and remaining herbs, cover with tinfoil and place in the preheated oven. Cook for twenty minutes then turn the heat down to 350 F/ 180 C / Gas Mark 4 and roast for the allotted time, or until the juices run clear from the thigh when pierced with it a small, sharp knife.

Remove the tinfoil for the last forty minutes to allow the turkey to brown. Carefully lift the turkey out of the tray and rest on a tray, somewhere warm, loosely covered in foil and a couple of folded tea towels, for about an hour.

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For the Gravy

- Very carefully skim the surface fat from the roasting tray and add port. Place on a medium heat and sift in the flour. Stir really well and slowly pour in the stock, when the gravy starts to thicken, reduce the heat and simmer for five minutes stirring regularly.
- Strain it into a pan ready to reheat. Carve your turkey at the table, serve with all the trimmings, the gravy and enjoy.

Notes

What to Drink? Oaked Chardonnay (white) and Chilean Merlot (red) are good matches for turkey with all the trimmings and gravy as are Amber style ales and American IPA's.

My perfect Christmas dinner -Braised Red Cabbage

Braised red cabbage is a beautifully versatile accompaniment to a host of winter dishes [pies](#), casseroles and stews, seasonal roasts such as venison and [game birds](#). You can adjust / experiment with the recipe and adapt it to suit whatever you are serving it with.



My perfect Christmas Dinner – Sides – Braised Red Cabbage

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You can experiment and add a large grated cooking apple to your recipe and braise in cider, replace the redcurrent jelly for cranberry sauce or add a small handful of raisins to the pan at the start of cooking.

Ingredients

- 1 Small Red Cabbage around 1 kilo
- 1 Large Red Onion peeled and finely sliced
- 100 gram Redcurrant Jelly
- A large glass good Red Wine
- A large splash Red Wine Vinegar
- A Tablespoon Jersey Butter
- Zest one Orange
- 1 [Bay Leaf](#)
- 1 Cinnamon Stick
- Sea Salt and freshly ground Black Pepper

Instructions

Quarter the red cabbage and carefully remove the center and then finely shred the cabbage with a sharp knife or on a mandolin.

Place into a large, heavy-bottomed pan with the red onion, red current jelly, red wine vinegar, red wine, butter, bay leaf and cinnamon stick and season well. Place on a medium heat and bring to a gentle simmer, then cover with a lid.

Reduce the heat and cook for about an hour and a half, stirring regularly.

Remove the lid and continue cooking for another half an hour to finish cooking and reduce the cooking liquid. Stir regularly. Check seasoning and serve.

Can be mad in advance and reheated until piping hot to serve.

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Stir Fry Brussel Sprouts

We all love Brussel sprouts and I am sure you will too if you follow this simple recipe.

If you bought your sprouts are on the stalk, twist each one off. Remove any discoloured or damaged leaves. Next, trim the base and cut an larger ones in half. Wash and drain.



Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil and add the Brussel sprouts. Remove after five minutes and plunge into cold, iced water. This stops the brussels over cooking. Drain thoroughly. To serve heat two heaped tablespoons of butter in a large, heavy-bottomed frying pan with a splash of olive oil. Toss the brussels in the pan over a medium-high heat for three to four minutes until thoroughly heated but still a little crunchy. Season well, top with a few toasted flaked almonds and serve.

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My perfect Christmas dinner – cranberry sauce



My perfect Christmas Dinner – Sides – Cranberry Sauce

This is my go to recipe for a delicious homemade Cranberry sauce. It may seem quite a lot but it goes just as well a roast chicken or in a cold turkey sandwich. Can be mad in advance and reheated until piping hot to serve.

- 500 gram Cranberries
- 250 gram Caster Sugar
- 100 ml Water
- 100 ml Port
- 2 Oranges juice and zest
- 1 Cinnamon Stick
- 3 clean and sterilised jam jars.

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- Wash and drain the cranberries.

Place the cranberries in a large, heavy-bottomed pan with the caster sugar, water, orange juice and zest, and the cinnamon stick and bring to a gentle simmer.

Place the cranberries in a large, heavy-bottomed pan with the caster sugar, water, orange juice and zest, and the cinnamon stick and bring to a gentle simmer.

After ten minutes when the cranberries begin to soften and start to burst open carefully mash with the back of a fork to let out all the pectin.

Add in the port, stir and cook on a gentle heat for ten more minutes or until the sauce has reduced by a third.

Remove from the heat, and allow to cool a little. Remove the cinnamon stick.

Carefully ladle into warm, dry, sterilised jars and seal.

Whatever roast [Turkey](#), [Ham](#) or [Beef](#) you have chosen for your *Christmas Dinner* you will need some *potatoes* to help mop up the delicious gravy, a plate full of Perfect Roasties to serve up on the table. You need a fluffy, floury potato such as a King Edward or Desiree.



Classic roast potatoes

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Some people will consider it a tragedy to put anything on a roast potato to make it crispier, but I have tried both flour and cornmeal and you do get an extra crunchy texture. The greatest heresy is however what you cook the potatoes in. I am from the North of England and only Beef Dripping will suffice, the chef's choice is Duck or Goose fat. There is a sensible reason for both of these choices, the high temperature both of these fats can reach without burning helps achieve an excellent crisp potato. You can, however, achieve perfectly satisfactory results with a quality vegetable oil.

1 kg Potatoes, peeled and halved or quartered if very large

2 tablespoons Flour or fine Cornmeal (entirely optional)

6 -8 tablespoons Beef Dripping or Duck Fat

Sea Salt and freshly ground Black Pepper

Heat your oven to 220 C / 425 F / Gas Mark 6-7. Put the potatoes in a large saucepan, cover with water and to the boil. Cook for five minutes, then remove from the heat. Drain the potatoes well, then return to the pan and shake in order to rough up the edges a little. Sprinkle with some salt and freshly ground pepper and the flour or cornmeal if you are adding it. Place the dripping or duck fat in a large roasting tray and heat in the oven until it is hot (about five minutes).

Remove the tray from the oven and very carefully add the potatoes, stirring with a wooden spoon to make sure they are totally covered with the fat. Roast the potatoes for fifty to sixty minutes then give them a stir and cook for around another fifty to twenty minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon, drain and serve.