

Christmas alternatives

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As every mother and grandmother knows, traditional holiday dishes pass from generation to generation within families... and some come to be so distinctly associated with particular holidays that, no matter how delicious, preparing them for any other occasion would seem almost a sacrilege. Aunt Olivia deplored such attitudes and took preventive

by Lydia Lovell

measures. She varied her holiday menus so that none of us would ever approach a meal with preconceived expectations. Not even Christmas dinners.

The typical Yankee Christmas Dinner menu of Aunt Olivia's day began with raw oysters on the half shell, followed by roast turkey with bread-and-chestnut stuffing, mashed potatoes, baked winter squash, creamed onions, peas, mashed white turnip, hot rolls, and a relish tray composed of celery, olives, sweet pickles, and cranberry sauce. For those with the capacity, there were mince and pumpkin pies or plum pudding for dessert. And every three or four years, at Christmastime, Aunt Olivia served just such a meal so we wouldn't forget our heritage.

Other years she blessed us with traditional meals from other regions. I remember her reply when I asked the reason. "Someday, dear, you might find yourself far from home at Christmas. I wouldn't want you to feel you couldn't enjoy the holiday just as much as you would if you were right here with me. That's why I try to have at least one dish that's typical of a Christmas dinner in some other part of the world."

When Aunt Olivia's menu was southern-styled, it might include claret-consomme with salted cream, roast turkey with pecan-cornbread stuffing, sweet potato tipsy, string bean casserole, a relish tray boasting Madeira jelly, scallions, pickled tomatoes, and celery stuffed with a garlicky cream cheese. Desserts were choices between pecan pie or spiced pudding with Cognac sauce, depending on geographics.

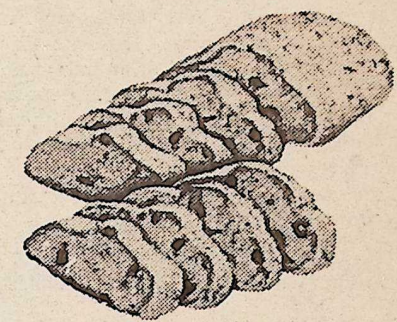
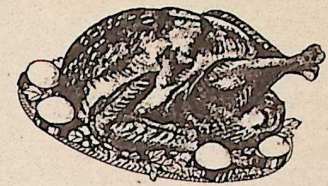
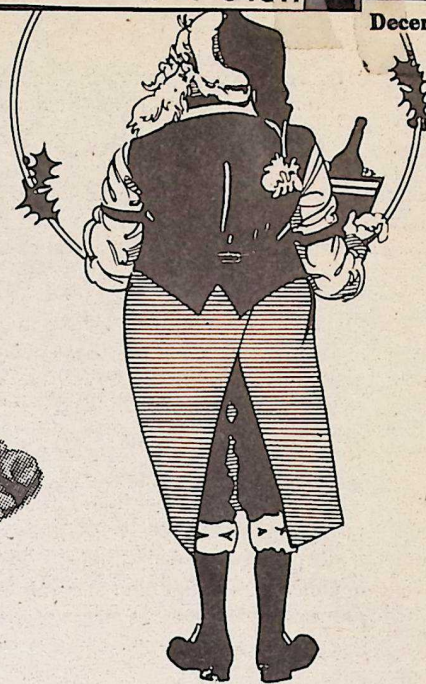
Introduce your family, this Christmas to turkey roasted with **Pecan-Cornbread Stuffing**.

In a small saucepan, simmer the giblets in 2 C. salted water, for 1-1/2 hours. Remove the liver after cooking 30 minutes. Reserve rest of giblets for use another day. Chop the liver coarsely; set aside. In a medium saucepan, saute a chopped medium onion in 4 T. butter until just tender. Add four cups of crumbled cornbread to onions. Sprinkle with half-a-cup of cooking water from giblets. Toss lightly. Add the chopped liver, 1 T. chopped fresh parsley, 1/2 C. chopped celery, 1/2 t. thyme, 2 t. Worcestershire sauce, 1 T. Vermouth, and 1 C. coarsely chopped pecans. Season to taste with salt and pepper and toss until well mixed. Stuff turkey without packing.

Sweet potatoes are preferred to white potatoes in the south, perhaps because southern-grown white potatoes lack the flavor of those coming from Maine. **Sweet Potato Topsy** is a taste of southern hospitality at its best and can be prepared a day or two ahead and reheated just before serving.

Cook and peel eight large sweet potatoes (or use canned ones). Mash or rice them into a large mixing bowl. Add 4 T. butter, 1/4 t. ground cinnamon, 2 t. salt, a pinch of pepper, and 4 T. whipping cream. Whip all together, and while still whipping, pour in 1/3 C. of rum. When potatoes are light and fluffy, heap in a casserole and refrigerate. Reheat in a 325° oven for 20 minutes after brushing surface with melted butter. Plenty for six people.

An alternative to Topsy is **Sweet Potato-Apple Casserole**; this too can be prepared ahead of time and reheated at the last minute. Allow a final baking of 10 minutes if cooking and serving immediately; if made ahead, take from refrigerator,



allow 20 minutes to reheat in 325° oven, plus a final 10 minutes to toast the topping.

1/3 C. firmly packed
brown sugar
1/2 t. ground ginger
1/8 t. salt
2 lbs. peeled cooked sweet potatoes

2 large sweet apples, sliced
3 T. melted butter, divided
1/2 C. shredded coconut
1/4 C. chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 375°; grease a 1-qt. shallow casserole. In a measuring cup, combine sugar, ginger, and salt; set aside. Slice sweet potatoes 1/2" thick; layer half in baking dish; cover with apples. Sprinkle with half the sugar mixture. Top with remaining sweet potatoes. Sprinkle the rest of sugar and dot with 2 T. butter. Cover and bake 35 minutes at 375°. Remove from oven. combine 1 T. melted butter with coconut and pecans. Sprinkle over surface. Bake 10 minutes, uncovered, until golden.

Christmas below the Mason-Dixon Line wouldn't seem like Christmas without **Pecan Pie**. So easy to make and such a treat! Serve with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

1 unbaked 9" pastry shell
3 eggs, slightly beaten
1 C. sugar
1 C. whole pecans

1 C. dark corn syrup
1 T. melted butter
1 t. vanilla

Preheat oven to 350°. In a medium bowl, stir together eggs, sugar, corn syrup, butter, and vanilla. Add pecans and mix well. Pour into pastry shell and bake at 350° for 50-60 minutes, or until a knife inserted halfway between center and edge comes out clean. Cool before serving.

In America's mid-section, goose rather than turkey might well be the bird that graces the festive board; goose with **Potato Stuffing** is a taste-treat any Yankee will appreciate.

In a large bowl, measure 1 t. rosemary, 1 t. salt, 1 t. freshly ground pepper, and 4 T. melted butter. Add 2-1/2 C. dried white bread crumbs, 1 C. finely chopped onions, 1/2 C. finely chopped celery, and 1 C. coarsely chopped walnuts. Toss. Fold in 3 C. whipped potatoes until well blended. Mixture will be crumbly and will not stick together. Stuff the goose; close the vent with skewers; lace firmly.

In a large, deep roasting pan, place a 10-12 lb. stuffed goose, breast up, on a rack. Roast, covered, at 450° for 30 minutes. Reduce heat to 325° and bake for another 1-1/2 to 2

hours, until breast is tender. Remove cover for last hour. Baste the bird at half-hour intervals with white wine to give it a good color and extra flavor. Use a baster to remove fat from the pan during the roasting period; a goose is a fatty fowl. (Save the fat to use instead of butter or margarine the next time you bake cookies.)

Another stuffing recipe especially suited to goose calls for apples and prunes rather than potatoes or bread. For flavoring the bird, **Fruity Dressing** is unsurpassed.

1/2 lb. prunes
4 delicious apples
1 T. salt

1/2 t. ground pepper
1 T. sugar
1/2 C. boiling water (approx.)

Prepare goose for roasting. Sprinkle cavity with the salt and pepper stirred together. Cook prunes in boiling water 10 minutes; drain, reserving cooking juice. Core and slice apples, but do not peel. Combine apple slices, cooked prunes, and sugar. Stuff cavity with fruits; skewer vent closed. Roast in preheated 375° oven for 20 minutes. Add juice of prunes to bottom of roasting pan and reduce heat to 300°. Bake three more hours. Baste bird with pan drippings every hour; use baster to remove excess fat from pan.

Aunt Olivia sometimes asked my mother to make **Spice Pudding** to take the place of plum pudding; this is simpler quicker, and easier to make, and yet a most festive dessert.

In a baking pan that may also be used over a burner (Corn ingware is ideal, but any large metal baking dish will do a well), combine 1 C. of brown sugar, 1/3 C. butter, and 1 C. boiling water. Over low heat, bring to a boil. Cook a few minutes, stirring. Remove from heat and set aside. In medium bowl, mix 1 C. sugar, 1 C. flour, 2 t. baking powder 1/2 t. each ground cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, and allspice, a pinch of salt, a cup of chopped, mixed dried fruits, a cup of chopped nuts, and 1/2 cup of cream. Pour batter over the brown sugar mixture and bake at 350° for 30 minutes. Pudding will puff up and brown. Serve hot with **Cognac Sauce**.

Begin preparing sauce exactly as you started making the pudding, mixing 1 C. brown sugar with 1/3 C. butter, but adding only 1/2 C. boiling water. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and allow to simmer a few minutes while you stir 1 T. corn starch and a scant pinch of salt into 1/4 C. cool water. Thicken sauce. Flavor with a generous jigger of Cognac. Spoon over Spiced Pudding and serve immediately.

Bon appetit. And happy holidays...