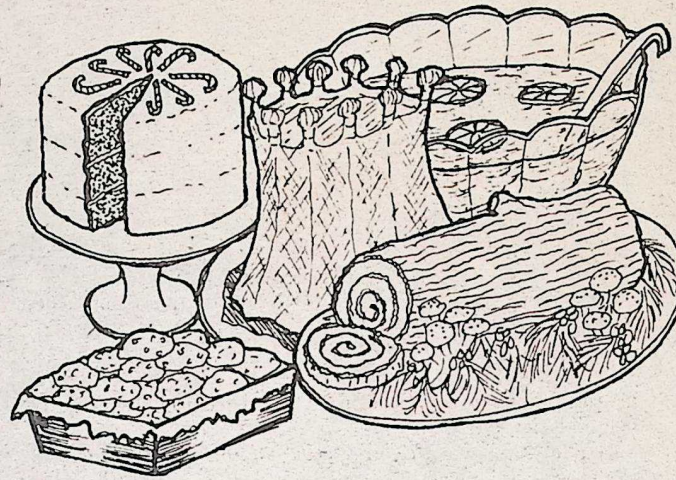


# Christmas presents for the palate

by Lydia Lovell



1 lb. currants  
 ½ lb. pitted dates, cut fine  
 ¼ C. red and green  
 maraschino cherries

½ t. each: mace, nutmeg,  
 cinnamon, ginger

Cream butter, add sugar, cream again; add well-beaten eggs, sour milk, and molasses with the soda mixed into it. Sift flour with other dry ingredients. Combine fruit and nuts and add enough flour to coat all surfaces so fruits do not stick together and to keep them from sinking to the bottom of the pan. Mix flour and liquid mixture, then stir in fruit and nuts including any flour that may remain in bowl.

Aunt Olivia usually filled two loaf pans with batter after greasing and flouring them well. She baked both at the same time in a 325° oven for 2½ hours. Had she used one large tube pan, she would have allowed 3½ hours for the cake to bake. When the cake comes away from the sides of the pan, turn off the oven, but leave pans in until oven is cool. This cake could also be baked in three round or three square 9" cake pans.

While the oven was in service for baking fruit cakes, Aunt

Olivia mixed up **Bourbon Balls** which require no baking.  
 1½ C. vanilla wafers, crushed 2 T. white corn syrup  
 2 T. cocoa ¼ C. bourbon  
 1 C. walnuts, chopped fine

Mix liquids together in a cup. Mix dry ingredients; add syrup and bourbon combination. Roll 2 T. of batter between palms to form balls; roll balls in powdered sugar. Store in airtight tins, or in zip-lock baggies. (Remove air by sucking out with a straw and closing tight.)

**Christmas Nuggets** were favorites with several of the older generation—a melt-in-the-mouth cookie also certain to please children.

**Sift:** 2 C. flour with 1 t. salt  
**Cream:** ¼ C. shortening with ¼ C. butter  
**Add:** ½ C. confectioner's sugar  
**Add:** flour and salt mixture  
**Chop:** ½ C. nuts, chopped very finely; chop another ½ C. nuts and reserve for later use

**Add:** 1 T. vanilla extract and 1 T. almond extract.  
 When mixture is creamy, spoon up approximately a tablespoon of batter. Roll between palms to form a ball or flatten ball to crescent shape. Place on ungreased cookie sheets and bake at 350° for 25 minutes. Watch to be sure cookie does not brown. While still warm roll in more chopped nuts and confectioner's sugar. Store airtight.

For those with a taste for pickles and relishes, Aunt Olivia made **Pickled Beets and Eggs**:

8 hard-cooked eggs, peeled 1 C. cider vinegar  
 2 cans (16 oz.) small whole beets 1 C. sugar  
 Water as needed 2 cinnamon sticks  
 3 whole cloves  
 1 small onion, sliced and separated into rings 3 black peppercorns  
 ¼ t. salt

Simmer eggs gently 20 to 25 minutes; do not boil. Eggs, like other protein food, become tough and leathery if cooked at too high a heat. Peel under cool running water to help ease off shells without gouging eggs. Place a layer of eggs in the bottom of a non-metallic bowl or wide-mouth jar with cover. Drain juice from beets into 2 cup measure, adding enough water to equal 2 cups liquid. Place layer of beets on eggs; repeat layers to within an inch of top of bowl or jar.

In a saucepan boil beet liquid with remaining ingredients. As soon as mixture boils, remove from heat and pour over beets and eggs to cover. Add onion rings. Cover and chill at least overnight.

To serve, drain off liquid, or remove as many eggs and beets as needed; slice eggs in half, and surround with beets and onion rings.

Hostesses always appreciated a jar of Aunt Olivia's **Cranberry Chutney**, wrapped in red or green cellophane and tied with one of Uncle Henry's bows.

2 C. water ¼ C. vinegar  
 2 C. sugar 1 C. seedless raisins  
 1 lb. fresh cranberries, washed and drained ¼ t. ground ginger  
 pinch of salt  
 2 T. dark brown sugar

Boil together water and sugar. Combine remaining ingredients and add to syrup. Simmer about 7 minutes until berries pop. Cool without stirring, then spoon into pint jars and refrigerate.

**Pickled Onions** were another holiday treat.  
 2 lbs. small white onions 1 C. white vinegar  
 6-9 whole dried chillies 1 T. mixed pickling spice  
 1 C. beet juice drained 3 T. sugar  
 from canned beets

Cut off and discard stem and root ends of unpeeled onions. Cook onions in boiling salted water for 5 minutes or until skins slip off easily. Onions should still be crisp. Rinse in cold water and remove skins. Pack onions snugly, but do not crush, in clean, scalded 8-oz. jars. Put 2-3 chillies in each jar. Combine remaining ingredients in a non-aluminum saucepan and bring to boil; stir until sugar melts. Fill jars to cover onions. Cover jars tightly and let stand three days at cool (65°) room temperature; then refrigerate. Keeps several weeks.

Should Aunt Olivia discover on Christmas morning that there's someone she's somehow overlooked, she is certain to solve the problem with a jar of her **Strawberry Preserves** which she put up by the dozen last June.

1 lb. ripe strawberries, hulled and washed 1 lb. sugar  
 2 C. water  
 Bring sugar and water to a boil, stir until sugar is melted. Add fruit and cook in syrup for 20 minutes. Pour into sterilized jars and seal with melted paraffin.

All the Lovells wish you and yours a happy Christmas.

As was then the practice in most families (and, in many families, still is today), the Lovells returned Aunt Olivia's Thanksgiving dinner hospitality with invitations to her and Uncle Henry to share holiday meals at Christmastime and on other special occasions. While to the best of my knowledge nobody kept debit and credit, a semblance of balance was maintained.

That didn't mean, though, that Aunt Olivia escaped from the kitchen during the Christmas season; if anything, she was busier than ever. No sooner had Thanksgiving left-overs been consumed and she could find storage space in her ice box, than she began Christmas baking and gift-making. With a reputation as one of the town's best cooks to preserve, she outdid herself at Christmastime. Each friend and family-member received his or her favorite delicacy, plus a little something new and different to sample and share with others.

When the cooking was completed, each present was lovingly wrapped and the gift packages decorated. Uncle Henry's help was solicited at wrapping time. So often had he been called to hold a finger over the knot so a bow could be formed, he had designed a gadget to make bows. Each Christmas his bow-maker was unpacked along with the tree decorations and, while Aunt Olivia bustled about cutting, chopping, mixing, and baking, he sat at the kitchen table making bows. Whatever happened to Uncle Henry's bow-maker, I do not know, nor could I describe how it worked. It might even have been a patentable invention, but the possibility never occurred to any of us at the time.

Among Aunt Olivia's holiday specialties was **Christmas Fruitcake** which may be made several weeks in advance and kept frozen. If freezer space is unavailable, this cake may be plastic-wrapped and stored in an airtight tin. Some people feel the cake's flavor is improved with the addition of a tablespoon of brandy once a week while it "matures," but others believe that practice is gilding the lily. For best results when mixing this cake, bring all ingredients to room temperature before beginning.

1 C. butter  
 1¼ C. brown sugar  
 5 eggs  
 ½ C. molasses  
 ½ t. baking soda  
 ½ C. sour milk  
 1 lb. seeded raisins

1 sm. pkg. candied orange peel (OR the juice and grated peel of one orange)  
 ¼ lb. almonds, shredded  
 ¼ lb. walnut meats, chopped  
 2½ C. flour  
 ¼ t. each: cloves and allspice