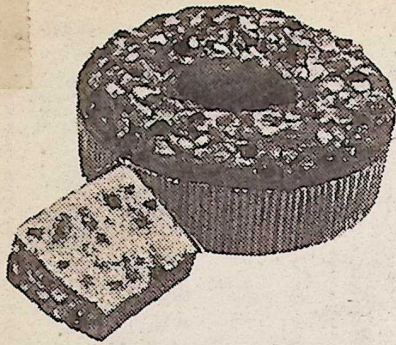
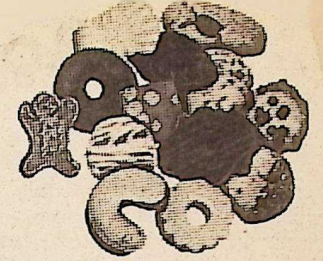


Christmas Cookery Commences

by Lydia Lovell



Nobody enjoyed the holidays more than Aunt Olivia. Not only did she delight in gathering together her beloved family but, for her, Thanksgiving began when she commenced planning the dinner menu. And it was Christmas as soon as her shopping list included the candied and dried fruits needed to prepare rich puddings, fruit cakes, and crisp or chewy cookies that would soon appear in profusion. A procession of goodies marched to the table Christmas week, continued through New Year's Day, and dwindled only after the final celebration of Twelfth Night brought the season to a close.

Pantry shelves bulged with packages of raisins, both yellow and dark kinds, with slabs of pitted dates and figs, with tins of almonds, walnuts, and pecans, and jars of red and green maraschino cherries, jellies, and jams. An extra supply of brown and confectioners sugar was laid in, a dozen oranges together with half-a-dozen lemons and three or four grapefruit filled an enormous wooden bowl... at hand in case a recipe called for grated citrus peel or fresh juice. And there were currants, and pineapple, and coconut. For Christmas began with fruitcakes.

Fruitcakes come in two varieties, light or dark, both good. Every year Aunt Olivia made at least two loaves of each and, in addition, another batch for miniatures to wrap individually for gifts. Her **Dark Fruitcake** was the richer of the two.

3-1/2 C. (1-1/2 lbs.) mixed diced fruits and peels for fruitcakes

1-1/4 C. each, seedless dark and seedless yellow raisins

1 C. each, chopped walnuts and chopped pecans

3 C. flour	1 t. cinnamon	1/2 t. ground cloves
1 t. baking powder	1 t. allspice	1 t. almond extract
1 t. salt	1/2 t. nutmeg	

1 C. shortening	4 large eggs
2 C. brown sugar (dark)	3/4 C. orange or pineapple juice

In a large bowl, mix fruits, peels, raisins and nuts. In a medium bowl, sift dry ingredients together; sprinkle 1/4 C. flour mixture over fruits, stirring well. In another large bowl, thoroughly cream shortening and sugar; add one egg at a time, beating well after each. Add dry ingredients to creamed mixture alternately with fruit juice, stirring smooth after each addition. Add fruits, folding them into batter.

Line each of two loaf pans with two sheets of waxed paper, allowing 1/2 inch to extend above all sides. Fill pans to within an inch of top edge. Place pans on the center shelf of your oven and bake slowly at 275° for 3 to 3-1/2 hours, or until a toothpick inserted in center of cakes comes out clean.

When baking either light or dark fruitcake, Aunt Olivia placed an 8" square cake pan with two cups of water in it on the oven's bottom shelf. She declared the wet heat made the

cakes rise better, insured good texture, and produced a pretty, shiny glaze. This trick may be worth trying; it takes only a minute and can't do a bit of harm.

Once her fruitcakes were done, Aunt Olivia removed them from the oven, but left them in the pans until cool. Those she had made to give away she wrapped carefully in waxed paper, packed into tins, and stored in the coldest corner of her pantry.

"Fruitcakes, like fine wines," she said, "improve with age." And Uncle Henry agreed. In fact, he liked to drizzle a tablespoon or so of brandy over the top of a fresh-baked dark fruitcake. After three or four weeks' storage, the flavor was superb. Aunt Olivia always marked the one Uncle Henry had "spiked," so that he could share his own specialty with a chosen few. Today we wrap fruitcakes in foil or plastic film to give their flavors opportunity to blend. Make yours well ahead to allow time for mellowing. You may prefer **Light Rum Fruitcake**.

4 C. (1-3/4 lb.) mixed diced fruits and peels for fruitcakes
1/2 C. each, cut up pitted dates, dried apricots, and dried figs
1-1/4 C. light seedless raisins
2 C. each, slivered blanched almonds and shredded coconut

2 C. flour	1 C. shortening	5 eggs
1-1/2 t. baking powder	1 C. sugar	1/2 C. grapefruit juice
1 t. salt	1 t. rum extract	

In a large bowl, mix fruits, nuts, and coconut. Sift dry ingredients together and sprinkle 1/2 C. of flour mixture over fruits; stir well. In another large bowl, cream shortening, sugar, and flavoring. Beat in eggs one at a time. Add dry ingredients alternately with fruit juice, beating until smooth, each time. Fold fruits into batter.

Line two loaf pans with waxed paper, allowing 1/2 inch to extend above all sides of the pans. Fill pans to within an inch of rim. Place on center shelf of oven and bake at 275° for 2-1/2 hours or until done. A pan of water placed on the oven's bottom shelf is recommended.

Incidentally, you may wonder why Aunt Olivia added a small quantity of the flour mixture to the cut-up fruits, peels and nuts. Two reasons: first, coating the surfaces of the fruits prevents the pieces sticking together and permits even distribution; second, coating the fruits with flour helps keep them from sinking to the bottom of the pan before the batter cooks sufficiently to support them.

Sometimes Aunt Olivia used fruitcake batter in other ways. On a cookie sheet she placed a dozen paper nut cups (1-3/4" in diameter and 1-1/4" deep) and filled each almost to the top. These she baked for 40 minutes or so at 300°. With half a red birthday-cake-candle stuck in the top, and a green ribbon tied on the candle, these miniature fruitcakes made festive bites.

Leftover batter? Thoroughly grease some custard cups and fill them 3/4 full. Bake at 300° about 1-1/2 hours. Cool completely; then turn one cake upside down on top of another still in its cup. You have created a **Fruitcake Ball!** Wrap up, including the bottom custard cup, in plastic film and tie with

holiday ribbon. A tree ornament? No, it's too heavy, but certainly suitable for part of a table decoration. Surround it with a wreath of holly... center it upon a golden sunburst... or encircle it with tiny silver balls on a crystal plate. We used Aunt Olivia's pewter porringers to hold fruitcake balls, tucking greens and unshelled nuts around the rims, and tying a red ribbon on each handle for a finishing touch.

If you have a ring mold, fruitcake batters of either type are well-suited for that shape. Or you may use a 10" tube pan, the kind you use to make angel cake. Line both bottom and sides with waxed paper and spoon in the batter. Bake 2-1/2 hours at 275° or until cake tests done. As with loaves, cool in the pan. Lining a ring mold is impractical, so grease it well, coat with flour, and fill 3/4 full. Bake as in a tube pan.

Christmas wouldn't seem like Christmas to the Lovells if Aunt Olivia's **Plum Pudding** wasn't part of the holiday.

4 C. flour sifted with 1 t. each of the following: cinnamon, powdered cloves, soda, salt
1 C. each of the following: firmly packed suet, milk, molasses, sugar, currants, and broken walnut meats
2 C. chopped seedless raisins and 1/2 a small bottle chopped maraschino cherries

Sift flour and spices into a large bowl. Stir in other ingredients. Divide batter into four clean coffee tins, filling each between 1/2 and 3/4 full. Seal tins with plastic covers or four layers of waxed paper and one of brown paper (a grocery bag) tied firmly with string. Place tins on a wire rack in a large kettle with a close-fitting cover. Add only enough water to touch bottom of tins. Steam about four hours (keep water simmering); check water level every hour or so. Yield: four puddings, each enough for six. Serve with hard sauce.

Making **Hard Sauce** before the days of electric mixers was one cooking chore I hated because my hand soon tired of creaming, particularly as the sugar content increased and the sauce grew stiffer. Use your electric mixer and murmur a Christmas blessing upon the soul of Thomas Edison.

Cream 1/4 C. butter, softened to room temperature, until light.

Cream in 3/4 C. confectioners sugar, one tablespoon at a time.

Blend in 1/2 t. vanilla extract.

Cream until fluffy. Some people like a sprinkle of nutmeg on the sauce but not the folks in the Lovell family. Plum puddings keep for weeks, wrapped in foil or plastic and stored in a cool place. Reheat before serving to capture every nuance of flavor. A generous dollop of hard sauce melts when ladled on hot pudding.

If you have the slightest difficulty getting into the spirit of the season, put some Christmas carols on the record player and start baking fruitcakes early in December. It's a sure way to bring holiday joy to your heart.