

Make it a magical Christmas

Catherine Fulvio shares her best tips and recipes for keeping Christmas sweet and stress-free

Catherine Fulvio knows a thing or two about putting together a delicious Christmas spread that's all about spreading cheer — not chores! She's partnered with Siúcra to share her best advice on how to keep the magic in festive entertaining.

What are your top tips for surviving the busy Christmas cooking season?

- Plan ahead: buy all the non-perishables in advance so you do not have too much to do in the run up to Christmas.
- Ditch unpopular dishes: if you find that you are left with the same bowl of leftovers year after year, don't be scared to drop it from the menu — it will cut down on the work load, the expense and the wastage!
- In the week before Christmas set time aside to write lists and allocate jobs, younger members of the family like to get involved in Christmas rituals, it's what memories are made of!
- Get as much of the prep work done ahead if possible. Make some pastry ahead of time and freeze it. Then you are well prepared for those unexpected visitors, just defrost and make sweet or savoury bites.
- Ensure delph and cutlery are clean and ready to go. My kids love polishing the cutlery, it's a ritual for them and part of the run up to Christmas.
- Don't bite off more than you can chew; ask for help and volunteers to bring a dish on the day especially among family.
- And here's a list of things I'll be doing on Christmas eve to ensure I too can enjoy Christmas day; prep my sprouts, peel the potatoes and keep them in cold water, prepare my roast veg and have them oven ready. I always prefer making my stuffing on

Christmas Eve as well as boiling the ham — it fills the house with sweet smells of Christmas. For those who are cooking dinner this year, remember to nominate washer-uppers ahead of time. At that rate, there'll be nothing left to do on the day!

What can home cooks do to make their Christmas that bit more magical?

- There are lots of ways of bringing a touch of magic that will impress your guests...
- I love to do a meringue — it can be prepared in advance and you can shape your meringue in a circle and decorate it like a Christmas wreath by using rosemary sprigs for the foliage and redcurrants for the berries; I tend to add additional blueberries too. Sprinkle with edible gold flakes and wow your guests. Or, try Siúcra's Red Velvet Yule Log on p.17!
 - Also, dip your cocktail or champagne glasses in sugar for a lovely frosted effect; it's really simple but a special decorative touch. For a simple cocktail recipe, check out Siúcra's Gingerbread Manhattan cocktail on www.siucra.ie.
 - I always light the Christmas pudding, which adds a touch of magic to the meal. It is usually dusk by the time we do this and the purple flames light up the room!

We want to make or bake most of our Christmas gifts for friends and family this year. What are some ideas for special homemade edible gifts?

Since we started our Christmas Cooking classes at Ballyknocken Cookery School, everyone really loves our edible gift ideas and, to my delight, I have received some back over the years. Edible gifts are also a great way of including the kids in Christmas preparations.



We have a dedicated children's class with some great edible gift ideas including stocking meringues, snowmen cookies and reindeer cupcakes that are easy enough to replicate at home. Edible gifts for adults include homemade limoncello or lemon and pine nut biscotti — a crisp dry Italian biscuit delicious when served with coffee, and they keep well when stored in airtight containers or jars.

What Christmas cooking or baking projects are ideal for little helpers?

Over the years I have always enjoyed making edible Christmas tree decorations with the children but — be warned — they don't last long! Of course, there is always the cake to be decorated, which is a Christmas tradition in Ballyknocken and icing the cake is definitely a job for the little helpers in the house. We pick a theme and usually use some of the children's toys as toppers, and have also used the same Christmas cake topper for years!

What are some of your favourite Christmas traditions in your household?

I start the Christmas traditions with making my pudding, which I usually do by the third week in November. This involves stirring the mixture and making a wish for each member of the family; we now extend the habit to students in the cookery school. On Christmas Eve, we stick with the Italian tradition of having a fish feast. After dining on a lovely meal we will all play cards and board games and enjoy the very traditional Italian chocolate panettone, which I also make and gift to friends at Christmas!

Red velvet Yule log

Serves 8-10

Ingredients

For the sponge:

- 4 large eggs
- 100g Siúcra caster sugar
- 70g self-raising flour
- 2 tbsp cocoa powder
- 2-4 tbsp red gel colouring

For the vanilla cream filling:

- 200ml cream, lightly whipped
- 30g Siúcra icing sugar
- A grating of nutmeg (optional)
- 150g raspberries, mashed

For the frosting:

- 200ml cream
- 400g soft cream cheese
- 60g Siúcra icing sugar
- 1 lime, juice only
- ½ tsp vanilla extract

To decorate:

- Lightly toasted coconut flakes
- Stars and holly leaves
- Siúcra icing sugar

Method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan/gas mark 5. Line a 35 x 24cm Swiss roll tin with parchment paper.
- 2 Whisk the eggs and Siúcra caster sugar together until it reaches the ribbon stage. Sieve the flour and cocoa powder together in a medium bowl.
- 3 Carefully fold the dry ingredients and enough of the colouring gel (to colour it deep red) into the egg mixture.
- 4 Pour the cake mixture into the lined tin and bake for 9-10 minutes until the sides start shrinking from the edge slightly.
- 5 Place a piece of parchment paper larger than the Swiss roll on a clean surface. Invert the cake onto the paper and carefully remove the parchment lining. Trim the edges and score a line along the length of the sponge about 2cm in, being careful not to cut through the sponge. This will help with rolling up.
- 6 Using the parchment paper, roll up the sponge with the paper inside. Set aside and allow to cool.
- 7 While the sponge is cooling, make the filling. In a bowl, combine the cream, Siúcra icing sugar and nutmeg (if using).
- 8 To make the frosting, whisk the cream,

cream cheese, Siúcra icing sugar, lime juice and vanilla extract together until thick.

- 9 To assemble, uncurl the Swiss roll and remove the parchment paper. Spread the mashed raspberries onto the sponge, followed by the cream, then re-roll tightly.
- 10 Cut one quarter of the cake off at one end on the diagonal. Transfer the large piece of cake to a serving platter or cake stand and angle the cut end to the side of the large cake to form a "branch".
- 11 Spread the frosting over the log with a palette knife, making indents to form the "bark" effect.
- 12 Sprinkle over the coconut flakes. Arrange the stars and holly leaves on top. Dust with a little Siúcra icing sugar.

Per Serving 399kcal, 25.4g fat (15.2g saturated), 37.3g carbs (26g sugars), 8.3g protein, 2.1g fibre, 0.2g sodium



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