

Traditional Holiday Mince Meat Mélange



TRADITION: "the handing down of information, beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction." Many of today's traditional holiday foods have been handed down... in fact, many were on the "traditional" holiday food list in Elizabethan England. Among these: stuffed turkeys, sausages, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy and mince pies.

Mince meat is an English invention. The English saved and preserved scraps of meat and suet from butchering, added bits of apple and other fruits and placed them in cider in great stone crocks. As the cider hardened, the mixture fermented and melowed until the time arrived to make the holiday pies.

Mince pie was so traditional by the Middle Ages that it was unthinkable to set a Christmas table without one. In Elizabethan England it became the custom of the manor houses to place on the hospitality table a gigantic mince pie as an invitation to come again. Somehow, this custom evolved into a small rectangular shape with a tiny pastry figure atop said to resemble the Child in the Manger. Then, along came the Puritans and Cromwell who called this heresy, and thereafter for almost 100 years mince pies became the reason for politico-religious debates.

The Plymouth Rock Pilgrims in the New World sought to end the debate by shifting the holiday emphasis to Thanksgiving. In the Southern colonies however, the ancient English customs persisted, aided by the increased potency of the ingredients until mince meat was "flavored vigorously enough to make one's head swim." The shape of pies was changed to round somewhere along the way and smaller round pies or tarts appeared. In order to insure good fortune for each of the 12 forthcoming months it became the custom to eat one small pie on each of the 12 days of Christmas.

Mince meat has remained the traditional Thanksgiving or Christmas food, and it is still found in the company of turkeys, sausages, stuffing, pies or cookies. So it is that the legend of mince meat, once the traditional holiday food of Kings, Queens and perhaps Little Jack Horner, goes marching through the 20th century.

What becomes a tradition the most? It's endurance! Commercially packed mince meat has been marketed in America since 1888. Today's mince meat... a mélange of plump raisins, brown sugar or corn syrup, citrus peel, currants, molasses, salt, spices, boiled cider or bitters, distilled vinegar and a minimum of beef, is ready-to-use at the flip of a lid or the snip of a package... and... its uses now extend beyond the traditional holiday mince pie.

In keeping with age-old tradition, we present a selection of mince meat holiday foods for your menus.

SOUTHERN MINCE STUFFING

(Makes about 8 cups, enough to stuff a 10- to 12-pound turkey)

- 1 pound bulk sausage
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon chicken-flavor instant bouillon OR 1 chicken-flavor bouillon cube
- 1 cup boiling water
- 3 cups dry bread crumbs (about 3 slices)
- 3 to 3-1/2 cups coarse corn bread crumbs
- 1 (28-ounce) jar Ready-to-Use Mince Meat
- 1 to 1-1/2 teaspoons poultry seasoning

In large skillet, brown sausage; pour off fat. Add celery and onion; cook until onion is transparent. Dissolve bouillon in water. In large bowl, pour sausage mixture and bouillon over bread cubes and corn bread crumbs; stir in mince meat and poultry seasoning. Mix well. Stuff loosely into neck and body cavities of a 10- to 12-pound turkey or other bird; truss. Place breast-side up on rack in shallow roasting pan; brush with melted butter. Roast as label directs. Turn extra stuffing into a well-greased 2-quart baking dish; cover and refrigerate. Uncover and bake 30 to 40 minutes at 375°. Refrigerate leftovers.

TRADITIONAL MINCE PIE

(Makes one 9-inch pie)

- Pastry for 2-crust pie
- 1 (28-ounce) jar Ready-to-Use Regular OR Brandy and Rum Mince Meat*
- 1 egg yolk plus 2 tablespoons water, optional

Prepare oven to 425°; place rack in lower half of oven. Prepare pastry. Turn mince meat into pastry-lined 9-inch pie plate. Cover with top crust; cut slits near center or top with pastry cutouts. Seal and flute. For a more golden crust, mix egg yolk and water; brush over entire surface of pie. Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until golden brown.

*To use Condensed Mince Meat: Prepare pastry for 2-crust 8-inch pie. In small saucepan, crumble 1 (9-ounce) package Condensed Mince Meat; add 1-1/2 cups water. Cook and stir over medium heat until lumps are thoroughly broken. Boil 1 minute. Cool.

To freeze baked pies or tarts: Bake as above; cool. Wrap tightly in aluminum foil and freeze.

To reheat pie in oven: Preheat oven to 325°. Unwrap pie; bake 40 to 45 minutes or until warm in center.

To thaw and reheat in microwave: Microwave on low to medium (1/2 power) 10 to 12 minutes, turning pie every 3 or 4 minutes, until warm in center. Let stand 5 minutes before cutting.

To freeze unbaked pies: Do not make slits in top crust before freezing; wrap tightly in aluminum foil and freeze.

To bake: Preheat oven to 425°. Unwrap frozen pie; make slits in top crust. Bake 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375°; continue baking 40 to 45 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly.

Mince Meat Tarts: One (28-ounce) jar Ready-to-Use Mince Meat fills 8 (3-inch) tart shells. One (9-ounce) package Condensed Mince Meat fills 6 (3-inch) tarts. Bake at 425° for 15 minutes or until crust is golden and its filling is warm.

To reheat frozen tarts: Preheat oven to 425°. Bake 15 to 20 minutes or until hot.

To thaw and reheat in microwave: Remove from aluminum foil or metal pans; place on plate. Heating 4 at a time, microwave on low or medium (1/2 power) 5 to 6 minutes, turning plate occasionally, until warm. Replace in tart pans to serve.

MINCE ORANGE PINWHEEL COOKIES

(Makes about 6 dozen)

- 1 (9-ounce) package Condensed Mince Meat, crumbled
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1/2 cup margarine or butter
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon grated orange rind
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1-3/4 cups unsifted flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

In small saucepan, combine mince meat, orange juice and 1 tablespoon flour. Bring to a boil, stirring frequently. Cook and stir 1 minute longer; set aside to cool. In large mixer bowl, cream together margarine, sugar, egg, rind and vanilla. Combine 1-3/4 cups flour, the baking soda and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture. Divide dough in half; roll or pat each half on wax paper to 11x7-inch rectangle. Spread half of mince meat mixture on each rectangle to within 1/2-inch of edge; roll, jelly roll-fashion, starting from long edge. Wrap tightly in wax paper; refrigerate at least 2 hours. Preheat oven to 400°. Cut into 3/4-inch slices; arrange on lightly greased baking sheets. Bake 6 to 8 minutes or until golden brown.

TIP: Dough holds well in refrigerator for 1 to 2 weeks.

FRUITED CARROT COOKIES

(Makes about 5-1/2 dozen)

- 1 cup margarine
- 3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups unsifted flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1-1/2 cups rolled oats
- 1 (9-ounce) package Condensed Mince Meat, crumbled
- 1 cup finely shredded carrots
- 1 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 375°. In large mixer bowl, cream together margarine and sugar; beat in eggs. Combine flour, baking soda and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture. Stir in oats, mince meat, carrots and nuts. Drop by rounded teaspoons onto lightly greased baking sheets; bake 8 to 10 minutes or until golden brown. If desired, spread Cream Cheese Frosting on top of cooled cookies.

Cream Cheese Frosting

- 3 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 2-1/2 cups sifted confectioners' sugar
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

In small bowl, beat cheese until smooth. Stir in remaining ingredients until smooth.

CRUMBLY-TOPPED LEMON MINCE BARS

(Makes 30 bars)

- 1-1/4 cups unsifted flour
- 1 cup finely crushed saltines (about 28)
- 1 cup flaked coconut
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup margarine or butter, melted
- 2 tablespoons grated lemon rind
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1-1/3 cups (one-half 28-ounce jar) Ready-to-Use Mince Meat
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts, optional

Preheat oven to 350°. In large bowl, combine all ingredients except mince meat and nuts; blend well. Reserving 1 cup crumb mixture, press remainder firmly on bottom of 13x9-inch baking dish. Spoon mince meat over crust; top with reserved crumbs and nuts if desired. Press down gently. Bake 30 minutes or until edges are lightly browned. Cool completely; cut into bars.