

The Warming Oven by Emily Watson

It's the sweet smell of Christmas wafting through the house — the aromas of good cooking and the fresh scent of pine that are as much a part of the holiday season as good cheer and good company.

Cooks around the world perfume the air with their own special dishes, all of them aromatic. In France, the Yule log and the cake named after it, *Bûche de Noël*, announce the arrival of the season.

In merrie olde England, Christmas is time for plum pudding, served with cups of steaming, fragrant coffee.

CHRISTMAS PLUM PUDDING

- 1 1/4 cups seedless raisins
- 1 1/4 cups dried currants
- 1/2 cup chopped nutmeats
- 1 cup sifted flour, divided
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/4 cup light molasses
- 1/4 cup buttermilk
- 1/4 cup finely chopped suet
- 1/4 cup pineapple juice
- 1 cup packaged bread crumbs
- 1/4 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 tsp. cloves
- 1/4 tsp. allspice
- 1/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp. salt.

Combine raisins, currants, nutmeats and 1/2 cup of flour. Combine eggs, molasses, buttermilk, suet and fruit juice. Combine remaining flour, crumbs, baking soda, spices and salt and add to egg mixture. Add floured fruit and mix well. Pour into greased 1 1/2 quart mold. Cover and set on rack in a deep kettle. Add boiling water to about one inch below cover of mold. Cover.

Steam continually 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Makes 10 to 12 servings. Serve with hard sauce.

GRAM KEITH'S CARROT PUDDING

- 1 1/4 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup ground suet
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup currants
- 1 cup grated raw carrots
- 1 cup grated raw potatoes
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. cloves
- Pinch of allspice and nutmeg
- 1/4 cup mixed candied peel
- 1/4 cup nut meats
- Pinch of salt

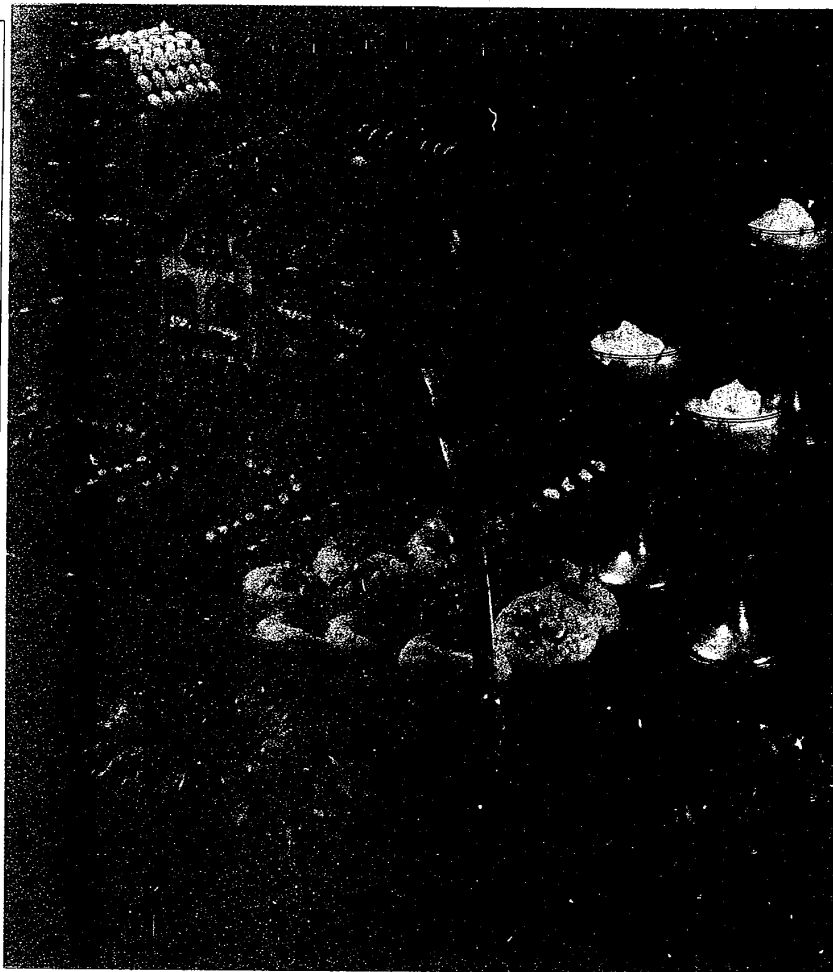
Work all together with hands. Turn into well-buttered can or mold which can be sealed. (Gram used to tie the two or three layers of waxed brown paper over the top with ordinary string.)

Steam for three hours and serve with caramel or hard sauce.

"Whoever eats a plum pudding on each of the Twelve Days of Christmas, making a wish on the first mouthful each day, will be blessed by luck all year. But bad luck attends the greedy who nibble plum puddings before the Christmas feast."

— English superstition

The proof of the pudding is in the eating.



A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS

Victorian Village Cake

- Heavy cardboard or plywood, 12" x 18"
- Aluminum foil
- 1-1/3 cups vegetable shortening
- 2 lb. confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 4 to 6 tablespoons milk
- 4 large (16 oz. each) pound cakes
- 2 regular-size (10-3/4 oz. each) pound cakes
- 1 can (16-1/2 oz.) ready-to-spread chocolate frosting
- Yellow, orange, tan and green paste food coloring or liquid food color to make similar colors
- Wooden pick
- Pastry bag with following decorating tips: fine plain tip, large star tip, fine star tip
- 2 pkgs. (15 oz. each) "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies
- 1 pkg. (15 oz.) "M&M's" Peanut Chocolate Candies

Victorian Village Cake Design



Decorated With "M&M's" Chocolate Candies

Assembling:

1. To form base, cover cardboard with foil.
2. For white frosting, beat shortening until light and fluffy, gradually adding sugar, 1/2 cup at a time. Add vanilla and enough milk to make spreadable.
3. For each end house, spread bottom of 2 large cakes with white frosting; press together. For middle house, repeat with 2 regular-size cakes. Trim surfaces; trim roof lines as shown.
4. Stand cakes next to each other as shown, placing small house in middle and securing adjoining edges with white frosting.

Decorating:

1. Reserve 1 cup white frosting; divide remaining into 4 equal portions. Tint green, tan, yellow and orange.
2. Frost houses 1 tan, 1 yellow, 1 orange, as shown in photo. Frost roofs with spreadable chocolate frosting.
3. Mark window, door and decorative designs on house with wooden pick. Fit pastry bag with fine plain tip; fill with chocolate frosting. Outline marked designs on front and sides of houses. Decorate with orange and yellow "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies. Use larger star tip to complete chocolate design on roofs and trim. While frosting is still soft, press candies on roofs.
4. Frost sidewalks, paths and border with chocolate frosting. Arrange "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies on frosted areas.
5. Fit pastry bag with large star tip; fill with green frosting. Pipe in "grass." Arrange green "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies on frosted area. Arrange "M&M's" Plain and Peanut Chocolate Candies around house for "bushes" and "flowers."
6. Add "highlights" with reserved white frosting applied with fine star tip.

Winter Warmer

- 2 cups milk, heated
- 1/2 cup "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies
- 1 teaspoon instant coffee
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon

Place milk, candies, coffee and cinnamon in blender container. Cover; blend at lowest speed about 10 seconds. Continue blending at medium-high speed about 20 seconds. Pour into mugs; garnish with whipped cream or marshmallows and cinnamon sticks, if desired. Makes four 3/4-cup servings.

Party Parlour Mix

- 1 pkg. (15 oz.) "M&M's" Plain Chocolate Candies
- 3 cups thin pretzel sticks, broken into 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup peanuts
- 1 cup raisins

Combine all ingredients. Store in tightly covered container. Makes about 7 cups mix.

VARIATION: Substitute 1 pkg. (15 oz.) "M&M's" Peanut Chocolate Candies for Plain Chocolate Candies; omit peanuts.

Festive Cookie Clusters

- 1 pkg. (about 17 oz.) sugar cookie mix
- "M&M's" Plain or Peanut Chocolate Candies

Mix cookie mix as directed on package. Shape dough to form 1-inch balls; place about 2 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 350°F. for 8 to 10 minutes or until edges are lightly browned. Immediately press 3 to 4 candies firmly into center of each warm cookie. Remove cookies from sheet; cool thoroughly. Makes about 2-1/2 dozen cookies.

VARIATIONS: Roll balls in shredded coconut before baking. Sprinkle baked warm cookies lightly with confectioners' sugar.

Christmas Crisps

- 4 cups miniature marshmallows
- 1/3 cup margarine
- 3-1/2 cups crisp rice cereal
- 1-1/3 cups "M&M's" Plain or Peanut Chocolate Candies

Melt together marshmallows and margarine in heavy saucepan over low heat, stirring occasionally until smooth. Pour over combined cereal and candies; toss until lightly coated. With greased fingers, gently shape mixture into 1-1/2-inch balls. Place on wax paper; let stand at room temperature until set. Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

Choco-Banana Bundt

- 2 cups biscuit mix
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel, if desired
- 1 cup mashed banana
- 2/3 cup water
- 1 egg
- 1 cup coarsely chopped "M&M's" Plain or Peanut Chocolate Candies
- 1/3 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 to 3 teaspoons orange juice

Combine biscuit mix and orange peel; add combined banana, water, and egg, mixing just until dry ingredients are moistened. Stir candies into batter; pour into greased 7-1/2 x 3-inch (6 cups) Bundt tube pan or 6 cup ring mold. Bake at 350°F. for 50 to 55 minutes or until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes; invert onto wire rack. Glaze cooled cake with combined confectioners' sugar and orange juice. Decorate with additional "M&M's" Plain or Peanut Chocolate Candies, if desired. Makes 1 cake.

VARIATION: Substitute 8-1/2 x 4-1/2-inch loaf pan for tube pan or ring mold.