

# An English tradition at Christmas time

http://homepage.mac.com/balexic2/christmaspudding/Menu17.html

English Plum Pudding or Christmas Pudding is a tradition in the homes of people who call the U.K. and Ireland home. My recipe was passed on to me from my Irish mother, who immigrated to Canada in the 1950's. I typically start making this pudding around the start or middle of October every year. Once it's cooked, it needs to age (in a cool place) until Christmas Day... (like a fine wine, puddings need to age in order to develop flavor). Two to Three months is usually enough time to do this. I hope you will enjoy this recipe that my family and I have enjoyed for more than 40 years.

## Ingredients.

1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g chopped pitted dates
1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g glacéed/candied lemon peel
1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g glacéed/candied orange peel
1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g glacéed/candied mixed peel
1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g glacéed/candied red cherries
1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g glacéed/candied red cherries
1/2 lb. (1-1/4 cups) or 225g glacéed/candied green cherries
15 ounce or 425g package dried currants
15 ounce or 425g package seedless raisins
15 ounce or 425g package yellow raisins
1 cup or 340g of ground almonds
2 cups or 450 ml of apricot or peach brandy

#### ....

2 cups or 450 ml sifted all-purpose flour
1/2 cup or 115g light brown sugar
1 teaspoon or 5 ml ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon or 5 ml ground ginger
1 teaspoon or 5 ml ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon or 1.25ml of ground cloves
1 teaspoon or 5 ml salt
1 cup or 340g of dry bread crumbs
1 lb. or 750g of chopped beef suet
6 large eggs, well beaten
6 ounces or 177 ml of red currant jelly (not jam)

#### ••••••

Butter (to grease the pudding molds) A few drops of Cognac or Brandy (weekly) to keep the pudding moist while it ages







### Day 1- day4.

During this time it's necessary to soak the fruits and ground almonds in apricot brandy, so that the fruit absorbs the brandy.

Place the dates, lemon peel, orange peel, mixed peel, red cherries, green cherries, currants, seedless raisins, and ground almonds in a very large metal or ceramic mixing bowl.



Add the apricot or peach brandy.



Mix all these ingredients thoroughly (taking care not to crush the cherries). It's recommended to use a metal spoon. I've broken a few wooden spoons on Plum Puddings in the past. The ingredients are heavy... and get heavier as they soak up the brandy as the days go on. I would not recommend mixing the ingredients in an electric mixer. The machine may crush the cherries, not to mention the fact that the ingredients are so heavy they

might burn out the motor.



Once everything is mixed, cover the mixing bowl with clear plastic wrap, and let soak for 4 days. Every day or so during this time, take the plastic wrap off, and mix up the ingredients. If the mixture looks a little dry... sprinkle on more apricot or peach brandy.



## Day 4.

Place the flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, salt and bread crumbs into a large mixing bowl. Mix these dry ingredients well, before adding the next ingredient. Now add the beef suet into the dry ingredients. Mix well. When the pudding cooks, the suet melts, so it must be well distributed or else it will look clumpy.



Split the brandy soaked fruit between two large mixing bowls (one bowl won't be



able to hold all of the mixture). Add the dry ingredients evenly between both bowls of fruit. Next add the beaten eggs, and currant jelly evenly... again between both bowls. Mix all this thoroughly, taking care not to crush the cherries if you can. This recipe makes 2 large puddings and 2 small ones. I give away the extra puddings to family members, as gifts. By this point you should have two very heavy bowls of a very sticky pudding mixture.

Next I grease up my molds with butter, so that unmolding the puddings later on will be easier. Press the mixture into the bottom of the bowl/mold

gently. The bottom of the bowl will be the top of the pudding once it is cooked and unmolded. Pressing the mixture in, ensures you have a solid pudding with no holes or gaps. Before filling up the bowls to the top, I stick to an old English/Irish tradition of my mothers (stretching back to the days of Charles Dickens). I put a very clean penny into the pudding. Tradition says that the person who finds the penny, will get one year of good luck... (be careful to tell your guests, to watch out for the penny). Don't fill



the pudding bowls up to the top. The pudding tends to expand when it cooks. Once you have all the pudding mixture in the bowls, press down with the back of a spoon to smooth out the pudding.

Cover each pudding mold with silver foil, and seal each covered bowl with a heavy duty elastic band. I use 3 elastic bands to be sure. It is important to do this, as you don't want any water to get into the pudding when it's cooking, in the water bath.

Make sure you don't get water in the pudding!

The puddings are now ready to be cooked, in a water bath or "bainmarie". I place the puddings into a slow cooker (crock pot), and fill up the bowl with boiling water. I leave about 3 cm or 1 inch of space between the water level and the top of the pudding mold, so that water does not get into the pudding molds. I then cook the pudding (depending on it's size) for 10-12 hours on medium or high heat. It's virtually impossible to burn something in a water bath. So over cooking the pudding at low temperatures is hard to do. For the last 20 years I've used a "slow cooker" or crock pot to cook my puddings. A crock pot cooks at very low temperatures, and are meant to be left alone for hours on end. It's perfect for those



who have to work. You just set the cooker on medium or high, and come back a few hours later. I usually check the pot every 8 hours or so, to make sure there is still enough water in the pot, and that it has not evaporated too much.

If you don't have a slow cooker you can always put the pudding bowls into a big pot of water and cook it on low for several hours. Make sure the water doesn't boil, as boiling water can get into the pudding molds sometimes.

Note: Don't put cold pudding molds into boiling water, unless the bowl is of a tempered material. The bowl may

crack from the drastic temperature change.

Be careful handling the puddings once they come out of the slow cooker. They are hot, and they take a while to cool down. I usually let the pudding sit on the counter for a few hours, before I attempt to unmold it. When one pudding is taken out of the slow cooker,



I place the next one in, and start the long cooking process all over again. For 4 puddings I will be cooking nonstop for 2 days. It is a labour of love... and it only comes once a year, so I don't mind.

I usually start making my puddings in early or mid October. There is a reason for this. As the puddings age, they develop more flavor. Smell the pudding once it's first cooked. Then smell the pudding on Christmas Day. You can smell and taste the difference in an aged Plum Pudding. I wouldn't dream of making a pudding one month before Christmas. It's not enough time to make one, in my opinion. I just remember every October to



start making the pudding... it's become a tradition for me. It's also one less thing to worry about before Christmas.

After unmolding the puddings (once they are cool). I will cover each pudding in cheese cloth, and then cover them in foil or keep them in a metal tin. I don't have a large tin anymore... so I use the foil method. Before I wrap the puddings, I will sprinkle brandy or cognac on the puddings. I then wrap the puddings in rinsed cheese cloth.

Note: New cheese cloth can smell medicinal... so rinse it in water, and wring out

the water before using.



Once the pudding is wrapped in cheese cloth, I then wrap the entire pudding in silver foil, and store it in the refrigerator. A cool place can be used as well. However I live in a condo, and I don't have cool places to store things.

Once a week I will take the foil off, and the cheese cloth, and sprinkle the pudding with brandy or cognac. Then I wrap it back up again (in the same cheese cloth and foil). Sometimes I have to replace the foil if it tears. At any rate I keep up the weekly maintenance on the puddings until Christmas.



On Christmas Day I will place the pudding back into it's mold and cover it with foil, and sealed the mold with elastic bands, and re-cook it again on a low setting. I will leave the pudding to cook/warm until the evening meal. I unmold the warm pudding onto a plate, and place a cross mark into the top of the pudding with the handle of a wooden or plastic spoon. I do this to allow flaming brandy to run down the cross marks on all sides, when the pudding is presented at the table.



In order to flame brandy, the liquor must be warm or hot. Cold brandy is impossible to light. I usually place a shot glass full of brandy into the microways and host it until it starts to steam. I then

crowave and heat it until it starts to steam. I then place the heated brandy over the pudding, letting it run down the sides of the pudding, where I put the cross indentations on the top. I then quickly light the pudding with a lighter or match. Be careful not

to burn yourself. A blue flame will cover the pudding where the brandy ran down. The flame will go out eventually after a few seconds. The brandy gives the pudding more punch, plus it looks spectacular to flame something at the dinner table.



I usually serve the pudding with a hard sauce, and or fresh whipped cream. Children like whipped cream, whereas the hard sauce contains even more brandy... and grown-ups usually prefer it. I hope you enjoy this recipe for Plum Pudding.

Happy Holidays, and Merry Christmas!



#### Notes:

- -Chopped beef suet is not the best thing in the world to eat. However it's only once a year. It's essential to have lard in this pudding. All English style puddings (Spotted Dick etc.), require suet. I know some people have used vegetable shortening (I'm not sure how well it comes out)... I stick to the old ways.
- -I use the microwave oven to heat and cook just about anything except for one thing. Plum Pudding. For some reason a microwave will change the consistency of pudding (especially if it heats too long). It might be the beef suet or the candied fruit, but for some reason a microwave makes the pudding sizzle, and thus much of it's moisture is lost. This then makes it dry out with in seconds. Don't use the microwave to heat up the pudding. If you need to heat it up... place the pudding in a covered heat proof dish, and let it sit in the oven for 30 minutes or so at a low temperature. Covering the pudding ensures the moisture doesn't get out. The pudding is best when it's warm and moist.
- The original recipe can vary for Plum Pudding. My recipe originally called for quartered almonds, and no whole cherries. My mother and I don't like biting into nuts in puddings or in cakes, so we use ground almonds instead. As for the cherries... I think they give the pudding more texture, and colour, so I added them to my recipe.
- -You can juggle with the fruits and nuts if you want, but don't alter the spices. The spices are what make this recipe so unique and special. I don't know of any other dish that smells quite like this. It truly is a smell of old Victorian cooking.
- -So the next time you read "A Christmas Carol" or watch the movie... you'll know what Tiny Tim means when he says the pudding is singing in the copper.