

IN SEARCH OF COMFORT FOOD

BY SOBIA AMEEN



Christmas Delights

What's better than the gifts you find under the Christmas tree on 25 December? The heavenly delights waiting on the dinner table, that's what! There's no better way to celebrate this day than with scrumptious meals that take away all the worry, and with these recipes, that is guaranteed.

FRUIT CAKE

One of my family favorites is a Christmas cake. We usually get one that has been aged for months, but the fresh one tastes amazing too. The kitchen starts smelling like a winter wooden loft while making this, so it is a great kickstart for the holiday spirit.

Ingredients

For fruit mixture —

- ¾ cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2/3 cup mixed dried fruits
- 2/3 cup glazed cherries
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 large orange (zest and juice)
- 1 lemon zest

For cake mix —



- 3 large eggs
- ½ cup ground almonds, or almond meal
- 1 and 2/3 cups plain, or all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- 1 tsp ground allspice

To feed —

- ½ cup cherry brandy, or ½ cup sugar and lemon water

Method

Over medium heat, start by adding butter to a large pot. Add brown sugar to the melted butter, and once it has dissolved, add the mixed dried fruits, glazed cherries, dried cranberries. Pour the orange juice into the fruit mixture and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, so that the fruits do not stick to the pot.

Before taking the pot off the heat, add the orange and the lemon zest. Let it cool for a bit before adding the cake mix.

Before making the cake mix, preheat the oven to 150° C. Take a 20-centimetre cake tin and line it with parchment paper, lightly brush with butter to prevent the cake from sticking to the pan.

Once the oven and the cake tin are ready, add the eggs to the fruit mixture, use a wooden spoon to mix it in. In a bowl, add all the dry ingredients — ground almonds, plain flour, baking powder, mixed spice and ground



allspice. Mix the dry ingredients well so that it can be mixed in evenly. Mix all the ingredients till the mixture looks like cake batter and pour into the tin. Tap the tin on the kitchen counter so that there are no air bubbles in the batter.

Bake for 45 minutes at 150° C and then reduce the temperature to 140° C and bake for another hour to an hour and a half till the top is dark golden brown. If you see the top burning, cover the top of cake tin with a foil. Check with a toothpick to see if the cake has cooked through. Take the cake out and wait till it has cooled.

Poke holes with a fork and feed with a tablespoon of the cherry brandy or sugar and lemon water. Store in an air-tight container and feed everyday till the day the cake is going to be iced, or have marzipan added to decorate.

Note: If the feed is not a form of alcohol, try not to store for more than a week.

GINGERBREAD EGGNOG

This is a spiced version of the traditional eggnog. It's smooth and silky, and makes a great desert.

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp ginger powder
- 1 tbsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ground clove
- 1½ tsp ground nutmeg
- 3 cups whole milk
- 6 egg yolks
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 tsp vanilla extract, or beans from a vanilla bean pod
- 1½ cup heavy cream

Method

In a large pot, pour the milk over medium heat. While the milk is warming up, whisk the egg yolks with a cup of granulated sugar, little by little till the consistency is close to a meringue.

Turn the heat off so that the milk is not boiling hot, just a little steamy. Use one ladle at a time to slowly pour it into the egg yolks and sugar mixture. Make sure to use a whisk to keep whisking so that the mixture doesn't curdle. After 2-3 ladles of milk have been added to the yolk and sugar mixture, add the mixture to the milk on the stove.

Keep cooking on low heat for 10 minutes, keep stirring so that the mixture does not curdle. Do not let it boil or come to a simmer. Add the vanilla extract and gingerbread spice mix. When the liquid thickens and can coat the back of a spoon. Use a fine mesh sieve to make sure the eggnog is smooth and creamy and place on top of an ice bath. Once cooled, add the heavy cream and serve with a dash of cinnamon or even a gingerbread cookie.

Christmas Goodies

It is Christmas eve today, and yet there are always those of us in a fix about buying presents for loved ones... either we couldn't make enough trips to the shops, or came home too late the weeks before, or just did not find something we liked enough. But that goodie bag must not remain empty! Fret not, as there is still time to think of something, and at Star Lifestyle we like to help you sort your ideas and give some of our own, just so you can pick up items that are readily available and can also be personalised, which is always a nice touch, especially on the receiver, as the giver's thoughtfulness truly shines through.

TEA TINS

There is a health trend of people cutting down on caffeine, but that does not mean that teas have to be given up completely—after all, green tea has so many benefits. Thus, a great gift would be the blends of floral/spiced teas and storing them in air tight containers.

For people who have not given up on caffeine yet, something like a French earl grey or high quality green tea would be ideal. Good quality green tea usually come in tins or ceramic pots, these also work as great collectables once the tea is used up. Different varieties of teas can be found at the many shops at the Gulshan 1 market in Dhaka.

MUFFLERS AND SCARVES

Nothing says Christmas gift like a muffler or woollen scarf, and it is also a charming gift! Since time is not on your side today, buying scarves is a good option, as many varieties are available for winter, along with dressier versions in silk for glamour all year round. The scarves themselves can also be fashioned into small goodie bags, full of other trinkets. Most of the boutiques and brand shops in the local malls carry woollen mufflers, like Artisan, Yellow, and Usha Silk, Doyel, Aarong, are some who carry brilliant silk and other dressy versions.

SKETCH PADS

Sketchpads and notebooks are almost always a great idea, even though everyone is not an artist. Locally made sketch pads are a great gift, with their touch of whimsy and colours. These can be used to jot down reminders, make lists of things to do, or simply to doodle and sketch as stress busting activities.

A bit of extra pizzazz can be added by including a personalized note or particularly favourite poem or quote on the first page—a nice pick-me-up for the receiver throughout their time of using the item.

Art supplies stores like ones in Nizam Shankar Plaza, Boi Bichitra, and many online pages have cute selections, for example Clumsy Crafter, Books and Notebooks, and Dream Chaser, and Paperworm pages on Facebook.



A TUTORIAL VOUCHER FOR POTTERY

While pottery is an art form mastered only in the long term, some simple objects are fairly simple to learn, for example customised plates for using or decoration, which make for great gifts, but working with clay is also very meditative and therapeutic, and that experience and spending of time adds to the gift's charm.

Clay station offers to teach a wide variety of techniques and always has someone to help with the process, and you can offer this very experience.

Photo and food: Sobia Ameen