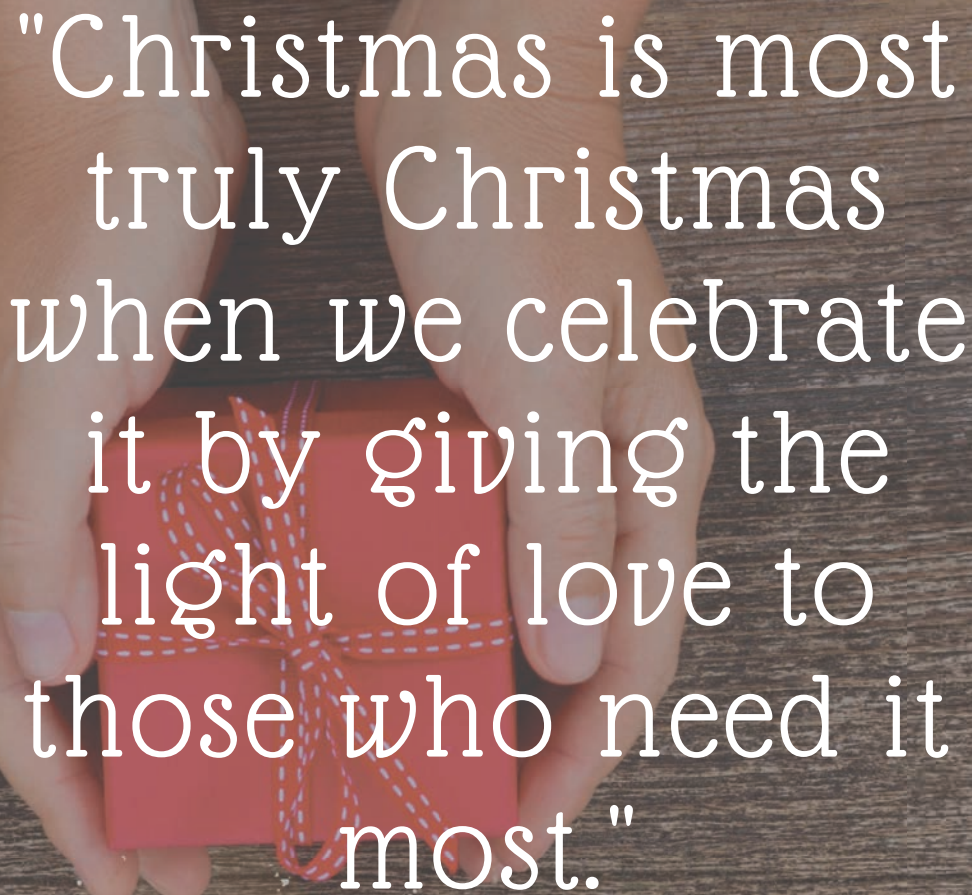




SAVING DINNER
by Leanne Ely

*Classic
Christmas
Menu*

2020



"Christmas is most
truly Christmas
when we celebrate
it by giving the
light of love to
those who need it
most."

RUTH CARTER STAPLETON

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Christmas Countdown!

FIVE TO SIX WEEKS AHEAD

Order or buy your Christmas Cards. Picture cards are nice but not a necessity. More than anything, family and friends just want to be remembered at this time of year.

Spend just a few minutes each night addressing envelopes. this will keep the card sending from becoming bothersome. Think about why the person(or people) is important to you. Cherish those thoughts.

Find any gifts you may have bought early and stashed away so the fam can't find them - look in unexpected places, better yet, next year make a list of those hiding spots!

Pull out your gift wrap, bags, etc. Decide if you might need more and watch for sales.

Pull out your decorations. Sort through and donate anything you know you won't use.

Make a list of the folks you still need gifts for, create your gift budget, and most importantly, stick to it!

If you plan to make homemade gifts, now is the time to make supplies list and go shopping! (Need some ideas for consumable, clutter-free gift ideas? We've got you covered. Pick up our Gift Giving eBook Bundle - I'm sure there's something for everyone on your list!

THREE TO FOUR WEEKS AHEAD

Mail out those Christmas cards you've already addressed.

Let the decorating begin! Don't make this a chore. Get the whole family involved. Put on some cheerful Christmas music and make memories as you hang your wreath and place ornaments on the tree!

Reassess your gift list. Purchase any last-minute needs.

TWO WEEKS TO TEN DAYS AHEAD

Call to confirm your guests and family.

Go through your grocery list and buy everything you need for dinner except the fresh stuff. If you're going to do Christmas cookies this year, make the dough now and freeze it for easy baking at a later date. (Need ideas for scrumptious Christmas cookies? Check out our 12 Cookies of Christmas eBook bundle!) These little do ahead tips *are* what make the holidays a whole lot less stressful!

Remember to hit the grocery store at an off time, preferably early in the morning when everything is freshly stocked. Make sure you have your list, check it twice, and leave the kids at home. This is not the time to be distracted and arguing with your child over why you won't buy him the mutant sugar ninja cereal that he wants sooooo bad.

Press all the linens and napkins, hang them in your closet on a hanger or fold gently and place back in the sideboard.

And don't forget to double-check the serving pieces you're going to need for your Christmas dinner. You might want to call now and beg, borrow, or steal (just kidding on the last one) the utensils or serving pieces you're going to need. Remember, it's a colossal drag to not have what you need the day of the event! Get it taken care of ahead of time.

ONE WEEK AHEAD

This is the time to go over your list once more. Everything should be bought (except the last-minute fresh stuff), and you should have your ducks or roast, for that matter, in a row. Double-check, double-check, double-check!

Now, go get your fridge cleaned out. I mean really cleaned out, mercilessly cleaned out. A serious scouring of your fridge will help you to have ample room come time to stock with the fresh stuff you will be buying in the next few days. If you need more fridge space, don't discount your cooler sitting in the garage waiting for summer. Clean that thing out, buy some ice, and put it to good use.

Reassess your gift list. Purchase any last-minute needs.

THREE DAYS AHEAD

Just like for Thanksgiving, we're going to pull out all of the serving pieces. Write what is going into what and with what on a 3 X 5 card. For example, note which serving bowl is for mashed potatoes, with serving spoon, and throw it into the bowl with the spoon inside. Once you have everything laid out in front of you, you can stack your serving dishes and the serving utensils separately. Still, leave the 3 x 5 card in the serving piece and place on the dining room table if you're not going to be using it. As you did with Thanksgiving, throw a clean sheet over the top so you can keep everything dust free.

TWO DAYS BEFORE

Purchase the remaining fresh items and pick up your roast if you ordered it from a butcher.

Make the Crème Anglaise that goes with the Easy Trifle. Once the Crème Anglaise has cooled, put a piece of plastic wrap over the top to stop a skin from forming.

THE DAY BEFORE

You can begin prepping your veggies. Place the washed green beans in a zipper-topped bag. If you have enough room in your fridge, you can even prep the butternut squash and put it in the pan, ready to go, covered with plastic wrap so all you have to do is remove the plastic wrap and cook. (You should let it sit to nearly room temperature before popping it into the oven.)

Set your Christmas dinner table and again, using that same sheet, cover your table to keep the dust off.

Sit down, put your feet up, and once again, go over your plan for dinner. You should have all your T's crossed and I's dotted by now. There is still much to do undoubtedly - this is Christmas Eve, after all. Aren't you glad dinner is completely under control?

CHRISTMAS DAY COUNTDOWN IN THE MORNING

First! Get up and get dressed. Don't start working in your robe and slippers. You need some good support in the way of shoes, and you may not have another minute for yourself so get yourself reasonably ready for the day. It's easy to change clothes and freshen your makeup; not so easy to have to start from scratch when the doorbell rings and you're just getting out of the shower!

Get the short ribs roasting, and then make the stock out of the bones, following the directions for the Pan Gravy. If you haven't done so already, prepare the Roasted Butternut Squash.

Prepare the potatoes for Old-Fashioned Mashed Potatoes. Place in a pot with cold water. Set aside, but again, not on the stovetop or the pot will get warm and begin cooking the potatoes prematurely.

Put the butter, salt and pepper (if not already there) on the table. Consider two butters and two sets of salt and pepper, one on either end of the table.

Clean as you go! Starting each little cooking spurt with a clean kitchen makes all the difference. Before you start up, run a sink full of hot, soapy water and dump stuff in there as you use it. If necessary, run the dishwasher and empty it after you're nearly finished with all the last-minute preparations.

Remember to rest up a bit. You've got company coming and a full day ahead. No need to burn out before the guests ever get there!



TWO AND A HALF HOURS BEFORE

Preheat your oven and place the roast in the oven to cook, following directions for the Roast Beast recipe. Don't forget to use your most important piece of equipment of the day: meat thermometer.

Make the Creamed Horseradish.

Make the Easy Trifle. Loosely place the plastic wrap on top. Remember to keep the custard (Crème Anglaise) separate. Pour the custard in to a serving pitcher and again, place a small piece of plastic wrap on the top to prevent a skin from forming.

Set up your coffeemaker for after-dinner coffee so all you have to do is flick the switch.

ONE HOUR BEFORE

Your Beast should be about halfway through its cooking time. Double-check the temperature (that means, check the meat thermometer), but for sure don't keep opening and closing the oven door. When you do, the oven loses heat, causing your cooking time to be way off. Be judicious in your oven openings and closings.

Place the Roasted Butternut Squash into the oven to roast with the beef.

Cook the potatoes for Old-Fashioned Mashed Potatoes and place in a crock-cooker on low when completed. (REMEMBER: all crock-cooker temperatures vary by brand and age - be sure you've tested yours for this function before trying this!)

Make the gravy.

Cook the Sautéed Green Beans with Nutmeg. Keep warm until serving time.

Heat the rolls.

After your roast has rested, carve the meat and place on the serving platter.

TIME TO EAT!

Put everything in its proper serving dish: the beef on the serving platter with the meat fork, rolls in the basket (or baskets) with the napkin to keep them warm, gravy in its boat, green beans, butternut squash, creamed horseradish, and of course, the mashed potatoes in their bowls or platters.

You've earned the praise you're bound to get. Sit back enjoy the meal and your guests, and do remember to join hands with those you love and give thanks.



"Christmas gives us an
opportunity to pause
and reflect on the
important things
around us."

DAVID CAMERON

Classic Christmas Menu Shopping List

PROTEIN

- 3-pound rump roast (and a little extra beef fat [R1])
- 1 pound beef short ribs [R3]

CONDIMENTS

- 1 jar prepared horseradish [R2]
- avocado oil [R3][R5][R6]
- 1 4-oz. jar seedless raspberry jam (or seeded if seedless is unavailable) [R8]
- cream sherry (optional) [R8]

DAIRY CASE

- 1 pint half-and-half (plus extra for the coffee) [R9]
- 8 eggs [R9]
- 1 pound unsalted butter (you can freeze whatever is leftover) [R4][R6][R7][R9]
- 1 pint heavy cream [R8]
- 1 8-oz. container sour cream [R2]
- 1 cup milk [R4]

SPICES

- garlic powder [R1]
- nutmeg [R6]
- lemon pepper [R5]
- vanilla extract [R8]
- white pepper [R3]
- sea salt (keep on hand)
- freshly ground black pepper (keep on hand)

BAKERY

- rolls for 12 (at my house that would be 3 dozen!) [Serve with Butter]

FREEZER SECTION

- 2 Sara Lee pound cakes [R8]
- rolls for 12 if not using bakery rolls [R7]

PRODUCE

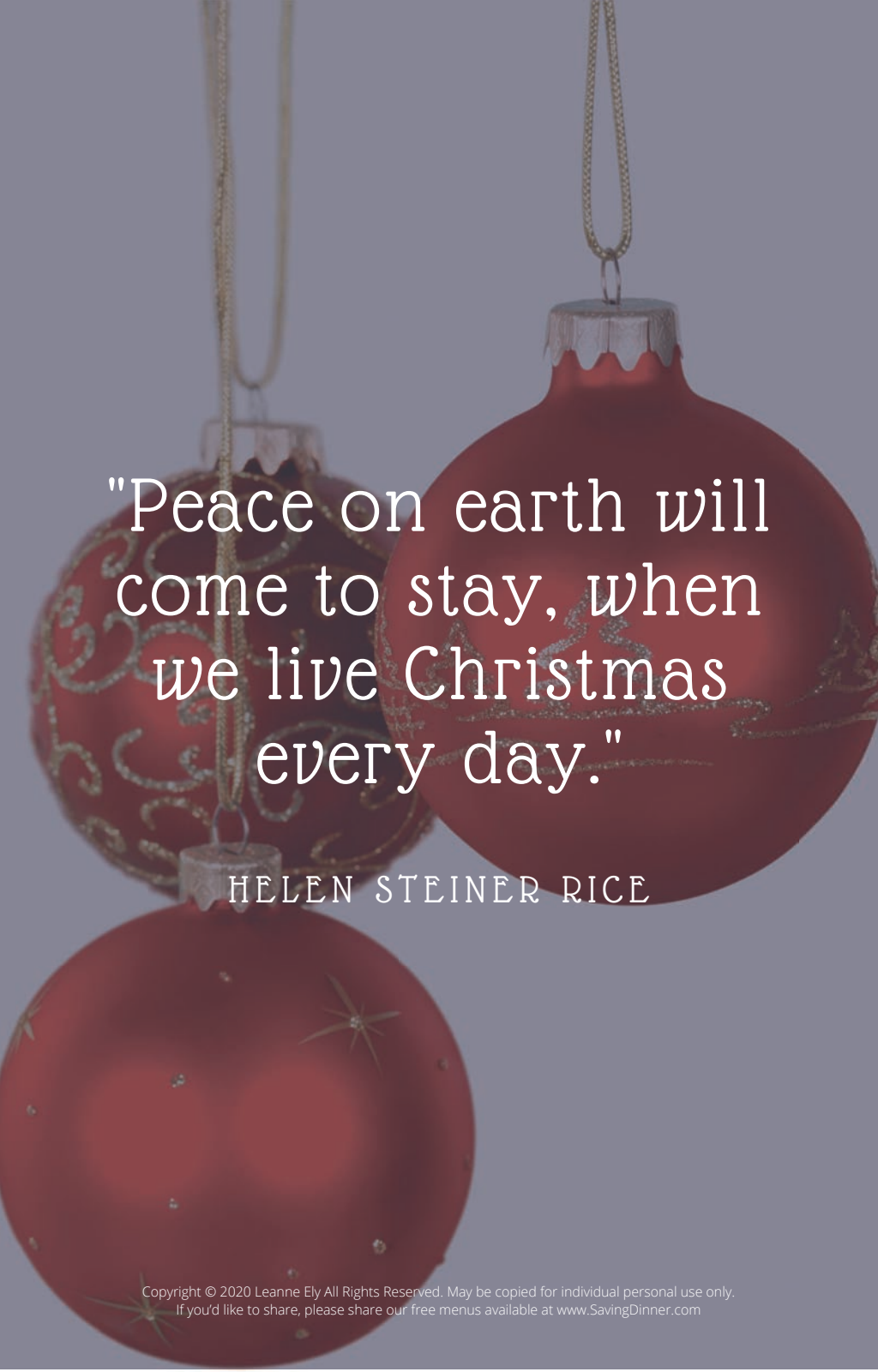
- 6 handfuls green beans [R6]
- 2 medium red onions [R5]
- 3 pounds onions (keep on hand for regular cooking) [R3]
- 1 bunch carrots [R3]
- 1 bunch celery [R3]
- 1 head garlic [R3]
- 1 butternut squash (I get a bigger one - 2 to 3 pounds) [R5]
- 6 large russet potatoes [R4]
- 1 pint raspberries (OR what is available, good, and affordable) [R8]

DRY GOODS

- Wondra flour (it's in a blue canister) [R3]
- 1 cup sugar [R9]
- coffee

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

- The tools you may need to borrow or purchase are a meat thermometer (big-time important; buy one if you don't own one!) and a trifle bowl or straight-sided salad bowl (clear glass is preferable).
- wire whisk
- roasting pan WITH rack
- meat carving set
- meat thermometer
- trifle bowl (or a salad bowl with straight sides)
- 9 X 13-inch baking dish



"Peace on earth will
come to stay, when
we live Christmas
every day."

HELEN STEINER RICE

Roast Beast (Roast Beef)

Serves 6

Ingredients:

1 3-pound rump roast
a little extra beef fat

salt and pepper, to taste
garlic powder, to taste

One year, I really wanted to do a beef tenderloin. Then, I found out how much it was per pound! A good rump roast will be just as flavorful as tenderloin, and you won't have to take out a second mortgage on your house.

This is a wonderful, flavorful roast. Make sure you have the butcher give you a little extra fat on the side. You will want some short ribs or other beefy bones to make a graver with, too.

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 500 degrees.

Wash the roast and pat dry with paper towels (this is important).

Insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the roast, if using a thermometer. Roast on a wire rack in a large roasting pan for 15 minutes, then turn the oven down to a respectable 375 degrees and roast for 1 3/4 hours, or to desired doneness. For a medium-rare roast, the meat thermometer should read 135 degrees.

Let the roast sit for 10 minutes on the rack, then remove it to a cutting board to sit for another 10 or 15 minutes. Roasts absolutely need to sit for a little bit, otherwise the meat is flabby and weird. It also cuts better, is more juicy, and has better flavor after it sits.

Cut thin slices and serve with Creamed Horseradish and Pan Gravy, *Yum!*

Roast Beast (Roast Beef)

ROAST BEAST

To make a delectable, wonderful roast beast (that's what my kids call it, it's really roast beef), you need to take these tips into serious consideration before you start:

- Warm up. to ensure even cooking, you need to make sure your beast has been brought to room temperature (take it out of the fridge about an hour or so before you plan to start roasting). This prevents uneven cooking because there are no cold spots. But that doesn't mean you take a fresh piece of beef out the night before and let it sit on the countertop for 8 hours!
- Rack it up. Your roasting pan should have a rack for the beast to sit on. Invest in a good roasting pan with a properly fitting rack. This investment should set you back a few bucks, but the payoff is the final product. I bought myself a really nice roasting pan last year for Thanksgiving and spent some significant change on it. The resulting best turkey I had ever cooked (and I've cooked a lot of turkeys) has me 100 percent convinced: do not skimp on good tools that will last you a lifetime. My roasting pan is highly favored among my kitchen tools. Remember, too, that the object of roasting is to surround the food with dry heat. When the meat is racked, you are surrounding it, as opposed to having it sit on a pan and get mushy on the bottom and not cook as evenly as it could.
- Fat up. Place the fatty side of the beast up on the rack when you first start roasting. This helps the beast to self-baste.
- Pull it early. Say you need to cook your beast for 2 hours. Pull it from the oven 15 minutes early. It is going to continue cooking during the rest time, so it will be timed just right if you keep this in mind.

Serves 6

Ingredients:

1 jar prepared horseradish

1 8-oz container sour cream

Instructions:

This is absolutely delicious and I offer no recipe. It's all a matter of taste and the amount of kick you and your guests can tolerate.

I was raised eating roast beef nearly every Sunday night. My Father was British, and we didn't eat creamed horseradish; it was straight horseradish, right from the jar. I learned to love it from an early age.

Consequently, when I discovered the subtlety of creamed horseradish, I still made it relatively strong, using a 1:1 ratio, horseradish to sour cream. Make a little batch of it this way, taste it (with a glass of water handy), and then add more sour cream as necessary.

You need prepared horseradish (Morehouse, French's, and a few others make this - it's just plain, though and in a jar in the condiment section of the grocery store) and sour cream (8 ounces is more than adequate).

Beef Stock for Pan Gravy

Yield varies according to size and juiciness of roast.

Ingredients:

1 pound beef short ribs

2 onions, chopped

6 cloves garlic

3 carrots, snapped in half

2 celery stalks, snapped in half

avocado oil

salt and pepper, to taste

water as needed

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Before you get your roast started, you're going to want to get the bones roasting so you can make a lot of gravy. Place the short ribs in a roasting pan or baking dish. Add the onions, garlic, carrots, and celery. Drizzle avocado oil over the top, sprinkle on salt and pepper, and place in the oven for 45 minutes to 1 hour. The bones should be bronzed and browned, and so should the vegetables.

At the end of the cooking time, scrape everything into a soup pot, cover with cold water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Use a wire whisk and water to scrape up any stuck bits off the bottom of the baking pan and add to the pot. Let the pot boil at a fairly rigorous rate uncovered (you can cover it to get it started; it will come to a boil faster that way), and cook for nearly 1 hour. You should get a nice, strong browned liquid at the end of this: this will be gravy later on. Strain the broth and reserve.

Yield varies according to size and juiciness of roast.

Ingredients:

1 reserved beef stock (you just made this with bones)

Wondra or Pillsbury's fine flour

salt and pepper, to taste
white pepper

Instructions:

Okay, your roast has been removed from the pan and is resting comfortably. Skim the big greasy globs of fat from the roasting pan and place in a medium saucepan (there should be about 3 tablespoons or so of fat). Next take an equal amount of Wondra flour and add to the beef grease (I know this sounds gross, but if you trust me with your turkey gravy, you can trust me with your roast beef gravy, too). The heat should be about medium-high, and you need to whisk away to your heart's content until the roux is golden and thick, and naturally lumpless. This roux procedure will take you all of 5 minutes - very easy, you can't mess this up. Set your smooth roux aside.

Now back to the roasting pan. Add a cup of your reserved beef stock to the roasting pan and turn up the heat (you will probably need two burners for the job), and bring it to a boil. Using your wire whisk, scrape up all the browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Those browned bits contain concentrated beef flavor that will make your gravy gourmet quality. Don't skip this step. Now add the golden roux you just made and whisk like your life depends on it, salting and peppering to taste; add just a pinch of white pepper for that extra punch. In just moments, a beautiful, velvety brown gravy should emerge and fill you once again with the joy of accomplishment.



"Christmas is not
as much about
opening our
presents as
opening our
hearts."

JANICE MAEDITERE

Serves 6

Ingredients:

6 russet potatoes, peeled and quartered

unsalted butter

milk

salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions:

Fill a large pot with water and as you prepare the potatoes, throw them in after quartering them. After you are finished, drain the water if it looks dirty or murky and fill it up with fresh cold water. You need to adequately cover the potatoes, but there should be at least a couple inches of cooking room.

Place the pot of potatoes on a burner, turn up to high, and get the potatoes boiling. You can put a lid on it (it will boil faster) but stay in the room so it doesn't boil over. When it starts to boil, bring the heat down to a simmer and cook until fork tender (about 20 minutes or so, depending on how big your potato quarters are).

Now carefully drain that heavy pot. See if you can draft a big burly guy to do it for you. Of not, please be careful!

To your steaming pot of potatoes, add butter. How much? Well I don't want to be quoted on how much I use on Christmas Day (hey, it's a special occasion!); let your conscience be your guide.

Next, add salt and pepper to taste and add about 1/2 cup of milk.

That's the starting place. Now pull out your potato masher and put some elbow grease into it or get the big burly guy to do it. *DON'T* use the electric mixer on the gems! Potatoes have starch in them and when you over handle them (as in whip the daylights out of them with an electric mixer), the starch develops making your lovely mashed potatoes look more like wallpaper paste that needs thinning. Don't go there! Use an old-fashioned potato masher.

Roasted Butternut Squash and Onions

Serves 6

Ingredients:

1 large butternut squash, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes	1 to 2 tablespoons avocado oil
2 medium red onions, cut into 1- inch pieces	2 teaspoons lemon pepper
	1 teaspoon salt

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Combine all ingredients in a 9 X 13-inch baking dish. Toss to coat vegetables with oil and seasonings. Bake for 35 minutes or so, until the butternut squash is fork tender and nicely browned.

QUICK TIP:

BUY the rolls! Buy the rolls from a good bakery or the frozen dough kind are good. Make sure they're of a good quality. And **BUTTER**, not margarine. I use unsalted, but get whichever butter you prefer.



Sautéed Green Beans with Nutmeg

Serves 6

Ingredients:

6 handfuls of green beans	Generous dash of nutmeg (or
1 tablespoon of unsalted butter	you can grate it fresh)
1 splash of avocado oil	Salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions:

When you go to the grocery store, count out by the handful, how many beans you will need. Give each adult one handful, and count one handful per two small children. Yes, use your hands, grab a handful of beans, plop it into a plastic bag and consider it a serving.

I know...that doesn't give you pounds. Well, it's the best way I know to give you a good idea of what to buy. Who cares if there isn't a weight? (It's probably close to 1 1/4 pounds anyway, if your cooking for 6.) Here's what you do with those beans:

Wash beans and string them (pull the string starting at the stem and pull to the bottom). Then snap them in half (or cut them or leave them whole if they're thin and small). Steam them in a veggie steamer or boil them in a skillet half full of water. When they turn bright green, they're finished. (They will still be a little undercooked). Strain them and set aside.

In a skillet, heat the butter and oil over a medium-high heat and add the well-drained beans. Add the salt and pepper to taste and sauté them for about 2 to 3 minutes. Add a touch of nutmeg and sauté another minute or so. Beans should be tender but not mushy.

Serves 6 (or more)

Ingredients:

2 Sara Lee frozen pound cakes, thawed and sliced	1 pint fresh raspberries (OR whatever berry you can find fresh, or skip)
1 4-oz. jar raspberry preserves (I prefer seedless)	Crème Anglaise (recipe below)
1 pint whipping cream (NOT Cool Whip and NOT the stuff in the can)	Cream Sherry (optional)

Instructions:

In a footed trifle bowl (or a salad bowl with straight sides), layer everything, starting with pound cake slices spread with a generous spoonful of raspberry preserves on top. Place the first layer on the bottom with the ham side up.

Then add a layer of whipped cream, then some berries, then more pound cake smeared with raspberry jam. Do it again. End with whipped cream on top. Garnish with remaining berries.

Serve with Crème Anglaise, and the sherry on the side in a pitcher.

My dad was quite the cook, and he often made his English trifle, which was traditional, but it floated in entirely too much sherry and a liquidy custard. I didn't like it because it was so soggy and boozy. In my young mind, eating trifle was equivalent to eating something that had a cocktail accidentally spilled on it – and who wants to eat accidental cuisine? So I came up with my own version that not only preserves the integrity of the pound cake but also gives those who don't want the sherry some options. Trust me, this is easy, fabulous, and you are going to love it!

Makes 2 cups

Ingredients:

2 cups half-and-half

8 egg yolks

1 cup sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

This is easy to make, but you *must* follow the directions exactly. You don't want the half-and-half to boil! It will break and you have scrambled eggs floating in your sauce. Not good. For those in the UK and Australia, half-and-half is half cream and half milk.


Instructions:

In a saucepan over medium heat, combine the half-and-half, half the sugar and 2 teaspoons vanilla.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the egg yolks and remaining sugar until smooth.

When the cream mixture starts to come to a boil, remove it from the heat. Whisk a small amount of hot cream into the egg yolk mixture, then pour the egg yolk mixture into the remaining hot cream and whisk until smooth.

Return it to the heat and cook over medium heat, stirring, until mixture coats the back of a metal spoon and is slightly thickened. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter and remaining vanilla. To keep it from getting a skin on top, put plastic wrap directly on the surface.

A festive Christmas dinner table is shown with a wine glass, plates, and a small red Christmas tree. The background is a bokeh of warm lights. The text is overlaid on the image.

“Remember this
December, that
love weighs
more than
gold.”

JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON