



Christmas ham

Glazing the Christmas ham in my covered gas grill barbecue has become an annual tradition. Using indirect cooking – switch off the two inside burners and the two outer burners on – place the ham on a stand in a preheated barbecue, put the hood down and baste and cook for 2-3 hours. The results are stunning! You can also use the oven for this.

8.7kg cooked ham
425g tin pureed apricots
2-3T brown sugar
Whole cloves for garnish

Remove the skin from the ham and make a criss-cross pattern on the ham with a sharp knife. Place the cloves in the corners of each criss-cross pattern. Mix pureed apricots with brown sugar and brush over the ham generously. Baste the ham during the cooking time, about every 20-30 minutes works well. Or you can place on a roasting tray with tin foil placed in the bottom and bake 165°C for 1.5-2 hours. You can glaze a ham at a higher heat for less time – but this way the ham is heated through gently and completely.

Ma's turkey stuffing

(Enough to fill the cavity of a large chicken or 3.5kg turkey.)

30g butter
½ onion, finely chopped
2 cups fresh breadcrumbs
1 diced apple, peeled
2 rashers bacon (optional)
½ cup chopped fresh herbs (parsley, sage, thyme, dill, rosemary, chives and oregano)*
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
½ cup sultanas or other dried fruits like chopped apricots or chopped prunes

Place the chopped onion in a bowl with the butter and microwave on high for three to four minutes. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix well. If you like, add cooked bacon.

It's important to always have the stuffing and the bird at the same temperature. Placing a hot stuffing in a very cold bird is not advised.

* This may seem a heavy measure of fresh herbs and you can reduce the quantity if you prefer, but my pleasure in visiting the vegetable garden to cut fresh herbs for the stuffing is a highlight in the preparation, and our family just loves the intensity of the mixed herb flavour you get with this recipe.

Gravy

To make turkey gravy from scratch, take the bird from the pan after roasting and remove most of the fat from the pan. Leave a little of the residual in the bottom and, of course, all those delicious tasty bits that have stuck to the pan. Lightly add flour and scrape with a fork all the fat, bits and flour together to make a strange floury, crumbly mix. When this has cooked out (or you can manage it no longer without fear of burning the entire thing) gradually add vegetable water or stock and season, whisking all the time. A spoonful of cranberry sauce or mustard or chutney will transform the gravy from the mundane into something stellar. Season to taste.



Super easy fresh cherry and raspberry trifle

Will feed 10 people.

36 fresh cherries, stoned and cut in half
½ cup creme de cassis
225g unfilled sponge (supermarket one is fine)
1 small punnet fresh or frozen raspberries
2 cups custard (buy one 1kg custard and keep in fridge)
300ml cream (whipped, but not sweetened)
¼ cup flaked almonds

Place the cherries in a bowl and drizzle the creme de cassis over the fruit. Cover and leave on the bench for 60 minutes. Break up half the sponge in serving bowl, scatter with half the cherries and the creme de cassis and then half the raspberries. Repeat. Make a few insertions into the sponge so the hot custard (that is heating covered for two minutes in the microwave) can ooze through the layers. Pour one cup of hot custard over the sponge and fruit. Wait a few minutes and then pour the remaining cup of hot custard over the sponge. Cover and refrigerate for an hour or two before serving. To serve, top with whipped cream and flaked almonds. Note: The great feature of this delicious dessert is that the cream and fruit are both non-sweetened. The cherries are wonderfully sweet in December and the sweetness in the commercial custard is perfect for the raspberries.



Setting the festive table:

- The week before Christmas get the table or tables sorted. Buy or borrow extra chairs and a collapsible table if necessary. If you're planning to eat outdoors, make sure you have sun protection and a wet-weather strategy.
- If you're planning a super casual Christmas dinner, keep in mind that most people like to eat at a table.
- Don't feel you have to invest in an expensive, once-a-year festive tablecloth – buy single unfitted sheets on sale. Go with pure white or if coloured, buy several sheets of the same colour.
- A ribbon down the centre of the table, with ivy and candles, makes for a pretty table without too much fuss. If you don't normally use candlesticks then pick up inexpensive glass candle holders on sale throughout the year.
- Creating an area away from the food prep and service to store cold drinks and glasses is a very sensible idea. Get creative with your drink service. Fill a large chilly bin with ice and water for the beers or a large garden urn can be used for wine cooling in the same way. I have seen a wheel barrow filled with ice to support the drinks – why not? Just not inside!
- Plan out the serving dishes and the serving cutlery. My American mother always sets her 25-plus table complete with serving dishes and cutlery days before the event. The result of such planning means her festive meals run like clockwork.
- When cooking for a crowd clear bench space really helps, so for Christmas Day, store the TV and any other appliances not needed in the garage or a spare room.
- Plan refrigeration space for leftovers. In warmer weather it is so important to cover and chill those leftovers as quickly as possible.



GRAVY

Even top chefs keep Bisto in the pantry. Both these options are good.

Bisto Liquid Gravy Chicken and Herb 165g \$2.99

This may be a life-saver if the gravy turns to custard. Just 40 seconds in the microwave. Per 100g total fat 1.4g, sugars 1.7g and sodium 515mg.

Bisto Gravy Light Brown 200g \$2.90

Solid performer and a nice safety net for the cook who is trying to get everything sorted. Add 1½ tablespoons of the mix to water and heat and cook for a few minutes. Per 100ml total fat less than 1g, sugars less than 1g, sodium 479mg.



STUFFING

If you are looking for a commercial product both of these would work well with chicken or turkey or rolled into balls, heated and served as a side dish with ham. Add a little lemon juice, zest and any freshly chopped herbs to the mix for a fresh balance.

Gregg Stuffing Sage and Onion 200g \$3.99

Per 100g 1.3g total fat, 1.4g sugars, 755mg sodium.

Gregg Stuffing Homestyle 200g \$3.99

Per 100g 1.3g total fat, 1.4g sugars, 756mg sodium.



BEST VANILLA ICECREAM

Kohu Rd Vanilla 1 litre \$17.95

This is pricey, but hey, it's Christmas and well worth the investment as a small scoop delivers a big bang of flavour. Great depth of vanilla taste, the creaminess coats the mouth and the consistency of this award-winning icecream will delight. A great gift for a family dinner, it makes strawberries or shortbread shine. Long vanilla after taste and could pass as homemade if you were a very good icecream maker. Packaging says no artificial preservatives, colours, or emulsifiers, 90% organic ingredients.

Per 100g 15.1g total fat, 17.4g sugars, 96mg sodium.



Kapiti Vanilla Bean Icecream 1 litre \$10.29

Who doesn't love Kapiti icecream? Their ginger variation is so good it should be banned. This vanilla variation is better priced and has great taste. A premium icecream but just not quite the depth of vanilla flavour of the award-winning Kohu Rd. No one will complain and does not taste mass produced. Per 100g total fat 16.4g, sugars 20.5g, sodium 74mg.



FRUIT MINCE PIES

Pandoro, six large fruit mince pies, \$17.99

Miss Piggy says "never eat more than you can lift" and these fruit mince pies are big and about as generous as you can manage. These are pricey at \$3 each but why not just have one delicious, full-flavoured fruit mince pie gently heated than a nasty version where the pastry dominates and the mince is AWOL? A super gift to take to a party. Ideally serve warm with lite creme fraiche as a dessert. They're too big as a coffee accompaniment. No preservatives or colours. Per 100g 9.4g fat, 36.4g sugar, sodium 217mg.



BUBBLES

Lindauer Special Reserve Brut Cuvee (\$20.95) and Lindauer Special Reserve Blanc de Blancs (\$20.95)

Both will serve your Christmas dinner well. Lindauer Special Reserve Brut Cuvee has well-balanced vanilla-dusted fruit qualities and will work with ham and turkey. Reliable bubbles at a great price. Try the Blanc de Blancs as an aperitif. Made from chardonnay grapes, it is the perfect partner to seafood.