

Christmas Pudding

Christmas pudding, the rich culmination of a long process of development of 'plum puddings' which can be traced back to the early 15th century. The first types were not specifically associated with Christmas. Like early mince pies, they contained meat, of which a token remains in the use of suet. The original form, plum pottage, were made from chopped beef or mutton, onions and perhaps other root vegetables, and dried fruit. As the name suggests, it was a fairly liquid preparation: this was before the invention of the pudding cloth made large puddings feasible. As was usual with such dishes, it was served at the beginning of the meal. When new kinds of dried fruit became available in Britain, first raisins, and then prunes in the 16th century, they were added. The name 'plum' refers to a prune; but it soon came to mean any dried fruit. In the 16th century variants were made with white meat...and gradually the meat came to be omitted, to be replaced by suet. The root vegetables disappeared, although even now Christmas pudding often still includes a token carrot...By the 1670s, it was particularly associated with Christmas and called 'Christmas pottage'. The old plum pottage continued to be made into the 18th century, and both versions were still served as a filling first course rather than as a dessert...What currently counts as the traditional Christmas pudding recipe has been more or less established since the 19th century.

"The plum pudding's association with Christmas takes us back to medieval England and the Roman Catholic Church's decree that the 'pudding should be made on the twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity, that it be prepared with thirteen ingredients to represent Christ and the twelve apostles, and that that every family member stir it in turn from east to west to honour the Magi (3 kings) and their supposed journey in that direction.'... Banned by the Puritans in the 1660s for its rich ingredients, the pudding and its customs came back into popularity during the reign of George I. Known sometimes as the Pudding King, George I requested that plum pudding be served as part of his royal feast when he celebrated his first Christmas in England after arriving from Hanover to take the throne in 1714. By 1740, a recipe for 'plum porridge' appeared in *Christmas Entertainments*. In the Victorian era, Christmas annuals, magazines, and cookbooks celebrated the sanctity of family as much as the sanctity of Jesus' birth, and the tradition of all family members stirring the pudding was often referenced...Poorer families made the riches version of plum pudding that they could afford...Even workhouse inmates anticipated a plum pudding on Christmas day.

In England some people still refer to the Sunday before the beginning of Advent as "Stir-Up Sunday"...In past times the words "stir up"...reminded people to begin preparing their Christmas puddings...Children chanted a rhymed verse on that day that mixed the words of the collect with requests for special Christmas fare...Thus, the preparation of the Christmas pudding eventually became associated with this day. Folk beliefs advised each member to take a turn stirring the pudding, and ace that was believed to confer good luck. Another custom encouraged stirrers to move the spoon in clockwise motion, close their eyes, and make a wish."

The tradition of inserting inedible trinkets into holiday foods is ancient. It descends from pagan rituals for good luck and fortune. It is difficult to pinpoint the genesis of inserting charms (coins, thimbles, rings) into Christmas puddings. Some say it developed in Victorian England; others date the practice to the Stuart period. Like their ancient counterparts, pudding charms were meant to bring luck to their finders.