

Yalbury Cottage

hotel and restaurant

Stress and Christmas seem to go hand in hand, but really is there any need for it??

I have been cooking for many years in some of the top establishments around the world and have found the secret to a stress free Christmas is all in the planning and preparation. It makes no difference whether you are cooking for 100 people or just a small family of 4, the principle remain the same.

By planning you will not only save time but money as well. You can then put that money towards buying better quality produce, which will also add to the wow factor for you and your guests at Christmas. Too many people over-purchase at Christmas and end up throwing food away, which is such a waste. All because they do not take time to sit and think about what they need and end up impulse buying once they are in the supermarket. If you are one of these people a good idea is to do your shopping on line and get it delivered this way you will only be buying what you really need and not "Oh, that will be nice!"

The secret to a perfect Christmas meal lies in the preparation...

What are you going to cook? Draw up a menu for each day - Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and for the 27th. This will help you do your shopping list and you can purchase the right products. Also do not be scared to show the menu to the people who are invited. This will give them a chance to tell you if they can eat the dishes that you are intending to prepare and will avoid any last minute embarrassing moments when you find out that your sons new girl friend is a vegetarian... Take time to think your menus through. Give consideration to preparation times and don't be too ambitious, after all it is your Christmas as well and the last thing anyone wants is a stressed host. Relax, enjoy and be proud of what you have prepared. Try not to take it all on your self, delegate out the cooking which can also be fun! Here's what we do:

Christmas Eve dinner: I cook and the family serve, I keep it simple soup, followed by fish, cheese board and then dessert.

Christmas day breakfast: My wife will cook; we eat our Christmas lunch early on Christmas day so we do not have a fully cooked breakfast but have a continental breakfast with croissants and pannatone egg bread with orange flavoured maple syrup.

Christmas day lunch: I cook with help from my brothers. Mick, second chef, Simon Wash up also cooks the red cabbage every year which is fantastic, Jim keeps us supplied with beer!!!

Christmas dinner: My sisters create a cold selection of sandwiches and rolls, cheese and biscuits and cakes...etc

Boxing Day breakfast: I cook a BIG full Monty breakfast (but the hat stays on!!).

Boxing Day afternoon tea: My sisters take care

The Perfect
Stress free

Christmas



Boxing Day dinner: We split up the family into groups and one group take care of the starter, one group the main course, another the desserts and the other group the setting of the table and serving. They tell me in advance what they want to cook and I buy what they need and have it ready for them.

This way I don't spend all my time off at Christmas in the kitchen and you don't get asked a thousand times "can you help" everyone knows what they have to do and are happy to be part of the fun!

How many people will you be cooking for? Take time to work out how much of each ingredient you need and stick to it, this will avoid over purchasing. If you do buy too much then you will give yourself another headache of where and how to store it. Once you have served the meal you have enough leftovers to feed an army, and you cannot fit it all back in the fridge. If you leave it out on top of the oven for a day or two, you will only end up throwing it all out. It is so much more dangerous these days to leave any food out over night. In the good old days before central heating this might have been OK, but today our houses are warm and therefore a perfect place for food born bacteria to grow. It is a well-known fact that at Christmas time food poisoning is at its highest even beating summer time with BBQ's!! So do not let all that hard work of preparing be tarnished by giving everyone food poisoning.

How do you store all the produce? You should start getting ready for Christmas in November!!! Start by clearing out your freezers and fridges and use up all those odds and ends. Then defrost the freezer and give the fridge a good clean out so that valuable space is not taken up with ice and things that might come in handy but never do.....You are now ready to fill it up again with all your treats for Christmas.

When should I order and buy all the food? Once you have done your menu split up your shopping list into the following:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Meat
- Fish
- Dairy
- Dry items (ketchup, brown sauce, cheese biscuits tomato puree, cereal etc...)
- House hold (washing up liquid, bleach washing powder etc...)
- Treats!!! (SWEETS!! chocolates, nuts, crisps, dips, etc...)
- Alcohol/mixers/drinks (do you really need an example for this one!!)

Then set a date next to each one when you are going to purchase and pick up each group. I would recommend the following

Fruit and vegetables: pick up on the 21st. Order if you can with your local grocers if you have one before so that your order is all ready to be picked up this will help give you time and less stress.

Meat: Please, please, please if you can go to your local butcher and order your meat from them, make sure it has a great reputation and you can check them out on the web to make sure they are as good as they say they are. Order the meat to be picked up on the 24th, last minute and make sure that your fridge is empty before you pick up the meat so it is straight home and straight into the fridge.

Fish: The price of fish at Christmas time goes through the roof so I always buy my fish for Christmas at the end of November (once I have defrosted the freezer) and freeze it, that way I can afford a better quality fish as I am buying it when demand is low. Make sure you bring out the fish from the freezer 24 hours before you are going to us it and leave it in the fridge to defrost NOT OUT ON THE SIDE OR RUNNING UNDER HOT WATER.

Dairy: Pick at the same time as the meat.

Dry items: There is no reason why these items can not be brought with you tokens from the supermarket at the beginning of the month along with house hold items; treats (just lock the treats away to resist temptation!!)...and booze.

How much should I buy of each item? This is the most important area for not over buying and can save you lots of time and money. Below is a guide to how much you should plan per person.

If you are purchasing fruit and vegetables in the supermarket try and stay away from the pre-packed items and opt to buy the loose items instead, this way you can not only choose the quality and the size you like but you will buy only what you really need, after all do you really need 4 large parsnips for 4 people (which you end up throwing out in January after it goes limp.)?

Vegetables: work on 65g raw weight per person as a guideline. One large parsnip will easily serve four people as well as one small swede. Potatoes work on three nice sized pieces per person.

Turkey: You can buy just turkey breast if you are a family of 4 and look for about 250-300g per person, this should still give you some left over for sandwiches.

If you are buying a whole turkey, work on a pound (500g) per person, which will also give you some left over for sandwiches but not for the rest of the month!! The same goes for duck or goose.

Ask your butcher to bone and roll the legs and take out the wishbone, this way you do not end up over cooking the breast meat just to cook the legs, which not many people eat in anyway which I think is a shame. Also by doing this you will make it much easier to carve and get more out of the bird in portions.

Cooking time for a Turkey is 15-20 minutes per pound and 20 minutes over in a moderate oven 200 degrees c.

Chipolatas: Ask your butcher to wrap them for you and work on 2 per person.

When do I start getting ready with the food? From experience of cooking for parties I always try to give myself a days head start and aim to have all the prep done by 2pm on Christmas Eve or you can even do this on the night of the 23rd.

Remember to get the family involved and make it fun, even my six year old daughter and 7 year old son help and have done for years and love and look forward to helping on Christmas eve, the quicker we get it done the more play time we get.

Basic things you need are large freezer bags and a large cool box, I do this every year with the family when we are all together. We prepare all the vegetables (Carrots, parsnips, swede, Brussels spouts, peel and cut potatoes ready for roasting and place in a large container and cover with water then place in the cool box), place them into freezer bags, seal them and then place them in the cool box.

Then I get a couple of ice blocks and wrap them in tea towels (this stops them freezing any items they come in contact with.) and then I seal up the cool box and place it in the garage or the shed.

This way nothing is taking up valuable space in my fridge and I still have place for my beer!!!

I also cook my red cabbage, prep my chipolatas wrapped in bacon, make my stuffing, prep my desserts and prepare my dinner menu for Christmas Eve.

If I do not have the time to make everything myself what can I get away with buying?

By following all of the above you have saved much needed time and stress.

But my advice would be to keep it simple, focus on the main items and do not worry about the frills.

For example:

Canapés, nibbles, and dips - BUY

Starter

Soup or cold platter - MAKE YOURSELF

Main Course

Fish, turkey goose - MAKE YOURSELF

Cranberry sauce - BUY

Cheese - BUY

Dessert

If you really do not have time BUY do not stress your self out if you do not feel confident in doing this... A good idea is if you do buy the dessert then buy a dessert wine to go with the dessert and shift the attention away from the dessert and onto the wine.

Mince pie's same as above if you have time to make your own great if not BUY

Christmas pudding BUY, but also do not buy one if you know no one in your family likes it!!!

Here are some menu ideas:

Christmas Eve Dinner

Soups

Watercress soup truffle foam

Butternut squash and carrot soup

White onion and cider soup cheese and onion toastie

Or

Smoked salmon platter with lemon and capers

Double baked cheese soufflé

Main Course

Pan fried sea bass with garlic mash and wilted baby spinach

Fillet of beef Wellington with crisp baked potatoes

Cheese board

Dessert

Baileys crème brulee

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### Christmas Day

#### Christmas Day Breakfast

Pannetoni eggy bread with Orange syrup

Pancakes with maple syrup

Waffles with clotted cream

#### Christmas Day Lunch

Creamy leek and potato soup

Seared scallops on warm ratatouille

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Roast Turkey, Goose or Duck (or ask your butcher or farm shop to do a roularde of the three birds for you!!) Chipolatas wrapped in smoked streaky bacon, date and chestnut stuffing  
Roast potatoes, honey glazed parsnips, brussel sprouts with bacon and roast chestnuts, diced swede baked in cream flavoured with garlic and lemon thyme, buttered carrots, wilted curly kale, and braised red cabbage.

Home made cranberry sauce and roast gravy

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Christmas pudding  
Pannatone bread and butter pudding

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## Boxing Day breakfast

Fully cooked English breakfast  
Kedgerree  
Or if you have any smoked salmon left over mix it with scrambled eggs  
and serve on toasted English muffins

This should see you through to dinner.

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I hope that this has been of use to you and helps ease that Christmas stress and leaves you some time to enjoy yourself, this is a special time of year.

If some thing is not working do not worry about it, worrying about it will not put it right, instead focus what you can put right and take your enjoyment from that!

Over the page are some recipes which have been with me for many years and have become like old friends which I see each year. I hope they are as kind to you as they have been to me!

If you need any further information, help or recipes then please do not hesitate to contact me by one of the following.

# A very Merry Christmas and a fun filled New Year

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## Christmas Recipes

### Cranberry sauce

This recipe is fantastic and because it can be made two weeks ahead of time it makes it another thing to not get stressed about, only thing is keep it a secret other wise you might not have any left by the time Christmas day comes along, at it also goes well with pate, pork pies and cold sausages, just the thing we boys like to munch on after a Christmas party!!

500g Fresh cranberries  
1 number Whole orange zested and juiced  
1 number Whole lemon zested and juiced  
150ml Red wine  
2 number Cloves  
1 number Cinnamon stick  
250g Caster sugar

#### Method

Place all the ingredients into a thick bottomed saucepan and bring to boil then simmer for 20 minutes stirring frequently.

Allow to cool, and then place in sterilized jar in the fridge, keeps for two weeks.

### Bread Sauce

1pt Milk  
1 Small onion studded with cloves  
40g Fresh white bread crumbs  
Salt and cayenne

#### Method

Simmer milk in a thick bottomed sauce pan and infuse with the studded onion for about 15 minutes

Remove the onion, mix in the crumbs and simmer for 2-3 minutes

Season with salt and cayenne pepper

For something different add a little truffle oil to the milk.

### The Perfect Roast Potatoes

Use king Edwards and you will not go wrong and you will be left with a crisp fluffy roast potato.

#### Method

Peel and cut potatoes to size required

Boil potatoes for 5 – 10 minutes according to the size of potatoes

Strain and dry off the potatoes in a saucepan over heat shaking the saucepan until the potatoes become fluffy

Place in a hot roasting tray, add vegetable oil, paprika, garlic cloves unpeeled, salt and pepper, mix thoroughly and place in a hot oven at 250c, gas mark 9 for 30 minutes

#### Hints

Peel the potatoes the day before and cover with water in a saucepan. Cover with the lid and place in the bottom of the cool box and leave out side

### Garlic foam

A very quick and easy way to impress your friends and family. You do need a hand blender to make this. You can replace the garlic for any other flavour you may wish.

250ml vegetable stock  
1 bulb garlic  
100g butter  
100ml whipping cream

## Method

Clean and slice the garlic and add to the stock, then bring to the boil to infuse.

Take off the heat and remove the garlic slices with a slotted spoon. Add butter and cream and swirl to emulsify.

Using a hand blender, whiz the liquid until frothy - this may take a few minutes, so be patient!

Spoon off the top of the foam and pour over the venison.

## Honey glazed parsnips - Serves 4

Quick and very easy way of getting the perfect parsnip

2no Large parsnips  
2 tablsps Clear honey  
3 sprigs Fresh thyme  
Salt and pepper to taste

### Method

Peel the parsnips and cut into large pieces.

Blanch the parsnips in boiling water for 3 minutes. Remove from the water and set aside.

In a frying pan heat the honey until it starts to foam, add the parsnips and continue to cook on a low heat until the parsnips are golden brown.

Add the fresh thyme and season to taste. Serve

## Savoy cabbage with pancetta and cream - Serves 4

1no Small savoy cabbage shredded  
50g Diced shallot or onion  
25g Butter  
100g Diced pancetta  
50ml White wine  
75ml Double cream  
Seasoning to taste

### Method

Heat a thick bottomed sauce pan and add the butter. Once melted add the onions and the pancetta and cook for a few minutes until the pancetta is cooked.

Add the shredded cabbage and the white wine. Bring back to boil.

Add the cream and boil until the cream is thick. Correct the seasoning and serve.

## Watercress soup - 6 portions

10 Bunches watercress  
120gr sliced onions  
140gr chopped celery  
80 cl Vegetable stock  
50gr butter  
Salt and pepper  
6 slices country bread

### Method:

Separate the leaves from the watercress stem. Blanch the leaves in salted boiling water then allow to cool in iced water.

Sweat gently the onion, celery and watercress stems in butter then add the vegetable stock and simmer for 10 minutes.

Mix together the blanched watercress leaves and the watercress stock, check the seasoning and allow to cool.

Reheat the soup and garnish with the truffle foam, serve with toasted country bread

## **Meat stuffing By Mr Christophe Gavois - Chestnut and date - 6 portions**

1kg sausage meat  
150gr breadcrumbs  
200gr chopped onions  
1teaspoon chopped thyme  
1 teaspoon chopped sage  
1 teaspoon chopped tarragon  
200gr chopped chestnut  
200gr diced dates  
5 cl chicken stock  
20 gr butter  
1 beaten egg

Method:

Sweat gently the onion with the butter until cooked, add the chopped thyme then the chicken stock.

Mix all ingredients together and check the seasoning

## **Bread stuffing By Mr Christophe Gavois - Chestnut and date - 6 portions**

300gr diced onions  
200gr diced carrots  
200gr diced celery  
1 chopped clove of garlic  
1 teaspoon chopped thyme  
1 teaspoon chopped sage  
1 teaspoon chopped tarragon  
1 pinch of nutmeg  
200gr chopped chestnuts  
150gr diced dates  
200gr white breadcrumbs  
1 beaten egg  
100gr butter  
5cl chicken stock

Method:

Sweat gently in butter, carrot, onion, celery, garlic and thyme for 5 minutes.

Add the nutmeg, the breadcrumbs, sage, tarragon, chestnut, dates and chicken stock.

Allow to cool slightly, check the seasoning and add the egg

## **Braised red cabbage - 10 portions**

1 sliced small red cabbage (1.2 kg)  
100gr chopped onions  
250gr diced apple  
30cl red wine  
30cl cranberry juice  
20cl apple juice  
2 tablespoon brown sugar  
1 bay leaf  
2 cinnamon sticks  
3 cloves  
1 teaspoon grated nutmeg  
100gr butter

Method:

Cook the onions in 20gr of butter until soft.

Add the spices and cabbage and cook over medium heat for a further 10 minutes.

Add the red wine apple juice, cranberry juice sugar and apples.

Cover and cook slowly for 80 minutes.

Remove the lid add the remaining butter and finish to cook for another 15 minutes until all the liquid has evaporated.

Cabbage should be cooked 4 to 5 days in advance and reheated slowly with butter and a drop of water

## **Bailey's crème brulee - 6 portions**

900gr cream  
100gr Bailey  
250gr sugar  
2 whole eggs  
8 egg yolk

Method

Boil the cream and Baileys together.

Pour over whisked whole eggs, egg yolk and sugar.

Pour the mixture into an oven proof dish and bake in a bain marie (150c) for 40 minutes

Sprinkle with sugar and caramelize under the grill

## **Pannatone bread and butter pudding - 6 portions**

½ each pannatone  
50gr raisins  
50gr diced dry apricots  
50gr diced prunes  
50gr diced dry figs  
5gr lemon zest  
1lt cream  
200gr milk  
9 egg yolk  
150gr sugar  
3 vanilla pods  
Icing sugar

Method

Boil the cream, milk and vanilla together then pour over the whisked sugar and egg yolk

Pour the mixture over the slice pannatone and dry fruits

Bake in the oven (150c) for 30 minutes

When ready sprinkle with icing sugar and caramelize under the grill

## **Brandy sauce**

2no Whole eggs  
100g Caster sugar  
50g White flour  
10g Custard powder  
1pt Milk

Method

Whisk the eggs and sugar in a bowl until almost white

Mix in the flour and the custard powder

Boil the milk in a thick-bottomed pan, then whisk into the eggs, sugar and flour and mix well.

Return the mix to a clean pan and stir to the boil.

Add a few drops of vanilla essence or a vanilla pod

Remove from the heat and pour into a basin

Add a dash of brandy to taste

For an even better brandy sauce why not add 100g of chocolate to the milk and proceed as above!!!!!!!!!!!!

## MINCE PIES (makes approx. 24)

200g Plain Flour  
125g Soft Butter  
75g Icing Sugar  
400g Mincemeat  
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon  
A little salt  
4 sheets of Filo Pastry, each cut into 6 x 5cm wide strips  
1 egg beaten

### Method

For the pastry sift together flour and salt onto a clean work surface. Make a well in the centre. Add into the centre of the well the butter, icing sugar, lemon zest and egg. Incorporate the flour until you have a smooth dough. Leave to rest and firm up in the fridge, covered, for at least 20 minutes.

Bring out of the fridge, leave for a few minutes, then roll out on a lightly floured surface to about 3mm thick. Using a 3cm round pastry cutter, stamp out 24 rounds. Use these to line 3 cm patty tins.

Divide the mincemeat between the lined patty tins, filling to just over half their depth.

Take one whole strip of filo Pastry and lightly egg wash, take another strip, place on top of the first piece of filo pastry and again egg wash. Cut into 10cm squares, slightly ruffle and place on top of the mince pies to form a lid. Do the same with the remaining pies.

Bake in a preheated oven for about 15 minutes on 200c or gas mark 6. Remove the tins and place to cool on a wire rack. Serve warm with a dusting of icing sugar.

## Breakfasts

### Pancakes

600g Self-raising All-Purpose flour  
1 tsp Salt  
1 tsp Bicarbonate of soda  
50g Sugar  
750ml Buttermilk  
250 ml Milk  
115g Butter  
4ea Eggs  
1 tbsp Vanilla extract

### Method

Sift the dry ingredients together.

Combine the wet ingredients and add to the dry.

Mixture should be slightly lumpy.

Pour into hot frying pan, slightly oiled, 4" in diameter and cook until golden brown on both sides.

### Waffle Batter

500g Soft flour  
50g Sugar  
6ea Whole eggs  
750g Milk  
180g Melted butter  
180g Egg whites  
Pinch of salt

### Method

Combine flour, sugar, whole eggs, milk and butter.

Whip together the whites and the salt, and fold into the mixture.

Pour into hot waffle machine.

## Kedegree

50g Butter  
3ea Spring onions, chopped  
2tsp Curry powder  
150g Rice  
125g Smoked Trout, cut into cubes  
100ml Cream  
150ml Chicken stock  
2ea Eggs, hard boiled  
Handful fresh parsley, chopped  
Handful fresh chives, chopped

### Method

Melt butter in large saucepan and add spring onions, frying until soft  
Add curry powder and rice and stir well  
Add chicken stock and bring rice to boil. Cook for 5 minutes  
Before taking rice off the boil, add the haddock, cream and parsley  
Serve in a bowl, topped with sliced boiled egg and chopped chives.

## Pannetonne with Orange Syrup - Serves 4 people

This is a great way to use up the left over panettone from the bread and butter pudding. Just what you need on boxing day morning after all that savoury turkey.

4 large pieces Pannetone  
200ml Milk  
3 Eggs  
40g Sugar  
Pinch of cinnamon powder  
Zest of 2 oranges

### Method

In a bowl whisk together eggs, sugar, cinnamon and orange zest. Step by step add the milk.  
Place in the fridge  
Cut 3 large pieces of Pannetone and plunge them into the mixture. Toast them from both sides in a hot non-stick frying pan with a little vegetable oil until golden brown.

## Orange Syrup

50ml Maple syrup  
Segments and juice of 2 oranges

### Method

Bring to boil the maple syrup until reduced by half. Add the segments and the juice, return to boil and pour over the Pannetone and serve warm dusted with icing sugar.

