

## **Christmas dinner at home with Nigel Smith, National Museums Liverpool's Executive Chef**

One of the key things for me when it comes to Christmas dinner is making sure that it's a family occasion and enjoying as much of the day as possible. This is achieved by doing lots of preparation beforehand. It's also really important to buy good quality ingredients. I hope that you enjoy my guide to cooking a great Christmas dinner with all the trimmings.

### **Turkey**

To prepare the bird I put a big pan of water on to boil, big enough to immerse the bird. I also have an ice cold bath of water on standby. I then dip the bird into the boiling water for a minute then into the cold water for the same amount of time, and repeat three times. This removes any excess blood and tightens the skin. At this stage I remove the legs as it's a different type of meat.

I then heat a large frying pan and add 1 tablespoon of duck or goose fat to both the legs and carcass (with breasts) to achieve a golden brown colour. At this stage I would weigh the bird and cook it at 175 ° Celsius for 20 minutes per pound, plus an extra 15 minutes. So, for a 4lb bird the cooking time would be 4 x 20 mins + 15 mins = 1hr 35 mins. I always probe my bird when it's cooked to make sure it has achieved 73° Celsius. I cook the legs at 140 ° Celsius for 40 minutes per pound plus an extra 40 minutes, so we can achieve moist and succulent meat. I also cover the bird with foil.

I put the legs on the bottom of the oven and sit my oven tray inside another tray filled with water. This softens the heat. Then cover with foil.

### **Vegetables**

I prepare the vegetables the day before. I blanch them lightly in boiling salted water so they remain crisp, and then refrigerate them overnight. On Christmas Day I plunge them back into boiling salted water shortly before serving which keeps them crisp. Butter lightly and serve.

With parsnips I blanch them in boiling salted water the day before and refrigerate. On Christmas day I sauté them with goose/duck fat, add 4-5 tablespoons of maple syrup, 1 clove and 1 star anise and then roast at 175 ° Celsius for 30 minutes to get a golden brown colour.

### **Bread sauce**

For the bread sauce I boil my milk with a studded onion and a bay leaf (a studded onion is half an onion with 7 or 8 cloves pressed into the flesh). Simmer for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, I take some white bread, remove the crusts and then blend until a crumb. I then add this to the milk until the sauce thickens enough to serve.

### **Stuffing**

I like to make a chestnut stuffing with some really good quality Cumberland sausage meat. The chestnuts I use are generally pre-cooked in a tight

vacuum packet. Place the chestnuts in a blender and lightly blend so the pieces are about ½ cm in size.

Then, finely chop an onion and caramelize it in a pan, before adding the chestnuts and lightly cooking. The chestnut mix and the sausage meat are put into a mixer and mixed until all ingredients are blended. I then take a small piece of the mixture and fry in a pan to check the seasoning, adjusting if needed.

### **Gravy**

For the gravy, once the turkey is cooked remove it from the roasting tin and leave it to rest in a warm place. I pour off and save all the excess fat which is great for roast potatoes. I then heat the bottom of the tin on the stove until the liquid starts to boil. Add a good ½ bottle of red wine and try and get the residue off the bottom of the tin as this is where the flavour is, before reducing the liquid by two thirds.

Next, add some chicken stock or bouillon and a little *buerre manie* (equal quantities of flour and butter mixed together used to thicken sauces). Cook out to gain the right consistency.

### **Potatoes**

I cook the potatoes the day before in boiling salted water until just cooked, then refrigerate overnight. I then heat a roasting tin with goose or duck fat - about 5 or 6 tablespoons - and place the dry potatoes into the hot fat. It's important the potatoes are dry otherwise the fat will spit furiously. I get a beautiful golden brown colour to the potatoes before placing them in an oven at 200° Celsius for 30 - 40 minutes until crispy.

### **Sausages wrapped in bacon**

I buy some chipolata sausages from the butcher and twist another link in the centre of each sausage. I then take smoked back bacon and roll it out onto cling film until it's very thin. Next, roll the sausage in the bacon for two complete turns of the sausage. These are then cooked at 175 ° Celsius for 8-10 minutes.

**Season's Greetings!**