

A HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS CAKES

Christmas cake is an English tradition that began as Plum porridge. People ate the porridge on Christmas Eve, using it to line their stomachs after a day of fasting. Remember that in those days the season of Advent was a Penitential time. (I was in the 1960's that the Anglican church converted this season to a season of Joyful Expectation and doing so, changed the Vestments to BLUE – the colour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of Heaven).

Soon dried fruit, spices and honey were added to the porridge mixture, and eventually it turned into Christmas pudding. In the 16th century, oatmeal was removed from the original recipe, and butter, wheat flour and eggs were added. These ingredients helped hold the mixture together, resulting in a boiled plum cake. Richer families with ovens began making fruit cakes with marzipan, an almond sugar paste, for Easter. For Christmas, they made a similar cake using seasonal dried fruit and spices. The spices represented the exotic eastern spices brought by the Wise Men. This cake became known as 'Christmas cake'.

Christmas cakes are made in many different ways, but generally they are variations on a classic fruitcake. They can be light, dark, moist, dry, heavy, spongy, leavened, unleavened, or lot more fruits than usual – showing forth the heritage of the Family Christmas Cake.

They are made in many different shapes, with frosting, glazing, a dusting of confectioner's sugar or plain. The traditional Scottish Christmas cake, also known as the Whisky Dundee, is very popular. It is a light crumbly cake with currants, raisins, cherries and Scotch whisky. Other types of Christmas cakes include an apple crème cake and a mincemeat cake.

The apple crème cake is made with apples, other fruit, raisins, eggs, cream cheese and whipping cream. The mincemeat cake is made with traditional mincemeat or vegetarian mincemeat, flour, eggs, etc. It can also be steamed as a Christmas pudding.

The trick with a great Christmas cake is in the timing. All Christmas cakes are made in advance. Many make them in November, keeping the cake upside down in an airtight container. A small amount of brandy, sherry or whisky is poured into holes in the cake every week until Christmas. This process is called 'feeding' the cake.

In Japan, Christmas cake is a frosted sponge cake with strawberries, chocolates or seasonal fruit and in the Philippines, Christmas cake is a yellow pound cake with nuts or the traditional British fruitcake. Both cakes are soaked in brandy or rum, a palm sugar syrup and water. Rosewater or orange flower water is usually added.



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