

Sweet & Savoury TRADITIONS

Celebrating the people and dishes contributing to our community table

Waterloo Region is a far cry from what it was 200 years ago, but one thing remains constant: from the indigenous community to those who've chosen to make this place home, our kitchens are steeped with memories and traditions.

Today, many of us come from all four corners of the world — almost half are first- or second-generation Canadian, and close to one-quarter are immigrants. We bring with us memories of the places and people we've left behind and the people we've met.

In a series of articles, I will explore the people and the dishes that contribute to our community table, beginning with this look at holiday food traditions in Sweden, Israel and Japan.

SWEDEN: SAINT LUCIA'S DAY

A festival of light breaks Sweden's long, dark winter on Dec. 13 and celebrates Saint Lucia. While her feast day is observed around the world, "The Swedish Festival of Lights" mixes ancient Jól (Yule) festivities with Christian motifs.



Jasmine
Mangalaseril

Jól was an important pre-Christian Scandinavian solstice festival meant to rouse the sun and chase away the darkness. To stop supernatural beings from causing mischief on the longest night of the year in the old Julian Calendar, bonfires were lit, mummers performed, and young people would carol door-to-door. Carollers and mummers received lussekatter (saffron buns, recipe follows) because it was believed their sunshine colour would scare away a malevolent spirit named Lusse or Lussi, or they were offered in exchange for her mercy.

The festivities also included feasting, drinking and gift-giving.

Christian missionaries brought tales of Lucia of Syracuse to Viking Age Sweden, and soon references to the young woman

who wore a candlelit wreath on her head as she took food to Christians hiding in the catacombs became part of Jól. While distinct Lucia celebrations were first held in the mid-18th century, modern festivities took root about 100 years ago.

Today on Dec. 13th, the eldest daughter gets up early and dresses as Lucia in a white robe tied with a red sash and a wreath-like crown adorned with lit candles. She wakes her family by singing the Lucia Song and serves a breakfast of coffee, lussekatter and pepparakakor (gingernut cookies). Each community also has a designated Lucia who leads a procession of handmaidens and star boys to visit schools, seniors' homes and churches to sing and hand out treats.

Buns and yeasted cakes spiced with cardamom or cinnamon are popular throughout the year but, in December, lussekatter are part of the holiday baking. Made from coiled or knotted ropes of dough, these saffron buns are shaped to represent various animals, objects and people.



LUSSEKATTER

(Makes 16)

Saffron is the hand-harvested red stamens of the saffron crocus and has a reputation for being the world's most expensive spice. Luckily, a little goes a long way! Look for whole thread saffron (as opposed to pre-ground) with few or no yellow threads. Store it in a dark, air-tight container. If you wish, you can add more saffron to the recipe (up to a good pinch or so) for a more vibrant yellow crumb. This recipe provides instructions to make julgalt (the Christmas pig), but you can find other shapes online.

Buns

115 ml (7½ tablespoons) butter, cubed

310 ml (1¼ cups) milk

12 threads saffron (or more, to taste), crumbled or ground

3.75 ml (¾ teaspoon) ground cardamom (seeds from 12 pods)

11 ml (2¼ teaspoons) dry active yeast (not rapid rise or pizza yeast) (2 sachets)

1 egg, beaten

125 ml (½ cup) sugar

5 ml (1 teaspoon) salt

1 litre (4 cups) all-purpose flour

32 raisins, plumped in water

Pearl sugar (optional)

Egg wash

1 egg, beaten

30 ml (2 tablespoons) milk or cream

cont'd on next page

Glaze (optional)

15 ml (1 tablespoon) sugar
30 ml (2 tablespoons) water

1. Heat milk, butter, saffron and cardamom (if using) until the butter melts. Cool until hand-hot and then stir in yeast.

2. Combine egg and sugar in a bowl. Mix in the yeasty-milk mixture. Add the flour and knead for 10 minutes (using a stand mixer). The dough should be soft, tacky and not stick to the sides of the bowl.

3. Cover the bowl and let stand at room temperature until the dough has doubled in volume, about 20 to 40 minutes.

4. Line two baking trays with parchment paper. Divide the dough into 16 pieces. To shape: roll a piece to a 30 cm (12-inch) length, and curl both ends so the pastry is shaped like an S. Place on prepared baking tray, leaving about 5 cm (2 inches) between buns. Poke a raisin in the centre of each coil. Let the buns double in size, about 20 minutes

5. Preheat the oven to 400 F (205°C) and make the egg wash by mixing the egg with the milk.

6. Poke the raisins back into the coils, in case they popped out during the rise. Brush with egg wash and sprinkle with pearl sugar (if using). Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, until golden.

7. To add shine, heat the glaze ingredients together and brush on the buns as soon as they've come out of the oven. Cool on a wire rack.

Prep time: 1¼ hours

Cook time: 20 minutes

Where to find ingredients locally

- Ayres Bulk Food, Waterloo: cardamom, saffron
- Many large grocers: cardamom, saffron
- Vincenzo's, Waterloo: cardamom, pearl sugar, saffron

ISRAEL: HANUKKAH

In the second century BCE, when the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks) ruled Jerusalem, Jewish customs were made illegal and Jews were forced to accept Greek culture and beliefs.

After the Maccabean Revolt, the re-dedication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem required the menorah to burn day and night. They only had one day's worth of purified oil, but that small amount lasted eight days — long enough to get more oil. Today, Jews commemorate the miracle of the oil during Hanukkah, an eight-day festival that begins on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, usually falling in December.

For each of eight nights, the hanukkiah (a nine-branched menorah) is lit — the ninth branch holds “the helper” candle, which is used to light the others. After sundown, another candle is added and lit as two blessings are recited or chanted: one is a blessing over the candles, and the other gives thanks for the deliverance. A third blessing, usually said during joyous occasions, is recited on the first night.

To remind others of the miracle, many display the menorah in their window. After the candle-lighting ceremony, families teach children about the celebration, play games, sing songs and give gifts. Observances usually take place at home, but some communities hold public lighting ceremonies.

Eating fried food on Hanukkah is an ancient tradition that refers to the miracle of the oil. While Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe often serve latkes (potato fritters), the Mediterranean region's Sephardic Jews have sufganiyot (stuffed or filled deep-fried yeasted dough fritters, recipe follows).

Savoury versions can be stuffed with meat, chickpeas, mushrooms and lentils, but it's the sweet ones — doughnuts filled with jam, custard, chocolate cream and even dulce de leche — that are Israeli favourites.

The first jelly doughnut recipe appeared in the 16th century. Over time, the recipe



evolved into pastries such as berliners and pączki. In Poland, ponchiks were Hanukkah treats. They were taken to Israel, and later renamed “sufganiyot” (“sufganiyah” is the singular), referring to the “spongy dough” referred to in the Talmud.



SUFGANIYOT

(Makes 36)

Sufganiyot are round jam-filled doughnuts fried in oil. A red jam, such as strawberry, is often used, but feel free to use your favourite. If the doughnut won't flip over after it rises to the top, an air bubble may be the culprit — simply lift the pastry out of the oil, pop the bubble with the tip of a sharp knife and return it to the pot.

140 ml (½ cup + 1 tablespoon) hand-hot milk (or more, as needed)

5.5 ml dry active yeast (not rapid rise

yeast or pizza yeast) (1 sachet)

125 ml (½ cup) sugar

38 ml (2½ tablespoons) soft butter

2.5 ml (½ teaspoon) salt

2 egg yolks

5 ml (1 teaspoon) vanilla

585 ml (2⅓ cups) all-purpose flour (or more, as needed)

190 ml (¾ cup) jam OR jelly (or more, as needed)

1.5 litres (6 cups) peanut oil OR flavourless oil suitable for deep frying (as needed)
Icing sugar or castor sugar for rolling

1. Dissolve the yeast and one-half teaspoon of sugar in the milk. As it froths, cream the butter, sugar and salt in a separate bowl; beat in the egg yolks and vanilla.

2. Pour the yeast mixture into the butter and combine. Beat in the flour then knead for 10 minutes (using a stand mixture). The dough should be firm, slightly tacky, and not stick to the sides of the bowl.

3. Place the dough in a buttered bowl and cover. Let rise until doubled in volume — you can either do this by placing the bowl in the refrigerator overnight OR place the bowl in a warm, draft-free spot for about 1¼ hours.

4. If the dough is coming out of the fridge, let the bowl sit at room temperature for about 30 minutes before making the sufganiyot. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and gently roll out to 6 mm (¼-inch) thickness. Cut with a 5 cm (two-inch) round pastry cutter. Gather and re-roll scraps and cut remaining discs. Let rise until doubled in size, about 30 minutes.

5. Line one tray with a double layer of paper towels and place a wire rack on top. Heat 5 cm (2 inches) of oil in a heavy bottomed pot to 195 C (385 F).

6. Carefully lower the discs into the oil, being careful to not overcrowd the pot — there should be at least 2 to 3 cm (about one inch) between the doughnuts. The discs will sink and then rise. After they rise, carefully flip them onto the second side.

7. Turn them every 10 to 15 seconds until both sides are golden brown; each batch will take two minutes (or less) to cook. Remove and cool on the wire rack. Return the oil to temperature between batches.

8. When cool enough to handle, bore a small hole into each sufganiyah with a paring knife, and then, using a pastry injector or a coffee spoon, fill with a teaspoon of jam (or as much as the doughnut will hold). Roll in sugar and serve.

Prep time: about 2¼ hours (including rising time)

Cook time: 30 minutes



JAPAN: OMISOKA

Just like New Year's Eve in Canada, Japan celebrates the passing of the old year and welcomes the incoming year's potential on Dec. 31.

After bonenkai (forget-the-year parties) are thrown and appreciation gifts, known as oseibo, are given, many prepare for Omisoka (the last day of the year) with a meticulous house cleaning. The grand cleaning ensures the new year arrives free from the outgoing year's dust and clutter. Afterwards, decorations are put up to welcome ancestral spirits and to encourage good fortune.

Since it's unlucky to cook on the first three days of the year, many prepare traditional new year foods called osechi-ryori on the last day of the year. There are parties and gatherings and many Japanese watch a music contest called "NHK Kohaku Uta Gassen."

Before midnight, Buddhist temples perform "joya no kane" by tolling the temple bell once for each of the 108 causes of human suffering (such as envy, irresponsibility and stubbornness). With each chime, a sin is left behind in the old year, giving the new year a fresh start.

The tradition of eating soba noodles (buckwheat noodles) on New Year's Eve began about 800 years ago when a Buddhist temple gave soba to the poor on the last day of the year. Within a few hundred years, eating toshikoshi-soba ("year-end noodles," recipe follows) on the day before the new year was firmly established. Soba noodles were available in many parts of Japan, but in some areas — like Kyoto — the tradition was established by eating wheat flour udon noodles.

Soba noodles' rich symbolism includes a long and peaceful life, resiliency and wealth. Having them before midnight on Dec. 31 encourages a good start to the new year: since the noodles are easily bitten through, eating them represents cutting off the old year's misfortune. Many traditional toshikoshi-soba toppings also have auspicious meanings: shrimp for longevity, herring for prosperity through children and kamaboko (cured and steamed fish cake) for good omens.



German Christmas Dinner - Roasted Goose with Apple Chestnut Stuffing, Braised Cabbage and Dumplings

Serves 6-8 People (30 min prep) plus 4-5 hrs Cooking Time

Ingredients

- 1 Fresh Whole Goose (available for order at Stemmler's)
- 2 Cups Chicken Broth (available at Stemmler's)
- 2 Crispy Apples (quartered, then quartered again)
- ½ Cup Raisins | Can Chestnuts
- 5 Sprigs Fresh Marjoram (can use Oregano in a pinch)
- 4 Tbsp Lemon Juice
- 1 Tbsp Apple Syrup (available at Stemmler's)
- 2 Tbsp Your Favorite Spices Salt/Pepper

Instructions:

1. For the goose, pull out any remaining feather end and discard. Rinse the Goose inside and out after removing the neck and giblets. Place them in a small pot with 2 cups water, 2 cups chicken stock, 1 bay leaf & 2 sprigs of marjoram. Simmer for 1 hour. Pat the goose dry. Sprinkle inside with seasoning and rub the skin as well. In a bowl take the chestnuts, apples, raisins, lemon juice and more seasoning. Mix together and stuff the goose with this. Skewer the skin flap to the goose to close the cavity. If the large wings are loose, tie them together with some butchers twine. Place goose on a roasting rack breast side down and into a 375F oven. After 2 hours, flip the goose then keep roasting and basting for another 2½ hours. During the last 15 minutes, turn the temp up to 400F to brown and crisp the skin.
2. Add 2 oz butter to pan and melt. Saute the onions until soft then add garlic for 2 minutes. Set aside ¾ of this mixture for the dumplings. To what's left in the pan, add cabbage, cloves, seasoning and the cider, then cover. Let braise on med/low heat for an hour.
3. For the dumplings, take the leftover mixture of onion/garlic and add parsley. Fill a bowl with the stale bread then pour the milk over. Mix in the eggs and seasoning together then add the leftover onions and garlic. If it's too runny, you can add some breadcrumbs to firm it up. Scoop out the bread mixture into the dumpling size you wish to make and form them with wet hands. When you are done this, add a few at a time to the simmering stock (after you've removed the neck and giblets). When they start to float, they are done. Remove and keep warm.
4. When the goose is finished, remove it from the rack and let it rest on a cutting board, loosely covered with foil for 15 minutes. Remove the stuffing into a bowl and keep warm as well.
5. Carve the goose, platter and serve everything hot with some homemade gravy. Frohe Weihnachten!

Ingredients: For the sides

- 1 Small Head Red Cabbage (shredded)
- 1 Can Local Apple Cider (available at Stemmler's)
- 1 ½ Cups Milk (slightly warm)
- 2 Bay Leaf Salt & Pepper
- 4 Cups Stale Bread
- 4 Small Onions (small diced)
- 3 Cloves Garlic (minced)
- 1 Bunch Parsley (chopped)
- 4 Oz Butter
- 4 Cloves
- 6 Eggs
- 3 Tbsp Flour

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TOSHIKOSHI-SOBA (YEAR-END NOODLES)

(Makes 4 servings)

Dashi stock is a key ingredient in many Japanese dishes and is easy to make from scratch (you can find recipes online). However, instant powder is also found in local shops. Dashi can be made from kombu (dried kelp/sea tangle), katsuobushi (dried and smoked skipjack tuna flakes), iriko/niboshi (anchovies/sardine), or a combination of these ingredients. Vegan dashi can be made from dried shiitake mushrooms. Information about where to find ingredients follows the recipe.

1.2 litres (4¾ cups) dashi, (preferably made with katsuobushi and kombu/sea tangle) OR shiitake mushroom stock
70 ml (4 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons) light soy sauce

70 ml (4 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons) mirin

70 ml (4 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons) sake

400 g (4 bundles) soba noodles (buckwheat noodles), cooked to 30 seconds to a minute less than indicated on packet instructions, drained

3 to 4 green onions, finely sliced (green and white parts)

Toppings (optional)

12 to 16 slices kamaboko (cured and steamed fish cake)

Shichimi togarashi (Japanese seven spice), to taste

Kakiage (recipe follows)

1. Combine dashi, light soy sauce, mirin and sake in a pot, and boil for about 15 minutes.

2. Divide the soba noodles between four large soup bowls and pour the hot broth over top. Sprinkle with green onions and add toppings, if using.

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 15 minutes

Where to find ingredients locally

• K-W Korean Food Market, Kitchener: bonito, kombu/sea tangle, instant dashi



powder, kamaboko

• LCBO: Sake

• Supercentre (or many large grocers): buckwheat noodles, mirin, shichimi togarashi

• Vincenzo's, Waterloo: instant dashi stock powder, mirin, shichimi togarashi

KAKIAGE

(Makes 4 servings)

Kakiage (pronounced ka-kee-ya-geh) is a popular accompaniment to soba noodle soup in the Kansai region (western Japan). This fritter binds thin strips of vegetables and chopped seafood in an egg-enriched tempura batter. The coating needs to be thick enough to keep the vegetables together without being claggy and light enough so only the lightest wisp covers the vegetables. An ice-cold batter helps to ensure crispness when it hits the hot oil.

1.5 litres (6 cups) peanut oil OR flavourless oil suitable for deep frying

250 ml (1 cup) cake flour (or more, as needed)

60 ml (¼ cup) cornstarch

1 egg, well beaten

250 ml (1 cup) very cold club soda (or more, as needed)

125 ml (½ cup) ice cubes, as needed

30 ml (2 tablespoons) sesame oil

100 g (3½ oz.) peeled and deveined raw shrimp, roughly chopped

400 g (14¼ oz.) vegetables, cut into 5-cm-long, 6-mm-wide strips (2 inches by

¼-inch); see notes

1. Line one tray with a double layer of paper towels. Place a wire rack on a second tray. Set aside.

2. Heat the peanut oil in a large heavy bottomed pot or wok until it reaches 170 C (340 F).

3. When the oil reaches 165 C (330 F), mix the egg with club soda in a jug or small bowl and set aside. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour and cornstarch. Make a well in the centre, add the eggy mixture, and stir lightly with a fork until just combined. It's OK if there are a few flour pockets.

4. The batter should be about as thick as cream — you can adjust the consistency by adding a little more soda water or flour as required. Add an ice cube to keep the batter cold. As you cook the batches, you may need to add ice and readjust the batter.

5. Add the sesame oil when the oil reaches 170 C (340 F).

6. Combine the shrimp and vegetables; coat well in the batter.

7. Make the fritters by scooping up a couple spoonfuls of coated vegetables; let the excess batter drip off. Hold the cluster together with chopsticks or heatproof tongs and slowly lower the vegetables into the hot oil. Deep fry until lightly golden and cooked through, about three minutes per side.

8. Remove and drain on the paper towels before transferring to the wire rack (the airflow underneath will help the fritters remain crispy). Return the oil to temperature between batches. Serve immediately.

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Notes:

• Use a mix of firm vegetables, such as carrots, green beans, onions, parsnips and sweet potatoes.

• To reheat leftovers, re-dip the fritters in hot oil for about 30 seconds to crisp them up again. 

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