



MY IDEAS FOR CHRISTMAS

Inspiration from around the world

nobilicia

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EDITORIAL

In a world where everyone longs to be a record-breaker and the aim is to be “faster, higher, stronger”, we at nobilia can also claim to have broken a special record: that we have published more cookery books than any other kitchen manufacturer!

Having covered topics such as cooking (2008), baking (2009), party recipes (2012) and international cuisine (2015), we have now arrived at Christmas. I believe that I can actually take the credit for coming up with the idea for the nobilia Christmas book. In Eastern Westfalia, there is a saying that even a blind chicken will eventually find a piece of grain. The same could be said about managing directors — this one has not even been in the job 20 years yet and he’s already come up with a useful idea. (At last, some might think).

I might not be the greatest fan of Christmas, but even I find it hard to resist the magic of this season. However hectic the rest of the year has been, everything becomes calmer and more contemplative at this particular time. If it snows as well, and muffles all the everyday sounds, then it really feels like Christmas.



It always strikes me that this tradition and the need for a contemplative end to the year are not exclusive to just one culture; they extend beyond nations, borders and cultures, and at the same time connect them. Christmas also unites different generations; it stands for freedom and tolerance.

Our new book includes not only Christmas recipes but also typical Christmas customs, songs and handicrafts from different parts of the world.

This international Christmas journey demonstrates that, despite our various differences, there are still more things that unite us than divide us.

And now the Christmas season is making me feel contemplative, too, so I would like to end my introduction by saying a heartfelt thank you for your solidarity and support. I wish you and your loved ones happiness and peace at Christmas and I hope you enjoy your “nobilia Christmas”.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "O. Streit".

Oliver Streit







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Sales team for Germany & Austria | Above from left to right: Katharina Beckmann, Jasmin Eschen, Inga Zaveckaite



GERMANY & AUSTRIA

In some areas the *Weihnachtsmann* (Father Christmas) brings the presents, in others it is the *Christkind* (Christ Child). Opinions also differ regionally as to whether the Christmas tree should be decorated on Christmas Eve or two weeks earlier. However, there are some things upon which different regions are in complete agreement—culinary delicacies, for example, such as the huge variety of Christmas biscuits that people bake during Advent.

FRÖHLICHE WEIHNACHTEN ...

In the German-speaking world, the build-up towards Christmas — one of the most important Christian feast days — begins four Sundays before Christmas, on the first Sunday of Advent. Depending on which day of the week the 24th of December falls, Advent can last anything from 22 to 28 days, which may seem like a very long time. Over the years, a number of customs have evolved which help people to enter into the Christmas spirit. The smell of *Zimtsterne* (cinnamon stars) and *Vanillekipferl* (small crescent-shaped biscuits) that have been baked with the help of our children or friends has a unique way of getting us into the mood for Christmas. This aroma combines with the scent of the candles on the Advent wreath, one of which will be lit on each Sunday of Advent so that all four are lit by Christmas Day.

Did you know that the very first Advent wreath originated in Germany? It was made in Hamburg in 1839 by the Protestant theologian and educator, Johann Hinrich Wichern, for a group of street urchins he looked after. His wreath looked somewhat different to the ones we see today. Wichern actually used an old wooden wagon wheel and placed 24 candles on it — four large ones for the Advent Sundays and 20 smaller ones for the remaining days in Advent that year. The children were allowed to light a candle every day and that is how they calculated how many more days they had to count until Christmas Day. Protestants in Germany

adopted this idea and developed today's familiar Advent wreath, which is made of sprigs of fir and has just four large candles on it. There are also modern versions, like the example in this book which is made of wood and is long and straight rather than round. Surprisingly, the Advent wreath was not taken up by the Catholic religion until after 1925.

The Advent calendar is also a 19th century German invention. It consists of 24 little boxes, doors, bags or packages, one for every day from the 1st of December. There are very many different kinds of Advent calendar on sale, but a lot of people prefer to make their own individual one for their nearest and dearest — maybe even one like our version with the snowy winter landscape. Every day, one person is allowed to open the calendar to discover a small gift, which could be a sweet, a nice poem, a picture or some other little surprise. Originally this custom was intended for children as a way of savouring the build-up to Christmas. The concept was often very simple; for example, parents might draw 24 chalk lines on the wall and the children were allowed to rub one out every day, or the children could place a straw in the Christmas crib every day until there was a soft bed for the Baby Jesus to lie in on Christmas Eve. In some families, 24 holy pictures would be hung up, one day at a time — this idea is similar to some of the more simple Advent calendars seen today.

In contrast to the custom in many other countries, in Germany the main celebration is on the 24th of December, the evening before Christmas Day, or *Heiligabend* (Holy Evening). It is usually an occasion on which families get together and have their own family traditions. Some sit down to a very simple meal, such as sausages and potato salad, and the real feast, which might be a traditional Christmas goose, is served on Christmas Day, the 25th of December. A lot of families go to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.

For many people, Christmas Eve without a decorated Christmas tree is unthinkable. This custom, which is well known throughout the world today, also originated in Germany. The first record of a Christmas tree is in a document of the Elector of Mainz dated 1527; it came from the Stockstadt Hübner forest near Aschaffenburg. When and how the Christmas tree is decorated — whether with tinsel, baubles, sweets, straw stars or Christmas decorations — varies according to individual taste and local practices. Candles are a must, even though, mainly for safety reasons, real ones have now been superseded by fairy lights or artificial candles.

Who brings the presents that lie under the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve? Opinions differ on this. In the Protestant areas of Germany it is the *Weihnachtsmann*, who is also well-



... UND EIN GUTES NEUES JAHR!

known in other countries as Father Christmas. In the western and southern areas of Germany, however, as well as in Austria, the presents are brought on the 24th of December, not by an old man, but by the *Christkind* (the Christ Child). When children are asked what the *Christkind* looks like, they describe a dazzling angel with blonde curls and a long white robe. The *Christkind* places the presents under the Christmas tree when nobody is in the room. No one really knows how he gets into their home because the doors and windows are all closed and are often decorated with Christmas stars made of paper or straw. He certainly does not come through the chimney, otherwise he would not be so dazzlingly white.

On the afternoon of the 24th of December, the children's patience is put to the test — they must wait for the Christ Child or Father Christmas and they are not allowed to enter the room where mysterious things are afoot. Outside, in the kitchen or one of the other rooms, everyone tucks into stuffed baked apples, or the Christmas cookies that the parents and children have baked during Advent. Families might go for a walk, or to the children's Christmas service. At last the moment the children have been waiting for arrives; a bell is rung and they are allowed to enter the darkened room, and the long wait is forgotten. There stands the tree, brightly lit up and decorated; there is a smell of pine needles, and

the gaily-wrapped presents lie underneath the tree. Grown-ups cling on to the memory of these magical moments for the rest of their lives.

The creatures who carry out their mischief in Alpine regions during the days, and particularly the nights, after Christmas Eve are much more frightening. These *Perchten* make their way noisily through the streets from the 25th of December until the 6th of January clothed in fur and animal skins and armed with cymbals and bells. According to mythology, there are good *Schönperchten* (*schön* = pretty) and evil *Schiachperchten* (*schlach* = ugly). The *Schönperchten* come out in the daytime and wish people good luck and pass on their blessings. Some regions have their own specific *Perchten* figures, with elaborate wooden masks and costumes.

These *Rauhnächte*, literally "furry nights" (from the Middle High German *rûch* meaning "furry", but also "rough"), are the nights occurring around the turn of the year. They have had special significance ever since Germanic times. The tradition possibly has its roots in the ancient lunar calendar, according to which the year had 12 lunar months, giving a total of 354 days. At the end of the year — around the winter solstice — it was therefore necessary to fit in eleven or twelve "dead days"; during this period people believed that the laws governing Nature and the strict division between this world

and the hereafter were suspended — in Germany people still refer to the time between Christmas and New Year as being *zwischen den Jahren*, in other words “between the years”.

The so-called *Perchtenläufe* — the days when the Perchten run amok — reach their climax in the final *Rauhnacht*, the night between the 5th and 6th of January. On that evening, a symbolic battle takes place between the good *Glöckler* (bell-ringing *Perchten*) and the evil *Bärigln* (*Perchten* in bear-skins). The *Glöckler* represent the spring (which stands for renewal, growth and fertility), the *Bärigln* represent the winter and its evil spirits. The *Glöckler* try to “ring out” the winter with their bells, the *Bärigln* try to stop them. The final, wild *Rauhnacht* battle ends at midnight.

The *Rauhnächte* were considered to be a particularly suitable time for looking into the future and this ancient belief led to the still popular New Year’s Eve custom of *Bleigießen*, or pouring lead, to discover what the New Year has in store. On New Year’s Eve, which is approximately half way through the *Rauhnächte*, a piece of lead is melted over a candle and poured into a dish of cold water where it immediately hardens to form a shape. Nowadays, since the use of blanks containing lead was prohibited for health reasons in 2018, wax, tin or a similar material is used. Everyone then tries to work out what the shape tells them about the future.



KNECHT RUPRECHT



*From out the forest I now appear,
To proclaim that Christmastide is here!
For at the top of every tree
are golden lights for all to see;
and there from Heaven's gate on high
I saw our Christ-child in the sky.
And in among the darkened trees,
a loud voice it was that called to me:
'Knecht Ruprecht, old fellow,' it cried,
'hurry now, make haste, don't hide!
All the candles have now been lit—
Heaven's gate has opened wide!
Both young and old should now have rest
away from cares and daily stress;
and when tomorrow to earth I fly
"it's Christmas again!" will be the cry.'
And then I said: 'O Lord so dear.
My journey's end is now quite near;*

*but to this town I've still to go,
Where the children are good, I know.'
'But have you then that great sack?'
'I have,' I said, 'it's on my back.
For apples, almonds, fruit and nuts
For God-fearing children are a must.'
'And is that cane there by your side?'
'The cane's there too,' I did reply;
but only for those, those naughty ones,
who have it applied to their backsides.'
The Christ-child spoke: 'Then that's all right!
My loyal servant, go with God this night!'
From out the forest I now appear;
To proclaim that Christmastide is here!
Now speak, what is there here to be had?
Are there good children, are there bad?*

Theodor Storm (1862)

Translation © 2006 Denis Jackson



Knecht Ruprecht is Saint Nicholas's assistant. When he comes on the 6th of December he gives good children presents and punishes naughty children by beating them with his birch rod. In the 19th century, Knecht Ruprecht was also seen in some areas as a helper of the Christ Child or Father Christmas.



CHRISTMAS GOOSE

Roast goose is a very popular Christmas dinner in Germany and in Austria; some families eat it on Christmas Eve while others indulge on Christmas Day or Boxing Day. It is traditionally served with red cabbage and apple, fried potatoes or potato dumplings.

Ingredients

(Serves 4–6)

For the stuffing

4 apples

3–4 carrots

½ celeriac

2 onions

2 sprigs wormwood

2 sprigs marjoram

**1 tablespoon orange zest
(organic)**

50 g goose fat

200 g chestnuts

For the goose

4.5 kg oven-ready goose

salt and pepper

300 ml red wine

300 ml orange juice

300 ml apple juice

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon mixed spice

cornflour

Preparation

1. To make the stuffing, peel the apples, carrots, celeriac and onions and chop finely. Remove and chop the marjoram and wormwood leaves and mix with the above ingredients and the orange zest. Heat some goose fat in a saucepan and cook the mixture for a few minutes. Add the chestnuts, mix well and remove the pan from the heat.
2. Season the goose on the inside and outside with salt and pepper. Pack the stuffing into the body cavity of the goose. Stitch up the opening and place the goose, with any remaining stuffing, into a lidded roasting tin. Pour in sufficient red wine, orange juice and apple juice in equal quantities to cover the base of the tin up to 10 cm.
3. Preheat the oven to 150°C (conventional oven). Put the lid on the roasting tin and place on a baking tray in the centre of the oven. Roast the goose for about 3 hours until tender. Take the lid off the roasting tin, add the remaining red wine and juice and increase the temperature to 180°C. Cook the goose for a further hour until golden brown; baste frequently with the juices. Switch the oven off and leave the goose to rest for 10 minutes.
4. In the meantime, pour the juices from the roasting tin through a sieve into a jug. Sprinkle the sugar evenly over the base of a frying pan and caramelize over a low heat; be careful not to let it burn, this can happen very quickly and will make the caramel bitter. (Warning: melted sugar is extremely hot!) As soon as the sugar has turned light brown, add the mixed spices and the liquid from the juices. Bring to the boil whilst stirring with a wooden spoon. Season with salt if necessary. Thicken the sauce with cornflour if it seems too thin. Carve the goose and remove the stuffing. Serve the goose with the stuffing and gravy.



CHRISTMAS STOLLEN

This is a famous Christmas classic from Dresden. It is usually made with candied orange and lemon peel and currants. This less well-known example is made with dates, figs and nuts and will definitely appeal to those less keen on the original version.

Ingredients

(Makes 1 stollen)

For the filling

150g dried dates

75g dried figs

50g almonds

50g hazelnuts

50g raisins

7 tablespoons almond

liqueur (e.g. Amaretto)

or water

For the dough

500g plain flour

5g mixed spice

½ teaspoon salt

150ml milk

1 cube fresh yeast (42g)

50g sugar

150g softened butter

For the glaze

50g butter

icing sugar

Preparation

1. To make the filling, finely chop the dates, figs, almonds and hazelnuts and mix with the almond liqueur plus 5 tablespoons of water. Leave to soak for at least 2 hours, or preferably overnight. Drain well.
2. To make the dough, mix the flour with the mixed spice and salt. Heat the milk until luke-warm. Make a well in the centre of the flour and crumble the yeast into it. Sprinkle with a little sugar and add about 5 tablespoons of milk. Stir carefully with a metal knitting needle or similar, at the same time mixing in a little of the flour, until the yeast has dissolved. Cover and leave the mixture in a warm place for approximately 15 minutes until it is frothy.
3. Add the remaining sugar, milk and butter (chopped) to the dough and knead with a hand mixer or in a food processor for approximately 8 minutes until the dough feels soft and smooth. Cover and leave in a warm place for 1 hour to rise. The dough should increase considerably in volume.
4. Knead the dough again. Add the filling and knead into the mixture. Leave the dough to prove again for about 1 hour until it has increased in size.
5. In the meantime, line a baking tray with greaseproof paper and preheat the oven to 175°C (conventional oven).
6. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and shape into a loaf. Press a rolling pin down lengthways onto the middle of the dough, moving it gently to and fro to form a rectangle with slightly rounded edges; the ends of the long sides should be slightly thicker. Now fold the dough lengthways so that the bottom half is not quite covered by the top. Press into the dough with your hand between the thick edge on one side and the thinner edge on the other to create the typical stollen form. Tuck in the ends and round off the edges. Place the stollen onto the prepared baking tray and bake in the oven for approximately 50 minutes.
7. Just before the end of the baking time, melt 50g of butter. Remove the stollen from the oven, brush with the butter and sprinkle liberally with icing sugar. Allow to cool completely then sprinkle with icing sugar until well covered.



NUSSECKEN

These typical German nut wedges are not only good to eat during Advent and at Christmas, they can also be part of a New Year buffet. Let your children help to make them. They'll love brushing the dough with jam and dipping the cooked biscuits in chocolate—and eating them of course—absolutely delicious!

Ingredients

(Makes 1 baking tray)

For the biscuit dough

300 g plain flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

90 g sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 medium eggs

130 g butter

salt

For the nut filling

200 g butter

150 g sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

400 g ground hazelnuts

Plus

**butter and flour for the
baking tray**

**3 heaped tablespoons
raspberry jam**

**1 large packet of chocolate
icing (about 500 g)**

Preparation

1. Grease a baking tray and sprinkle with flour.
2. To make the biscuit dough, combine all the ingredients and a pinch of salt in a bowl and quickly knead to a smooth dough, working first with the dough hook and then by hand. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out to approximately the size of the baking tray. Transfer it onto the baking tray and press into the sides and corners to cover it completely. Leave in a cool place for about 30 minutes.
3. Prick the dough all over with a fork and spread with the jam. Preheat the oven to 180°C (conventional oven).
4. To make the filling, combine the butter, sugar, vanilla extract and 5 tablespoons of water in a saucepan and bring to the boil whilst stirring. Spread the mixture onto the dough base.
5. Bake the nut wedges in a hot oven for 20–25 minutes. Remove from the oven and cut into triangles straight away. Leave to cool.
6. Melt the chocolate icing in a bain-marie or in the microwave. Dip the two smaller corners of the nut wedges in the chocolate and leave to cool on greaseproof paper.



ZIMTSTERNE

These cinnamon stars come originally from Swabia (SW Germany), where they can be found in almost every Christmas biscuit tin. Ours is a particularly fine version made with kirsch. The ground almonds make them wonderfully light.

Ingredients

(Makes 90)

250 g icing sugar

3 egg whites

salt

350 g ground almonds

3 teaspoons cinnamon

1 teaspoon kirsch

Plus

flour

star-shaped pastry cutters

Preparation

1. Sieve the icing sugar into a small bowl and put to one side.
2. Beat the egg whites in a medium-sized bowl, add a pinch of salt and beat with an electric mixer until stiff, gradually adding the icing sugar a little at a time. Remove 6 tablespoons of the mixture for glazing and put to one side in a small bowl.
3. Mix together the almonds and cinnamon and add, together with the kirsch, to the larger bowl of egg white mixture, folding in to make a light dough. Wrap in cling film and leave in the fridge for at least 1 hour, or overnight.
4. Preheat the oven to 125°C (fan oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
5. Remove the dough from the fridge and roll out onto a floured surface. Cut out the stars with the pastry cutter and place onto the baking tray leaving a little room between each one. Dip the pastry cutter in cold water from time to time to prevent the dough from sticking.
6. Using a small spoon, glaze the stars by taking a little of the egg white mixture that was put to one side and spreading on each one carefully.
7. Place the baking tray with the stars in the oven and bake for 11–12 minutes, making sure that the egg white icing does not turn yellow! Remove from the oven and leave to cool on the baking tray. When the *Zimtsterne* have cooled down completely take them off the baking tray and store in a biscuit tin.



BRATÄPFEL

The smell of these freshly baked apples is truly unmistakable—and as familiar at Christmas time in Germany as the smell of Christmas biscuits. Usually, the core is cut out and the filling is inserted from the top. In this version the apples are simply cut through the middle. They taste wonderful with custard.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

4 firm, slightly tart apples
(e.g. Belle de Boskoop)

For the filling

200 g marzipan

70 g cranberries

50 g soft butter

50 g flaked almonds

1 teaspoon cinnamon

Plus

**40 g butter for drizzling +
butter for greasing the
baking dish**

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 200 °C (conventional oven). Grease a baking dish.
2. Cut the apples in half through the middle, remove the entire core and put the apples to one side.
3. To make the filling, cut the marzipan into small pieces and roughly chop the cranberries. Mix together in a bowl with the soft butter, almonds and cinnamon to form a dough.
4. Fill the apple halves with the mixture and put back together. Place in the greased baking dish and bake in the middle of the preheated oven for 10 minutes.
5. In the meantime, melt the remaining butter in a saucepan. Remove the baking dish from the oven and drizzle the apples with the melted butter. Turn the oven down to 180 °C and bake for a further 10–15 minutes. Remove from the oven and serve while still warm.



VANILLEKIPFERL

In Southern Germany and Austria, a plate of Christmas biscuits without this vanilla speciality is almost unthinkable. Although it is possible to buy pastry cutters for them, “real” Kipferl are made by hand; it requires a little practice, but really isn’t difficult. The word “Kipferl” describes the biscuits’ crescent shape.

Ingredients

(Makes about 30)

210 g cold butter

70 g sugar

100 g ground almonds

280 g plain flour

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

**3 heaped tablespoons of
icing sugar**

Preparation

1. Chop the butter into small pieces, put into a mixing bowl with the sugar and cream both together with a hand mixer until fluffy. Mix together the almonds and the flour and stir into the butter and sugar mixture. Knead the mixture to a smooth dough. Make into a ball, wrap in cling film and place in the fridge for at least 1 hour.
2. Preheat the oven to 170 °C (conventional oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
3. Remove the dough from the fridge. Cut into 30 walnut-sized pieces and make into *Kipferl* (crescents). To do this, roll each piece so that it is thick in the middle and thinner at the tips, and then gently bend the tips to form a crescent.
4. Place the crescents on a baking tray, leaving spaces between them because they will spread. Bake in the centre of the preheated oven for 15 minutes until golden brown. Remove from the oven and leave to cool on the baking tray.
5. In the meantime, mix together the vanilla extract and the icing sugar. Coat the crescents carefully in the sugar mixture while they are still warm. Leave on a cooling rack until they are dry and firm.



KOKOSBUSSLERL

These light delicacies, also known as coconut macaroons, are based on an Arabian almond biscuit. This version, whose name translates as “coconut kisses”, was first recorded in the USA but it has become a German classic. The biscuits keep for a long time and should be kept in a biscuit tin to prevent them from drying out.

Ingredients

(Makes 30)

3 medium egg whites

1 pinch salt

freshly squeezed juice of

½ lemon

150 g sugar

150 g desiccated coconut

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (conventional oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
2. Place the egg whites, salt and lemon juice in a grease-free bowl; whisk together until stiff with a hand mixer, whilst gradually adding the sugar. Fold in the coconut a little at a time, testing the consistency all the time — the mixture should not become too firm.
3. Using two wet teaspoons, spoon the mixture out onto the baking tray in little heaps. Bake in the middle of the preheated oven for about 15 minutes until golden brown and crispy on the outside but still soft in the middle. Remove from the oven and leave on the baking tray to cool down; transfer onto a cooling rack to cool completely.



jaja's
CUTE KITCHEN

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CUTE KITCHEN

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CUTE KITCHEN

A CHRISTMAS WONDERLAND

This romantic Advent calendar is something special. A sand sieve is transformed into a snowy winter forest with animals, lights, baubles and the Star of Bethlehem ...



1. Cut out a round piece of paper to fit exactly inside the sand sieve so that the mesh part is covered. Spray the inside and outside of the frame of the sand sieve evenly with white spray paint. This is best done out of doors, or at least in a well-aired room. Leave to dry completely.

2. When the paint has dried, attach the fairy lights by simply pushing the bulbs through the mesh from the back. Stick the battery mounting to the back with adhesive tape.

3. Now create a winter landscape with the cotton wool and decorations.

4. The little gift bags being used here are self-fill teabags which simply need to be stamped, filled and closed with the drawstring. They can then be attached to the sieve with the string. Fix a few baubles to the sieve and then the Advent calendar is ready to be hung on the wall.

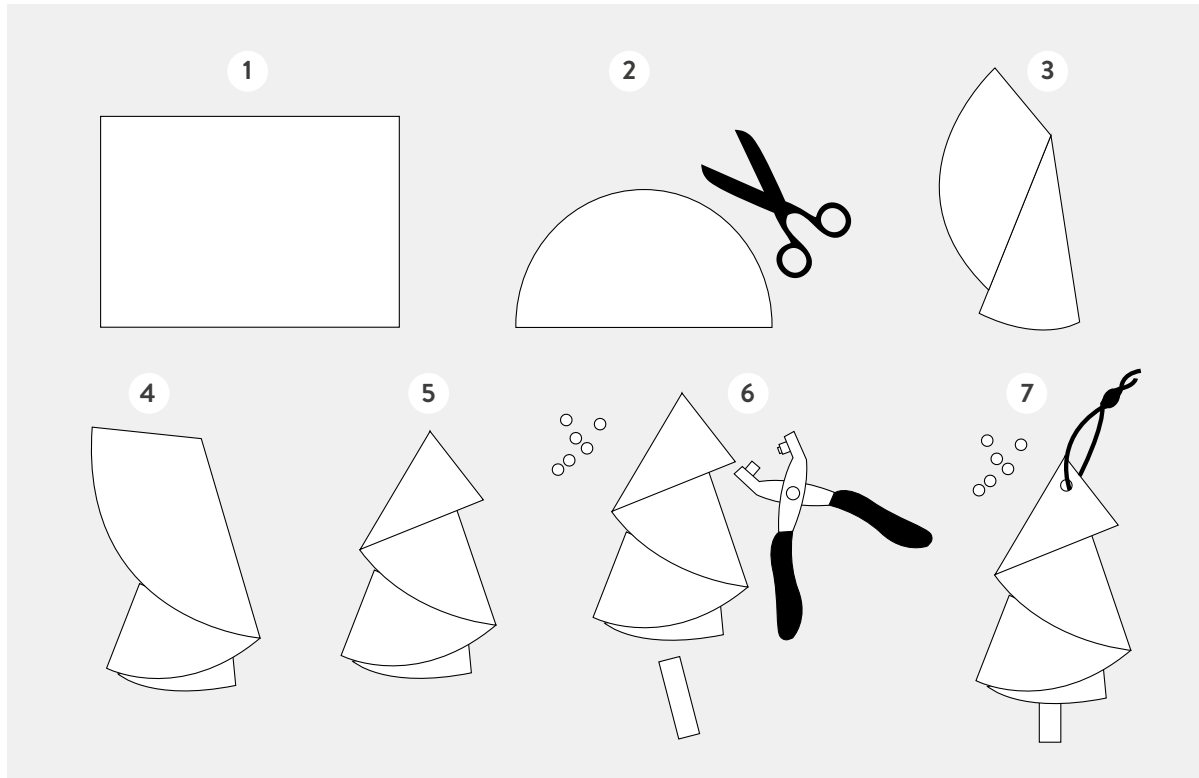
Materials

- 1 sand sieve (42 cm Ø, 7–10 mm mesh; found in any hardware store or garden centre)
- masking paper (e.g. newspaper)
- white spray paint
- LED fairy lights
- clear adhesive tape
- cotton wool
- decorations
- 24 small bags, boxes or pouches



ELEGANT PAPER TREES

These little trees are not just great gift tags for Christmas presents; fitted with silver rivets, they can also be hung as decorations on the Christmas tree.



1. For the first tree, use a compass to measure out a semicircle on a sheet of paper and cut it out with the scissors.

2. Fold the semicircle into the shape of a Christmas tree, following steps 3–5 as shown.

3. Using the hole punch, make a hole at the centre of the top of the tree, making sure that it is the correct size for the rivet. Place the rivet in the hole with the broad side at the front and secure with the rivet pliers.

4. Make as many more trees as you wish in the same way.

Materials

- white paper
(80–100 g/m²)
- compass
- scissors
- hole punch
- rivets
- rivet pliers



ALL LINED UP FOR ADVENT

Everyone knows the traditional, round Advent wreath. Here's a modern variation that will make other people envious. The four candles are arranged attractively in a row; glistening copper and elegant white radiate a festive feeling.



1. Using the acrylic roller, roll out the Fimo® modelling clay to a thickness of approximately 1 cm. Cut out 4 stars with each of the two pastry cutters.

2. While the modelling clay is still soft, press the copper pipe connecting pieces into the centres of the 4 smaller stars. Leave all 8 stars to dry.

3. When the stars are dry, sand them down with sandpaper to make them smooth. Spray the 4 larger stars with copper-coloured acrylic paint and allow to dry well.

4. Stick each of the smaller stars onto a big one. Glue the stars in a row onto the driftwood. Finally, just push the candles into the copper piping — done!

Materials

- 1 packet of Fimo® Air Light in white
- acrylic roller
- 2 different-sized star-shaped pastry cutters
- 4 copper pipe connecting pieces
- sand paper
- acrylic spray paint, copper
- glue
- 1 piece of driftwood
- 4 candles





Sales team for Netherlands & Belgium | Above left: Jonas Migura and Franziska Ostlinning | Below from left to right: Lisa Lönne, Chiara Rehage, Isabella Kliever



NETHERLANDS & BELGIUM

Christmas is celebrated on the 24th, 25th and 26th of December in the Netherlands and Belgium. However, before then, some bigger celebrations take place which are all about the man with with the bushy beard and lots of helpers — Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Piets. This part of the world also has its own culinary Christmas specialities, mainly sweet ones, such as *spekulaas*, *pepernoten* and *kruidnoten*.

ZALIG KERSTFEEST EN GELUKKIG NIEUWJAAR!

In the Netherlands and Belgium, the Christmas season begins in mid-November. Every year, on the first Saturday after Saint Martin's Day, these countries celebrate a huge festival which has everyone either out and about or glued to the television. Why is this? Because it is the day on which the steamship *Pakjesboot 12*, with Sinterklaas on board, finally reaches the shore. Children have been longing for him to arrive. Sinterklaas' helpers are also on board; they are all called Zwarte Piet (Black Peter), and each one of them is responsible for a specific task — seeing to the presents, the balloons, the ship ... etc.

There will be lots of Zwarte Piets waiting at the harbour, too; he is a very popular figure and children come to greet him in fancy dress and with their faces painted black; in recent years there has been some controversy as to whether Zwarte Piets should come with multi-coloured or white-painted faces, in order to avoid appearing racist or causing insult.

Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Piets have been on a long voyage, all the way from Spain, where they live during the rest of the year. In the Netherlands, towns take it in turns every year to hold the welcoming festivities; in Belgium, where the day is not quite so important, they are usually held in Antwerp. After they arrive, there is a huge procession through

the town led by Sinteklaas with his bushy beard, wearing bishop's robes with mitre and staff, and riding on his white horse, Amerigo. The Zwarte Piets distribute sweets, nuts and mandarin oranges among the crowds.

Does Sinterklaas remind us of Santa Claus? Yes, of course. Both are based on the figure of Bishop Nicholas of Myra, the patron saint of children and the poor, who died on the 6th of December 350 AD. His feast day is celebrated in many Christian countries, and especially in the Netherlands. The first Dutch settlers in New York (then known as New Amsterdam) also celebrated Sinterklaas and it was there that the figure of Sinterklaas gradually developed — you guessed it — into the American figure of Santa Claus.

At home, on the evening in mid-November when Sinterklaas arrives in Northern Europe, children place their shoes in front of the chimney. They also put out a carrot and a saucer of water for Amerigo the horse. Next morning, the carrot has disappeared and the water is gone; in their place the children look inside their shoes to find a little present which Sinterklaas has brought down the chimney for them.

Now the wait begins. The main celebration does not take place until the evening before Saint Nicholas' Day; it is known as the *pakjesavond* (parcel evening) when good chil-

dren receive presents and naughty children live in fear that Sinterklaas will put them in his sack and take them off to Spain. On the days leading up to it, grown-ups bake *spekulaas* and *pepernoten* (spiced biscuits) and children watch a special television news programme, the *Sinterklaasjournaal*, to follow what Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Piets are up to and how their preparations are coming along. The helpers have all sorts of mishaps and often the children are called upon to help, so that the presents get delivered on time.

On *pakjesavond*, the way the presents are wrapped is just as important as the presents themselves. The wrapping is usually very elaborate and has something to do with a characteristic or hobby of the recipient; it will often include a humorous poem about them, too. Typically, the gift must also include a chocolate letter, usually the first letter of the person's first name.

So what happens in the Netherlands and Belgium between the 24th and the 26th of December? On Christmas Eve, after a normal working day, people go to church or out for a meal, and on the following two public holidays they meet up with their families. The Dutch, and many Belgians, have already celebrated the "main" feast day of the Christmas season, so now they can just relax. Actually, that doesn't sound too bad, does it?



GINGERBREAD WITH MARZIPAN FILLING

This Christmas speciality belongs to the Advent season in the Netherlands. The fine gingerbread biscuits are filled with homemade marzipan, which makes the hearts of marzipan fans beat faster. The baking and eating make the wait for Sinterklaas fly by.

Ingredients

(Makes 16)

For the marzipan

250 g ground, blanched almonds

250 g sugar

1 egg

zest of 1 organic lemon

For the gingerbread dough

500 g plain flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

300 g brown sugar

salt

2 teaspoons cinnamon

¼ teaspoon ground cloves

¼ teaspoon ground ginger

¼ teaspoon ground white

pepper

¼ teaspoon nutmeg

350 g butter

For the glaze and decoration

1 egg

2 tablespoons milk

16 whole almonds

Preparation

1. To make the marzipan, mix together the almonds, sugar, egg and a little lemon zest in a food processor or mixer until they turn into a paste. Cover with cling film and put in the fridge.
2. To make the gingerbread dough, mix together the flour with the baking powder, sugar, salt, spices and butter and knead to form a smooth dough. Wrap in cling film and leave to rest for at least 1 hour in the fridge. (If you are in a hurry, leave for 30 minutes in the freezer.)
3. Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper. Remove the dough from the fridge and roll out on a floured surface until approximately 5 mm thick. Cut out 32 rectangles (5 cm x 10 cm each) with a sharp knife.
4. Place 16 rectangles on the baking tray. Spoon 1 teaspoon of marzipan onto each one and cover each with another rectangle, making a sandwich. Press the edges together with a fork to seal.
5. Whisk the milk with the egg. Glaze the parcels with the mixture and decorate with an almond. Bake in the centre of the preheated oven for 9–12 minutes. Remove from the oven and leave to cool.



PEPERNOTEN

Sinterklaas and his Zwarte Piets distribute many different kinds of spiced biscuit to the waiting children in the Netherlands and Belgium. The biscuits don't look particularly spectacular, but they taste all the more deliciously "Christmassy"—beware of becoming addicted!

Ingredients

(Makes 30)

For the dough

80 g butter
80 g icing sugar
350 g plain flour
2 teaspoons potassium carbonate
2 tablespoons rum
200 g honey
2 teaspoons mixed spice
100 g ground walnuts
1 medium egg

For the icing

100 g icing sugar
2 teaspoons lemon juice

Preparation

1. Melt the butter in a small pan. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. Sift the icing sugar and flour into a bowl. Mix together the potassium carbonate and rum and add to the bowl along with the mixed spice and the walnuts. Beat the egg and add this and the cooled butter to the mixture. Knead the ingredients together to form a dough. Cover and leave at room temperature to infuse for 1 day.
2. On the next day, preheat the oven to 175 °C. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
3. Form the dough into balls of approximately 3 cm diameter and place on the baking tray leaving sufficient space between them. Bake the *pepernoten* in the centre of the oven for about 15 minutes. Remove and allow to cool completely.
4. For the icing, sieve the icing sugar into a small bowl and mix with the lemon juice, glaze the biscuits and allow to dry.



DELICATELY SPICED SPECULAAS

In Holland and Belgium the traditional Christmas cookies are known as “speculaas”, or “speculoos”. Having experimented in the kitchen with various spices and shapes we’re convinced that the best ones are homemade. Don’t you think our biscuits look delicious?

Ingredients

(Makes 50)

250 g plain flour

2 teaspoons cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

½ teaspoon cardamom

ground cloves

ground nutmeg

white pepper

ground aniseed

salt

bicarbonate of soda

110 g butter

120 g brown sugar

1 egg

Plus

cornflour for the moulds

wooden or metal *speculaas*

**moulds (or, if not available,
other biscuit cutters)**

pastry brush

sharp knife

Preparation

1. Mix together the flour, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom and a pinch each of cloves, nutmeg, pepper, aniseed, salt and bicarbonate of soda in a small bowl, and then put to one side. Chop the butter into small pieces.
2. Cream the sugar and butter together in a medium-sized bowl for about 2 minutes with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Gradually add the flour mixture, stirring slowly, followed by the butter. Mix everything to a smooth dough.
3. Wrap the dough in cling film and chill for at least 1 hour, or overnight, in the fridge.
4. Remove half of the dough from the fridge, take a small amount and knead it with your fingers until soft.
5. Dust the wooden moulds with a little cornflour. Press a generous amount of dough into the first mould and cut away any overhanging edges with a sharp knife. Now remove the dough carefully from the mould; this is made easier by gently tapping the sides of the mould on the work surface. Place the biscuits on a baking tray covered with greaseproof paper. When all the biscuits have been made, leave them in the fridge again for a few hours or overnight so that they keep their shape whilst baking.
6. Preheat the oven to 170 °C (fan oven). Bake the speculaas in the centre of the oven for 10–12 minutes until golden brown. Remove from the oven and leave to cool.



GINGERBREAD HOUSES

In Amsterdam there are many attractive brown sandstone houses with little sets of steps leading up to them. It must be especially nice to live in one of them at Christmas time, when snowflakes fall onto the steps. Here is your chance to create some of these pretty houses for your window sill.



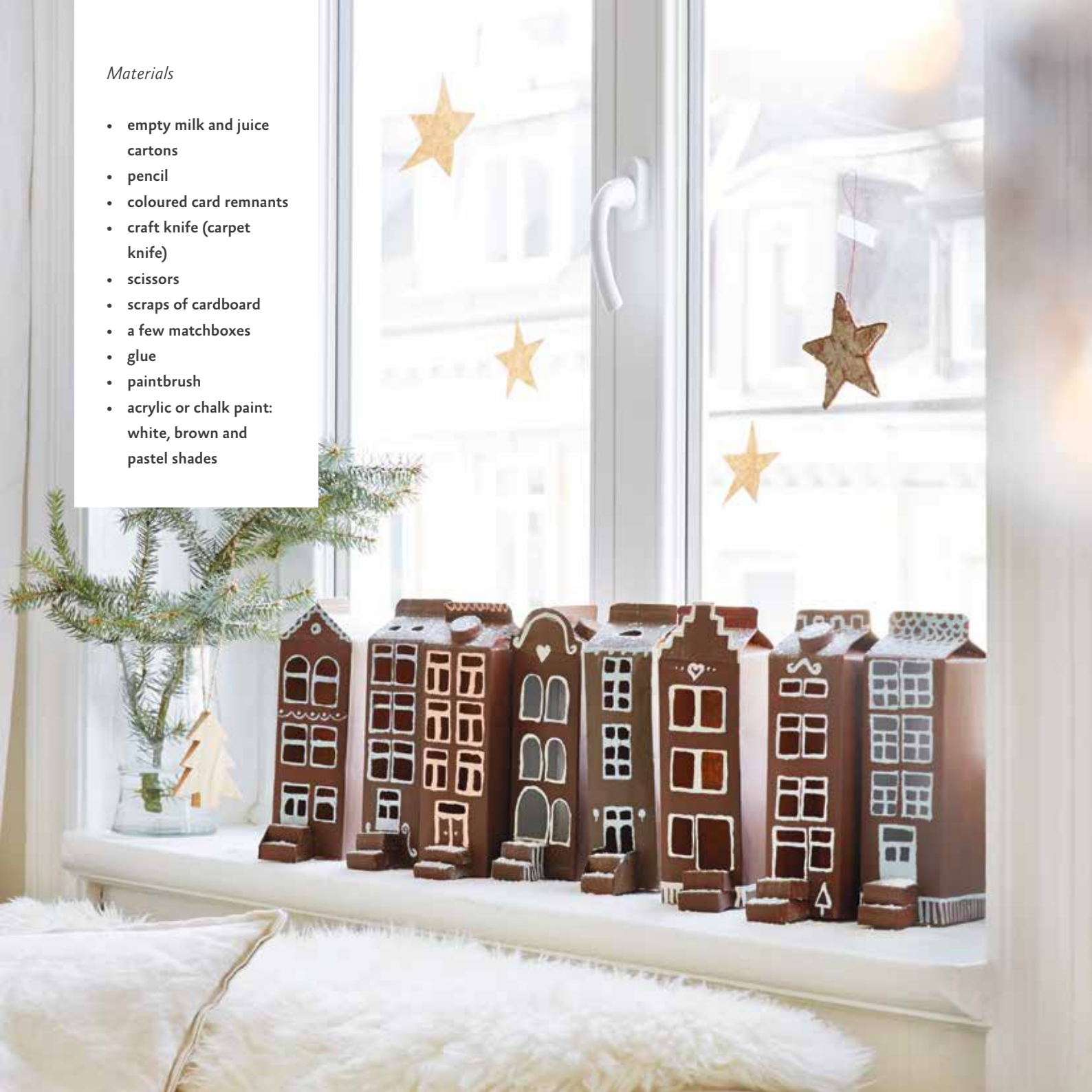
1. First draw the windows and doors on the cartons with a pencil; if necessary, cut out templates from pieces of carton and draw around them. Cut out the windows and doors carefully with the knife.

2. Now you can design your houses however you like. Scraps of cardboard can be used to make attractive eaves to stick onto the roof. The steps can be made with the inside of a matchbox cut into two pieces, one longer than the other; stick the shorter half onto the longer one and turn the open edge to the back. Now paint the houses white and leave to dry thoroughly.

3. Paint the Amsterdam gingerbread houses in the typical brown sandstone colour. Let the paint dry thoroughly and then add your own pretty decoration with pastel-coloured paints. How about painting a pattern on the eaves, making some window shutters, or a Christmas tree for the front garden?

Materials

- empty milk and juice cartons
- pencil
- coloured card remnants
- craft knife (carpet knife)
- scissors
- scraps of cardboard
- a few matchboxes
- glue
- paintbrush
- acrylic or chalk paint: white, brown and pastel shades



MONEY CHRISTMAS TREE

You would like to give money but don't just want to hand over banknotes or put them in a Christmas card? Then why not make our pretty Christmas tree — it fits the occasion perfectly!



1. Fold the banknotes into different widths to make up a triangle (Christmas tree shape) when placed on top of one another. Tip: the greater the value, the larger the banknote.

2. Take a long piece of thin wire and bend it in the middle. Place the longest banknote in the bend and twist the wire so that the banknote is held in place. Continue in the same way with the banknotes getting smaller and smaller up to the top of the tree.

3. Wind the remaining wire around the wooden skewer so that the tree is securely fixed; leave enough of the pointed end of the skewer free to push into the moss later. Cut off any loose ends of wire.

4. Attach a star to the top of the Christmas tree. Make the star by cutting out 2 identical stars from the coloured paper, then stick them together on either side of the wooden skewer with double-sided tape.

5. Cut a piece of sacking big enough to fit around the glass like a sleeve around a flower pot; it doesn't matter if the edge of the material is slightly higher than the glass. Wind double-sided tape around the glass and stick the sacking to it. Fill the glass with moss and push the wooden skewer with the "Christmas tree" into it. That's another original gift made!

Materials

- banknotes
- thin wire
- wooden skewers
(1 wooden skewer
per tree)
- scissors
- coloured paper
- double-sided tape
- 1 small glass
- moss
- sacking





Sales team for the United Kingdom | Laura Swonke and Richard Urban



UNITED KINGDOM

Christmas in the UK is a cheerful, sociable occasion. At Christmas dinner, people pass round Christmas crackers, which may seem odd to an outsider, but they help to create a party atmosphere and get everyone into a good mood during the long, delicious meal. In the afternoon, friends often call by after they have finished their own celebrations to wish everybody "Merry Christmas".

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Anyone visiting a British home in the weeks leading up to Christmas will be amazed — there are Christmas cards everywhere, lined up on the mantelpiece and hanging on strings all around the house! Every year approximately 670 million cards are sent. How do people find the time to write them? Look inside the card and there is the answer — usually there is a short printed text, and the only things written by hand are the names of the recipient and the sender.

The world's first commercial Christmas card was printed in the UK. It was commissioned in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole and designed by his friend, the artist John Horsley. It depicts a festive gathering in the centre with a grapevine surround, beneath which a text reads: "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you". A copy of this card can be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

People in the UK meet up in the pub with friends on Christmas Eve, the 24th of December, and get into the festive spirit together. Children hang up their Christmas stockings on the mantelpiece so that Father Christmas can come in the night and fill them with toys, sweets and other gifts. Up until the Middle Ages, Father Christmas was known as Yule Father and he embodied the celebration and merriment of Yuletide at the end of the year. Although Christianisation has replaced Yuletide with Christmas, "Merry Yule" or "Merry

Yuletide" can still be found on Christmas cards. The words Yule and Yuletide also appear in Christmas carols and are occasionally used in certain dialects.

The tradition of hanging mistletoe with white berries above the doorway as part of the Christmas decorations also dates back to before the Middle Ages. Mistletoe has traditionally been associated with fertility and vitality. The saying goes that if a couple kisses under the mistletoe the relationship will last for ever. It is forbidden to refuse to be kissed under the mistletoe.

On Christmas Day, the 25th of December, children wake up very early to look for their presents. The grown-ups also exchange presents in the morning; later on everyone sits down to the traditional Christmas dinner of a turkey filled with stuffing or chestnuts, which has been roasted for several hours in the oven. The accompaniments are gravy, cranberry sauce, Brussels sprouts and other winter vegetables, roast potatoes and sometimes Yorkshire pudding. Christmas crackers add to the boisterous merriment of the meal. The table is set with a cracker next to every dessert spoon; after the first course or before the meal begins, each person finds a partner to pull their cracker with. The cracker tears in half with a loud pop, and out fall: a paper crown which the owner of the Christmas cracker must put on, a

piece of paper with a joke — often a play on words — which has to be read aloud and, finally, a small novelty gift. Everyone is also provided with party poppers filled with streamers or confetti which burst out with a bang when the “fuse” is pulled. By the end of the meal, the partygoers are sitting around in a jolly gathering with paper crowns on their heads and a table covered in paper streamers and confetti.

The dessert is Christmas pudding, or plum pudding. Christmas pudding is a moist, steamed fruit pudding which is soaked in brandy (or sometimes whisky or other spirits) and set alight — it is extremely filling, but delicious.

In the UK the Christmas holiday draws to a cosy end on the 26th of December, which is known as Boxing Day. On this day tradesmen and errand boys would visit their employers and collect “Christmas boxes” with money or presents for their service throughout the previous year. Servants, who had to work for their masters on Christmas Day, were not able to visit their families until the day after Christmas. Their employers gave them Christmas boxes filled with presents, money and/or leftovers from the Christmas dinner. All this is probably how Boxing Day got its name. Nowadays the British finish off the Christmas celebrations on Boxing Day and spend a few relaxing days leading up to the New Year.



EGGNOG

When it's cold and wet outside, the best way to warm up is with a hot drink. This will go down a treat if you are entertaining guests during Advent or waiting to open the Christmas presents with your family. Eggnog also tastes good cold, and then there is no need for a bain-marie.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

1 vanilla pod

3 very fresh organic eggs

150 ml milk

250 ml single cream

60 g sugar

100 ml brandy (optional)

50 ml dark rum (optional)

Also

150 ml double cream

fresh nutmeg

Preparation

1. Cut open the vanilla pod lengthwise and scrape out the seeds.
2. Separate the eggs. Whisk the egg whites with an electric mixer until stiff (make sure that the bowl is clean and that there is no grease on the whisk).
3. Half-fill a saucepan with water and heat. Sit a bowl with the egg yolks, vanilla, milk, cream and sugar over the bain-marie and beat until smooth, making sure that no water gets into the mixture, until the sugar has melted. Remove from the heat, stir in the alcohol and carefully fold in the beaten egg whites.
4. Share the eggnog out between four glasses. Whip the double cream until stiff, fill into an icing bag with a star nozzle and decorate the glasses of eggnog with the whipped cream. Grate a little nutmeg onto each drink and serve.



SHORTBREAD REINDEERS

Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer, who pulls Santa Claus' sleigh, is popular outside the English-speaking world, too. Now you can bake your own version of the famous reindeer with his shiny nose — out of shortbread, the delicious speciality that originated in Scotland!

Ingredients

(Makes 35)

For the dough

225 g softened butter

60 g icing sugar

salt

250 g plain flour

For the decoration

50 g icing sugar

35 red chocolate beans

100 g milk chocolate icing

Plus

flour for the work surface

round pastry cutter (6 cm Ø)

icing bag with round nozzle

(1 mm Ø)

Preparation

1. To make the dough, place the butter, icing sugar and 1 pinch of salt in a mixing bowl and beat until fluffy with a hand mixer. Add the flour a little at a time and knead into a firm dough. Make the dough into a ball, wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for approximately 30 minutes.
2. Preheat the oven to 170°C (conventional oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
3. Roll out the dough on a floured surface until approximately 3 mm thick. Cut out about 35 circles, place them onto the baking tray and bake in the centre of the preheated oven for 10–12 minutes. Remove and leave to cool.
4. To decorate, mix together the icing sugar and 2 tablespoons of water to make a thick icing. Spread a little icing onto each piece of shortbread and press 1 red chocolate bean onto it for a nose.
5. Half-fill a saucepan with water and heat. Sit a bowl with the chocolate icing over the water to melt; make sure that no water gets into the bowl. Remove from the heat and leave to cool a little. Fill the round-tipped icing bag with the icing and draw the reindeers' eyes and antlers. Place the shortbread reindeers in the fridge until the icing has set.



GINGERBREAD MAN

Gingerbread is available everywhere in the UK up to and around Christmas. It has a rather strong ginger taste and can be found in the shape of gingerbread men, candy canes, hearts and stars. Many people hang gingerbread shapes as decorations on their Christmas tree.

Ingredients

(Makes about 40)

120 g sugar

100 ml treacle

1 ½ teaspoons ground ginger

1 teaspoon cinnamon

**2 large pinches ground
cloves**

2 large pinches ground mace

**1 teaspoon bicarbonate of
soda**

125 g cold butter

1 medium egg

350 g plain flour

80 g icing sugar

1 ½ teaspoons lemon juice

Plus

different pastry cutters

**(e.g. gingerbread man,
candy cane, ...)**

**decorating bottle or icing
bag with nozzle**

Preparation

1. Heat the sugar and treacle in a saucepan until the sugar has melted. Stir in the spices and bicarbonate of soda. Chop the butter into pieces, add to the saucepan and stir until everything is well mixed together. Leave to cool until the mixture is lukewarm.
2. Beat the egg and stir well into the butter mixture; add the flour a little at a time, stirring in well. Leave the dough to cool completely, wrap in cling film and leave to rest in the fridge overnight.
3. On the next day, preheat the oven to 200 °C (conventional oven); 180 °C (fan oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
4. Remove the dough from the fridge and divide into 2 halves or 4 quarters. Roll out the portions onto a floured work surface to approximately 4 mm thick. Cut out the gingerbread shapes and arrange on the baking tray leaving enough space between them.
5. Bake the biscuits in the centre of the oven for 8–10 minutes until golden brown. Remove from the oven, leave to cool briefly, then transfer onto a cake rack.
6. Mix the icing sugar and lemon juice to a smooth paste and fill into a decorating bottle or icing bag. Decorate the gingerbreads with faces, clothes and buttons. Leave on the cake rack to dry.



CHRISTMAS PUDDING

There is no such thing as Christmas dinner without Christmas pudding. Also known as plum pudding, this dessert is unbelievably rich and has an alcoholic “kick”. Use either brandy or rum with at least 50 Vol.-% to flambé. Traditionally, a coin is hidden in the pudding which will bring the finder good luck.

Ingredients

(Serves 4–6)

For the pudding

250 g sultanas

100 g currants • 125 g prunes

3 tablespoons rum

2 apples • 1 organic lemon

100 g candied orange peel

100 g candied lemon peel

90 g shredded suet (or frozen butter)

4 medium eggs

65 g raw cane sugar

100 g plain flour

120 g breadcrumbs

100 g ground hazelnuts

½ teaspoon each ground cloves and cinnamon

nutmeg • pepper

For the brandy butter

125 g butter • 125 g sugar

3 tablespoons brandy

Plus

butter and breadcrumbs for the pudding basin

6 tablespoons brandy or rum (54%) to flambé

Preparation

1. Put the sultanas, currants and chopped prunes into a bowl, pour in the rum and leave to soak overnight.
2. On the next day, peel and core the apples and chop into small pieces. Wash the lemon in hot water and dry; squeeze the juice and grate the rind. Add the lemon juice and zest, candied orange peel and candied lemon peel to the apples.
3. Put the eggs and sugar in a bowl and beat until smooth; sieve in the flour. Add the breadcrumbs, hazelnuts, cloves, cinnamon, freshly ground nutmeg and a pinch of pepper. Combine everything with the suet (or chopped frozen butter).
4. Grease the pudding basin with butter and sprinkle the inside with breadcrumbs. Transfer the mixture into the basin and close the lid. Steam the pudding for approximately 3 hours.
5. To make the brandy butter, mix together the soft butter, sugar and brandy.
6. Take the cooked Christmas pudding out of the saucepan or steamer and allow to rest for 5 minutes before turning out. Warm the brandy or rum slightly. Then, at the table, pour over the pudding and ignite. Serve with the brandy butter.



CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

Christmas crackers are just as much a source of fun at office parties with colleagues as they are for the family on Christmas Day. This version can also be used as a novel way of wrapping a Christmas present.



1. To make the first Christmas cracker, spread a sheet of coloured paper widthways in front of you and place a toilet roll tube at the centre of the bottom edge. Roll the paper around the tube.

2. Hold the rolled paper with one hand whilst bunching one end of the paper together with the other. The paper should be firm enough to do this again for the other end without the Christmas cracker falling open.

3. Cut two fairly long lengths of ribbon or twine and tie a bow around one end of the cracker. Before tying the other end, fill

the Christmas cracker with a little gift, such as a chocolate Santa or a voucher for something. Tie a bow at the other end. Make the rest of the crackers in the same way.

4. The Christmas crackers can also be decorated with Christmas stars to make them look even more festive.

Materials

- sheets of thin sugar paper in different shades of red
- toilet roll tubes
- ribbon or twine
- small gifts
- gold marker pen



FATHER CHRISTMAS PLACE CARDS

Whether for the pre-Christmas office party with colleagues or Christmas Day with the family, it's always a good idea to have place cards for everyone to take home with them after the event.



1. Choose a sheet of festive coloured paper. With a compass or saucer, draw a circle measuring 20 cm in diameter. Cut out the circle. Cut through the middle to make two halves.

2. Write the name of a guest in the centre of each semicircle with a white gel pen and draw a few dots around the name.

3. Bend the semicircle into a cone shape and stick the ends together with glue.

4. Make a bobble out of a small ball of cotton wool and stick to the tip of the hat. Stick cotton wool around the bottom edge of the hat and you have a Father Christmas place card!

Materials

- coloured craft paper (2/3 DIN-A4-sheet per guest)
- compass or saucer
- pencil
- scissors
- white gel pen
- glue
- cotton wool



CHRISTMAS STOCKING

This Christmas stocking for Father Christmas can be sewn by machine—or if you don't have a machine it can also be made easily with textile adhesive!



1. Using a fabric pen, on the wrong side of the material, draw a stocking measuring 10 cm at the top, 16.5 cm at the bottom and 23 cm high. Cut out, leaving an allowance of 1 cm (for the glue). Use this stocking as a mirror-image template and cut out a second one.

2. Place the two pieces together with the right sides inside (the stocking will be turned right side out later). Spread the glue carefully around the edge of the bottom piece of material, taking care not to let glue go beyond the line. (Do not glue the top edges together!) Press pieces together and allow to dry completely.

3. To make the hanger, take three 40 cm lengths of wool, tie together at the top and make a plait by alternately crossing

the right and left threads over the middle thread. Tie the two ends of the plait together to make a loop.

4. Cut a rectangle of fleece fabric 22 cm x 7 cm. Using a thick needle and thick wool, embroider a name in the middle; alternatively, cut out fabric or felt letters and stick on with fabric adhesive.

5. Once the stocking has dried, turn the material right side out. Stick, stitch or staple the loop of wool to the corner

6. Stick the fleece material to the top edge of the stocking, using plenty of glue, otherwise the material will not hold. Leave to dry completely. Now you can give someone their own personal stocking, or hang it up for yourself!

Materials

- fabric pen
- cotton fabric (2 pieces, each 20 cm x 25 cm)
- needlework scissors
- fabric adhesive
- black wool
- fleece fabric (about 25 cm x 10 cm)
- thick sewing needle





Sales team for France | Below from left to right: Kristina Stolz, Estelle Musahl, Melissa Dörksen



FRANCE

Christmas in France is a rather solemn occasion, full of Christian and pre-Christian symbolism. Customs vary according to the region, but food has a very important part to play throughout the country. Whilst almost everywhere in France people start to indulge in the consumption of fine delicacies on Christmas Eve, in Provence the Christmas Eve meal is rather meagre and the real feast is served on the 25th of December.

JOYEUX NOËL ET BONNE ANNÉE!

The Christmas highlight in France is referred to as “*le réveillon*”, the name given to Christmas Eve on the 24th of December, as well as the long festive dinner enjoyed on that day.

The 24th of December starts off as a normal working day. In the evening many French people go to church for the *messe de minuit* (Midnight Mass), which, in spite of its name, is celebrated between 6pm and 10pm, after which they go home to a real feast. The hors d’oeuvres consist of smoked salmon, coquilles St Jacques, rillettes, paté, and often paté de foie gras, snails and other shellfish. The main course is duck à l’orange or turkey with chestnut stuffing (*dinde aux marrons*). Naturally, the meal must also include bread and butter and an assorted cheese board.

A *bûche de Noël* (Yule log) — a chocolate-covered sponge in the shape of a log — is typically served for dessert. This cake harks back to a pre-Christian winter solstice tradition which still continues in Scandinavia and some other areas, such as Provence, where it is known as *cacho-fiè*. Before sitting down to the Christmas meal, a special log is ceremoniously lit in the hearth and left to burn for the next 12 days until the 6th of January, which is the last day of the Christmas season. The ashes are then spread over the fields, and sometimes even mixed in with animal fodder,

because they are believed to bring happiness, blessings and a successful harvest.

On Christmas Eve in Provence, instead of a luxurious dinner, a *gros souper* (big supper) is served. It consists of 7 plain or “lean” dishes (without any meat) followed by 13 desserts (*treize desserts*) which include *pompe à l’huile* (an aromatic bread), fresh and dried fruits such as dates and chestnuts, nougat and other similar sweetmeats. The number 13 symbolises Jesus and the 12 Apostles at the Last Supper. The table is spread with three white tablecloths: one for the *gros souper*, one for the festive midday dinner (with meat) on the 25th of December, and one for the evening meal on Christmas Day. Three candles are placed on the table to symbolise the Holy Trinity.

Generally speaking, Christmas customs in France vary from region to region. In the north, children put their shoes under the *sapin de Noël* (Christmas tree) before they go to bed on Christmas Eve. The Christmas tree is a common feature in this area; in Alsace, and in particular the capital, Strasbourg, the tradition of decorating fir trees at Christmas reaches back as far as the 16th century. In the south of France, on the other hand, just as in Italy and Spain, cribs have a more important role than Christmas trees. *Père Noël* (Father Christmas) comes down the chimney with presents in the night.

Unlike Father Christmas, he wears a long robe and carries a big basket on his back. Children have to wait until the next morning for their presents, but sometimes grown-ups already exchange their presents on Christmas Eve.

Just one week after Christmas, there is another *réveillon* with yet another luxurious feast to look forward to—the *réveillon du nouvel an* (New Year). This is celebrated more often with friends than with family. Anyone looking forward to a big New Year's firework display will be disappointed, however, because it is forbidden to set off fireworks in most French towns; the only exception is the national holiday on the 14th of July.

In France, as well as in Spain, the “Three Kings’ Cake” is a treat to be enjoyed on the last (12th) day of Christmas. In the north, the round *galette des Rois* is made of puff pastry and has an almond cream filling whilst, in the south, the *gateau des Rois* is a brioche ring made with candied fruit. A figure or “*fève*” is baked inside the cake and whoever finds it is allowed to choose a partner and together they become the royal couple for the day. This custom also existed at the French royal court and the finder of the *fève* could have a wish granted by the (real) king. Often, the cake is cut so that one slice is left over; this is the poor man’s slice and is intended for the first poor person who comes to the house.



BOUILLABAISSSE

At Christmas, people in France treat themselves to something special—and this definitely includes coquilles St Jacques and other fine seafood. Provence is the home of bouillabaisse but it is not eaten on Christmas Eve because tradition dictates that the meagre gros souper has to be eaten instead.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

2 shallots
2 garlic cloves
1 head of fennel
100 g mushrooms
2 tomatoes
400–500 g fish fillets
4 king prawns
4 scallops
3 tablespoons olive oil
200 ml dry white wine
100 ml vermouth
1 litre fish stock
0.1 g saffron
2 star anise
1 teaspoon tomato puree
½ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon curry powder
12 sprigs fresh thyme
salt and pepper
**½ teaspoon organic lemon
zest**

Preparation

1. To make the bouillabaisse, peel and finely chop the shallots and garlic. Wash and dry the fennel, mushrooms and tomatoes. Cut the fennel and mushrooms into thin slices and chop the tomatoes into small chunks. Wash the fish fillets and seafood and pat them dry. Cut the fish fillets into bite-sized pieces.
2. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan; add the shallots and garlic and cook until translucent. Add the white wine and vermouth. Next, add the fish stock, saffron, star anise, tomato puree, paprika, curry powder and thyme and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes.
3. Add the fennel slices and king prawns and cook for a further 5–10 minutes. Then, one after another, add the mushrooms, fish fillets, tomatoes and scallops and simmer for 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt, pepper and lemon zest. Remove the thyme sprigs and star anise before serving.



DUCK RILLETTES

Rillettes, usually made from duck or goose, are served in France as an hors d'oeuvre at the réveillon on Christmas Eve. The speciality is related to „Pottsuse“ from the Harz region of Germany; it can also be made from fish such as trout or salmon. As a preserve it can be kept in the fridge for about 3 weeks — it is also a great Christmas present!

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

For the rillettes

4 duck legs (about 300 g each)
2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons sugar
30 g fresh ginger
1 bay leaf
1 cinnamon stick
1 star anise
1 small dried chilli
zest of ½ organic orange
200 g duck fat (or goose fat if preferred)

For the shallot marmalade

400 g shallots
1 tablespoon duck fat
2 heaped tablespoons sugar
150 ml ruby port
250 ml blackcurrant juice

Plus

4 sprigs of marjoram
1 small loaf rye bread

Preparation

1. Wash the duck legs, pat them dry and rub with salt and sugar. Peel the ginger and cut into slices. Place the duck legs, bay leaf and ginger in a saucepan. Add enough water to cover the meat. Bring to the boil; cover and simmer over a low heat for about 2 hours until the meat falls off the bone.
2. Put the cinnamon stick, star anise, chilli and orange zest in a mortar and grind coarsely. Put 1 tablespoon of the duck fat to one side; add the rest to the ground spice mixture, melt over a low heat and leave to steep in the saucepan for 30 minutes.
3. To make the shallot marmalade, peel the shallots and cut lengthwise into thin slices. Heat the reserved duck fat, soften the shallots in it for 2–3 minutes, and then add the sugar. Pour in the port and blackcurrant juice and reduce, uncovered, to syrup. Leave the marmalade to cool.
4. Take the duck legs out of the water and remove all the fat and bones. Shred the meat with two forks and transfer to a dish. Strain the spiced duck fat through a sieve into the bowl; if it has solidified, reheat. Discard the herbs. Chill the rillettes in the fridge for 2–3 hours.
5. Wash the marjoram, pat dry and pick off the leaves. Cut the bread into slices and fry on both sides in a hot frying pan. Serve the rillettes on the bread slices topped with shallot marmalade and sprinkled with marjoram leaves.



DUCK À L'ORANGE

Canard à l'orange is a typical Christmas recipe in France. Traditionally, a whole duck is served but this recipe using duck breasts is less complicated and much quicker to prepare. Duck can be cooked like this in the summer on a barbecue and tastes just as delicious.

Ingredients

For the duck

- 1 teaspoon organic orange zest**
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander**
- 1 teaspoon ground vanilla**
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 4 duck breast fillets**
- rapeseed oil for frying**

For the orange sauce

- 2 oranges**
- 1 sprig of thyme**
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper**

For the glaze

- 1 clove garlic**
- juice of ½ lime**
- 4 tablespoons honey**
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 2 tablespoons light soy sauce**
- 6 tablespoons orange liqueur**

Preparation

- 1.** To cook the duck, combine the orange zest, pepper, coriander, vanilla, sugar and salt in a small bowl. Make several slits in the skin of the duck breasts with a sharp knife and massage the spice mixture well into the skin. Place the meat in the bowl, cover and leave to marinate for at least 30 minutes.
- 2.** To make the orange sauce, remove the flesh from the oranges and pick off the thyme leaves; place them in a saucepan with the sugar, salt and cayenne pepper and bring to the boil. Remove from the stove and leave to steep.
- 3.** For the glaze, peel and crush the garlic, combine with the honey, sugar, soy sauce and orange liqueur and mix well.
- 4.** Preheat the oven to 200 °C (grill). Brush the baking tray with rapeseed oil. Heat a little rapeseed oil in a frying pan and fry the duck breasts on both sides until the skin is crispy. Brush the duck with the glaze and caramelize under the grill for 3 minutes on both sides. Reduce the temperature and carry on roasting the duck until cooked, basting from time to time with the glaze. When cooked, cover the duck with aluminium foil and leave to rest for 5 minutes.
- 5.** Remove the duck from the oven, cut into slices and serve with the orange sauce.



MADELEINES

These light, airy cakes originate from Lorraine. They do not just taste good at Christmas, and are really simple to make. The special baking mould gives them their characteristic shape. If you like, they can also be flavoured with almonds or orange blossom water.

Ingredients

(Makes 24)

100 g butter
(room temperature)

100 g sugar

3 eggs

150 g plain flour

½ teaspoon baking powder

zest of 1 organic lemon

seeds from ½ vanilla pod

Plus

1 Madeleine mould

butter for the mould

icing sugar for sprinkling

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven). Grease the Madeleine mould well with butter.
2. Cream the butter and sugar together in a bowl with a hand mixer until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time and mix well.
3. Combine the flour, baking powder, lemon zest and vanilla seeds; fold this flour mixture into the egg mixture until all the dry ingredients are just about moist.
4. Spoon the mixture into the mould cavities and bake in the centre of the preheated oven for 15–20 minutes until golden brown. Remove and allow to cool for a while in the mould, then carefully take the cakes out of the mould. When cool, sprinkle the Madeleines with icing sugar according to taste.



BÛCHE DE NOËL

This sponge roll with a delicious chestnut filling is the classic dessert on the Christmas menu in France. Its name and appearance — “Christmas log” — get their inspiration from the ancient tradition of burning a consecrated log during the 12 days of Christmas from the 25th of December to the 6th of January.

Ingredients

For the sponge

120 g plain flour
bicarbonate of soda
90 g butter
6 eggs
150 g sugar

For the chocolate ganache

250 g plain chocolate
360 ml cream

For the chestnut-chocolate filling

200 g chestnut puree
150 g butter
80 g plain chocolate

To decorate (optional)

chopped pistachio nuts
cranberries
rosemary sprigs

Preparation

1. To make the sponge, mix the flour with 1 pinch of bicarbonate of soda. Melt the butter in a small saucepan, let it cool and set aside. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper. Preheat the oven to 180 °C (fan oven).
2. Mix the eggs and sugar together in a heat-resistant bowl. Sit the bowl over a saucepan of hot water so that the water does not touch it and heat whilst stirring until the sugar has dissolved and the mixture has almost doubled in volume.
3. Remove from the heat. Fold in the flour and stir in the butter. Transfer the mixture to the baking tray and smooth the surface. Bake for 15 minutes in the preheated oven until golden brown. Spread out a damp tea towel and cover it with greaseproof paper. Remove the sponge from the oven and carefully turn it onto the clean greaseproof paper. Peel away the lining paper from the base of the cake. Trim the edges so that they are straight. Using the tea towel, roll the cake carefully from the long side. Place in the fridge to cool for a short while.
4. Meanwhile, chop up the chocolate for the chocolate ganache and place into a bowl. Boil the cream in a small saucepan and pour over the chocolate. Leave for 2 minutes, then stir well until the chocolate has dissolved. Put in the fridge.
5. For the chestnut-chocolate filling, whip together the chestnut puree and the butter until creamy. Melt the chocolate, add to the cream and mix well.
6. To complete the *bûche de Noël*, take the cake out of the fridge, unroll it and spread with the chestnut-chocolate cream. Re-roll the cake and chill again. Beat the ganache until smooth. Cut off the ends of the roll at an angle and arrange them as branches next to the log on the plate. Coat the roll with the ganache to give a tree bark effect. Cool until served.
7. Just before serving, decorate to taste with chopped pistachio nuts, cranberries and little sprigs of rosemary.



A GOLDEN CHRISTMAS GREETING

You can never have too many Christmas messages around the house during Advent. How about this golden sign that we have made from a piece of driftwood? That's true Christmas cheer!



1. Make a ball with the gold Fimo®, then roll it into a sausage shape approximately 1 cm in diameter.

2. Preheat the oven to 130 °C (conventional oven). Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper and “write” your Christmas sign or message on it with the modelling clay sausage. Bake the lettering in the oven for approximately 20 minutes until hard.

3. Remove the hardened lettering from the oven and leave to cool. Using the smallest bit, drill holes at every point where the lettering touches the base. Mark the corresponding points on the piece of wood and drill holes. Insert the screws from the underside so that the lettering stands firmly. (Alternatively, the lettering can be stuck on with a hot glue gun, although this will be less stable.)

Materials

- 1 ½ packets of gold Fimo® Soft
- greaseproof paper
- cordless drill/screwdriver
- 1 small piece of wood or driftwood
- small screws
- hot glue gun if necessary





Sales team for Spain | Opposite page, from left to right: Estrella Almansa, Caroline Hollenhorst, Karina Relard



SPAIN

In the land of Seville oranges, Christmas doesn't really "get going" until the 22nd of December, when all Spaniards join in the excitement of the lottery. The following two weeks are sure to be busy. People go to Midnight Mass, spend time with their families, play tricks on one another and eat "lucky grapes" until the 6th of January comes along, when they have their big celebration and exchange presents.

¡ FELIZ NAVIDAD Y PRÓSPERO AÑO NUEVO!

Spanish children have to wait until the 6th of January for their presents — quite a bit longer than children in most other countries! Advent in Spain is a rather quiet time. People create elaborate Christmas cribs at home, and in many town squares there are “living cribs” with real animals and local residents dressed in costumes. The 6th of December is in fact a public holiday; not in honour of Saint Nicholas, but because the democratic constitution was passed on the 6th of December 1978.

During Advent you are more likely to come across a lottery ticket-seller than Saint Nicholas. Almost everyone in Spain joins in with the Christmas State Lottery and the ticket-sellers want to get rid of the last tickets. Approximately 70% of the stakes are redistributed. This is the highest percentage worldwide (as a comparison, only approximately 50% of the income from the German *Lotto* or the UK National Lottery gets redistributed). There is a total of more than 2.2 billion euros to be won. There are 100,000 lottery numbers (*billetes*) which are divided into ten sub-tickets costing 20 euros each, and every lottery number has a so-called series of 170. People often buy a whole lottery ticket, keep one sub-ticket, and give the rest away to friends and family for Christmas.

Christmas therefore starts in Spain on the 22nd of December. In the morning, everyone in the country sits in front of the

television or the radio to hear the winners of the Christmas State Lottery being drawn. The winning numbers are sung out by children from a primary school in Madrid. The fact that the *billetes* are divided up means that up to 1700 people might be cheering at the same time for every number called — they could be groups of friends, families or even whole villages. Everyone hopes to win the top prize, *el gordo*, the “fat one”; the whole ticket is worth four million euros.

On the evening of the 24th of December, which is known as *Nochebuena* (the Good Evening), families get together for a festive Christmas dinner with *turrón* — nougat made with whole almonds — for dessert. At midnight they go to church for the *misa del gallo*, the “cockerel’s Mass”, which was given that name because a cockerel is said to have been the first to announce the birth of Jesus. This is often followed by carol singing and celebrations that continue well into the early hours. There is only one public holiday and Spaniards go back to work again on the 26th of December.

However, by the 28th of December there is already something else going on. This is the Day of the Holy Innocents (*Día des los Santos Inocentes*), which primarily commemorates the babies who were slaughtered by order of King Herod. It is also a day, like April Fools’ Day, on which people are allowed to play tricks and (harmless) pranks

on each other; if someone is taken in by a prank, the response is to shout “¡Inocente!”.

Three days later, the festivities continue with *la Nochevieja* (“the old night”) or New Year’s Eve. People spend the evening with friends and family. The New Year celebrations involve large amounts of grapes. Grapes? Yes. People in Spain have to eat one grape for each of the chimes of the clock at midnight. If you manage to eat all of your *doce uvas de suerte*, or twelve lucky grapes, in time, then the New Year will bring good luck.

At last, after New Year, the 6th of January arrives; this is the day that children have been waiting for, when the *Reyes Magos* — the Three Wise Men — bring their presents. The kings first arrive in Spanish villages on the 5th of January and hand out sweets to the children. That evening, the children place their shoes close to a door or window, along with some sweets for the kings and water and straw for their camels. On the following morning, children who have been good find their presents, but naughty children find a piece of coal (made of sugar). The 6th of January is the most important day in the Christmas season. Once again, families sit down to a big feast. For dessert everybody has a slice of *roscón de Reyes*, Three Kings’ cake, in which a small porcelain figure or a dried bean has been baked. Whoever finds it is crowned “King” or “Queen” and has to pay for everyone’s cake.



CHRISTMAS SONG



*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*

*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*

*A todos quiero desearles siempre
felicidades y un gran presente,
es el momento de que gocemos,
mucho paz,
vengan a cantar...*

*Vivan contentos, vivan felices
en el amor y dulce sentimiento,
cantando voy para que me escuchen
bien en tiempos de amor y paz.*

*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*

*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*



*A todos quiero desearles siempre
felicidades y un gran presente,
Es el momento de que gocemos,
mucho paz,
vengan a cantar...*

*Vivan contentos, vivan felices
en el amor y dulce sentimiento,
cantando voy para que me escuchen
bien en tiempos de amor y paz.*

*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*

*Vivan contentos, vivan felices
en el amor y dulce sentimiento,
cantando voy para que me escuchen
bien en tiempos de amor y paz.*

*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*

*Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad,
próspero año y felicidad.*

José Feliciano (1970)



MANCHEGO STARS

If the sweet smells coming from the kitchen during the Christmas season have become too much, then this recipe might appeal to people's taste buds—savory cheese biscuits! Manchego is a Spanish sheep's cheese from the region of Castilla-La Mancha; it tastes anything from mild to intensively nutty, depending on its maturity.

Ingredients

(Makes 50)

For the dough

180g plain flour

100g cold butter

150g Manchego

2 teaspoons olive oil

salt

pepper

2 teaspoons caraway seeds

Plus

star-shaped pastry cutter

Preparation

1. First, pulse the flour and cold butter together in a food processor. Grate the Manchego, add to the flour mixture along with the olive oil, salt and pepper and mix again.
2. Stir in the caraway seeds and knead the dough well with your hands. Add some more flour if the dough is too moist. Place the dough between two sheets of greaseproof paper and roll out with a rolling pin.
3. Cut out different-sized stars (or other shapes if preferred) and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven) and bake the biscuits for 8–10 minutes until golden brown. Turn the oven off and leave the biscuits to cool for a short while; remove from the oven and leave to cool completely.



ROSCÓN DE REYES

In Spain the Three Kings arrive on camels to bring gifts to the children. This is a cake baked in honour of those Three Wise Men from the East. It has a little figure or a bean hidden inside and whoever finds it (don't bite too hard!) is crowned king for the day.

Ingredients

(For one 26 cm ring cake tin)

For the dough

300 ml milk
1 cube fresh yeast (42 g)
200 g sugar
1 pinch salt
3 medium eggs
500 g plain flour
200 g cornflour
zest of 1 organic orange
2 cl orange liqueur
(e.g. Grand Marnier)
50 ml olive oil

Plus

1 small porcelain figure of a king (or 1 dried broad bean)
butter and flour for the cake tin

For the icing

1 egg yolk
2 tablespoons mixed candied peel
1 tablespoon decorating sugar

Preparation

1. Heat the milk until lukewarm and crumble the yeast into it. Add 50 g sugar and a pinch of salt. Mix with a hand whisk until the yeast and sugar have dissolved. Leave for 15 minutes in a warm place until frothy.
2. Whisk the eggs in a bowl. Sieve the flour and cornflour into the yeast mixture. Add the rest of the sugar, the orange zest, whisked eggs, Grand Marnier and olive oil. Mix together by hand or in a food processor to form a smooth dough. Sprinkle the dough with flour, cover and leave to rise for about 45 minutes in a warm place.
3. Grease a ring cake tin with butter and sprinkle lightly with flour. Roll the dough into a sausage shape and press the porcelain figure or bean into it. Place the dough in the cake tin and leave to rise again for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 200 °C (conventional oven). To make the icing, whisk the egg yolk with 1 teaspoon of water and brush thinly on the dough. Chop the candied fruit and sprinkle onto the dough together with the decorating sugar. Bake in the centre of the hot oven for about 20 minutes. Leave the cake in the tin to cool for a short while, then turn out onto a cake rack while still warm and leave to cool completely.



TURRÓN DURO

Many Spanish sweets originated in the Arab world and were brought to Spain by the Moors in the Middle Ages; this “hard” almond nougat is one example. Traditionally, turrón is rectangular but there is also a round version known as torta imperial or “imperial cake”—just the right name for a cake at Christmas time!

Ingredients

(Makes 4 tortas imperiales)

350g whole almonds

250g honey

300g sugar

80g glucose syrup

2 small fresh egg whites

8 round white wafers

**(18 cm), or 2 large sheets of
rice paper**

Plus

cooking thermometer

Preparation

1. Roast the almonds on all sides in a non-stick frying pan, or in a medium oven. Shake the pan/baking tray frequently to avoid burning the almonds.
2. In the meantime, heat the honey very gently in a saucepan, stirring frequently. When it has liquefied add 100 ml water and pour the sugar in slowly until it has dissolved. Stir in the glucose syrup. Bring to the boil uncovered and heat to 145°C.
3. Beat the egg whites in a bain-marie until stiff. Remove from the heat and slowly drizzle in the honey mixture, stirring constantly until the mixture has an even consistency. Continue stirring for 30 minutes.
4. Add the hot almonds to the egg white mixture and mix until evenly distributed.
5. Place 4 wafers out onto a clean work surface and divide the egg white and almond mixture between them. Place the 4 remaining wafers on top. Roll the “cakes” to a thickness of 1 cm with a rolling pin, so that the egg white mixture is distributed evenly. Trim any overhanging edges.
6. Leave to dry for several days in a cool, dry place.



CHURROS DE NAVIDAD

In Spain people enjoy churros for breakfast all year round. This Christmas version of the choux pastry delicacy is dipped in cinnamon sugar. Those who are more adventurous can also experiment by adding cinnamon, vanilla or allspice to the dough. Churros are shaped like candy canes, so they can also be used to decorate the Christmas tree.

Ingredients

(Makes 20)

For the choux pastry

60 ml milk

1 pinch salt

50 g butter

100 g plain flour

2 medium eggs

For the dip

chocolate-nut spread

Plus

**a piping bag fitted with a
star nozzle (13 mm)**

**500 ml neutral vegetable oil
for frying**

2 tablespoons sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

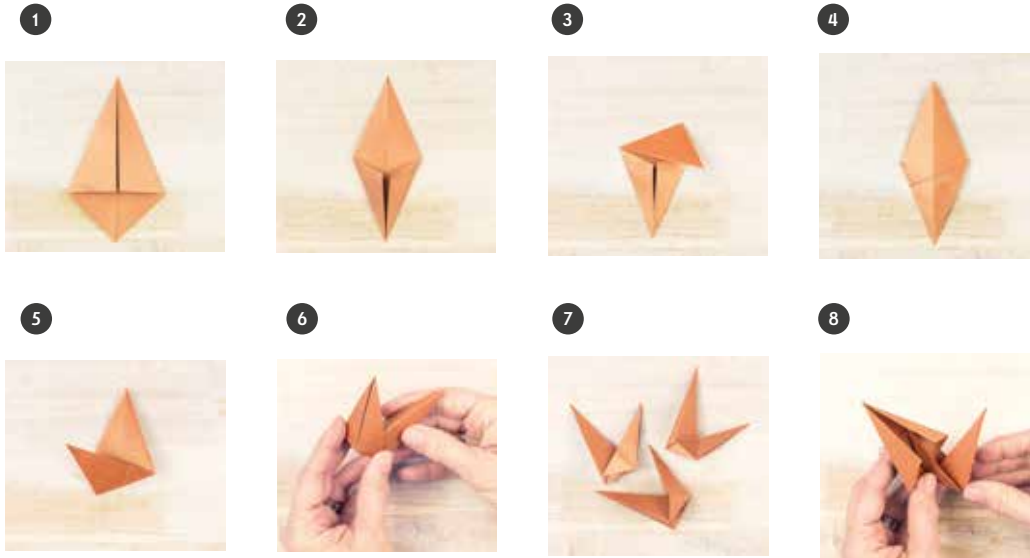
Preparation

1. To make the choux pastry, place the milk, 60 ml water, salt and butter in a small saucepan and bring to the boil. Quickly add the flour and stir until it forms a ball, leaving a white layer on the base of the pan. Cook the dough for approximately 1 minute, stirring all the time. Transfer to a bowl and leave to cool.
2. Add the eggs to the dough one at a time and knead, using the dough hook attachment of the mixer, until the mixture is glossy and smooth.
3. Spoon the mixture into a piping bag fitted with a large star nozzle. Pipe equally-sized *churros* in the shape of candy canes onto a sheet of greaseproof paper that has been spread out on the work surface.
4. Heat the oil to 150–180°C in a medium-sized saucepan; ideally use a kitchen thermometer. The oil is hot enough for frying if tiny bubbles form on the handle of a wooden spoon held in the pan.
5. Slide the *churros* gently into the oil using a slotted spoon and fry for 1.5 minutes. Remove them as soon as they turn golden brown and place on paper towels to absorb the excess oil. Mix the sugar and cinnamon together in a bowl and roll the warm *churros* in the mixture.
6. To make the dip, gently warm the chocolate-nut spread in a bain-marie and serve with the *churros*.



COPPER ORIGAMI STAR

Copper tones are not just Christmassy, they are elegant and festive. Each point of this star is folded individually. The eight-pointed star can be made with alternating colours.



1. Fold the paper square in half from corner to corner. Open again and place so that the fold is running from top to bottom. Fold the top sides towards the middle to form a kite.
2. Fold the bottom sides along the centre to the top.
3. Fold the top point across the side corners to the right and to the left. Make sure that the side edges are one on top of the other. Open out again.
4. Turn the diamond over and rotate it 180 degrees. The fold-diagonals should now be visible at the bottom half of the diamond.

5. Fold up the lower tip along one of the diagonals.
6. Squeeze the larger side following the fold. Squeeze the smaller side in the same direction and pull both sides apart slightly—this creates one large and one small star point.
7. Continue in the same way with all 7 sheets.
8. Open out the inner edges of a large point and push the small point of one of the other shapes into it. Close the inner edges over the small point. Carry on in the same way with all of the sheets and join them together into a circle.

Materials

- 7 sheets of bronze or copper-coloured craft paper (14 cm x 14 cm)





Sales team for Italy | Opposite page, from left to right: Ewa Grzeskowiak, Patricia Mertensotto, Gabriella Sapia



Italy is traditionally a Catholic country where greater importance is attached to the saints' feast days and Christian practices around Christmas than in most other European countries. The Christmas crib originated here. Christmas is a family celebration that is also all about spending time together. Children are showered with presents, many of which are brought by a good witch who rides on a broomstick ...

BUON NATALE E FELICE ANNO NUOVO!

In Italy it is a woman, the good witch Befana, who brings the children's gifts. Legend has it that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem Befana was living in a cottage nearby; her husband and child were already dead. One day, three men knocked at her door and asked her the way to the stable over which a bright star was shining. They had heard that a very special child had been born there. It was the Three Wise Men! They invited the lonely old lady to go with them, but she refused, saying that she had too much work to do. After the Wise Men had left she regretted this, packed her bag with toys that had belonged to her child, and set off; but in the meantime the star had stopped shining and, however hard she searched, she never found the stable.

Ever since then, Befana comes every year on her broomstick to share out her presents at last. She is late. On the 5th of January children hang up their stockings on the mantelpiece; if they have been good they find sweets and toys there the next morning, but if they have been naughty Befana leaves a piece of coal for them (this is a delicious sweet made of egg white, sugar and colouring). The Feast of the Three Kings on the 6th of January is also known as Epiphany and the name Befana derives from the Italian *Epifania*.

This is not the only occasion on which children are given presents; they could receive gifts as many as four times,

starting on the *Festa di San Nicola* on the 6th of December. Christmas preparations begin in earnest two days later on the 8th of December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is a very important feast day in Italy. Some people might question how it could be possible for Jesus to be conceived just 16 days before he was born, but this is a common misunderstanding. The feast day actually refers to how Mary herself was conceived. According to the Roman Catholic Church, Mary, who later became the Mother of God, was conceived without original sin, i.e. "immaculately" by her own mother, Anna.

The 8th of December is the day on which both the Christmas tree and the Christmas crib are set up. Did you know that the Christmas crib originated in Italy? Pictorial representations of the birth of Christ already existed in the 4th century in the Roman catacombs where persecuted Christians went into hiding. Saint Francis of Assisi created the first version of the crib as we know it today. In 1223 he built a representation of the Nativity in a rock cave near Greccio; it consisted of an ox and an ass standing by an animals' manger filled with straw. He invited the simple folk from the region to come and have the Christmas story visualised for them in a Mass. Joseph, Mary and the Baby Jesus did not feature in Francis' crib, but they would certainly have been the subject of his sermon.

The most ornate Christmas cribs are made in workshops in Southern Italy, particularly Naples. They depict detailed village scenes and quite often feature a pizza seller, publican or priest from that village. Many modern cribs are less elaborate but still effective nevertheless; the one shown in this book, for example, is made from twigs sprayed with white paint. In Italy, traditionally, the Baby Jesus is not placed in the manger until the night of the 24th–25th of December, and to round off the Christmas season the Three Wise Men are added on the 5th–6th of January.

In some regions, and especially in Sicily, presents are also exchanged on the 13th of December; this is the Feast of Saint Lucy, which is an important day here, as it is in Scandinavia, and it is celebrated with big processions. Many people are not aware of the fact that Saint Lucy lived around 300 AD in Syracuse, Sicily.

Finally, on the morning of the 25th of December, or *Natale*, children find presents from *Bambinello Gesù* (Baby Jesus). The 24th of December is a normal working day but in the evening families get together for a meal. There is fish, seafood and vegetables to eat, but no meat. For dessert, there is cake — *panettone*, *pandoro* or *panforte*, depending on the region. After the meal people play games and then go to the Christmas Eve service.



POLENTA CAKES WITH CREAMY MUSHROOMS

This appetiser is simple to make and very tasty. Polenta stars are the ideal way to start an Italian Christmas menu and they add to the festivity of the occasion; stars of different sizes make the dish even more appealing. Of course, you can choose to make other shapes if you prefer.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

3 shallots
1 tablespoon butter
400 g cream
salt
100 g polenta (cornmeal)
300 g oyster mushrooms
pepper
1 tablespoon fresh chopped
mixed herbs

Plus

vegetable oil
star-shaped pastry cutter

Preparation

1. Peel and dice the shallots. Heat the butter in a saucepan, add half of the shallots and cook until soft. Stir in 200 ml water, 200 g cream and a pinch of salt. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and stir in the polenta. Simmer over a low heat for 5–6 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Line a baking tray with aluminium foil and brush with vegetable oil. Spread the polenta 2 cm thick. When it has cooled completely, cut out the cakes with the star-shaped pastry cutter.
3. Clean the oyster mushrooms and cut into small pieces. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil and cook the remaining shallots until soft. Add the mushrooms, fry for a few minutes then pour in 200 g cream. Season with salt and pepper and add the herbs. Put on one side to keep warm.
4. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a frying pan and fry the polenta cakes on both sides until crispy. Serve with the oyster mushrooms.



TAGLIATELLE WITH SALMON AND SPINACH

On Christmas Eve, Italians do not eat meat, but a primo piatto with fish or seafood is almost obligatory—just like this fine dish which is made in no time with white wine, salmon and fresh baby spinach. Freshly grated lemon zest makes it especially aromatic.

Ingredients

salt
250 g tagliatelle
1 onion
1–2 cloves garlic
150 g baby spinach
200 g smoked salmon
olive oil
1 teaspoon vegetable stock granules
100 ml white wine
100 ml cream
zest of ½ organic lemon
pepper

Preparation

1. Cook the tagliatelle in a large saucepan until al dente, following the instructions on the packet.
2. In the meantime, make the pasta sauce. Peel the onions and garlic. Dice the onions and finely chop the garlic. Wash the spinach thoroughly and leave to drain. Cut the smoked salmon into strips.
3. Heat the olive oil gently over a low heat in a frying pan and fry the onions and garlic until translucent. Add the spinach, season with the vegetable stock and pour in the white wine and cream. Allow to simmer gently.
4. Finally, add the salmon strips and stir into the mixture. Season with the grated lemon rind, salt and pepper. Strain the tagliatelle and serve with the salmon and spinach sauce.



STEWED LAMB KNUCKLES

On Christmas Day, or Natale, the menu for the festive meal includes a secondo piatto with meat, such as these lamb knuckles served with warming winter vegetables. If the dish does not have to be part of a typically Italian menu, then roast or boiled potatoes make a wonderful accompaniment.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

1 clove garlic
2 medium onions
2 medium carrots
1 stick celery
4 lamb knuckles
salt and pepper
½ teaspoon turmeric
2–3 sprigs of rosemary
6–7 sprigs of thyme
olive oil or clarified butter
(ghee) for frying
1 teaspoon tomato puree
2 bay leaves
freshly chopped mint to
garnish

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 160°C. Peel the garlic and the onions. Cut the onions into quarters. Wash and peel the carrots. Wash the celery. Chop the carrots and celery into pieces approximately 4 cm in size. Rub the lamb knuckles generously with salt, pepper and turmeric. Wash the rosemary and thyme and shake dry.
2. Heat some oil or clarified butter in a casserole, turn the heat up high and fry the knuckles until brown on all sides. Add the garlic, onions and celery and sauté briefly. Stir in the tomato puree and cook everything for a further 5 minutes. Add the rosemary and thyme sprigs and the bay leaves. Pour in approximately 750 ml water so that the knuckles are just over half-covered. Place the lid on the casserole leaving a slight opening and bring to the boil.
3. Cook the meat for approximately 1 hour in the bottom half of the oven. Turn the meat over and cook for another 1–1½ hours, adding the carrots about 30 minutes before the end of the cooking time. The meat should be tender and almost falling off the bone.
4. To make the sauce, remove the meat and carrots and keep warm. Strain the juices through a sieve into a saucepan. Bring to the boil and boil, uncovered, over a medium heat for 5–10 minutes until the sauce has reduced and thickened. Season with salt and pepper. Arrange the lamb knuckles and carrots on a platter and garnish with mint. Serve the sauce separately. Serve with basmati rice or couscous.



CHOCOLATE-NUT SALAMI

There is something for everyone in this “salami”, not only for chocoholics! The roll is full of chocolate and festively enhanced with biscuits and nuts. It makes a perfect dessert, but it can also be offered with other Christmas biscuits and coffee during Advent; wrapped in brown paper and kitchen twine, it also makes an original gift.

Ingredients

(Makes two 10 cm salamis)

280 g chocolate

120 g butter

2 tablespoons cocoa

2 eggs

60 ml cream

40 g pistachio nuts

80 g almonds

**50 g Rich Tea or similar
biscuits**

Plus

clips or kitchen twine

icing sugar to dust

Preparation

1. Melt the chocolate and butter in a saucepan over a medium heat, whilst stirring all the time. Add the cocoa and mix in well until the mixture is smooth.
2. Whisk the eggs and cream together gently in a bowl and stir into the chocolate mixture. Leave to cool.
3. Finely chop the pistachios and almonds. Break the biscuits into small pieces. Stir everything into the chocolate mixture.
4. Leave the mixture in the fridge for 30–60 minutes for it to harden. Place half of the mixture onto a piece of cling film and form it into a rough salami shape using a spoon. Twist the ends of the cling film and seal with a clip or kitchen twine. Do the same with the other half of the mixture. Roll the salamis into a more even shape.
5. Chill the salamis in the fridge for at least 6 hours, or overnight. Before serving pour the icing sugar onto a large plate, remove the cling film and roll the salamis in the icing sugar.



chocolate
salami

PANFORTE

Italy is renowned for its many Christmas cakes. The most famous, panettone, comes from Milan; pandoro comes from Verona, and panforte originated in Siena, Tuscany. It is similar to German Lebkuchen and tastes good all year round!

Ingredients

(Makes one 28 cm cake)

For the panforte

150 g cashews

150 g walnuts

250 g prunes

100 g dried dates

80 g plain flour

½ teaspoon cinnamon

zest of 1 organic orange

(optional)

140 g honey

100 g sugar

Plus

icing sugar to dust

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 150°C (fan oven). Line the cake tin with greaseproof paper.
2. Chop 100 g cashews and 100 g walnuts and leave the rest of the nuts whole.
3. Chop the prunes and dates very finely, by hand or in a food processor. Mix together with the chopped and whole cashews and walnuts. Add the flour, cinnamon and orange zest (optional).
4. Heat the honey and sugar in a saucepan, stirring all the while; bring to the boil briefly so that the sugar dissolves. Pour into the fruit and nut mixture and mix all the ingredients well.
5. Transfer the mixture to the cake tin, spread well and press flat. This is best done by hand; wet your hands first so that the mixture does not stick to your fingers.
6. Bake the *panforte* in the centre of the preheated oven for approximately 40 minutes. Leave to cool, then sieve icing sugar over it. Serve immediately or store in a cool dry place; it will keep for several days.



AMARETTI

These soft Italian almond biscuits not only look good on any Christmas biscuit plate, they also taste good with coffee in the afternoon and make a wonderful gift! The liqueur adds a special touch — why not serve your guests a glass of it with the biscuits?

Ingredients

(Makes 30)

3 egg whites

250 g ground almonds

300 g caster sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla sugar

30 ml almond liqueur (e.g.

Amaretto) or apple juice

50 g icing sugar

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C (fan oven). Cover two baking trays with greaseproof paper.
2. Whisk the egg whites in a bowl until they are stiff. Mix the almonds with 250 g sugar and the vanilla sugar and fold into the egg mixture using a whisk. Finally add the almond liqueur.
3. Put the icing sugar and the remaining sugar into two separate dishes. Take out walnut-sized amounts of the egg white mixture and roll into balls. Roll these first in the sugar, then in the icing sugar. Place the finished balls 2 cm apart on the baking trays. Bake for 15 minutes then cool on a cake rack.



A MODERN CHRISTMAS CRIB

This is the perfect crib for anyone who prefers a simpler, modern design. We found it quick to make, inexpensive and original; making it really got us into the mood for Christmas!



1. First, cut the twigs to the desired lengths, depending on how big the crib is to be. The 5 twigs for the long sides and the top of the crib must all be of equal length; the 4 vertical sides must also be equal; the 4 slanting pieces for the roof must also be cut to equal lengths and so must the 2 shorter pieces for the base. Using the hot glue gun, first stick the pieces together for the rectangle base, then stick on the 4 upright twigs followed by the long ones for the tops of the sides. Finally, stick on the two diagonal roof pieces and the long twig at the top.



2. When the glue has dried the crib can be painted. This is best done with spray paint, ideally out of doors, or in a well-ventilated room. The corners can be strengthened with thread. Decorate the crib with a star and arrange the crib figures inside.

Materials

- 15 straight twigs
- secateurs
- hot glue gun
- thread
- white spray paint
- decorations
- crib figures





Sales team for Eastern Europe | From left to right: Natasa Crbovic, Iveta Dufala



EASTERN EUROPE

Christmas in the Eastern European countries is full of symbolism that brings the Christmas story of Mary, Joseph and the Baby Jesus to life and promises people peace, happiness and prosperity for the next year. Only in Russia, where religious symbols were forbidden during the Soviet era, do people have to get by with Father Frost — but he looks uncannily like Santa Claus.

WESOŁYCH ŚWIĄT BOŻEGO NARODZENIA

In the majority of East European countries people of faith fast before Christmas; for 40 days they do without meat as well as cheese, butter, milk and eggs. This fast is called "Philip's Fast" because it starts on the 24th of November, the Feast of Saint Philip the Apostle.

The end of the fast is celebrated on Christmas Eve with a festive meal which is still without any meat, and may even be vegan in some countries. The customs and conventions connected with this meal vary greatly from place to place. Even the timing varies; in Russia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, people celebrate according to the Julian calendar. This means that Christmas Eve in those countries is on the 6th of January, and the fast does not begin until the 28th of November.

In Poland the Christmas meal, or *Wigilia*, cannot begin until the first star has appeared in the sky; this is believed to be the bright evening star seen by the Three Wise Men. *Wigilia* is also the term applied to Christmas Eve itself.

By the time the star appears in the sky, the Christmas tree must be decorated, the meal has to be prepared and the table set. There is always one setting more than the number of guests; this place is reserved for an unexpected guest who might knock at the door because he is in need, just as, 2000 years ago, Joseph and the heavily pregnant Mary went in

search of somewhere to stay in Bethlehem but were turned away. The extra place at the table is also set in commemoration of deceased relatives. Sometimes a coin is placed under each plate to protect everyone from poverty in the coming year. (In the Czech Republic people use a fish bone or fish scale, while in Bulgaria they bake a coin into a loaf of bread and the person who it finds will be rich.) A little bunch of hay is also tucked underneath the tablecloth as a reminder of the manger in which the Baby Jesus slept after he was born.

Once the children have spotted the evening star, usually sometime between 5pm and 6pm, the guests are given blessed wafers to share. These wafers are larger than the ones used in church services or for baking; they are often square, and have a religious motif. Everyone breaks off a piece of wafer, after which they hug one another and pass on their Christmas wishes. The wafer is a symbol of reconciliation, peace and love. It is important to everyone that the Christmas Eve celebration runs harmoniously and without any arguments because this evening determines how the coming year will be.

The festive meal is made up of at least 12 different dishes, symbolising the 12 Apostles and also the 12 months of the year. They must be made from ingredients that are found in forest, field, garden and water; failure to include one of these means that particular area will not yield much profit in the

year to come. Cabbage, beetroot, mushrooms, fish and cereals are all typical ingredients. The meal is rounded off with *kutia*, a cereal dish which is called *sochivo* in Russia; and the Russian name for Christmas Eve is *sochel'nik*. The guests are obliged to try every single one of the dishes; otherwise it will bring bad luck. After the meal everyone puts a fish scale or a fishbone into their wallet for good luck and prosperity.

After dinner the children are given their Christmas presents and everyone sings Christmas carols. At midnight all the family go to the *pasterka* ("Shepherds' Mass"), a Midnight Mass that can last several hours.

In Russia, Father Frost brings the Christmas presents. He rules the winter and comes with his granddaughter, Snegurotchka (the Snow Maiden), in a horse-drawn carriage. Sometimes they arrive on New Year's Eve, and then the children do not have to wait until the 6th or 7th of January and the Christmas tree is decorated on the 30th or 31st of December.

Christmas is also a time for looking into the future. In the Czech Republic people cut open an apple; if the pips are in the shape of a star they will have good luck, but pips in the shape of a cross are a sign of death. In Bulgaria people crack walnuts; a good walnut means good luck, but if the shell is empty or the walnut inside is rotten, then bad luck is in store.



BORSCHT

Dishes with beetroot are a must at Christmas in Northern and Eastern Europe. Borscht is usually made with meat, but on Christmas Eve, Wigilia, this speciality is strictly vegetarian. In Poland, little dumplings filled with mushrooms or sauerkraut known as uszka, or "little ears", are added. We've tried them and they are delicious!

Ingredients

(Serves 6)

For the soup

1 onion

250 g potatoes

500 g beetroot

1 bay leaf

2 litres vegetable stock

1 teaspoon dried marjoram

salt and pepper

2 tablespoons red wine

vinegar

For the uszka (pasta dumplings)

200 g plain flour

2 eggs

1 onion

200 g mushrooms

**(e.g. button mushrooms,
porcini mushrooms)**

butter for frying

1 egg white

Preparation

1. To make the soup, peel and dice the onion, potatoes and beetroot. Melt the butter in a pan and fry the onion until it is translucent; add the potatoes, beetroot and bay leaf and cook for a little longer. Pour in the stock and stir in the marjoram. Bring the soup to the boil and simmer gently for 25–30 minutes.
2. Remove the bay leaf and liquidise the soup. Season with salt, pepper and vinegar.
3. To make the *uszka*, mix together the flour, 1 egg, 75 ml water and a pinch of salt and knead into a smooth dough. Cover the dough and leave for about 30 minutes.
4. In the meantime, clean and finely dice the onions and the mushrooms. Heat the butter in a frying pan until it is frothy. Reduce the heat and fry the onions. Add the mushrooms and cook until there is no more liquid in the pan. Leave to cool. Whisk 1 egg, stir into the onion and mushroom mixture and season with salt and pepper.
5. Bring some water to the boil in a large saucepan.
6. Roll out the dough on a floured surface until it is no more than 2 mm thick. Cut out 5 cm circles using a glass or a pastry cutter. Brush the edges with egg white.
7. Spoon portions of the filling onto each of the circles, fold them over to create crescents and press the edges firmly together. Turn the sides inwards and press or twist them into "little ears", similar to tortellini. Boil in plenty of boiling salted water on a low heat for 6 minutes until soft.
8. Fill the borscht into preheated soup dishes, add a few dumplings to each dish and serve hot.



STUFFED CABBAGE LEAVES

Golabki are a Polish speciality. They are usually stuffed with minced meat and served with gravy, but at Christmas they are stuffed with various kinds of mushroom. Boiled rice is added to the filling to give them a lighter texture. Cook some extra rice to serve as an ideal accompaniment.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

salt

1 small white cabbage

1 onion

**400 g mixed mushrooms
(e.g. button mushrooms,
oyster mushrooms)**

black pepper

1 teaspoon dried marjoram

150 g boiled long grain rice

1 egg

300 ml vegetable stock

100 g cream

2 tablespoons tomato puree

flat leaf parsley

Plus

1 teaspoon butter to grease

Preparation

1. Bring plenty of salted water to the boil in a saucepan. In the meantime, remove the outer leaves from the cabbage and cut out the stalk. Place the cabbage in the boiling water. After a few minutes, remove 8 leaves one by one and spread them out on the work surface.
2. Peel and finely dice the onions. Clean and dice the mushrooms. Mix both in a bowl with the salt, pepper, marjoram and boiled rice.
3. Preheat the oven to 200°C (conventional oven). Grease a large baking dish with butter.
4. Divide the filling into 8 equal portions and place one portion at the centre of each cabbage leaf. Wrap the sides over the filling, make into rolls and place the roulades next to each other in the baking dish with the ends of the leaves facing downwards.
5. Heat the stock. Stir in the cream and tomato puree and pour over the cabbage parcels. Place the cabbage parcels in the centre of the preheated oven and bake for approximately 40 minutes.
6. Before serving, wash and dry the parsley, remove the leaves and cut into strips. Remove the stuffed cabbage leaves from the oven and allow to cool a little. Sprinkle with parsley and serve hot.



HERRING SALAD WITH BEETROOT

At least one or more of the dishes served at Polish and Russian Wigilia celebrations includes fish, often herring, served with beetroot, potatoes, eggs and pickled gherkins. This tasty and colourful salad is really quick to make and your guests are sure to love it!

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

2 potatoes

2 beetroots (about 100 g each)

2 eggs

4 pickled herrings

1 apple (e.g. Braeburn)

1 red onion

2 medium-sized gherkins (plus juice)

4–5 tablespoons mascarpone (or mayonnaise)

1 tablespoon gherkin juice

sugar

salt and pepper

ground paprika

Preparation

1. Wash the potatoes and beetroots; trim the stalk of the beetroot without cutting into the flesh; place the potatoes and beetroots into separate saucepans and cover with water. Add some salt to the pan with the potatoes. Boil until soft (30–40 minutes, depending on the size). Do not add salt to the beetroot until 5 minutes before they are cooked.
2. Boil the eggs for approximately 10 minutes until hard. Rinse the pickled herrings, pat dry with kitchen paper, cut into small 1 cm cubes and put on one side.
3. Peel the onions and cut them and the gherkins into small cubes. Shell the eggs and chop coarsely. Peel and core the apple and cut into small cubes.
4. Place all the ingredients into a large bowl. Stir in the mascarpone, gherkin juice and 1 pinch of sugar; season with salt and pepper and stir into the herring salad. Transfer the salad to the fridge to marinate for 1–2 hours.



KUTIA

In many Eastern European countries kutia (known as sochivo in Russia) must be on the Wigilia menu, whether Wigilia is on the 24th of December or the 6th of January. The ingredients — honey, nuts, poppy seeds and raisins — symbolise hope, immortality, success, happiness and peace.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

350 g buckwheat
150 g poppy seeds
100 g sugar
120 ml water
100 g honey
60 g chopped walnuts
60 g dried fruit
(raisins and apricots)

Preparation

1. Rinse the buckwheat in cold water and soak it overnight in a saucepan with 3 litres of water.
2. On the next day, bring the water and buckwheat to the boil. Cover and leave to simmer on a low heat for about 4 hours. Stir from time to time so that the buckwheat does not stick to the bottom of the pan and add more water if necessary. The buckwheat is ready when the grains are soft and plump and the mixture has a creamy texture. Leave the buckwheat to go cold.
3. Place the poppy seeds in a small saucepan, blanch them with boiling water and simmer for about 15 minutes. Strain the poppy seeds through a sieve and mix them in a blender.
4. Bring the sugar and 120 ml water to the boil and continue boiling until the liquid has clarified. Mix in the honey and leave to cool.
5. Mix together the buckwheat, walnuts, poppy seeds, dried fruits and honey/water mixture; add more honey if the mixture is not sweet enough. Serve in individual dishes.



CHRISTMAS ICE BAUBLE

When it's really cold and wintry outside, the trees can also be decorated a little ... these ice balls look pretty next to the fat balls we put out for the dicky-birds.



Make a hole in one half of the plastic ball using a metal knitting needle held over a flame. Fill both halves with decorating material and press together again. Seal the join with adhesive tape.

Inject water into the ball through the hole with the syringe; do not fill completely, since water expands as it freezes. Pass a length of thread through the hole. Place in the freezer, or outside if it is cold enough. When the water is completely frozen, remove the ball from the plastic and hang it up.

Materials

- 2 clear plastic fillable balls (available in handicraft shops)
- metal knitting needle
- berries
- twigs
- fruit
- pine needles
- adhesive tape
- single-use syringe (from chemist's)
- string



GIFT WRAPPING FOR LUCKY CHARMS

In Poland people put a coin under a plate, in Bulgaria they crack a walnut to find out about the New Year. You can hide a coin, a nut or any other lucky charm in this pretty package ...



Copy the template, transfer onto coloured card and cut out. Fold the edges as shown on the template and tuck the folded sides into each other.



Materials

- coloured card
- template
- ruler
- pencil
- craft knife





Sales team for Scandinavia | From left to right: Kristin Puchtinger, Eva Walljasper



SCANDINAVIA

In Northern Europe there is a fairy-tale atmosphere at Christmas time. Saint Lucy, the Queen of Light, brings light and warmth to the villages; elves and *julbocks* make sure that everybody is safe and well. There is good food to eat at home, starting with *lussekatter* on the 13th of December, right up to the *julbord* with salmon and *kanelbullars* on the 24th of December; and of course there must always be *glögg*.

GOD JUL OCH GOTT NYTT ÅR!

In Scandinavia people celebrate *Jul*. This ancient Nordic name for Christmas means “festival” or “feast” and originally applied to an old northern European winter festival which was celebrated in this part of the world long before Christianity and Christmas. Christianity reached Southern Europe in the 4th and 5th centuries but did not reach Scandinavia until the 9th and 10th centuries. This is probably the reason why pre-Christian festivals have survived longer here than in many other countries.

The first important day in the Christmas season throughout Scandinavia is the 13th of December, the Feast of Saint Lucy, who is known as the Queen of Light. For more than 100 years, due to a series of calendar reforms, in Sweden and Finland the winter solstice — i.e. the shortest day and the longest night of the year — fell on the 13th of December (nowadays it falls on the 21st or 22nd of December) until eventually, in 1753, the Gregorian calendar was introduced. The Feast of Saint Lucy has only been celebrated since the 18th century, but it probably superseded another, earlier, solstice festival.

In the months leading up to the festival, every village holds a contest to select a girl to represent it as its “Queen of Light” for the rest of the year. At home, early on the morning of the 13th of December, the oldest (sometimes the youngest) daughter in the family dresses up in a long white robe with a red silk sash tied around her waist and a “crown” of burning candles

(nowadays these are usually battery-powered). She sings *Sankta Lucia*, the hymn to Saint Lucy, as she brings the traditional Saint Lucy’s Day breakfast to her parents’ bedside. The breakfast consists of saffron buns, *lussekatter* (“Lucy cats”), studded with raisins and coffee or *glögg*, which is Scandinavian mulled wine, often non-alcoholic, served with almonds and raisins. At school every class has its own Saint Lucy’s Day celebrations with home-made crowns and home-made *lussekatter*, and sometimes the children also put on a play.

In the evening all the villages have a Saint Lucy’s Day procession. The “Queen of Light” is accompanied by an entourage of girls and boys. The girls are dressed in white with a red sash; they do not have crowns, but instead they carry candles; the boys are dressed in red as “star boys”. Saint Lucy is supposed to restore light and joy to Nature at the end of the year.

Ten days later, on the 23rd of December, which is known in Norwegian as *lille julaften* (Little Christmas Eve), Scandinavians start making preparations for the following day’s big celebration. They clean the entire house, decorate the Christmas tree, and make the final batch of Christmas cookies. They also prepare the traditional Christmas ham (*julskinka*), which is an obligatory element of every Christmas buffet or *julbord*. The presents are wrapped and amusing *julklapp* rhymes about the gifts and their recipients must also be composed.

The Christmas presents are distributed on the following day; at one time this task was carried out by the *julbock*, a goat that has now been reduced to a Christmas decoration, having been superseded by Christmas elves and Father Christmas. According to Swedish popular belief every home has a *tomte* living in it, a guardian spirit or house elf who protects the inhabitants; they must show their gratitude towards him, otherwise he will play tricks and practical jokes on them. His favourite food is porridge or rice pudding. In December he makes the Christmas presents for his family and they are brought by the *jultomte*, a Father Christmas figure whose sleigh is pulled by two “Yule goats”.

House elves, known as *tonttu* or *nisser*, also exist in Finland, Norway and Denmark. They look after their families during the year and at Christmas they help the *julutonttu* or *julenisse* (“Christmas elf”) who traditionally brings the presents.

Children discover their presents under the Christmas tree on the 24th of December. The grown-ups organise a *julklapp*. Their presents have all been wrapped up and each one has a rhyme attached to it; there is a loud knock at the door and each time the door is opened one of the presents is thrown into the room; they then have to work out from the *julklapp* rhyme who the present is intended for, but the donor remains anonymous. Whilst Scandinavian families are celebrating inside the house, the elves tuck into their rice pudding outside.



GLÖGG

This delicious mulled wine is sometimes known as Swedish punch, but it also exists in Finland (“glögi”), Norway and Denmark (“gløgg”) as well as Sweden. It is usually served with a separate dish of almonds and raisins which everyone can help themselves to. It is traditionally drunk on St Lucy’s Day, the 13th of December.

Ingredients

(Serves 4)

**1 piece fresh ginger (about
2 cm)**
1 organic orange
150 g cane sugar
5 cloves
5 cardamom pods
1 star anise
1 bottle dry red wine
100 g raisins
100 g blanched almonds
200 ml vodka

Preparation

1. Peel the fresh ginger. Wash the orange in hot water and wipe dry. Grate the orange peel. Cut the orange in half and squeeze out the juice.
2. Put the sugar in a saucepan and warm up over a low heat whilst stirring. As soon as it starts to melt, add the orange juice. Add the cloves, cardamom and star anise and allow the orange juice to reduce almost completely. Pour in the red wine and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat, allow to cool, then leave to infuse overnight in the fridge.
3. Strain the red wine brew through a sieve and discard the spices. Add the raisins and almonds to the *glögg* and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and add the vodka. Stir well then divide the *glögg* between four mulled wine glasses or mugs.



COLOURFUL JULBORD

The smörgåsbord originated in the far North. It is a buffet of cold and warm dishes served with bread and butter (smörgås = open sandwich). At Christmas time a special smörgåsbord known as the "julbord" is prepared with salmon, beetroot and other delicacies. (We also tried this for our staff Christmas party).

1 GRAVED LACHS

1 piece of fresh salmon with skin (about 800g cut into 2 pieces, see tip)

1 small organic lemon

½ organic orange

1 large bunch dill

10 juniper berries

1 teaspoon coriander seeds

½ teaspoon yellow mustard seeds

¾ teaspoon black peppercorns

50g coarse (sea) salt

30g brown sugar

3 tablespoons Aquavit (or vodka)

1. Check the salmon for bones and remove them with a fishbone remover, or clean tweezers. Rinse under cold water and pat dry. Wash the lemon and the orange in hot water and dry; coarsely grate the rind, or use a lemon zester. Wash the dill, shake dry, then pat dry; remove the tips and chop coarsely. Put the spices in a mortar, grind coarsely and mix with the salt and sugar.

2. Place the pieces of salmon, skin side down, in a deep dish and sprinkle the spice mixture over them evenly. With your fingertips, rub the spice mixture gently into the fish. Spread the orange and lemon zest evenly over the fish. Spread one of the fish fillets with the herbs and sprinkle it with Aquavit or vodka; take the other fish fillet and, with the seasoned side down, lay it on top of the first and press down firmly.

3. Cover the dish with cling film, making sure that the fish fillets are completely covered. Place a board on top of the fish and weigh it down with full bottles or jars so that the pieces of fish are pressed together as firmly as possible, then place the dish in the fridge. Leave to pickle in

the fridge for 2 days. After the first day, pour some of the juice that has escaped over the top piece of fish, then turn the pieces over so that the top piece is now on the bottom. Press the fillets firmly together again and put back in the fridge, weighed down again as described above.

4. Separate the fillets on the third day and gently pat them dry with kitchen paper. With a sharp, thin-bladed knife (preferably a meat knife or filleting knife) cut the fish away diagonally from the skin into fairly thick slices.

Tip: Ask the fishmonger for the front section of a whole salmon, filleted and cut into two pieces. The pieces will then fit exactly together and the slices will be nice and even.



2 HONEY AND MUSTARD SAUCE

8 tablespoons Dijon mustard
6 tablespoons clear honey
3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
3 tablespoons freshly squeezed orange juice
1 dash chilli sauce
salt and pepper • 5 sprigs dill

1. Mix together the mustard, honey, vinegar and orange juice and season with chilli sauce, salt and pepper.
2. Wash the dill and shake dry. Pick off the feathery ends and chop finely; mix into the sauce just before serving.

3 QUICK CUCUMBER BITES

**2 large cucumbers (about
1 kg)**
5 shallots
2 small bay leaves
**1 ½ teaspoons yellow
mustard seeds**
3 tablespoons sugar
salt and pepper
2–3 pinches chilli flakes
2–3 pinches ground turmeric
**8 tablespoons white wine
vinegar**
⅓ bunch dill

1. Peel the cucumber and cut in half lengthways. Scrape out the seeds with a spoon and cut the two halves into 5 mm thick slices. Peel the shallots and cut into thin rings. Cut the bay leaves into thirds and place in a large bowl with the cucumbers, shallots and mustard seeds.
2. Mix the sugar, 1 teaspoon salt, pepper, chilli flakes, turmeric and vinegar together and stir until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Stir into the cucumbers, cover and leave to marinate for 4–5 hours.

3. Wash the dill and shake dry; pull off the tips, chop them finely and mix in with the cucumber. Leave the cucumber to marinate again in the fridge for 4–5 hours, or overnight. To serve, drain, keeping back some of the liquid and transfer to a serving dish.

4 BEETROOT WITH REDCURRANTS

**500 g cooked beetroot
(vacuum packed)**
125 g redcurrants
**2 tablespoons redcurrant
jelly**
**2–3 tablespoons white wine
vinegar**
salt and pepper
sugar
5 tablespoons sunflower oil

1. Drain the beetroot and slice, or cut into slivers. Wash the redcurrants and pick the berries off the stalks. Mix the redcurrant jelly with 2 tablespoons of vinegar — if necessary, heat the jelly gently to dissolve it. Season generously with salt, pepper and 1–2 pinches of sugar. Beat the oil in vigorously.
2. Mix the dressing and the beetroot, and then carefully add the redcurrants. Leave to steep for 15 minutes. If necessary, season to taste again with salt, pepper and vinegar.



5 CREAM CHEESE WITH CRANBERRIES

350g cream cheese
3 tablespoons yoghurt
½ organic lemon
40g fresh horseradish (or
2 tablespoons horseradish
sauce)
salt and pepper
½ teaspoon sweet paprika
½ bunch chives
3 tablespoons cranberry
sauce (ready-made)

1. Mix the cream cheese and yoghurt until smooth. Wash the lemon in hot water and dry; finely grate the rind and squeeze out the juice. Peel the horseradish and grate finely. Mix immediately with 1 tablespoon of lemon juice.
2. Stir the horseradish and one teaspoon of lemon zest into the cream cheese, season well with salt, pepper, paprika and a dash or two more of lemon juice. Wash the chives and chop into little rolls; put 1 tablespoon of chopped chives to one

side and add the rest to the cream cheese. Scatter the cranberries onto the cream cheese and stir them in a spiral so that only some of them are mixed in. Sprinkle with the remaining chives.

GIANT CINNAMON BUN

These cinnamon buns, called kanelbullar, are usually eaten at Christmas time in Sweden. Instead of several small buns, we decided to make one big one; it is just right for sharing when everyone is sitting around the table and there is a wonderful smell of cinnamon and Christmas around the house.

Ingredients

(For one 28 cm quiche tin)

For the dough

125 ml milk

1 tablespoon sugar

½ cube fresh yeast (21 g)

60 g butter

250 g plain flour

1 egg yolk

½ teaspoon cardamom

salt

For the filling

50 g melted butter (or more)

3 tablespoons brown sugar

3 teaspoons cinnamon

decorating sugar

Preparation

1. Heat the milk in a pan until it is lukewarm; add the sugar and crumble in the yeast. Stir with a whisk. Leave for a short while in a warm place until frothy.
2. In the meantime, melt the butter, for the dough in a small pan. Put the flour in a large mixing bowl and add the milk/yeast mixture, egg yolk, cardamom and 1 pinch of salt. Start to knead with the dough hook.
3. Whilst kneading, add the melted butter then knead for about 8 minutes. Cover and leave to rise for at least 40 minutes in a warm place (e.g. in the oven at 50°C, fan oven).
4. Preheat the oven to 180°C (fan oven). Turn the dough onto a floured work surface and roll out into a large square with a rolling pin.
5. To make the filling, melt the butter in a small pan. Leave to cool a little. Add the sugar and cinnamon and spread over the dough. Roll up lengthways.
6. Using a sharp knife cut the roll in half along its length and turn the cut surface to the outside. Turn the dough around on itself so that the cut ends show on the outside, and then coil it into the quiche tin. Brush with butter and sprinkle with decorating sugar (optional).
7. Bake the bun in a preheated oven for 25–30 minutes until golden brown. Best served warm.



DECORATED BABY CHRISTMAS TREES

These delightful little Christmas trees will attract attention even though they are so simple to make. They can be decorated with multi-coloured sugar balls instead of silver balls; white icing, for snowy Christmas trees, looks good with silver or coloured sugar balls. Why not use a mixture?

Ingredients

(Makes 12)

For the dough

50 g ground almonds

1 tablespoon sugar

250 g plain flour

100 g butter

(room temperature)

1 egg yolk

Plus

30 g icing sugar

green natural food colouring

edible silver sugar balls

tree-shaped pastry cutters

Preparation

1. Place the almonds, sugar, flour, chopped butter and egg yolk in a bowl. Mix everything together using the dough hook of the mixer to make a smooth dough; add 1–2 tablespoons of cold water if necessary.
2. Wrap the dough in cling film and leave to rest in the fridge for 30 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 170°C (conventional oven). Line a baking sheet with greaseproof paper.
4. Place the dough between two pieces of cling film and roll out to 3 mm thick. Cut out trees with a pastry cutter and arrange them on the baking tray. Chill in the fridge for 30 minutes. Remove from the fridge and bake in the oven for 15 minutes until golden brown.
5. Mix the icing sugar with 6 drops of water to make a thin paste and colour with 1 drop of green food colouring. Let the biscuits cool down a little on a cake rack, then spread them with the icing and decorate with sugar balls.



SAINT LUCY'S CROWN

In Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, children go from house to house wearing crowns with lights on them on the 13th of December, Saint Lucy's Day. You can also make one of these symbolic headpieces with your children.



1. Cut a narrow strip of card to fit around the child's head. Draw leaves and twigs of different sizes on the rest of the paper and cut them out.

2. Cut the scraps of felt furniture pads into small, narrow strips. Now stick the leaves onto the strip of card; stick some of them straight onto the card and, with the remaining leaves, create a more realistic, three-dimensional effect by sticking a piece of felt between them and the strip of card.

3. Cut the drinking straws to the size required; cut small flames out of crepe paper and glue them to the tops of the straws.

4. Adjust the paper strip to the head size required and stick so that it fits snugly. Stick the straw candles onto the crown with adhesive tape.

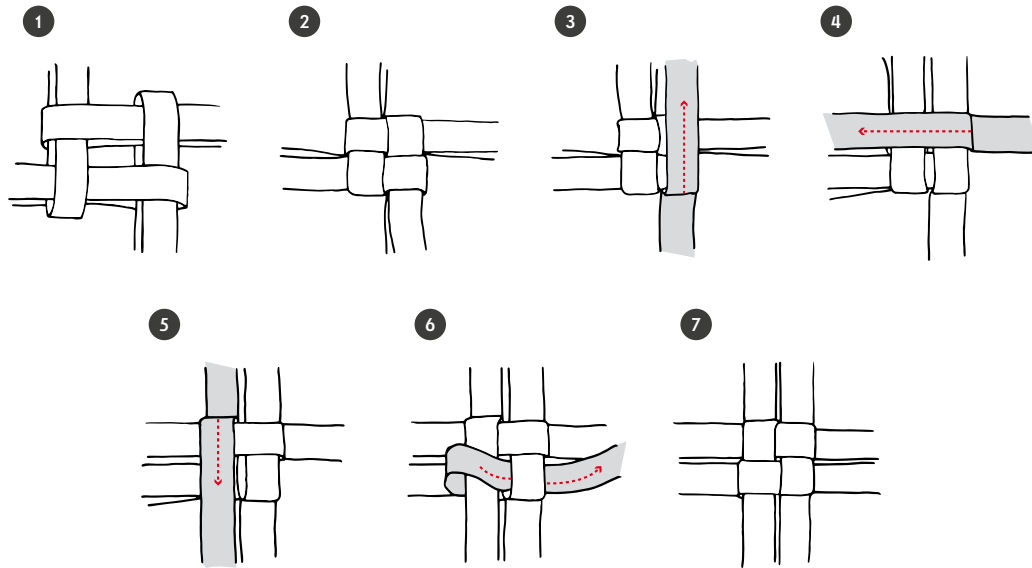
Materials

- different shades of green card
- pencil
- scissors
- scraps of felt pads
- liquid glue
- paper drinking straws
- yellow crepe paper
- adhesive tape



FRÖBEL STARS

Fröbel stars are three-dimensional stars woven from four long strips of paper. They are named after a German educationist but were probably invented in Scandinavia, where they are hung on Christmas trees and used to decorate Christmas presents.



The paper strips for the stars can be cut out of any paper you like, or they can be bought ready-made. If you are making your own, make sure that they are long enough and that they are cut perfectly straight.

1. Fold each strip 1x in the middle and arrange together as shown in Figure 1.

2. Pull the strips together in the middle.

3. Fold the top strip from the bottom to the top.

4. Fold the top strip from the right over to the left.

5. Fold the top strip from the top to the bottom.

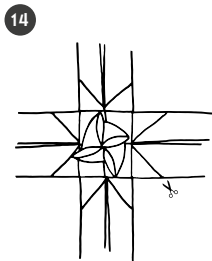
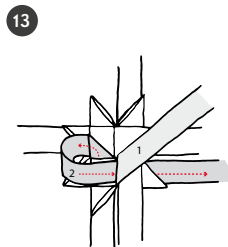
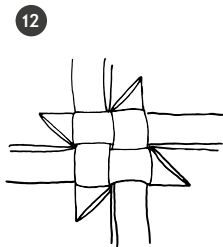
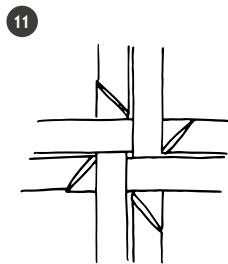
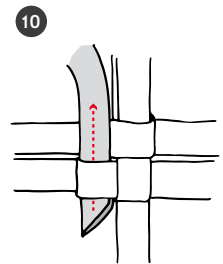
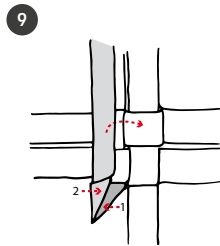
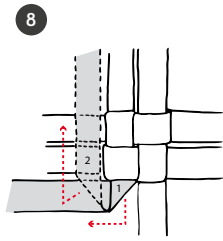
6. Fold the top strip from left to right, passing it over the first and under the second.

7. Pull the strips together.

Materials

- 4 paper strips of equal length e.g. 1.5 cm x 44 cm
- scissors





Continue as follows:

8. To make the side points of the star, bend the bottom left-hand strip 90 degrees towards the back so that it now points to the left (1). Bend the strip 90 degrees again so that it now points upwards (2).

9. Fold point (2) over onto point (1).

10. Thread the end of the strip through the woven square; this is easy to do if you bend the tip downwards a little and hold it tightly.

11. Turn the piece clockwise and make the rest of the points in the same way. Turn the whole thing over and it should look the same as in Fig. 11.

12. Repeat steps 8–10 for all four corners, turning clockwise. The star should now look the same as in Fig. 12.

13. Now make the top points. Lift the lower of the two left-facing strips (1) to reveal the flap underneath. Take the left one of the two upward-pointing strips (2) and fold it 90 degrees towards the back; thread the end of the strip through the flap so that it comes out again through the right-hand point.

14. Turn the piece clockwise and repeat step 13 on the remaining three corners. When the 4 points are complete, turn the star over and repeat the procedure on the other side. Trim off any overhanging edges of paper strip.



THE FIR TREE

Out in the woods stood such a pretty little fir tree. It grew in a good place, where it had plenty of sun and plenty of fresh air. Around it stood many tall comrades, both fir trees and pines.

The little fir tree was in a headlong hurry to grow up. It didn't care a thing for the warm sunshine, or the fresh air, and it took no interest in the peasant children who ran about chattering when they came to pick strawberries or raspberries. Often when the children had picked their pails full, or had gathered long strings of berries threaded on straws, they would sit down to rest near the little fir. "Oh, isn't it a nice little tree?" they would say. "It's the baby of the woods." The little tree didn't like their remarks at all.

Next year it shot up a long joint of new growth, and the following year another joint, still longer. You can always tell how old a fir tree is by counting the number of joints it has.

"I wish I were a grown-up tree, like my comrades," the little tree sighed. "Then I could stretch out my branches and see from my top what the world is like. The birds would make me their nesting place, and when the wind blew I could bow back and forth with all the great trees."

It took no pleasure in the sunshine, nor in the birds. The glowing clouds, that sailed overhead at sunrise and sunset, meant nothing to it.

In winter, when the snow lay sparkling on the ground, a hare would often come hopping along and jump right over the little tree. Oh, how irritating that was! That happened for two winters, but when the third winter came the tree was so tall that the hare had to turn aside and hop around it.

"Oh, to grow, grow! To get older and taller," the little tree thought. "That is the most wonderful thing in this world."

In the autumn, woodcutters came and cut down a few of the largest trees. This happened every year. The young fir was no longer a baby tree, and it trembled to see how those stately great trees crashed to the ground, how their limbs were lopped off, and how lean they looked as the naked trunks were loaded into carts. It could hardly recognize the trees it had known, when the horses pulled them out of the woods.

Where were they going? What would become of them?

In the springtime, when swallows and storks came back, the tree asked them, "Do you know where the other trees went? Have you met them?"

The swallows knew nothing about it, but the stork looked thoughtful and nodded his head. "Yes, I think I met them," he said. "On my way from Egypt I met many new ships, and some had tall, stately masts. They may well have been the trees you mean, for I remember the smell of fir. They wanted to be remembered to you."

"Oh, I wish I were old enough to travel on the sea. Please tell me what it really is, and how it looks." "That would take too long to tell," said the stork, and off he strode.

"Rejoice in your youth," said the sunbeams. "Take pride in your growing strength and in the stir of life within you."

And the wind kissed the tree, and the dew wept over it, for the tree was young and without understanding.





When Christmas came near, many young trees were cut down. Some were not even as old or as tall as this fir tree of ours, who was in such a hurry and fret to go traveling. These young trees, which were always the handsomest ones, had their branches left on them when they were loaded on carts and the horses drew them out of the woods.

"Where can they be going?" the fir tree wondered. "They are no taller than I am. One was really much smaller than I am. And why are they allowed to keep all their branches?"
"Where can they be going?"

"We know! We know!" the sparrows chirped. "We have been to town and peeped in the windows. We know where they are going. The greatest splendor and glory you can imagine awaits them. We've peeped through windows. We've seen them planted right in the middle of a warm room, and decked out with the most splendid things-gold apples, good gingerbread, gay toys, and many hundreds of candles."

"And then?" asked the fir tree, trembling in every twig. "And then? What happens then?"

"We saw nothing more. And never have we seen anything that could match it."

"I wonder if I was created for such a glorious future?" The fir tree rejoiced. "Why, that is better than to cross the sea. I'm tormented with longing. Oh, if Christmas would only come! I'm just as tall and grown-up as the trees they chose last year. How I wish I were already in the cart, on my way to the warm room where there's so much splendor and glory. Then-then something even better, something still more important is bound to happen, or why should they deck me so fine?"

Yes, there must be something still grander! But what?
Oh, how I long: I don't know what's the matter with me."

"Enjoy us while you may," the air and sunlight told him.
"Rejoice in the days of your youth, out here in the open."

But the tree did not rejoice at all. It just grew. It grew and was green both winter and summer-dark evergreen. People who passed it said, "There's a beautiful tree!" And when Christmas time came again they cut it down first. The ax struck deep into its marrow. The tree sighed as it fell to the ground. It felt faint with pain. Instead of the happiness it had expected, the tree was sorry to leave the home where it had grown up. It knew that never again would it see its dear old comrades, the little bushes and the flowers about it-and perhaps not even the birds. The departure was anything but pleasant.

The tree did not get over it until all the trees were unloaded in the yard, and it heard a man say, "That's a splendid one. That's the tree for us." Then two servants came in fine livery, and carried the fir tree into a big splendid drawing-room. Portraits were hung all around the walls. On either side of the white porcelain stove stood great Chinese vases, with lions on the lids of them. There were easy chairs, silk-covered sofas and long tables strewn with picture books, and with toys that were worth a mint of money, or so the children said.

The fir tree was planted in a large tub filled with sand, but no one could see that it was a tub, because it was wrapped in a gay green cloth and set on a many-colored carpet. How the tree quivered! What would come next? The servants and even the young ladies helped it on with its fine decorations.



From its branches they hung little nets cut out of colored paper, and each net was filled with candies. Gilded apples and walnuts hung in clusters as if they grew there, and a hundred little white, blue, and even red, candles were fastened to its twigs. Among its green branches swayed dolls that it took to be real living people, for the tree had never seen their like before. And up at its very top was set a large gold tinsel star. It was splendid, I tell you, splendid beyond all words!

"Tonight," they all said, "ah, tonight how the tree will shine!"

"Oh," thought the tree, "if tonight would only come! If only the candles were lit! And after that, what happens then? Will the trees come trooping out of the woods to see me? Will the sparrows flock to the windows? Shall I take root here, and stand in fine ornaments all winter and summer long?"

That was how much it knew about it. All its longing had gone to its bark and set it to arching, which is as bad for a tree as a headache is for us.

Now the candles were lighted. What dazzling splendor! What a blaze of light! The tree quivered so in every bough that a candle set one of its twigs ablaze. It hurt terribly.

"Mercy me!" cried every young lady, and the fire was quickly put out. The tree no longer dared rustle a twig-it was awful! Wouldn't it be terrible if it were to drop one of its ornaments? Its own brilliance dazzled it.

Suddenly the folding doors were thrown back, and a whole flock of children burst in as if they would overturn the tree completely. Their elders marched in after them, more se-

ately. For a moment, but only for a moment, the young ones were stricken speechless. Then they shouted till the rafters rang. They danced about the tree and plucked off one present after another.

"What are they up to?" the tree wondered. "What will happen next?"

As the candles burned down to the bark they were snuffed out, one by one, and then the children had permission to plunder the tree. They went about it in such earnest that the branches crackled and, if the tree had not been tied to the ceiling by the gold star at top, it would have tumbled headlong.

The children danced about with their splendid playthings. No one looked at the tree now, except an old nurse who peered in among the branches, but this was only to make sure that not an apple or fig had been overlooked.

"Tell us a story! Tell us a story!" the children clamored, as they towed a fat little man to the tree. He sat down beneath it and said, "Here we are in the woods, and it will do the tree a lot of good to listen to our story. Mind you, I'll tell only one. Which will you have, the story of Ivedy-Avedy, or the one about Humpty-Dumpty who tumbled downstairs, yet ascended the throne and married the Princess?"

"Ivedy-Avedy," cried some. "Humpty-Dumpty," cried the others. And there was a great hullabaloo. Only the fir tree held its peace, though it thought to itself, "Am I to be left out of this? Isn't there anything I can do?" For all the fun of the evening had centered upon it, and it had played its part well.



The fat little man told them all about Humpty-Dumpty, who tumbled downstairs, yet ascended the throne and married the Princess. And the children clapped and shouted, "Tell us another one! Tell us another one!" For they wanted to hear about Ivedy-Avedy too, but after Humpty-Dumpty the story telling stopped. The fir tree stood very still as it pondered how the birds in the woods had never told it a story to equal this.

"Humpty-Dumpty tumbled downstairs, yet he married the Princess. Imagine! That must be how things happen in the world. You never can tell. Maybe I'll tumble downstairs and marry a princess too," thought the fir tree, who believed every word of the story because such a nice man had told it.

The tree looked forward to the following day, when they would deck it again with fruit and toys, candles and gold. "Tomorrow I shall not quiver," it decided. "I'll enjoy my splendor to the full. Tomorrow I shall hear about Humpty-Dumpty again, and perhaps about Ivedy-Avedy too." All night long the tree stood silent as it dreamed its dreams, and next morning the butler and the maid came in with their dusters.

"Now my splendor will be renewed," the fir tree thought. But they dragged it upstairs to the garret, and there they left it in a dark corner where no daylight ever came. "What's the meaning of this?" the tree wondered. "What am I going to do here? What stories shall I hear?" It leaned against the wall, lost in dreams. It had plenty of time for dreaming, as the days and the nights went by. Nobody came to the garret. And when at last someone did come, it was only to put many big boxes away in the corner. The tree was quite hidden. One might think it had been entirely forgotten.

"It's still winter outside," the tree thought. "The earth is too hard and covered with snow for them to plant me now. I must have been put here for shelter until springtime comes. How thoughtful of them! How good people are! Only, I wish it weren't so dark here, and so very, very lonely. There's not even a little hare. It was so friendly out in the woods when the snow was on the ground and the hare came hopping along. Yes, he was friendly even when he jumped right over me, though I did not think so then. Here it's all so terribly lonely."

"Squeak, squeak!" said a little mouse just then. He crept across the floor, and another one followed him. They sniffed the fir tree, and rustled in and out among its branches.

"It is fearfully cold," one of them said. "Except for that, it would be very nice here, wouldn't it, you old fir tree?"

"I'm not at all old," said the fir tree. "Many trees are much older than I am."

"Where did you come from?" the mice asked him. "And what do you know?" They were most inquisitive creatures.

"Tell us about the most beautiful place in the world. Have you been there? Were you ever in the larder, where there are cheeses on shelves and hams that hang from the rafters? It's the place where you can dance upon tallow candles-where you can dart in thin and squeeze out fat."

"I know nothing of that place," said the tree. "But I know the woods where the sun shines and the little birds sing." Then it told them about its youth. The little mice had never heard the like of it. They listened very intently, and said,





"My! How much you have seen! And how happy it must have made you."

"I?" the fir tree thought about it. "Yes, those days were rather amusing." And he went on to tell them about Christmas Eve, when it was decked out with candies and candles.

"Oh," said the little mice, "how lucky you have been, you old fir tree!"

"I am not at all old," it insisted. "I came out of the woods just this winter, and I'm really in the prime of life, though at the moment my growth is suspended."

"How nicely you tell things," said the mice. The next night they came with four other mice to hear what the tree had to say. The more it talked, the more clearly it recalled things, and it thought, "Those were happy times. But they may still come back-they may come back again. Humpty-Dumpty fell downstairs, and yet he married the Princess. Maybe the same thing will happen to me." It thought about a charming little birch tree that grew out in the woods. To the fir tree she was a real and lovely Princess.

"Who is Humpty-Dumpty?" the mice asked it. So the fir tree told them the whole story, for it could remember it word by word. The little mice were ready to jump to the top of the tree for joy. The next night many more mice came to see the fir tree, and on Sunday two rats paid it a call, but they said that the story was not very amusing. This made the little mice to sad that they began to find it not so very interesting either.

"Is that the only story you know?" the rats asked.

"Only that one," the tree answered. "I heard it on the happiest evening of my life, but I did not know then how happy I was."

"It's a very silly story. Don't you know one that tells about bacon and candles? Can't you tell us a good larder story?"

"No," said the tree.

"Then good-by, and we won't be back," the rats said, and went away.

At last the little mice took to staying away too. The tree sighed, "Oh, wasn't it pleasant when those gay little mice sat around and listened to all that I had to say. Now that, too, is past and gone. But I will take good care to enjoy myself, once they let me out of here."

When would that be? Well, it came to pass on a morning when people came up to clean out the garret. The boxes were moved, the tree was pulled out and thrown-thrown hard-on the floor. But a servant dragged it at once to the stairway, where there was daylight again.

"Now my life will start all over," the tree thought. It felt the fresh air and the first sunbeam strike it as if it came out into the courtyard. This all happened so quickly and there was so much going around it, that the tree forgot to give even a glance at itself. The courtyard adjoined a garden, where flowers were blooming. Great masses of fragrant roses hung over the picket fence. The linden trees were in blossom, and between them the swallows skimmed past, calling, "Tilira-lira-lee, my love's come back to me." But it was not the fir tree of whom they spoke.



"Now I shall live again," it rejoiced, and tried to stretch out its branches. Alas, they were withered, and brown, and brittle. It was tossed into a corner, among weeds and nettles. But the gold star that was still tied to its top sparkled bravely in the sunlight.

Several of the merry children, who had danced around the tree and taken such pleasure in it at Christmas, were playing in the courtyard. One of the youngest seized upon it and tore off the tinsel star.

"Look what is still hanging on that ugly old Christmas tree," the child said, and stamped upon the branches until they cracked beneath his shoes.

The tree saw the beautiful flowers blooming freshly in the garden. It saw itself, and wished that they had left it in the darkest corner of the garret. It thought of its own young days in the deep woods, and of the merry Christmas Eve, and of the little mice who had been so pleased when it told them the story of Humpty-Dumpty.

"My days are over and past," said the poor tree. "Why didn't I enjoy them while I could? Now they are gone—all gone."

A servant came and chopped the tree into little pieces. These heaped together quite high. The wood blazed beautifully under the big copper kettle, and the fir tree moaned so deeply that each groan sounded like a muffled shot. That's why the children who were playing near-by ran to make a circle around the flames, staring into the fire and crying, "Pif! Paf!" But as each groan burst from it, the tree thought of a bright summer day in the woods, or a starlit winter night. It thought of Christmas Eve and thought of Humpty-

Dumpty, which was the only story it ever heard and knew how to tell. And so the tree was burned completely away.

The children played on in the courtyard. The youngest child wore on his breast the gold star that had topped the tree on its happiest night of all. But that was no more, and the tree was no more, and there's no more to my story. No more, nothing more. All stories come to an end.

Hans Christian Andersen (1844)

Translation © Jean Hersholt

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