

## COOK'S TIPS

While English tradition would see families make their puddings on the last Sunday of November and hang them in a cool place until Christmas, Australian summers say otherwise! If the weather's warm, it's best to make this pudding up to two weeks in advance and store it in the refrigerator. You can reheat the pudding by boiling it for one hour or simply removing it from the cloth and microwaving it in single serves.

The extra lengths of string tied to the pudding make lowering and lifting it a little easier. If your saucepan has two handles you could secure the ends of the string to them to stop the pudding from moving around and catching on the pan. Use the string to hang the pudding to dry, too.

MAIN PHOTO BY CHRIS COURT, PORTRAIT BY HUGH STEWART

Tastes Like Home edited by Anastasia Safioleas

# Christmas Pudding

## Ingredients

Serves 6

¼ cup (40g) sultanas  
½ cup (80g) dried currants  
¾ cup (100g) raisins  
8 soft fresh dates (160g), pitted and chopped  
½ cup (70g) slivered almonds  
½ teaspoon mixed spice  
⅓ cup (80ml) sweet sherry  
⅔ cup (160ml) brandy  
125g unsalted butter, softened  
¼ cup (45g) light brown sugar  
¼ cup (55g) caster sugar  
2 eggs  
⅔ cup (100g) plain flour, sifted  
1½ cups (100g) fresh white breadcrumbs  
brandy custard, to serve

60cm-square piece of calico cloth

## Method

Place the sultanas, currants, raisins, dates, almonds, mixed spice, sherry and half the brandy in a large bowl and mix to combine. Cover with plastic wrap and allow to soak in a cool, dark place for 24 hours, mixing occasionally.

Place the butter and both the sugars in the bowl of an electric mixer and beat for 8-10 minutes or until pale and creamy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add the butter mixture, half the flour and the breadcrumbs to the soaked fruit and mix to combine.

Place a large saucepan of water over high heat and bring to the boil. Add a 60cm-square piece of calico cloth and boil for 5 minutes. Using tongs, remove the calico and allow to cool. Squeeze to remove any excess water. Drain, refill the pan with water and bring to the boil. Open the calico out and top with the remaining ½ cup (50g) of flour. Rub the flour over the calico to form a large circle. Spoon the pudding mixture into the centre of the calico to form a mound, and gather the ends together firmly. Tie the calico as close to the mixture as possible with kitchen string, leaving at least a 15cm length of string at both ends. Place the pudding in the water, reduce the heat to medium and cover with a tight-fitting lid. Simmer for 4 hours, adding more water if necessary.

Drain and hang the pudding over a bowl for 24-48 hours or until dry. Cut the string and invert the pudding onto a serving plate. Gently remove the cloth, top with the remaining ½ cup (80ml) of brandy and serve with brandy custard.



## Donna Hay says...

**I** grew up near the beach, so my childhood Christmases were super summery, relaxed and Australian. But Christmas was, and still is, all about family for me. My grandmother, a central figure in my childhood, loved to bake. She'd tie an apron around my waist and let me help her in the kitchen, teaching me her secret recipes for cakes, cookies and puddings. Looking back, I can see that she was the one who inspired me to cook. Now, every year, for dessert on Christmas Day I make my grandmother's Christmas pudding.

It's a memory I cherish. In the weeks leading up to the big day, my little cousins, sisters and I used to pile into my grandmother's kitchen and help make her famous Christmas pudding. She'd let us do some measuring, stir the ingredients, flour the cloth or shape the mixture...all while making as much mess as we pleased. To our absolute delight she'd produce a silver coin to be hidden in the centre. I can't help but smile at how much excitement it brought us. Of course, whoever found the coin on Christmas Day was to make a secret wish for the year ahead. I loved the way my grandmother baked with such care and attention. Those memories, that smell and that pudding that I make every year – that's home to me.

These days I usually start Christmas Day in the same way, with a refreshing swim at the beach with my boys, then we head home to start preparing lunch before the rest of the family arrive. I really love when we all spend the Christmas holidays together. It's a very casual, relaxed day. Boxing Day is also my son's birthday, so the festivities always continue.

As for the menu, I'm a classics girl at heart so I'll have my glossy glazed ham and signature turkey breast on the table, but I like to experiment with new sides and salads. It may surprise you, but I actually love it when my guests bring a plate of something at Christmas. It's fun experiencing other families' food traditions, and everyone has a memory or story that's special to them.

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