

Keep Christmas Cooking Deliciously Simple with Antony Worrall Thompson's Festive 'Dos and Don'ts'

Submitted by: Minx PR

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The Christmas season can often see you cooking for more people than perhaps you and your oven are used to, and for some that may spell disaster. To help you enjoy cooking over the festive season, Antony Worrall Thompson has put together some short cuts, tips and hints that will ensure you feel confident in the kitchen to weather the increase in demand on your culinary skills!

Antony says: "I love Christmas. I love the whole tradition, sights and smells of Christmas. We always have the traditional turkey and all the trimmings but with so much going on with family in the house on the day, I always make sure I've planned the timings carefully and stick to a schedule.

"But a crowded kitchen can create chaos and so I recommend that you ask one or two people to help at a time. Even if someone just disposes of the dirty dishes, it all helps you stay focused on the timing. Keep it simple and make sure someone is tasked with the most important job of all – ensuring the chef doesn't get thirsty!"

Antony's Festive Dos and Don'ts:

1) Do cut corners by being prepared. Make a list, schedule your time so that you can make brandy butter, mince pies, stuffing and cranberry sauce a week or two before Christmas: freeze them and thaw overnight on Christmas Eve. If guests drop by unexpectedly, don't panic, you can cook mince pies from frozen.

2) Don't slow cook the turkey: unless you like shoe leather don't slow cook the turkey overnight! The best way to ensure you get a juicy and succulent bird cooked in good time is to add stock, a glug of white wine and some herbs to the roasting tin, cover the turkey and tin completely in Bacofoil to keep heat in and speed up cooking times. Cook your stuffing in a separate baking tray to save time as an un-stuffed turkey cooks more quickly than one with stuffing in its cavity.

3) Do juggle roast potatoes: If you are cooking with a conventional single oven, then you will really benefit from pre-cooking the roast potatoes for 40 minutes before the turkey goes into the oven to help relieve the burden on your cooker. The turkey will need 20 minutes' standing time tightly wrapped in foil to allow the juices to go back into the flesh having risen to the surface during cooking. So during this time, turn up the oven to hot and pop your potatoes back in to finish roasting and crisp up.

4) Don't have gravy grumbles: if making real gravy always ends up a scramble or you don't have a suitable roasting tin to do this on your hob, for no hassle lump-free gravy try Antony Worrall Thompson's Chicken Gravy Paste (£2.00 mail order at www.jardox.com). Simply disperse the paste in cold water, heat it gently until it thickens and serve. Add three or four tablespoons of turkey cooking juices for extra flavour.

5) Do bake ahead: two weeks before Christmas cook in bulk and freeze dishes that can be fed to the masses when you're just too tired to cook from scratch. The basic meat for lasagnes, shepherd and cottage pies, moussakas and Bolognese can all be prepared using my 'Really Useful Mince' recipe which is the

perfect standby for converting any of these mince-type dishes into gourmet delights. You'll need 1.75kg of minced beef plus lots of store cupboard basics. For the full recipe visit www.awtonline.co.uk or find it featured in Antony's cookbook, 'Real Family Food' (Mitchell Beasley) £16.99 from www.octopusbooks.co.uk.

Quick Fix Party Tips:

Do expect guests – and keep breadsticks handy for pre-dinner snacks and appetisers. Antony Worrall Thompson's freshly baked ciabatta style croutini and breadsticks pack a real crunch and come in a variety of flavours to complement many dips. Available from Morrison's, Waitrose and Booth's priced around £1.99 for 95g (breadsticks) and 90g (croutini). Try:

1. Crispy Cranberry Bites

Top Antony Worrall Thompson's Olive, Sea Salt & Black Pepper Croutini with a thin slice of brie. Melt it under the grill for 30 seconds then add a dollop of hot or cold cranberry sauce. Serve immediately

2. Saucy Salsa Dip

Buy a ready-made salsa dip and thoroughly stir in about 8oz of cream or curd cheese until you have the ideal dipping consistency. Or visit www.awtonline.co.uk for a home-made version that you can make up and refrigerate for convenience. Serve with Antony Worrall Thompson's Garlic & Coriander Breadsticks and strips of carrot, cucumber and yellow pepper for a cheerful festive snack platter

Store Cupboard Secrets for Tasty Leftovers

Make sure you have plenty of herbs and spices tucked away, plain flour, dried mustard, onions, eggs, and Christmas spices such as cinnamon and dried fruits. You'll no doubt have used some of these in your Christmas cooking from scratch and they will be handy for turning your leftovers into tasty treats.

Antony says: "When I was young the Sunday roast was always a source of left over meals for the next few days and so the Christmas lunch is no different really. One of my favourite left over recipes are cromeskis, a crispy pancake roll usually served with a crisp salad." Antony's Christmas Cromeskis will take you 40 minutes from start to table leaving you plenty of time to enjoy your festive holiday without feeling like you've been slaving over a hot stove the entire time! You'll find the basic Cromeski recipe in Antony's new book, Fast Family Food (Mitchell Beasley) £18.99 from www.octopusbooks.co.uk

Antony Worrall Thompson's Christmas Cromeskis

Preparation 15 minutes. Cooking 22-25 minutes.

Ingredients:

1 onion, finely chopped
1 tsp soft thyme leaves

55g (2oz) unsalted butter
300g (11oz) leftover turkey, beef, lamb or chicken, finely chopped
2tbsp chopped parsley
1 tbsp snipped chives
Salt and ground black pepper
1 egg yolk and 2 free-range eggs, beaten
225g (8oz) ricotta or cream cheese
55g (2oz) sultanas
1tbsp clear honey
A pinch of cinnamon
8 shop-bought pancakes
85g (3oz) plain seasoned flour
150g (5oz) white breadcrumbs.

- Place the onions in a saucepan with four tablespoons of water and the thyme leaves, and simmer for 12-15 minutes.
- Heat half the butter in a frying pan, add the meat and the boiled onions with their juices, and cook for 3 minutes, stirring regularly. Fold in the herbs and season. Allow to cool, then fold in the egg yolk.
- Meanwhile, in a bowl mix the ricotta, sultanas, honey and cinnamon.
- Lay the pancakes on a work surface and spread a line of cream-cheese mixture on each one, leaving 2.5cm (1in) each side and 2.5cm (1in) in from the top of the pancake. Top the cream cheese with the meat mixture, then lightly roll up the pancakes, tucking them in at the sides.
- Arrange three plates or shallow bowls: one with the flour, one with the beaten eggs and the last with the breadcrumbs. Dip each pancake roll in the flour, then the egg, then the breadcrumbs. Place them seam side down on a plate until ready to cook.
- Preheat the oven to 180°C/360°F/Gas 4.
- Heat the remaining butter in a large frying pan and fry the pancakes seam side down for 3 minutes, then turn them over and cook until golden. Put them in the oven until ready to serve – they should be very hot. Serve with salad or green vegetables.

For a vegetarian alternative – instead of the meat add any leftover Christmas Veg such as Brussel sprouts and carrots and roast potatoes for a bubble and squeak type parcel.

To find out more about Antony's range of food, kitchen and lifestyle products click onto:
www.awtonline.co.uk

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