



'Tis the Season ... to start your own traditions



by **Lorraine Mercedes Picot, RNCP** (article written in 2000)

Does the thought of the approaching Holidays leave you feeling more blue than jolly? At a time of year when even the most well-closeted chocoholics come out of hiding, an allergy to the sweet confection can torment or exasperate the most dedicated among us. Some of you may have a child whose allergies include sugar and chocolate. Visions of sugar-plums quickly morph into nightmares of you as Scrooge or the “food police”.

How do you pass up the treats during the pre-holiday office feeding frenzy? Gracefully decline a gift of chocolates from a well-wishing boss or colleague? In short, how do you survive the Holiday season with your nerves, your relationships, and most importantly, your health intact? If honesty doesn't feel like your best policy, recycling chocolate gifts has worked for me in the past (you've got to act quickly on this one!). As a last resort, spend your holiday at a resort (where meals are not included!). I've tried that one too but family members who stayed behind can make you feel guiltier than a whole box of Laura Secord!

My bet is you'll feel a lot jollier if you spend a little time concocting a few home-made tasty treats to share with family, friends, and colleagues (copy the recipe and include with your samples).

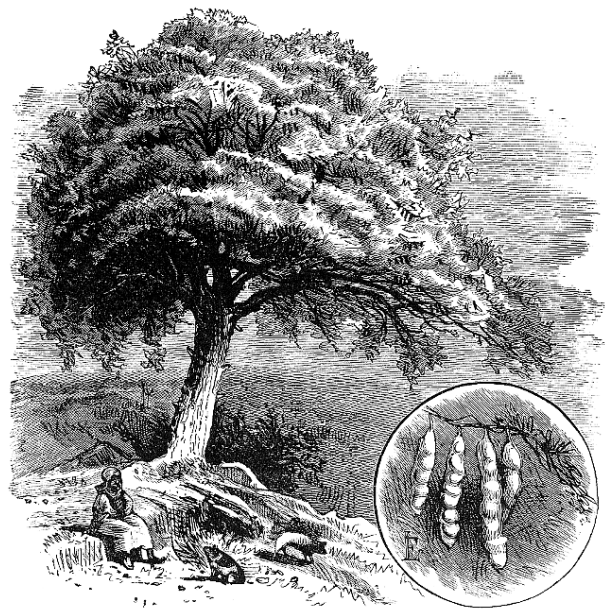
Once you have settled the question of treats, pick out a few favourite recipes and plan your Holiday menu. Here's your chance to start unique Holiday traditions with your personal stamp on your choice of dishes. You may want to remember your ethnic origins, you may want to go completely eclectic or to honour Mother Nature. Allow for special “Feast Foods”; the occasion calls for them!

Bringing up a daughter in a vegetarian home meant that I had to find a creative and tasty alternative to the traditional Christmas turkey. Our traditional meal goes like this: a savoury Nut Roast (baked in a Bundt pan) surrounded with oven roasted vegetables; mushroom gravy; cranberry sauce; scalloped or sweet potatoes; and a fresh green salad. Dessert is a Polenta and Raisin Flan garnished with a spiral of fresh apple slices. We prepare sweet treats made from dried fruit and nuts and healthy sweeteners. These dishes are easily wheat-free, dairy-free, and sugar-free! Best of all, they can be assembled or prepared ahead of time, leaving you stress-free.

Tell your kids that eating chocolate is a relatively recent concept as far as Holiday traditions go. Although the Mayans, Aztecs, and Toltecs cultivated the cocoa bean several thousand years ago, it was only introduced into Europe (via Spain) in 1527. Cocoa had made its way into Africa by about 1822 but it was not until 1847 that the first chocolate bar was introduced by the Fry and Sons Company in Britain. Today the African continent supplies most of the cocoa consumed in the world but it is Switzerland which beats the record for yearly consumption at about 24 pounds per person! That's enough to make anyone yodel!

Chocolate's mood altering properties can have a strong effect on sensitive or young bodies and minds. It is listed as a powerful trigger for migraines and headaches; PMS; fibrocystic breast disease; and mood and energy swings. Many cheaper brands contain highly saturated palm oil which can wreck havoc with your vascular system. The *oxalic acid* found in chocolate interferes with the absorption of calcium so important to growing bones.

You may want to cast your sight on a bean of an entirely different tree at this time of year. The carob tree dates back to antiquity and probably originated in Syria. Carob was mentioned in biblical lore as having sustained St. John through his desert crossing (almost wrote "dessert"!). Although unjustly maligned as a poor substitute, carob, not chocolate, should occupy a place of honour among your own traditional Holiday treats.



Chocolate has found its way into the top ten list of food allergens and no matter how strong the pull, many of us will be better-off keeping it out of our stockings and our stomachs! Aside from its' content of caffeine, fat, and refined sugar (not to mention cockroach parts, no kidding!), chocolate contains a stimulant called *theobromine*. This chemical compound closely resembles caffeine and may account for some of its' addictive qualities. Chocolate's high sugar content combined with the high fat content make it a magnet for those afflicted with compulsive eating, even without the assistance of caffeine and theobromine!

Carob, which can be purchased as a powder, liquid (syrup), or solid (chips or bars); contains neither caffeine nor theobromine. As it is naturally sweet, this wonderful alternative requires very little added sweetener.

Use honey or *Stevia* (a healthy alternative to sugar). It is highly alkaline, low in fat, contains calcium, phosphorus, B-vitamins, protein, and quality carbohydrates.

Having spent much time reflecting on why Holiday traditions survive successive generations, I've come to a few conclusions to explain their longevity. It's really all about stress management!

There is nothing like knowing where you're headed when the white stuff covers the ground and the proverbial brown stuff (chocolate in our case!) hits the fan.

"Traditions" equal sanity, serenity, security... Knowing, year after year, what you're having for that special dinner and which treats to prepare, has spared the nerves of many a harried cook for generations. In the words of Martha Stewart, that's a (jolly) good thing! Do your own thing; start your own traditions!



1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 1/3 cups toasted hazelnuts, ground
2/3 cup walnuts, ground
2/3 cup Brazil nuts, ground
12 oz. tomatoes, blanched, peeled, & chopped
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
1/4 lb. fresh mushrooms, chopped
1/2 tsp. dried basil
1/2 dried oregano
1 tsp. vegetable salt
1 egg, well beaten

Vegetarian Nut Roast

Preheat oven to 425 F. Lightly oil a 2 lb. loaf tin or round mold. Line with waxed paper and set aside. Place the nuts, tomatoes, onion, garlic, mushrooms, basil, oregano, sea salt, and egg in a medium-sized bowl. Mix until the ingredients are thoroughly combined.

Turn the mixture into the prepared loaf tin, smoothing the surface with the back of a spoon.

Place the tin in oven and bake for 30-40 minutes or until roast has shrunk slightly from the sides of the tin.

Let cool slightly and with a knife around the edges, turn out to a wooden board or plate. Cut into thick slices and serve with mushroom or onion gravy.

Serves 6-8

1 lb. fresh mushrooms
1 large onion, chopped
3 cloves garlic, pressed
1 Tbs. cold-pressed oil
2 Tbs. cool water
2 Tbs. whole-wheat pastry flour
1 cup hot water

Mushroom Gravy

Sauté mushrooms, onion and garlic in oil until onion is transparent. Add cool water and flour. Stir well. Add hot water and tamari if desired. Add more water for thinner gravy. Stir and cook for a few more minutes. Serve over nut loaf or lentil loaf.

Serves 6-8

2 medium apples
 ¼ cup honey
 1 cup orange juice
 ½ tsp. sea salt
 1 tsp. cinnamon
 1 tsp. ground clove
 ½ tsp. ground ginger
 1 lb. fresh cranberries

3 cups soft whole wheat flour
 2 tsp. baking soda
 2 tsp. alum-free baking powder
 ½ tsp. sea salt
 1 tsp. cinnamon
 3 well-beaten eggs
 ½ cup date purée*
 1 cup cold-pressed vegetable oil
 2 cups grated carrots
 1 can (396 ml) crushed,
 unsweetened pineapple,
 drained
 ¾ cup chopped nuts (walnuts or
 pecans)

2 cups dried dates or dried apricots
 1 cup water

½ cup tahini or
 ½ cup cashew nuts (ground)
 4 oz. (½ block) soft tofu, crumbled
 2 Tbs. honey
 1 tsp. vanilla
 2-4 Tbs. apple or pear juice

1 cup cooked brown rice
 2 cups vanilla soya milk
 1 ¼ cup water
 1 pinch of sea salt
 ¼ cup raisins
 2 heaping Tbs. of dried cranberries

Quick Cranberry Sauce

Wash apples well and cut into small cubes without peeling. Pour honey and orange juice into saucepan with apples, salt, and spices. Cook over low heat for about 10 minutes. Add cranberries and continue cooking for 10 more minutes uncovered.



Makes about 2 ½ cups sauce



Carrot Cake (no added sugar)

Preheat oven to 350 F (325 F for a Pyrex pan). Sift together flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon.

In another bowl, combine eggs, date purée, oil, grated carrots, crushed pineapple, and chopped nuts. Gradually add dry ingredients and mix well.

Pour into a rectangular cake pan. Bake for 40-45 minutes.

Serve warm or cold with Tofu Whipped Cream.

Date or Apricot Purée*

Rinse dried fruit well and soak overnight in water. Purée in blender or food processor until smooth. This purée freezes well or keeps in refrigerator for up to one week .

Tofu Whipped Cream

In a blender or food processor, blend all ingredients until smooth and creamy.

Serve for icing sweet breads or as a topping over fresh fruit.

Rice Pudding with Raisins and Cranberries

Preheat oven to 300 F. Place brown rice, soya milk, water, cinnamon, and nutmeg in an oven-proof casserole dish. Bake uncovered for 1 hour. Remove from oven and stir in raisins and cranberries. Reduce heat to 250 F. Bake uncovered for 1 more hour.



- 1 2/3 cups of dates (1/2 lb.)
- 1 1/2 cups raisins (1/2 lb.)
- 1/2 cup whole almonds
- 1/2 cup walnuts
- 1/3 cup crystallized ginger
- finely grated peel of 1 orange
- 2 Tbs. Orange or Apricot juice
- 1/2 cup white sesame seeds
and/or
- 1 cup finely shredded coconut

Snowballs

In a food processor, chop dates and raisins and pour into a large mixing bowl. Place almonds, walnuts, and ginger in food processor and chop coarsely. Add to date-raisin mixture. Add orange peel and brandy or orange juice. Blend together with a wooden spoon.

In a shallow plate or tray, pour and spread out sesame seeds or shredded coconut. Roll fruit mixture into little balls about 1" in diameter. Roll each ball in sesame or coconut, coating well all around. Store in airtight containers, separating layers with wax paper. Will keep in refrigerator for several weeks or in the freezer for longer periods.



Makes about 36 snowballs

- 1/4 lb. or 1 stick of unsalted butter
- 6 Tbs. of honey
- 2 Tbs. of molasses
- 3/4 cup milk or soya milk
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 Tbs. lemon juice
- 2 cups whole wheat pastry flour
- 1/2 cup rye flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 tsp. ground allspice
- 1/2 tsp. ground cardamom
- 1/2 tsp. ground coriander
- 1/2 tsp. grated nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
- pinch of sea salt



Spice Bread

Preheat oven to 375 F. In a large mixing bowl, cream together the butter, honey, and molasses. Whisk in the milk, egg, and lemon juice.

In a separate bowl, sift together the flours, baking soda, sea salt, and spices. Stir into the liquid mixture and blend well.

Butter a loaf pan and line with greased waxed paper. Spoon in the batter and bake for 50-60 minutes in preheated oven. Test for doneness with a toothpick. Turn out onto a wire rack and remove paper. Cool and wrap tightly in plastic wrap and foil. Let sit for several days before eating. Keeps for several weeks.

Makes 1 loaf.

- 1 cup almond butter, room temperature
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/2 cup carob powder
- toasted almonds (about 40)
- 1 cup (approx.) toasted sesame seeds or shredded coconut

Almond Nuggets

In a medium bowl, cream together almond butter and honey with a fork and mix well. Gradually mix in the carob.

Place the toasted sesame seeds or shredded coconut in a bowl. Take one almond and shape about one teaspoonful of dough mixture around it, covering it completely. Repeat until all dough is used. Refrigerate for 1 hour before serving. Store in refrigerator.

Makes about 40 nuggets.



1 cup unsweetened carob chips
¾ cup of vanilla soya milk

Carob Fondue

Prepare a variety of fresh fruit into bite-size pieces and refrigerate. You can use a combination of any of the following: banana slices; slices of apple or pear; fresh pineapple, papaya, or mango cubes; grapes and strawberries.

Melt the carob chips in a double-boiler and stir. Remove from heat and gradually stir in the soya milk. Mix until smooth and pour into a chocolate fondue dish. Dip individual fruit pieces and enjoy!

1 cup cooked brown rice
2 cups vanilla soya milk
1 ¼ cup water
1 pinch of sea salt
¼ cup raisins
2 heaping Tbs. of dried cranberries

Rice Pudding with Raisins and Cranberries

Preheat oven to 300 F. Place brown rice, soya milk, water, cinnamon, and nutmeg in an oven-proof casserole dish. Bake uncovered for 1 hour. Remove from oven and stir in raisins and cranberries. Reduce heat to 250 F. Bake uncovered for 1 more hour.

10 apples
1 cup pitted dates
½ cup orange juice

Apple-Date Spread

Core and dice unpeeled apples into small pieces. Place in a medium cooking pot. Add dates and orange juice. Cook slowly over low heat stirring often. When apples are cooked, remove from stove and refrigerate until mixture has cooled. Purée in food processor until smooth. Spoon into clean glass jars with tight fitting lid. This spread will store in refrigerator for up to 3 weeks. Serve with fresh yogurt or on pancakes or toast.

