

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? A short history of Christmas pudding

There are many symbols of Christmas, but few are as ubiquitous as the Christmas (a.k.a. plum) pudding.

It is an iconic symbol of the holiday itself, but also of a traditional Christmas dinner, despite not everyone being a fan. Its status as a Christmas symbol has been firmly solidified in Christmas carols, literature and on everything from T-shirts to ornaments. What's more interesting is that the Christmas pudding we know and love today has evolved and changed from its original form, dating back centuries.

Several sources cite that the origins of the Christmas pudding date back as far as medieval England in the 14th century, when it was called 'frumenty,' which was made with beef and mutton, combined with raisins, currants, prunes, wine and spices. In this form, it was more of a soup and was consumed as a fasting meal in anticipation of the upcoming Christmas festivities. Other sources cite the pudding's early origins to medieval English sausages, where fruits, spices and fat were combined with meats, vegetables and grains, which were then stuffed into animal stomachs and intestines to delay spoiling for as long as possible.

Early records of plum puddings are said to date back to the early 15th century, when 'plum pottage,' a savoury mixture consisting largely of meat and root vegetables, was served at the beginning of a meal. The 'plum' in the pudding pertained to any dried fruit used in the dish, which could be raisins and currants. Prunes and other dried, preserved or candied fruits would be added based on their availability. The pudding moved from its savoury beginnings to a sweet dish by the end of the 16th century, as dried fruits were more plentiful in England. It's also said that around this time, the emergence of the pudding cloth, a floured piece of fabric which was capable of holding any size of pudding, helped to alleviate the dependence on animal products; however, suet remained an important ingredient, which continues to be used in many recipes today. There are sources which cite alcohol also being added to the dish from the late 16th century and into the 17th century. It has been said that recipes for plum pudding emerged in the 17th century and it became a traditional dessert associated with Christmas by the mid-1600s. It is also about this time that the dish starts being prepared in advance and stored in earthenware pots. However, the pudding was banned by the Puritans around this time, as well as several other Christmas customs.

There are sources that credit King George I with bringing back the plum pudding as a Christmas tradition, since he enjoyed it himself and requested that it be served at his first English Christmas banquet. Following this, plum pudding in its standard form became firmly established during the Victorian era, as English journalists, political leaders and novelists sought to establish and promote a vision of a traditional, family-centred English Christmas. It's been said that it wasn't until the 1830s when the cannonball shape of the pudding, consisting of flour, fruits, suet, sugar and spices, topped with holly (the classic image that we associate with Christmas pudding today) first appeared and increasingly became tied to Christmas.

Today, there are many recipes available for Christmas (or plum) pudding, but what hasn't changed is its prominence at the Christmas dinner table and the joy it brings as a very special treat. It (along with many other symbols of Christmas) adds to the magic of the season and reminds us to extend goodwill and charity to everyone and especially to our fellow citizens who are less fortunate. As the Member of Parliament for Dufferin-Caledon, I wish you and your loved ones much peace and joy, as you celebrate your cherished holiday traditions together, whatever they may be.

Merry Christmas!

Ring in the New Year with family

It's hard to believe that 2018 is just around the corner.

The year 2017 was an eventful year to say the least, both at a national and international level. It flew by.

The hustle and bustle of Christmas is exciting, but can also be tiring. However, New Year's can be a more relaxing, laidback holiday to catch our breath and recharge with family and loved ones before we tackle the year ahead. There are many fun and relaxing activities to do with family to make this New Year's an extra special and memorable one.

The internet can be an easy first step to finding new and creative ideas to ring in New Year's with your loved ones. Many of the ideas you will find are inexpensive, family-friendly and easy to do. One such idea is to create a delicious 'mocktail,' which all members of your family and loved ones can enjoy to toast the New Year. You can break out your mixology skills and develop your own custom recipe using juices, soda water, etc. Be sure to give it an imaginative name and pour it into nice glassware to make it extra special for the younger members of your family.

Another family-friendly idea is to enjoy fireworks together. After researching locations where such displays will be taking place, gather some blankets, and drive with your loved ones to a site to enjoy the spectacular display together. A similar option here in the riding is to explore Christmas in the Park in Orangeville, hosted by the Optimist Club of Orangeville at Kay Cee Gardens at 29 Bythia St. This spectacular and unique lights display, which runs nightly to Dec. 31 from 5:30 to 10 p.m., is sure to please every age

group. Admission and parking are free.

A fun activity for everyone to ring in the New Year is to make holiday crackers to add some glitz to your New Year's dinner table. You only need a few supplies to create them, such as toilet paper rolls, treats, wrapping paper and some other things you can find around the house.

Another unique idea is a New Year's Tree. For this activity, have everyone work together to remove all of the Christmas decorations from the Christmas tree, leaving just the lights. Once that is done, let your imagination run free, and redecorate the tree with New Year's-themed decorations. The decorations can be things from around the house. The finished product will create a whole new look for the tree for everyone to enjoy before the season comes to a close.

You can always host your own party at home with your family and loved ones. Everyone can get into the spirit by making party hats, confetti and noise makers, using items and craft supplies from around the house. The party can also include easy, homemade New Year's-themed games or you can break out your favourite, classic board games. This is guaranteed fun for everyone.

Another not-to-miss event here in the riding that's sure to be fun for the whole family is the Annual Grand Valley Polar Bear Dip in the Grand River New Year's Day at Old Firehall Dam in Grand Valley. The event is hosted by the Grand Valley Lions Club and takes place from noon to 2 p.m. with the dip starting at 1 p.m. sharp. All funds raised go to the local food bank.

These are just a few ideas to ring in the New Year with family and loved ones that can be found on the internet. The possibilities are endless and one activity may lead to discovering a completely new idea. You may also find some of them will quickly become annual traditions in your home.

Regardless of how you decide to ring in this New Year's with your loved ones, I sincerely wish you a very healthy and happy 2018

