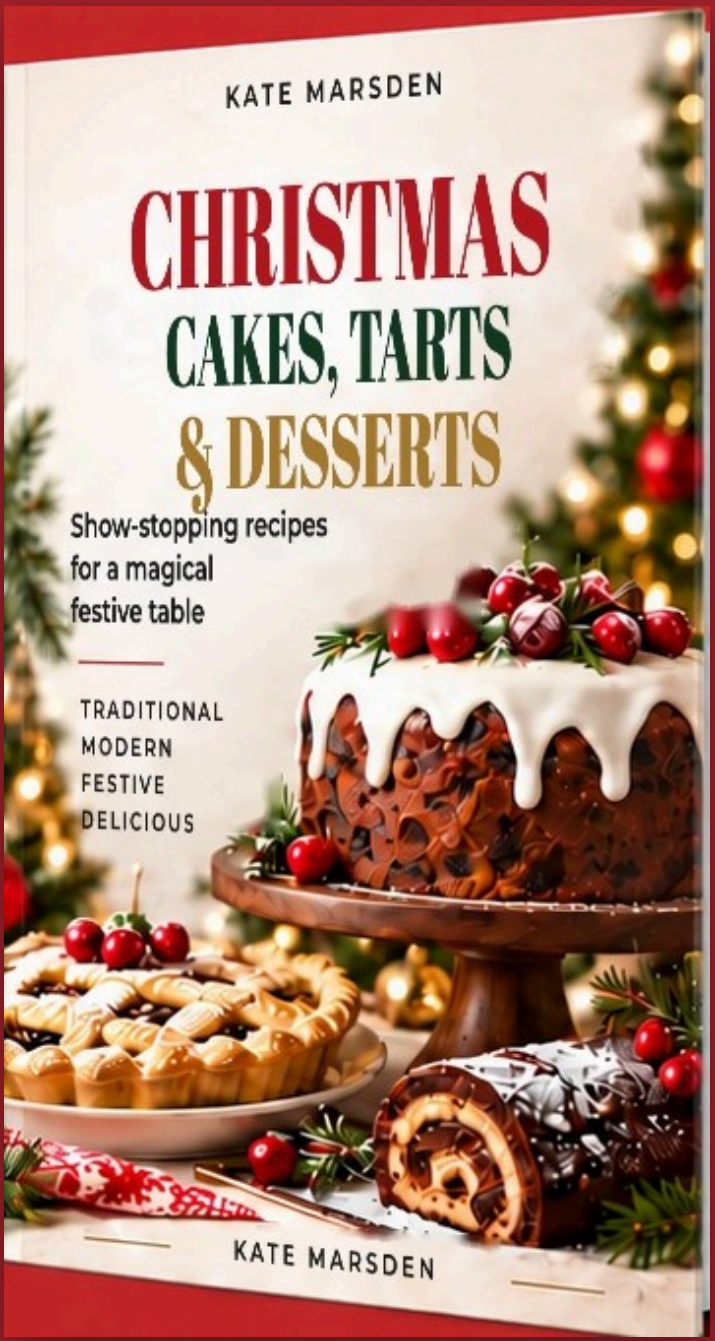
KATE MARSDEN
CHRISTMAS
CAKES, TARTS
& DESSERTS
Show-stopping recipes
for a magical
festive table
TRADITIONAL
MODERN
FESTIVE
DELICIOUS
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Traditional · Modern · Festive · Delicious

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Christmas Cakes, Tarts & Desserts – Show-stopping recipes for a magical festive table
Kate Marsden

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Please note: these recipes use ingredients that can cause allergies (gluten, egg, milk, nuts and others): always check the ingredients if you are baking for someone with an allergy or intolerance. Do not serve dishes containing raw egg to pregnant women, young children, older people or anyone with a weakened immune system; use the alternatives given. When children help in the kitchen, an adult always handles the oven, hot oil and knives. Drinks and syrups containing alcohol are not for children. Times and temperatures depend on your oven: always keep an eye on the first batch.

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A word from the author

There is a moment in the days before Christmas that I love: the oven is on, the kitchen warms up and the whole house begins to smell of cinnamon, orange and butter. Nobody needs to be called. They all drift in, one at a time, to ask whether it is ready yet.

This book grew out of that moment. I have gathered here the cakes, tarts and desserts that make a Christmas table: the Portuguese king cake (*bolo-rei*) and the sponge known as *pão de ló*, the Portuguese festive French toast (*rabanadas*) and rice pudding, the almond tart, and a few more modern desserts that need no oven and please children and grown-ups alike.

I wrote every recipe with beginners in mind. The quantities are in grams and millilitres, the steps are numbered and, wherever possible, I tell you how to know when something is ready: the colour, the skewer that comes out clean, the custard that coats the back of the spoon. I also tell you how long each sweet treat keeps and what the most common mistake is, so that it goes well the first time.

You do not need any special equipment. A large mixing bowl, a simple electric whisk, a baking tray and two or three tins are enough for almost everything. And you do not have to make

everything on the same day: in the last chapter you will find a plan for 22, 23, 24 and 25 December, with what you can prepare ahead and what is best left for the last minute.

Start with the chapter ‘Before you begin’. It is only a few pages, but it explains the basics you will use in almost every recipe: sweet shortcrust pastry, whisking egg whites to stiff peaks, the bain-marie and oven temperatures.

Then choose a recipe, call someone in to keep you company and switch on the oven. The rest will follow.

Happy Christmas, with a full table and a warm home.

Kate Marsden

Before you begin

This chapter gathers the basics you will use throughout the book. Read it once, calmly. Then, whenever a recipe mentions ‘sweet shortcrust pastry’, ‘stiff peaks’ or ‘bain-marie’, you can come back here.

Measures used in this book

- **1 tbsp** (tablespoon) = 15 ml. **1 tsp** (teaspoon) = 5 ml. Spoon measures are level, unless a recipe says ‘heaped’.
- **Eggs:** medium (about 55–60 g in the shell), at room temperature.
- **Butter:** always unsalted. ‘Softened’ means it takes a fingerprint easily but is not melted (take it out of the fridge 1 hour beforehand).
- **Flour:** plain flour for cakes and tarts; strong white bread flour for yeasted doughs, such as the king cake (*bolo-rei*). If you only have one, use plain flour for everything.
- **Baking powder** is the raising agent for cakes. **Yeast** (fresh or dried) is for doughs that prove, such as the king cake and the Portuguese fried doughnuts (*filhós*). They cannot be swapped.

- Kitchen scales are the best investment you can make. In baking, weighing works far better than measuring in cups.

Tins and equipment

You do not need to have everything. This is the list of the tins used in the book and what you can use instead.

Tin	Used for	Alternative
24 cm round tin (loose-bottomed, if possible)	Simple cakes, cheesecake	22 cm tin: the cake will be taller and needs 5–10 minutes longer
24–26 cm loose-bottomed tart tin	All the tarts	Shallow round tin, lined with baking parchment
24 cm ring tin (with a hole in the middle)	Sponge (*pão de ló*), spice cake	24 cm round tin, with 5 minutes longer
25–28 cm loaf tin (rectangular)	Fruit and nut cake	Two small loaf tins, with 15 minutes less
30 × 40 cm baking tray	Yule log, king cake	Oven tray lined with baking parchment
20–22 cm crème caramel tin	Crème caramel	Tall round tin, not loose-bottomed

Also useful: an electric mixer (a hand-held one is enough), two large bowls, a balloon whisk, a rubber spatula, a rolling pin, baking parchment, a heavy-based saucepan, a slotted spoon and a long skewer (or cocktail stick) for testing cakes.

Sweet shortcrust pastry: the base of almost all the tarts

Sweet shortcrust pastry is a sweet, crisp, buttery pastry. It takes 10 minutes to make, but it needs to rest in the fridge. You can make it 2 or 3 days ahead and keep it in the fridge, wrapped in cling film.

Sweet shortcrust pastry (base for one 24–26 cm tart)

Makes: 1 tart base · Time: 15 min + 1 h chilling + 20 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

This is the pastry you will use in the tarts in chapter 4. It stays firm, does not shrink much and holds up well under moist fillings.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 g plain flour
- 80 g icing sugar
- 1 pinch of salt
- 125 g unsalted butter, cold, in small cubes
- 1 whole egg, cold
- 1 tbsp cold water (only if needed)

METHOD

1. In a large bowl, mix the flour, icing sugar and salt.
2. Add the cold butter. Rub it into the flour between your fingertips, quickly, until the mixture looks like coarse sand. There should be no pieces of butter bigger than a pea.
3. Add the beaten egg and mix with a spatula or your hand, just until the dough comes together in a ball. If it is crumbling, add the spoonful of cold water. Do not

knead more than necessary: overworked pastry turns tough.

4. Flatten the ball into a disc 2 cm thick, wrap it in cling film and chill in the fridge for at least 1 hour.
5. Roll out the pastry between two sheets of baking parchment until it is 3–4 mm thick and a circle about 5 cm wider than the tin.
6. Line the greased tin, pressing the pastry firmly into the base and sides. Trim off the excess by running the rolling pin over the rim. Prick the base with a fork.
7. Chill the lined tin in the fridge for 15–20 minutes while the oven heats to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4).

BAKING BLIND (WHEN THE RECIPE ASKS FOR IT)

1. Cover the pastry with crumpled baking parchment and fill with dried beans or chickpeas (they are only there for weight and can be kept for next time).
2. Bake for 15 minutes. Carefully remove the paper and beans.
3. Return to the oven for 5–8 minutes, until the base is dry and lightly golden at the edges.

Storage: raw pastry keeps for 3 days in the fridge or 2 months in the freezer (thaw in the fridge overnight). A baked case keeps for 2 days in a well-sealed container. Common mistake: the pastry shrinks in

> the oven. This happens when it has been overworked or has not rested in the cold; always respect the chilling times.

Whisking egg whites to stiff peaks

Stiff egg whites give lightness to the sponge, the yule log, the mousse and the pavlova. To get them right:

1. Use a very clean, dry bowl, made of glass or metal. Any trace of fat stops the whites from rising.
2. Separate the eggs carefully: a single drop of yolk is enough to spoil the whites. Separate each egg into a cup first and only then add it to the bowl.
3. Whites at room temperature rise higher than cold ones.
4. Start whisking at medium speed. When they are frothy and white, increase the speed.
5. If the recipe includes sugar, add it little by little, a spoonful at a time, only once the whites are white and opaque.
6. **Stiff peaks:** when you lift the whisk, the whites form upright peaks that do not fall over; if you turn the bowl upside down, they do not slide out.
7. To fold them into a mixture, use a spatula, from the bottom upwards, with wide, slow movements, without beating.

> **Tip:** if you over-whisk, the whites turn grainy and weep. Stop as soon as they form firm, glossy peaks.

Bain-marie

A bain-marie is used to cook gently and evenly: puddings, custards and some cheesecakes. There are two ways:

- **In the oven:** stand the tin inside a larger roasting tin and pour hot water into the roasting tin until it comes halfway up the side of the tin. Pour the water in once the roasting tin is already in the oven, so you do not spill it on the way.
- **On the hob:** set a bowl over a pan of simmering water on a low heat, making sure the base of the bowl does not touch the water. Use it to melt chocolate and to warm egg whites with sugar (Swiss meringue).

> **Warning:** the water and steam from a bain-marie can scald. Wear oven gloves, and take out the tin first and only then the roasting tin of water, once it has cooled a little.

Oven temperatures

All the temperatures in this book are for a **conventional oven** (heat from above and below). If your oven is **fan-assisted**, lower the temperature by **20°C**. Switch the oven on

at least 15 minutes beforehand, so it is properly hot when the cake goes in.

For	Conventional	Fan
Pavlova and meringues	120–140°C (gas mark ½–1)	100–120°C
Dense cakes (dried fruit and nuts, honey)	160°C (gas mark 3)	140°C
Puddings in a bain-marie, custard tarts	160–170°C (gas mark 3)	140–150°C
Ordinary cakes, tarts, king cake	180°C (gas mark 4)	160°C
Thin sponge for rolling (yule log)	200°C (gas mark 6)	180°C

How to tell when a cake is cooked: push a skewer into the centre. If it comes out clean or with a few dry crumbs, it is ready. If it comes out with wet batter, leave it another 5 minutes and test again. Do not open the oven during the first two thirds of the time: the cake may sink.

> **Tip:** every oven is different. The first time you make a recipe, start checking 5 minutes before the stated time and note the right time for your oven in the margin.

Frying safely

Portuguese festive French toast (*rabanadas*), doughnuts, *filhós* and *coscorões* (fried dough ribbons) are all fried in oil. It goes

well if you follow these rules:

- Use a deep, wide pan, with oil to 1/3 of the height, never more than half.
- Right temperature: 165–175°C. Without a thermometer, drop in a small piece of dough: it should rise to the surface within a few seconds and bubble, without darkening straight away.
- Fry only a few pieces at a time, so the oil does not cool down.
- Always drain on kitchen paper.

> **Warning:** never pour water into hot oil and never leave the pan unattended on the heat. Turn the pan handle inwards, away from the edge of the hob. If the oil catches fire, turn off the heat and cover with a lid or a damp tea towel; never use water. Keep children away from the hob for the whole time you are frying.

Allergens

In each recipe, in the information line, we list the main allergens: **gluten**, **egg**, **milk** and **tree nuts** (almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, hazelnuts). If you have guests with allergies, also check the labels on the products you buy (chocolate, candied fruit, biscuits), because they may contain traces.

Raw eggs and vulnerable groups

Almost all the recipes in this book cook the eggs thoroughly. The exception is the classic chocolate mousse, which uses raw eggs.

> **Warning:** desserts made with raw eggs are not suitable for pregnant women, small children, older people and people with a weakened immune system. In those cases, use pasteurised egg whites and yolks (sold in cartons, in the chilled section) or choose the alternative version given in the recipe. Always use fresh eggs, within their date, and keep these desserts in the fridge.

Planning the Christmas table

A lovely Christmas table does not need ten desserts. It needs variety and good organisation. A simple rule:

- **1 celebration cake** (the king cake, the yule log or the sponge);
- **1 tart**;
- **2 or 3 traditional sweet treats** (festive French toast, rice pudding, doughnuts or *filhós*);
- **1 cold dessert**, made the day before (mousse, cheesecake or chocolate salami).

For 8–10 people this combination is enough, with some left over for Christmas Day. Choose at least two sweet treats that can be made ahead. In chapter 7 you will find the complete plan, day by day.

Celebration cakes

Cakes are the centrepiece of the Christmas table. In this chapter you will find the great Portuguese classics, the king cake (*bolo-rei*) and the queen cake (*bolo-rainha*), the sponge (*pão de ló*) and the honey cake (*bolo de mel*), as well as a few simpler cakes that can be made in an afternoon and please everyone. The yeasted cakes (king cake and queen cake) take longer, but almost all of that time is waiting: the dough does the work on its own.

Portuguese King Cake (*bolo-rei*)

Makes: 1 large cake, 12 slices · Time: 45 min + 3–4 h proving + 35 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

The king of the Christmas table: a soft, sweet dough scented with orange and lemon, full of glacé fruit and nuts. In Portugal it is baked from December until Epiphany on 6 January. Made at home, it tastes like a celebration.

INGREDIENTS

For the dough:

- 500 g strong white bread flour (plus a little more for the work surface)
- 25 g fresh yeast (or 10 g dried yeast)
- 120 ml lukewarm milk
- 100 g caster sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 eggs
- 100 g unsalted butter, softened
- Zest of 1 orange and 1 lemon
- 50 ml port (or orange juice)

For the filling:

- 150 g glacé fruit, chopped

- 50 g raisins
- 50 g walnuts, roughly broken
- 30 g pine nuts

To decorate:

- 1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tbsp milk
- 100 g whole or sliced glacé fruit (fig, orange, cherry, pear)
- A few whole walnuts and almonds
- 2 tbsp granulated sugar or icing sugar
- 2 tbsp apricot jam (optional, for a shine)

METHOD

1. The day before, or 1 hour ahead, soak the raisins in the port.
2. Dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm milk (it should feel warm to the touch, never hot) with 1 tsp of the sugar. Leave for 10 minutes, until frothy.
3. In a large bowl, mix the flour, the rest of the sugar, the salt and the zests. Make a well in the centre and add the yeast mixture, the eggs and the port drained from the raisins (keep the raisins).
4. Mix with a wooden spoon until the dough comes together. Turn it out onto the floured work surface and

knead for 10 minutes. The dough will be sticky: that is normal. Avoid adding too much flour.

5. Add the softened butter in 3 stages, kneading well between each. Keep kneading for another 5–8 minutes, until the dough is smooth and elastic and comes away from your hands. If you have a mixer with a dough hook, use a low speed for 10–12 minutes in total.
6. Add the raisins, chopped glacé fruit, walnuts and pine nuts, and knead just until evenly distributed.
7. Shape into a ball, put it in a greased bowl, cover with cling film and a tea towel and leave to prove in a warm place, away from draughts, for 2 to 3 hours, until doubled in size.
8. Line the baking tray with baking parchment. Shape the dough into a ball, make a hole in the centre with your fingers and widen it slowly, until you have a ring about 28–30 cm across. Put a small greased ovenproof bowl in the centre so the hole does not close up.
9. Cover with a tea towel and leave to prove for another 45–60 minutes, until well risen. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4).
10. Brush the ring with the beaten egg yolk. Decorate with the glacé fruit, walnuts and almonds, pressing them in lightly. Sprinkle with the granulated sugar.

11. Bake for 30–35 minutes, until deep golden. If it starts to darken too much before the end, cover with foil. It is ready when it sounds hollow if you tap the base with your fingers.
12. If you want a shine, warm the jam with 1 tbsp water and brush it over the cake while still warm. Leave to cool on a wire rack.

Storage: 3–4 days wrapped in cling film or in a well-sealed bag, at room temperature. It freezes well, in slices, for up to 1 month. Common mistake: the dough does not prove because the milk was too hot and killed the yeast; use only lukewarm milk. Traditionally, the king cake had a dried broad bean and a small prize hidden inside; today nothing is hidden in the cake, for safety.

Portuguese Queen Cake (*bolo-rainha*)

Makes: 1 large cake, 12 slices · Time: 45 min + 3–4 h proving + 35 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

The king cake's sibling, for those who do not like glacé fruit. It contains only nuts, a hint of cinnamon and a honey glaze that turns crisp.

INGREDIENTS

For the dough:

- 500 g strong white bread flour
- 25 g fresh yeast (or 10 g dried)
- 120 ml lukewarm milk
- 90 g caster sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 3 eggs
- 100 g unsalted butter, softened
- Zest of 1 orange
- 50 ml orange juice

For the filling:

- 80 g walnuts
- 80 g blanched almonds

- 50 g hazelnuts
- 40 g pine nuts
- 50 g raisins

For the topping:

- 1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tbsp milk
- 100 g whole nuts (walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts)
- 2 tbsp honey
- Icing sugar, as needed

METHOD

1. Roughly chop the walnuts, almonds and hazelnuts for the filling (pieces the size of a pea).
2. Make the dough exactly as for the king cake (steps 2 to 5): yeast in the lukewarm milk, then mixed with the flour, sugar, salt, cinnamon, zest, eggs and orange juice, and then the butter a little at a time, until the dough is smooth and elastic.
3. Add the chopped nuts, pine nuts and raisins, and knead just until evenly distributed.
4. Leave to prove in a greased, covered bowl for 2 to 3 hours, until doubled.
5. Shape the 28–30 cm ring on a baking tray lined with baking parchment, with a greased bowl in the centre.

Leave to prove for another 45–60 minutes. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4).

6. Brush with the egg yolk and cover the whole surface with the whole nuts, pressing them in a little.
7. Bake for 30–35 minutes, until golden. Cover with foil if the nuts start to darken too much.
8. Warm the honey for 20 seconds in the microwave and brush it over the cake while still warm. Once cold, dust with icing sugar.

Storage: 3–4 days well wrapped, at room temperature. Variation: swap the raisins for chopped dried figs. Common mistake: nuts burning on top; put the foil on as soon as they turn golden.



The king cake, crowned with glacé fruit and nuts.

Photo: Jose G. Ortega Castro / Unsplash

Simplified Honey Spice Cake (*bolo de mel*)

Makes: 1 cake of 24 cm, 14 thin slices · Time: 25 min + 60 min baking · Oven: 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Inspired by the honey cake of Madeira, dark, moist and full of spices, but made without proving. It improves with time, so it is ideal for making ahead.

INGREDIENTS

- 400 g plain flour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground fennel seeds
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp nutmeg
- 150 g dark muscovado sugar
- 250 g cane syrup or golden syrup (or 150 g honey + 100 g black treacle)
- 100 g unsalted butter
- 2 eggs
- Zest and juice of 1 orange (about 80 ml juice)
- 100 g glacé fruit, chopped
- 100 g walnuts and almonds, chopped
- Whole almonds, to decorate

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3). Grease a 24 cm round tin and line the base with baking parchment.
2. In a saucepan, over a low heat, warm the syrup, muscovado sugar and butter, stirring, only until the butter melts. Do not let it boil. Take off the heat and leave to cool for 10 minutes.
3. In a large bowl, mix the flour, bicarbonate of soda and all the spices.
4. Add the eggs and orange juice to the warm honey mixture and whisk with a balloon whisk.
5. Pour the liquid over the flour and mix with a spatula until there is no dry flour left. The batter will be thick and glossy.
6. Fold in the glacé fruit, chopped nuts and orange zest.
7. Pour into the tin, level the top and decorate with the whole almonds in a circle.
8. Bake for 55–65 minutes. After 40 minutes, cover with foil. It is ready when a skewer comes out clean from the centre.
9. Leave to cool in the tin for 15 minutes and then on a wire rack. Wrap in cling film only when completely cold.

Storage: 3 to 4 weeks wrapped in cling film and foil, in a cool place. It is at its best after 2–3 days. Cut into thin slices, by hand, as tradition dictates. Common mistake: boiling the honey mixture, which makes it bitter; just heat it until the butter melts.

Yule Log

Makes: 1 log, 10 slices · Time: 50 min + 2 h in the fridge · Oven: 200°C (fan 180°C / gas mark 6) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

A rolled chocolate sponge filled with whipped cream and covered in chocolate, made to look like a tree trunk. It looks spectacular on the table and is easier than it seems.

INGREDIENTS

For the sponge:

- 4 eggs, at room temperature
- 100 g caster sugar
- 60 g plain flour
- 20 g cocoa powder
- 1 pinch of salt
- Sugar, for sprinkling on the tea towel

For the filling:

- 250 ml whipping cream, very cold (35% fat)
- 40 g icing sugar
- Zest of 1 orange (optional)

For the topping:

- 200 g dark chocolate
- 150 ml double cream

- 20 g unsalted butter
- Icing sugar, for the ‘snow’

METHOD

1. Make the topping first, because it needs to cool: heat the cream until it starts to boil, take it off the heat and add the broken chocolate and the butter. Wait 2 minutes and stir until smooth. Leave to cool at room temperature for 1 hour, until it has the consistency of a spreadable cream.
2. Heat the oven to 200°C (fan 180°C / gas mark 6). Line a 30 × 40 cm baking tray with baking parchment.
3. Whisk the eggs with the sugar in the mixer on high speed for 8–10 minutes, until the mixture is very pale, has tripled in volume and, when you lift the whisk, falls in a ribbon that leaves a trail on the surface.
4. Sift the flour, cocoa and salt over the top and fold in with a spatula, from the bottom upwards, slowly, until there are no streaks of flour.
5. Spread the batter over the tray in an even layer, getting right into the corners.
6. Bake for 8–10 minutes. It is ready when the surface springs back when touched with a finger. Do not overbake, or it will crack when rolled.

7. Sprinkle a clean tea towel with sugar. Turn the hot sponge out onto the towel, carefully peel off the paper and roll up the sponge with the towel, starting from the shorter side. Leave to cool rolled up, for about 30 minutes.
8. Whip the cold cream with the icing sugar and the zest until firm.
9. Unroll the sponge, spread over the cream leaving 2 cm free at one end, and roll up again, this time without the towel, pressing lightly.
10. Cut a 5 cm slice on the diagonal from one end and place it against the side of the log, to look like a branch.
11. Cover everything with the chocolate topping and drag a fork along its length to imitate bark. Chill in the fridge for at least 2 hours. Before serving, dust with icing sugar.

Storage: 2 days in the fridge, covered. Variation: for the filling, swap the cream for 200 g mascarpone whipped with 150 ml cream and 50 g icing sugar, which is firmer. Common mistake: the sponge cracks when rolled; roll it as soon as it comes out of the oven, while still hot and flexible.

Chocolate and Orange Cake

Makes: 1 cake of 24 cm, 10–12 slices · Time: 20 min + 45 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Chocolate and orange are a classic Christmas pairing. A soft, moist cake, drizzled with warm orange syrup.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g unsalted butter, softened
- 200 g caster sugar
- 4 eggs
- Zest of 2 oranges
- 200 g plain flour
- 30 g cocoa powder
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 pinch of salt
- 100 ml orange juice

For the syrup:

- 100 ml orange juice
- 50 g caster sugar

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4). Grease and flour a 24 cm round tin.

2. Beat the butter with the sugar and zest for 3–4 minutes, until you have a pale, fluffy cream.
3. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well between each.
4. Sift the flour, cocoa, baking powder and salt. Add to the batter in 3 stages, alternating with the orange juice, and mix only until smooth.
5. Pour into the tin and level the top. Bake for 40–45 minutes, until a skewer comes out clean.
6. While it bakes, boil the juice with the sugar for 3 minutes, until you have a light syrup.
7. As soon as the cake comes out of the oven, prick it all over with a skewer and slowly pour over the hot syrup. Leave to cool in the tin for 20 minutes before turning out.

Storage: 4 days in a well-sealed container, at room temperature. Variation: top with 100 g chocolate melted in 100 ml cream and decorate with candied orange peel. Common mistake: beating too much after adding the flour, which makes the cake heavy; mix only until the flour disappears.



The yule log, covered in chocolate and dusted with 'snow'.

Photo: Kisoulou / Unsplash

Port, Fruit and Nut Loaf Cake

Makes: 1 loaf cake, 14 slices · Time: 25 min + 1 h soaking + 70 min baking · Oven: 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

A dense, aromatic cake, packed with dried fruit, nuts and glacé fruit. Cut it into thin slices; it goes very well with a coffee or a small glass of port.

INGREDIENTS

- 100 g raisins
- 100 g glacé fruit, chopped
- 50 g walnuts, chopped
- 50 g almonds, chopped
- 60 ml port (or orange juice)
- 150 g unsalted butter, softened
- 150 g light muscovado sugar
- 3 eggs
- Zest of 1 orange
- 200 g plain flour (plus 1 tbsp for the fruit)
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground ginger

METHOD

1. Put the raisins, glacé fruit, walnuts and almonds in a bowl with the port. Leave to soak for at least 1 hour (or overnight, covered).
2. Heat the oven to 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3). Grease a 25–28 cm loaf tin and line it with baking parchment.
3. Beat the butter with the muscovado sugar until creamy. Add the eggs one at a time, then the orange zest.
4. Mix the flour, baking powder and spices and add to the batter, stirring only until smooth.
5. Drain the fruit (add any liquid left over to the batter), toss it in 1 tbsp flour and mix it into the batter. The flour helps stop it all sinking to the bottom.
6. Pour into the tin and level the top. Bake for 60–70 minutes. Cover with foil after 40 minutes. It is ready when a skewer comes out clean.
7. Leave to cool in the tin for 20 minutes and then on a wire rack.

Storage: up to 2 weeks wrapped in cling film and foil, in a cool place. Variation: swap the almonds for pine nuts and add 50 g chopped dried figs. Common mistake: an oven that is too hot, which burns the outside before the centre is cooked; these dense cakes need a low oven and time.

Portuguese Sponge Cake (*pão de ló*)

Makes: 1 ring-tin cake of 24 cm, 12 slices · Time: 25 min + 35 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg

Just three ingredients and plenty of patient whisking. It contains no raising agent: it is the air in the whisked eggs that makes it rise. Light, fluffy and golden, it is the most Portuguese cake on the table.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 eggs, at room temperature
- 180 g caster sugar
- 120 g plain flour, sifted
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 pinch of salt
- Butter and flour, for the tin

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4). Grease a 24 cm ring tin very thoroughly with butter and dust with flour, shaking out the excess.
2. In the mixer, whisk the whole eggs with the sugar, salt and zest on maximum speed for 12–15 minutes. Do not shorten this time.
3. The mixture is ready when it is almost white, has tripled in volume and, when you lift the whisk, the

ribbon that falls leaves a trail on the surface for at least 3 seconds.

4. Sift the flour over the top in 3 stages, folding in each time with a spatula, from the bottom upwards, slowly. Stop as soon as you can no longer see flour.
5. Pour carefully into the tin and put straight into the oven.
6. Bake for 30–35 minutes. Do not open the oven in the first 25 minutes. It is ready when it is well golden, the surface springs back when touched and a skewer comes out clean.
7. Leave to rest in the tin for 10 minutes, run a thin knife around the edge and turn out onto a wire rack.

Storage: 3 days in a well-sealed container or under a cake dome. Variation: serve with orange slices and whipped cream, or with *doce de ovos* (a Portuguese sweet egg-yolk spread). Common mistake: the sponge sinks because the eggs were not whisked for long enough or because the oven was opened too early.

Spiced Apple Cake

Makes: 1 ring-tin cake of 24 cm, 12 slices · Time: 25 min + 50 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, tree nuts (if made with walnuts)

A moist cake that fills the whole house with the scent of cinnamon and ginger. It is made with oil, without a mixer, and is one of the easiest in the book.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 eggs
- 180 g light muscovado sugar
- 120 ml sunflower oil
- 250 g plain flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp nutmeg
- 1 pinch of salt
- 3 medium apples (about 450 g), peeled and coarsely grated
- 50 g chopped walnuts (optional)

For the icing:

- 100 g icing sugar
- 2 tbsp orange juice

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4). Grease and flour a 24 cm ring tin.
2. In a bowl, whisk the eggs with the muscovado sugar and oil with a balloon whisk for 1 minute.
3. In another bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, spices and salt.
4. Add the dry ingredients to the wet and mix until there is no dry flour left. Fold in the grated apples (with any juice they release) and the walnuts.
5. Pour into the tin and bake for 45–50 minutes, until a skewer comes out clean.
6. Leave to cool for 15 minutes in the tin and turn out.
7. Mix the icing sugar with the orange juice until you have a thick icing that runs slowly. Drizzle it over the cold cake and leave to set for 20 minutes.

Storage: 3 days in a sealed container; in the fridge, up to 5 days. Variation: swap half the apples for pears. Common mistake: grating the apples too early and throwing away the juice; grate them at the last moment and add everything, because the juice keeps the cake moist.



Golden pão de ló, freshly turned out.

Photo: manfredrichter / Pixabay

Tarts

A beautiful tart looks the part on any table and has one big advantage: the base can be made days ahead. All the tarts in this chapter use the **sweet shortcrust pastry** from the chapter ‘Before you begin’, for a 24–26 cm loose-bottomed tart tin. Some call for a raw base, others for a base already baked blind; each recipe says which.

> **Tip:** on busy days, make two batches of sweet shortcrust pastry at once. One goes in the fridge, the other in the freezer.

Almond Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 10 slices · Time: 30 min + base + 20 min baking · Oven: 190°C (fan 170°C / gas mark 5) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

A classic of Portuguese pastry shops: flaked almonds coated in a buttery caramel that turns crisp on top and soft inside.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 sweet shortcrust pastry base, baked blind (see chapter 2)
- 150 g caster sugar
- 100 g unsalted butter
- 3 tbsp milk
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- 150 g flaked almonds

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 190°C (fan 170°C / gas mark 5). Have the base, already baked blind, in its tin, on a baking tray.
2. In a saucepan, put the sugar, butter, milk and flour. Bring to the boil over a medium heat, stirring constantly.
3. Add the flaked almonds and boil for another 2 minutes, stirring all the time, until the mixture thickens slightly.

4. Pour straight onto the base and spread evenly with a spoon.
5. Bake for 15–20 minutes, until the surface is caramel-golden and bubbling. Keep an eye on it in the last few minutes: almonds go from golden to burnt very quickly.
6. Leave to cool completely in the tin before removing and slicing.

Storage: 4 days in a sealed container, at room temperature (in the fridge the caramel goes soft). Variation: add the zest of 1 orange to the caramel. Common mistake: taking it out of the tin while hot, so the caramel runs; wait until it has cooled and hardened.

Apple and Cinnamon Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 10 slices · Time: 30 min + base + 45 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Thin slices of apple in a spiral, sugar and cinnamon, and a glossy apricot glaze on top. Simple, pretty and smelling of Christmas.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 raw sweet shortcrust pastry base, in the tin (see chapter 2)
- 4–5 Braeburn or Cox apples (about 800 g)
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 50 g caster sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 tbsp ground almonds (or dried breadcrumbs)
- 30 g unsalted butter, in small pieces
- 3 tbsp apricot jam

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4). Keep the tin lined with the raw pastry in the fridge.
2. Peel and core the apples and cut into thin slices (3 mm). Toss them in the lemon juice so they do not darken.

3. Mix the sugar with the cinnamon.
4. Sprinkle the bottom of the pastry with the ground almonds: they absorb the juice from the apples and stop the base going soggy.
5. Arrange the apple slices in overlapping circles, from the outside in. Sprinkle with the sugar and cinnamon and dot the butter over the top.
6. Bake for 40–45 minutes, until the pastry is golden and the apples are soft with browned edges.
7. Warm the jam with 1 tbsp water and brush it over the tart while still warm.

Storage: 2 days at room temperature, covered; 4 days in the fridge. Serve warm, with whipped cream. Variation: add 50 g soaked raisins and a pinch of nutmeg. Common mistake: thick slices that stay raw; cut thinly and evenly.

Walnut Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 10–12 slices · Time: 20 min + base + 40 min baking · Oven: 170°C (fan 150°C / gas mark 3) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Walnuts in a honey and muscovado filling that bakes until firm and glossy. Very sweet and very rich: cut thin slices.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 sweet shortcrust pastry base, baked blind for only 15 minutes (without the second baking)
- 3 eggs
- 150 g light muscovado sugar
- 100 g honey
- 50 g unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 180 g shelled walnuts (half chopped, half in whole halves)

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 170°C (fan 150°C / gas mark 3).
2. In a bowl, whisk the eggs with the muscovado sugar, honey, melted butter, cinnamon and salt with a balloon whisk, only until smooth (without making it foamy).

3. Scatter the chopped walnuts over the bottom of the base. Pour the filling over the top.
4. Arrange the walnut halves on the surface, in circles.
5. Bake for 35–40 minutes. It is ready when the edges are firm and the centre wobbles only slightly when you shake the tin. It firms up further as it cools.
6. Leave to cool for at least 2 hours before cutting.

Storage: 4 days in a sealed container, in a cool place. Variation: swap half the walnuts for pine nuts. Common mistake: baking until the centre is completely firm in the oven; the tart turns dry. Take it out while the centre still wobbles slightly.

Chocolate Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 12 slices · Time: 20 min + base + 3 h in the fridge · No oven for the filling · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

A crisp base and a smooth, glossy chocolate cream that never goes in the oven. Make it the day before and let it wait in the fridge.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 sweet shortcrust pastry base, fully baked blind and cold (see chapter 2)
- 250 g dark chocolate
- 250 ml double cream
- 30 g unsalted butter, softened
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 pinch of salt
- To decorate: cocoa powder, orange zest or red berries

METHOD

1. Break the chocolate into small pieces into a bowl.
2. Heat the cream with the honey until it begins to bubble at the edges. Pour over the chocolate and wait 2 minutes, without stirring.
3. Stir slowly with a spatula, from the centre outwards, until smooth and glossy. Add the butter and salt and stir until they disappear.

4. Pour the cream into the cold base. Tap the tin lightly on the work surface to release air bubbles.
5. Chill in the fridge for at least 3 hours, until firm.
6. Take out of the fridge 20 minutes before serving. Decorate with sifted cocoa, orange zest or red berries. For clean slices, cut with a knife warmed in hot water and wiped dry.

Storage: 4 days in the fridge, covered. Variation: spread 3 tbsp Seville orange marmalade over the bottom of the base before the chocolate. Common mistake: cream boiled hard, which can make the chocolate grainy; it only needs to bubble at the edges.

Cream and Cinnamon Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 10 slices · Time: 20 min + base + 35 min baking + 2 h cooling · Oven: 170°C (fan 150°C / gas mark 3) · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

A cream and egg yolk custard, scented with lemon and cinnamon, baked slowly in sweet shortcrust pastry. It recalls the Portuguese custard tart (pastel de nata) in a family-sized version.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 sweet shortcrust pastry base, baked blind for only 15 minutes
- 400 ml double cream
- 100 ml milk
- 3 egg yolks + 1 whole egg
- 100 g caster sugar
- 1 tbsp cornflour
- Zest of 1 lemon
- Ground cinnamon, for dusting

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 170°C (fan 150°C / gas mark 3).
2. In a bowl, mix the sugar with the cornflour. Add the yolks and the egg and whisk with a balloon whisk until smooth.

3. Heat the cream with the milk and lemon zest until very hot, but not boiling.
4. Pour the hot cream over the eggs a little at a time, whisking constantly, so the eggs do not curdle.
5. Strain the custard into the base.
6. Bake for 30–35 minutes. It is ready when the custard is firm at the edges and the centre wobbles a little, like jelly.
7. Leave to cool for at least 2 hours. Dust generously with cinnamon before serving.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, covered. Variation: instead of lemon, flavour the cream with a cinnamon stick and a strip of orange peel (remove them before adding to the eggs). Common mistake: an oven that is too hot, which makes the custard puff up and crack; keep to 170°C (gas mark 3).

Pear and Almond Cream Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 10 slices · Time: 30 min + base + 40 min baking · Oven: 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk, tree nuts

Pear halves fanned out and set in a light almond cream that rises in the oven. Elegant and easy to serve.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 raw sweet shortcrust pastry base, in the tin (see chapter 2)
- 3 Conference pears, ripe but firm
- Juice of ½ lemon

For the almond cream:

- 100 g unsalted butter, softened
- 100 g caster sugar
- 2 eggs
- 100 g ground almonds
- 1 tbsp plain flour
- Zest of 1 orange
- 2 tbsp flaked almonds and icing sugar, to decorate

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (fan 160°C / gas mark 4). Keep the tin lined with the raw pastry in the fridge.

2. Beat the butter with the sugar until creamy. Add the eggs one at a time, then the ground almonds, flour and zest. Mix until smooth.
3. Spread the almond cream over the base in an even layer.
4. Peel the pears, halve them and remove the core with a small spoon. Sprinkle with lemon juice.
5. Cut each half into thin slices lengthways, without cutting all the way through the narrow end. Press lightly to fan them out.
6. Arrange the 6 halves in a star on the cream, with the narrow end pointing to the centre. Sprinkle with the flaked almonds.
7. Bake for 40 minutes, until the cream is puffed and golden and a skewer comes out clean from between the pears.
8. Leave to cool and dust with icing sugar before serving.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, covered; serve at room temperature. Variation: swap the fresh pears for pears poached in port (chapter 6), well drained. Common mistake: over-ripe pears, which release a lot of water; choose them still firm.

Lemon Meringue Tart

Makes: 1 tart of 24–26 cm, 10–12 slices · Time: 50 min + base + 3 h in the fridge · Oven: 220°C to brown (fan 200°C / gas mark 7) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

The sharpness of lemon, the sweetness of toasted meringue and the crispness of the pastry. It uses Swiss meringue, heated over a bain-marie, which turns out firm and glossy, with the egg whites thoroughly heated.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 sweet shortcrust pastry base, fully baked blind and cold

For the lemon curd filling:

- 150 g caster sugar
- 35 g cornflour
- 300 ml water
- 120 ml lemon juice (about 3 lemons)
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 3 egg yolks
- 30 g unsalted butter

For the Swiss meringue:

- 3 egg whites
- 150 g caster sugar

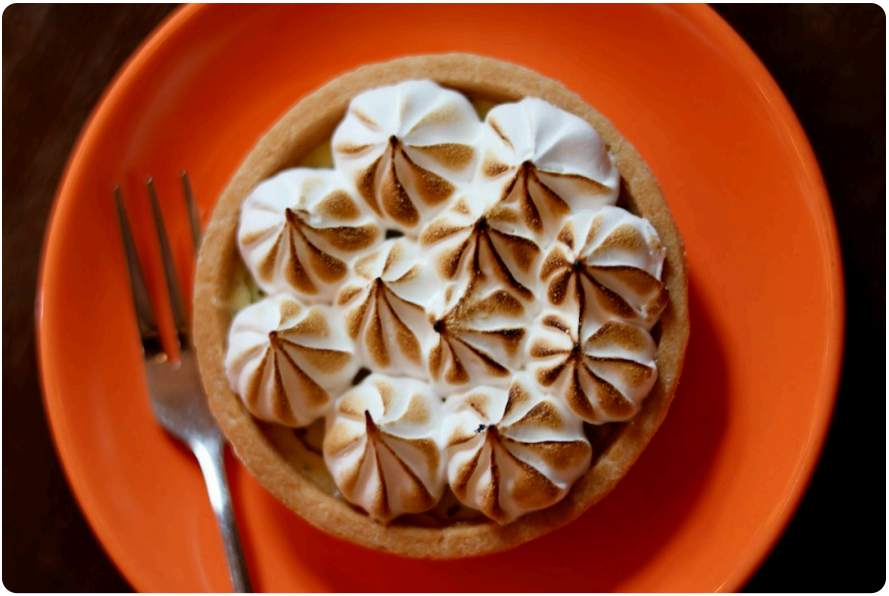
- 1 pinch of salt

METHOD

1. In a saucepan, mix the sugar with the cornflour. Add the water, lemon juice and zest, stirring until dissolved.
2. Cook over a medium heat, stirring constantly with a balloon whisk, until it boils and thickens (about 5 minutes).
3. Beat the yolks in a bowl. Add 3 spoonfuls of the hot filling to them, whisking, and then pour everything back into the saucepan.
4. Cook for another 2 minutes over a low heat, stirring constantly, until the filling is thick and coats the back of the spoon. Take off the heat and stir in the butter.
5. Pour the hot filling into the base, smooth the top and leave to cool for 30 minutes. Chill in the fridge for at least 2 hours, until firm.
6. For the meringue: put the egg whites, sugar and salt in a heatproof bowl, over a pan of simmering water (bain-marie). Whisk constantly with a balloon whisk for 4–5 minutes, until all the sugar has dissolved (rub a little between your fingers: it should not feel grainy) and the mixture is very hot to the touch. With a thermometer, it should reach 70°C.

7. Take off the heat and whisk in the mixer on high speed for 6–8 minutes, until the meringue is firm, glossy and just lukewarm.
8. Spread the meringue over the cold filling, taking it right to the pastry at the edges (so it does not shrink). Make peaks with the back of a spoon.
9. Bake at 220°C (fan 200°C / gas mark 7), on the top shelf, for 3–5 minutes, until the peaks are golden. Do not walk away: it browns in an instant. You can also use a kitchen blowtorch, carefully.
10. Return to the fridge for another hour before serving.

Storage: 2 days in the fridge, not covered with cling film (the meringue turns sticky); use a tall container. Variation: make it with lime, or with half lemon and half orange. Common mistake: the meringue ‘weeps’ drops of syrup when the sugar was not properly dissolved over the bain-marie; heat until you can feel no grains.



Lemon tart with toasted meringue.

Photo: You Le / Unsplash

Traditional Portuguese desserts

These are the desserts that many of us remember from the Christmas Eve table in Portugal: festive French toast (*rabanadas*) dripping with sugar and cinnamon, fried choux puffs (*sonhos*) so light they seem hollow, and rice pudding (*arroz doce*) with patterns drawn in cinnamon. Some are fried, others are made on the hob, in a pan, with patience and a wooden spoon.

> **Warning:** four recipes in this chapter are fried. Before you start, re-read 'Frying safely' in chapter 2. Hot oil causes serious burns: keep children away from the hob, turn the pan handle inwards and never leave the oil unattended on the heat.

Portuguese Festive French Toast (*rabanadas*)

Makes: about 16 slices · Time: 40 min · Fried · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Slices of bread soaked in sweet, scented milk, dipped in egg, fried and tossed in sugar and cinnamon. For many Portuguese families, it is not Christmas without them.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 loaf of sturdy white bread or a baguette, from the day before (about 400 g)
- 750 ml milk
- 3 tbsp caster sugar
- 1 strip of lemon peel (yellow part only)
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 eggs
- Oil, for frying
- 100 g caster sugar mixed with 2 tsp ground cinnamon, for coating

METHOD

1. Cut the bread into slices 2 cm thick.
2. Heat the milk with the sugar, lemon peel and cinnamon stick until it boils. Turn off the heat and leave to cool for 15 minutes. Pour into a shallow dish.
3. Beat the eggs in another shallow dish.

4. Heat the oil in a deep pan to 170°C.
5. Dip each slice into the warm milk for 10–20 seconds on each side: it should be soaked but not falling apart. Drain a little.
6. Dip in the beaten egg on both sides and fry straight away, 3 or 4 at a time, 1–2 minutes on each side, until golden.
7. Drain on kitchen paper and, while still hot, toss in the cinnamon sugar.

Storage: best on the day; they keep for 2 days covered, in a cool place. Variation: instead of cinnamon sugar, drizzle with a syrup made from 200 ml port, 100 g sugar, 100 ml water and a strip of orange peel, boiled for 10 minutes (for children, make the syrup with orange juice or with honey and water). Common mistake: using fresh bread, which falls apart in the milk; the bread should be at least a day old.

Fried Choux Puffs (*sonhos*)

Makes: about 30 puffs · Time: 50 min · Fried · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Little fried puffs of cooked dough, light and hollow inside, which swell and turn over by themselves in the oil. Served with sugar and cinnamon or with orange syrup.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 ml water
- 50 g unsalted butter
- 1 pinch of salt
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 150 g plain flour
- 4 eggs
- Oil, for frying
- Sugar and cinnamon, for coating

For the syrup (optional):

- 200 g caster sugar
- 200 ml water
- 1 strip of orange peel and 1 cinnamon stick

METHOD

1. In a saucepan, bring the water, butter, salt and lemon zest to the boil, until the butter has melted.

2. Add all the flour at once and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon over a medium heat for 2 minutes, until the dough forms a ball that comes away from the sides and leaves a thin film on the bottom of the pan.
3. Transfer the dough to a bowl and leave to cool for 10 minutes.
4. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well with the spoon or an electric whisk before adding the next. At the end, the dough should be smooth, glossy and fall slowly from the spoon, in a thick ribbon.
5. Heat the oil to 160–165°C. Sonhos need cooler oil than rabanadas, so they can swell before browning.
6. With two teaspoons, drop small portions of dough into the oil (the size of a walnut). Fry 5 or 6 at a time: they will swell and turn over by themselves. If they do not turn, help them with a slotted spoon.
7. Fry for 6–8 minutes, until deep golden and light. Drain on kitchen paper.
8. Toss in cinnamon sugar or, for the syrup, boil the sugar, water, orange peel and cinnamon for 5 minutes and pour over the sonhos when serving.

Storage: on the day they are at their best; up to 2 days in a container, without syrup (add the syrup only when serving). Variation: add 2 tbsp cooked, mashed pumpkin to the dough. Common mistake:

heavy sonhos that are raw inside, caused by oil that is too hot; lower the heat and fry more slowly.

Pumpkin Fritters (*filhós de abóbora*)

Makes: about 35 fritters · Time: 40 min + 1 h 30 min proving · Fried · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg

Soft, yeasted fritters of pumpkin and orange, fried by the spoonful. They come out golden outside and tender inside, with a lovely orange colour.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g pumpkin or butternut squash, peeled and deseeded
- 20 g fresh yeast (or 8 g dried)
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp caster sugar
- Zest of 1 orange and 2 tbsp of its juice
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 pinch of salt
- 400–450 g strong white bread flour
- Oil, for frying
- Sugar and cinnamon, for coating

METHOD

1. Cut the pumpkin into cubes and boil in water for 15 minutes, until very soft. Drain very well (keep 3 tbsp of the water) and mash to a purée. Leave to cool until lukewarm.

2. Dissolve the yeast in the 3 tbsp of cooking water, which should be only lukewarm.
3. In a large bowl, mix the warm purée, yeast, eggs, sugar, orange zest and juice, cinnamon and salt.
4. Add 400 g of the flour and beat by hand or with a wooden spoon for 5 minutes, until the batter is elastic and bubbly. It should be soft and sticky, not holding its shape by itself; if it is too runny, add more flour, a spoonful at a time, up to 450 g.
5. Cover with cling film and a tea towel and leave to prove in a warm place for 1 hour 30 minutes, until doubled and full of bubbles.
6. Heat the oil to 170°C. Wet two tablespoons in water, scoop up portions of batter and let them drop into the oil.
7. Fry 4 or 5 at a time for 3–4 minutes, turning, until well golden all over. Drain on kitchen paper.
8. Toss in cinnamon sugar while still hot.

Storage: 2 days in a container lined with kitchen paper; warm for a few minutes in the oven at 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3) to crisp up again. Common mistake: badly drained pumpkin, which makes the batter so soft that it needs too much flour and the fritters turn heavy; drain the purée well in a sieve.

Fried Dough Ribbons (*coscorões*)

Makes: about 40 pieces · Time: 1 h + 30 min resting · Fried · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: gluten, egg, milk

Wafer-thin sheets of orange dough, fried until crisp and full of bubbles. You break them with your hands and they vanish fast.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g plain flour (and more for the work surface)
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 pinch of salt
- 2 tbsp caster sugar
- Zest of 1 orange
- 2 eggs
- 50 g unsalted butter, melted
- 150–180 ml orange juice
- Oil, for frying
- Sugar and cinnamon (or icing sugar), for dusting

METHOD

1. In a bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, salt, sugar and zest.
2. Add the eggs, the melted butter and 150 ml of orange juice. Mix and knead for 5–8 minutes, until you have a

smooth, firm dough that does not stick to your hands. If it is dry, add more juice, a spoonful at a time.

3. Wrap in cling film and leave to rest for 30 minutes at room temperature.
4. Divide the dough into 4 parts. Roll each one out on the floured work surface as thinly as you can (1–2 mm: you should almost be able to see the work surface through the dough).
5. Cut into rectangles of about 8 × 10 cm with a knife or pastry wheel. Make two parallel cuts in the middle of each rectangle, without reaching the edges.
6. Heat the oil to 175°C. Fry 2 or 3 coscorões at a time, about 1 minute on each side, until pale golden and full of bubbles.
7. Drain on kitchen paper and immediately dust with sugar and cinnamon.

Storage: up to 1 week in a tin or well-sealed container, away from damp. Variation: swap the orange juice for half juice and half milk, for a milder flavour. Common mistake: thick dough, which turns hard instead of crisp; always roll out until very thin.

Portuguese Rice Pudding (*arroz doce*)

Makes: 8 portions · Time: 1 h · On the hob · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: milk, egg

Creamy, scented with lemon and decorated with cinnamon patterns. There is no secret: just time, a low heat and a wooden spoon always to hand.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g short-grain pudding rice
- 600 ml water
- 1 large strip of lemon peel (yellow part only)
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 litre whole milk, hot
- 200 g caster sugar
- 3 egg yolks (optional, for a yellower, richer pudding)
- Ground cinnamon, to decorate

METHOD

1. In a wide pan, put the rice, water, lemon peel and salt. Bring to the boil and cook over a medium heat for about 10 minutes, until almost all the water has been absorbed.
2. Add the hot milk one ladleful at a time, stirring often. Add another ladleful only when the rice has absorbed

the previous one. Do this over a low heat for 30–35 minutes.

3. When the rice is tender and wrapped in a thick cream, add the sugar and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring constantly (the sugar makes the cream runnier at first).
4. If using egg yolks: beat them in a bowl, add 2 ladlefuls of the hot rice, stirring, and pour everything back into the pan. Stir over a very low heat for 1–2 minutes, without letting it boil.
5. Remove the lemon peel. Pour into a serving dish or individual bowls.
6. Leave to cool and decorate with ground cinnamon, making patterns or letters (with a paper stencil, it looks perfect).

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, covered. It thickens a lot as it cools; if you prefer it creamier, turn off the heat while it is still a little runny. Common mistake: a high heat, which makes the rice stick to the bottom and taste burnt; keep the heat low and stir constantly.

Vermicelli Pudding (*aletria*)

Makes: 8 portions · Time: 30 min · On the hob · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk, egg

Fine pasta cooked in sweet milk, with lemon and cinnamon. Quicker than rice pudding and just as comforting, warm or cold.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 ml water
- 1 pinch of salt
- 30 g unsalted butter
- 250 g fine vermicelli (angel hair pasta in nests)
- 1 litre milk
- 1 strip of lemon peel and 1 cinnamon stick
- 150 g caster sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- Ground cinnamon, to decorate

METHOD

1. Heat the milk with the lemon peel and cinnamon stick until it boils. Turn off the heat and set aside.
2. In another pan, bring the water, salt and butter to the boil. When it boils, add the vermicelli, breaking up the nests with your hands. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring with a fork to loosen the strands.

3. Add the hot milk (without the peel and cinnamon) and cook over a low heat for 10 minutes, stirring now and then, until the vermicelli is tender.
4. Add the sugar and cook for another 3 minutes.
5. Beat the egg yolks in a bowl, add 1 ladleful of the hot milk, stirring, and pour everything back into the pan. Stir over a very low heat for 1 minute, without boiling, until it thickens.
6. Pour into a serving dish, leave to cool a little and decorate with cinnamon.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, covered. Variation: add orange zest instead of the lemon peel. Common mistake: boiling after adding the egg yolks, which curdles them into little lumps; once the yolks are in, the heat is always at its lowest.



Rice pudding decorated with cinnamon.

Photo: Alexey Demidov / Unsplash

Portuguese Milk Custard (*leite-creme*)

Makes: 8 small bowls · Time: 30 min + 3 h in the fridge · On the hob · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: milk, egg

A smooth, velvety egg yolk custard, with a thin layer of burnt sugar on top that cracks when you tap it with a spoon.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 litre milk
- 1 strip of lemon peel and 1 cinnamon stick
- 6 egg yolks
- 180 g caster sugar
- 40 g cornflour
- 4–6 tbsp caster sugar, for caramelising

METHOD

1. Set aside 200 ml of the cold milk. Heat the rest with the lemon peel and cinnamon stick until it boils. Take off the heat and leave to infuse for 10 minutes; then remove the peel and cinnamon.
2. In a bowl, whisk the yolks with the sugar and cornflour. Add the reserved cold milk and whisk until smooth, with no lumps.
3. Pour the hot milk over the yolk mixture a little at a time, stirring constantly.

4. Pour everything back into the pan and cook over a medium heat, stirring non-stop with a balloon whisk, especially on the bottom and in the corners.
5. When the custard thickens and the first bubbles appear, stir for another minute over a low heat. It should coat the back of the spoon and, when you run a finger through it, leave a line that does not close up.
6. Divide among shallow bowls or a serving dish. Cover with cling film pressed against the custard (so a skin does not form) and leave to cool. Chill in the fridge for at least 3 hours.
7. Just before serving, sprinkle each bowl with a thin, even layer of sugar and caramelise with a kitchen blowtorch or a very hot salamander (a special branding iron), until caramel-coloured.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, without the burnt sugar (caramelise only at the last moment, or it goes soft). Variation: flavour the milk with orange peel instead of lemon. Common mistake: lumpy custard from not stirring the bottom of the pan; if it happens, blitz it with a hand blender while still hot.

Warning: the blowtorch and the branding iron reach very high temperatures. Use them away from tea towels and paper, never in front of children, and put the iron down somewhere safe while it cools.

Portuguese Bread Pudding (*formigos*)

Makes: 8 portions · Time: 35 min · On the hob · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg, tree nuts

An old sweet from the north of Portugal, made with the previous day's bread, honey, nuts and port. Also called mexidos, it is a delicious way of not wasting bread.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g hard white bread, from the day before, crusts removed
- 500 ml water
- 150 g caster sugar
- 100 g honey
- 1 strip of lemon peel and 1 cinnamon stick
- 50 ml port (or orange juice)
- 100 g nuts (almonds, walnuts and pine nuts), chopped
- 50 g raisins (optional)
- 3 egg yolks
- Ground cinnamon and a few pine nuts, to decorate

METHOD

1. Crumble the bread with your hands or in a food processor, until you have coarse crumbs.
2. In a saucepan, boil the water with the sugar, honey, lemon peel and cinnamon stick for 5 minutes.

3. Remove the peel and cinnamon. Add the crumbled bread and cook over a low heat for 5–8 minutes, stirring constantly, until it becomes a thick paste that comes away from the bottom.
4. Add the port, nuts and raisins and stir for another 2 minutes.
5. Beat the egg yolks in a bowl, add 2 spoonfuls of the hot paste, stir, and pour everything back into the pan. Stir for 1 minute over the lowest heat, without boiling.
6. Pour into a serving dish, smooth the top and decorate with cinnamon and pine nuts. Serve warm or cold.

Storage: 4 days in the fridge, covered. The alcohol in the port partly evaporates during cooking, but not entirely: for children, use orange juice. Common mistake: using fresh bread, which turns into a sticky paste; the bread should be properly hard.

Homemade Crème Caramel (*pudim flan*)

Makes: 1 pudding of 20 cm, 8–10 slices · Time: 25 min + 60 min baking + 4 h in the fridge · Oven: 160°C in a bain-marie (fan 140°C / gas mark 3) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: egg, milk

Smooth, free of holes and covered in golden caramel. Make it the day before and turn it out at the last minute; it is always a success at the table.

INGREDIENTS

For the caramel:

- 150 g caster sugar
- 3 tbsp water

For the pudding:

- 500 ml milk
- 1 strip of lemon peel
- 4 eggs + 4 egg yolks
- 150 g caster sugar

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3). Have ready a 20–22 cm crème caramel tin (not loose-bottomed) and a larger roasting tin for the bain-marie.
2. Caramel: in a small saucepan, heat the sugar with the water over a medium heat, without stirring (you may swirl the pan). When it turns the colour of dark honey,

pour it straight into the tin and tilt it to coat the base and part of the sides.

3. Heat the milk with the lemon peel until almost boiling. Remove the peel and leave to cool for 10 minutes.
4. In a bowl, stir the eggs, yolks and sugar with a balloon whisk, without beating too hard (we do not want foam). Add the warm milk a little at a time, stirring.
5. Strain the mixture into the caramelised tin. Skim off any foam left on the surface with a spoon.
6. Stand the tin in the roasting tin, put it in the oven and pour hot water into the roasting tin until it comes halfway up the side of the tin.
7. Bake for 50–60 minutes. It is ready when the pudding is set and, if you push a knife in halfway between the edge and the centre, it comes out clean. The centre may wobble slightly.
8. Take the tin out of the bain-marie, leave to cool and chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours (better overnight).
9. To turn out: run a thin knife around the edge, dip the base of the tin in hot water for 30 seconds, put a plate on top and flip in one go.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, covered. Common mistake: a pudding full of holes, from an oven that is too hot or from beating the eggs

hard; stir only as much as needed and keep to 160°C (gas mark 3). Variation: add 1 tsp orange zest to the milk.

Warning: hot caramel reaches temperatures far above boiling water and sticks to the skin. Do not touch it, do not taste it and keep children away. To wash the saucepan, fill it with water and bring to the boil: the caramel dissolves by itself.



Crème caramel, smooth and covered in caramel.

Photo: Felippe Lopes / Unsplash

Modern and no-bake desserts

When the oven is busy with the king cake and the hob with the festive French toast, these desserts save the day. Almost all of them are made without an oven, the day before, and wait for you in the fridge. They are also the favourites of the youngest guests.

> **Warning:** the classic chocolate mousse contains raw eggs. It is not suitable for pregnant women, small children, older people or people with a weakened immune system. For these guests, use pasteurised eggs or make the egg-free version given in the recipe. The other recipes in this chapter contain no raw eggs.

Chocolate Mousse

Makes: 6 small bowls · Time: 25 min + 4 h in the fridge · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: egg, milk

Light, intense and made with just five ingredients. A dessert that never fails and can be prepared the day before.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g dark chocolate
- 30 g unsalted butter
- 4 very fresh (or pasteurised) eggs, separated
- 40 g caster sugar
- 1 pinch of salt

METHOD

1. Melt the broken chocolate with the butter in a bain-marie (or in the microwave, in 30-second bursts, stirring between each). Stir until smooth and leave to cool for 5 minutes.
2. Add the egg yolks, one at a time, stirring well after each. The mixture becomes thick and glossy.
3. In a clean bowl, whisk the egg whites with the salt until white and frothy. Add the sugar a little at a time and whisk until they form firm, glossy stiff peaks.

4. Stir a third of the egg whites into the chocolate without fear, to loosen it.
5. Add the rest of the egg whites and fold in slowly with a spatula, from the bottom upwards, until there are no white streaks.
6. Divide among 6 small bowls, cover and chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours.

EGG-FREE VERSION (FOR EVERYONE)

1. Heat 100 ml of cream until it begins to boil, pour over 150 g of broken chocolate, wait 2 minutes and stir until smooth. Leave to cool to room temperature.
2. Whip 250 ml of very cold cream with 1 tbsp icing sugar until firm.
3. Fold the whipped cream into the chocolate, in two stages, and divide among the bowls. Chill in the fridge for at least 3 hours.

Storage: 2 days in the fridge, always covered. Variation: add orange zest or a pinch of cinnamon to the melted chocolate. Common mistake: adding the yolks to chocolate that is still hot, which turns grainy; wait until it has cooled slightly.

No-Bake Red Berry Cheesecake

Makes: 1 cheesecake of 22–24 cm, 10–12 slices · Time: 35 min + 6 h in the fridge · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk

A biscuit base, a cream cheese filling and a glossy red topping, the colour of Christmas. Make it the day before and cut it into perfect slices.

INGREDIENTS

For the base:

- 200 g digestive biscuits
- 90 g unsalted butter, melted

For the filling:

- 3 leaves of unflavoured gelatine (6 g)
- 400 g full-fat cream cheese, at room temperature
- 100 g icing sugar
- Zest of 1 lemon and 2 tbsp of its juice
- 250 ml whipping cream, very cold

For the topping:

- 300 g red berries (fresh or frozen)
- 50 g caster sugar
- 1 tsp cornflour dissolved in 1 tbsp water

METHOD

1. Crush the biscuits to fine crumbs. Mix with the melted butter.
2. Line the base of a 22–24 cm loose-bottomed tin with baking parchment. Scatter in the biscuit mixture and press down firmly with the back of a spoon or the bottom of a glass. Chill in the fridge while you prepare the filling.
3. Soak the gelatine leaves in cold water for 5 minutes.
4. Beat the cream cheese with the icing sugar and lemon zest until smooth.
5. Warm the lemon juice (20 seconds in the microwave), squeeze out the gelatine well and dissolve it in the hot juice. Add 2 spoonfuls of the cream cheese mixture to the gelatine, stir, and then pour everything into the cream cheese mixture, whisking.
6. Whip the cold cream until firm and fold it into the cream cheese mixture.
7. Pour onto the base, level the top and chill in the fridge for at least 6 hours (better overnight).
8. Topping: cook the red berries with the sugar over a medium heat for 5 minutes. Add the dissolved cornflour and boil for another minute, until thickened. Leave to cool completely.

9. Spread the cold topping over the cheesecake before serving. Run a knife around the edge before opening the tin.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge. Variation: a topping of orange marmalade, or just fresh fruit and mint leaves. Common mistake: adding cold gelatine to the filling, which forms strings; always dissolve it in a warm liquid and first mix it with a little of the filling.

Christmas Pavlova Wreath

Makes: 1 wreath of 24 cm, 8–10 portions · Time: 30 min + 1 h 15 min baking + 2 h cooling · Oven: 120°C (fan 100°C / gas mark ½) · Difficulty: Medium · Allergens: egg, milk

A meringue crisp outside and soft inside, shaped into a wreath and topped with cream, red berries and pomegranate seeds. It looks just like a Christmas garland.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 egg whites, at room temperature
- 1 pinch of salt
- 220 g caster sugar
- 1 tsp cornflour
- 1 tsp white wine vinegar or lemon juice

For the topping:

- 250 ml whipping cream, very cold
- 1 tbsp icing sugar
- 250 g red berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries)
- Seeds of ½ pomegranate
- Mint leaves

METHOD

1. Heat the oven to 150°C (fan 130°C / gas mark 2). Draw a 24 cm circle on a sheet of baking parchment (use a plate as a template), turn the paper over and put it on a baking tray.
2. Whisk the egg whites with the salt until white and frothy.
3. Add the sugar one spoonful at a time, whisking constantly on high speed, until the meringue is very stiff and glossy and the sugar has dissolved (rub a little between your fingers: it should not feel grainy). This takes 8–10 minutes.
4. Add the cornflour and vinegar and whisk for another 30 seconds.
5. With a spoon, place mounds of meringue on the drawn circle, some touching each other, forming a wreath about 7 cm wide with the centre left open.
6. Put in the oven, immediately lower the temperature to 120°C (fan 100°C / gas mark ½) and bake for 1 hour 15 minutes. Do not open the oven.
7. Turn off the oven and leave the pavlova to cool inside, with the door slightly open, for at least 2 hours.
8. Just before serving, whip the cream with the icing sugar and spread it over the wreath. Decorate with the

red berries, pomegranate seeds and mint.

Storage: the meringue without topping keeps for 3 days in a well-sealed container, away from damp (never in the fridge). Once assembled, serve within 1–2 hours. Common mistake: the meringue weeps syrup or cracks a lot, because of undissolved sugar or an oven that is too hot. Small cracks are normal and are hidden by the cream.



Pavlova wreath, with cream, red berries and pomegranate.

Photo: Kathysg / Pixabay

Christmas Tiramisu (egg-free)

Makes: 1 dish of 20 × 25 cm, 8 portions · Time: 25 min + 6 h in the fridge · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, egg (in the sponge fingers), milk

A festive version of tiramisu, with cinnamon and orange in the cream and no raw eggs. Creamy, light and easy to assemble.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 g mascarpone, cold
- 250 ml whipping cream, very cold
- 70 g icing sugar
- Zest of 1 orange
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 250 ml strong coffee, cold
- 2 tbsp port (optional, adults only)
- 200 g sponge fingers
- 2 tbsp cocoa powder

METHOD

1. Whisk the mascarpone with the cold cream, icing sugar, orange zest and cinnamon on medium speed for 2–3 minutes, until you have a firm cream that holds its shape. Do not overwhisk, or it turns grainy.

2. Mix the cold coffee with the port, if using, in a shallow dish.
3. Dip half of the sponge fingers, one at a time, into the coffee for 1–2 seconds on each side (they should be moist, not soaked), and line the base of the dish.
4. Cover with half of the cream and level it.
5. Make another layer of sponge fingers dipped in coffee and cover with the rest of the cream.
6. Cover and chill in the fridge for at least 6 hours.
7. Before serving, sift the cocoa over the top. For a Christmas touch, put a paper star on top before sifting and carefully lift it off.

Storage: 3 days in the fridge, covered. For children: swap the coffee for cold chocolate milk and leave out the port. Common mistake: sponge fingers that are too wet, which leave the base watery; dip them quickly in the coffee.

Chocolate Biscuit Salami (egg-free)

Makes: 2 rolls, about 30 slices · Time: 20 min + 4 h in the fridge · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk, tree nuts (if made with walnuts)

The children's favourite no-bake sweet: broken biscuits coated in chocolate, rolled up like a salami and cut into slices. This version uses condensed milk instead of raw eggs.

INGREDIENTS

- 200 g rich tea biscuits
- 100 g unsalted butter, softened
- 200 g sweetened condensed milk (about half a tin)
- 80 g sweetened chocolate powder (drinking chocolate)
- 50 g chopped walnuts (optional)
- Icing sugar, for coating

METHOD

1. Break the biscuits by hand into small pieces (the size of a fingernail), leaving some smaller. Do not crush them to dust.
2. In a bowl, beat the softened butter with the condensed milk and chocolate powder until you have a smooth cream.
3. Add the biscuits and walnuts and mix with a spatula until they are all coated.

4. Divide the mixture in two. Put each half on a sheet of cling film and roll up, twisting the ends like a sweet wrapper, to make a roll 5 cm in diameter.
5. Chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours (or 1 hour in the freezer), until firm.
6. Remove the cling film, roll the logs in icing sugar and, if you like, tie with kitchen string, like a real salami. Cut into slices 1 cm thick.

Storage: 1 week in the fridge, wrapped; 2 months in the freezer. It makes a great gift wrapped in baking parchment with a ribbon. With children: they can break the biscuits and roll it up. Common mistake: biscuits crushed to powder, which spoils the ‘salami’ effect; leave visible pieces.



Chocolate biscuit salami cut into slices.

Photo: Ashkan Forouzani / Unsplash

Biscuit, Cream and Orange Glasses

Makes: 6 glasses · Time: 20 min + 3 h in the fridge · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk

Layers of biscuit soaked in orange juice and of cream, served in glasses. Pretty, fresh and ready in 20 minutes.

INGREDIENTS

- 150 g rich tea biscuits
- 200 ml orange juice
- 300 ml whipping cream, very cold
- 200 g sweetened condensed milk
- Zest of 1 orange
- Ground cinnamon and orange segments, to decorate

METHOD

1. Whip the cold cream until it starts to firm up. Drizzle in the condensed milk and add the orange zest and whisk for another minute, until you have a thick cream.
2. Pour the orange juice into a shallow dish.
3. Break the biscuits in half. Dip them quickly in the juice and put a layer in the bottom of each glass.
4. Cover with 2 spoonfuls of cream. Repeat until everything is used up, finishing with cream.
5. Chill in the fridge for at least 3 hours, so the biscuit softens.

6. Before serving, sprinkle with cinnamon and decorate with an orange segment.

Storage: 2 days in the fridge, covered. With children: they can build the layers themselves. Variation: swap the orange for red berries crushed with a little sugar. Common mistake: whipping cream that is not cold enough, which will not thicken; use very cold cream and a very cold bowl.

Portuguese Biscuit Cake (*bolo de bolacha*)

Makes: 1 cake of 20 × 10 cm, 10 slices · Time: 35 min + 6 h in the fridge · No oven · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: gluten, milk

Layers of rich tea biscuits dipped in coffee and buttercream, covered in grated biscuit. A classic of Portuguese family celebrations, made here without raw eggs.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 packets of rich tea biscuits (about 400 g)
- 300 ml strong coffee, lukewarm, unsweetened
- 250 g unsalted butter, softened
- 200 g icing sugar
- 2 tbsp strong coffee, cold

METHOD

1. Beat the softened butter in the mixer for 2 minutes. Add the icing sugar a little at a time and beat for another 4–5 minutes, until you have a very pale, fluffy cream. Add the 2 tbsp of cold coffee and beat for another minute.
2. Set aside 6 biscuits for decoration.
3. On a rectangular serving dish, dip 8 biscuits in the coffee, one at a time, and arrange them in a rectangle of 2 × 4 biscuits.

4. Spread with a thin layer of cream.
5. Repeat biscuits and cream, layer upon layer, until the biscuits are used up (about 6–7 layers).
6. Cover the whole cake, top and sides, with the remaining cream.
7. Grate or crush the reserved biscuits and scatter over the top and sides.
8. Chill in the fridge for at least 6 hours, so the biscuits soften and the cake cuts well.

Storage: 4 days in the fridge, covered. For children: swap the coffee for chocolate milk. Common mistake: curdled buttercream, because the butter was cold; it should be well softened, at room temperature.

Pears Poached in Port

Makes: 6 portions · Time: 15 min + 40 min on the hob · On the hob · Difficulty: Easy · Allergens: none of the main allergens (the wine contains sulphites)

Whole pears cooked slowly in port with cinnamon and orange, until they take on a ruby colour. An elegant, light and very Portuguese dessert.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 firm Conference pears, with stalks
- 500 ml ruby port
- 200 ml water
- 100 g caster sugar
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 strip of orange peel
- 2 cloves

METHOD

1. Carefully peel the pears, leaving the stalks on. Cut a thin slice from the base of each, so they stand upright.
2. In a pan large enough to hold the pears lying side by side, put the port, water, sugar, cinnamon, orange peel and cloves. Bring to the boil.
3. Add the pears, lying on their sides. Lower the heat and cook for 20–30 minutes, turning them every 5 minutes

so they take on colour evenly. They are ready when the tip of a knife slides in easily.

4. Lift the pears out into a bowl.
5. Boil the liquid over a high heat for 10–15 minutes, until reduced by half and it becomes a thick syrup.
6. Spoon the syrup over the pears. Serve warm or cold, standing upright, with whipped cream or a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Storage: 4 days in the fridge, in the syrup (they turn redder from day to day). Some of the alcohol evaporates during cooking, but not all: for children, make it with red grape juice instead of wine and 50 g less sugar. Common mistake: over-ripe pears, which fall apart; choose firm ones.

The Christmas table

The secret of a relaxed Christmas Eve is simple: do not leave everything until the 24th. Many of the sweet treats in this book are even better made ahead. In this chapter you will find a day-by-day plan, a table of what can be prepared in advance and the rules for serving and storing.

Choosing the dessert menu

For 8–10 people, choose about 5 desserts, from different groups. Three examples that work well:

Menu	Cake	Tart	Traditional	Cold
Classic	King cake (*bolo-rei*)	Almond tart	Festive French toast (*rabanadas*) and rice pudding	Chocolate mousse
With children	Chocolate and orange cake	Apple and cinnamon tart	Choux puffs (*sonhos*) and vermicelli pudding	Chocolate biscuit salami
Stress-free	Simplified honey spice cake	Chocolate tart	Fried dough ribbons (*coscorões*) and milk custard	No-bake cheesecake

Plan for 22 to 25 December

Up to Day 20 (optional)

- Simplified honey spice cake: can be made up to 3 weeks ahead.
- Port, fruit and nut loaf cake: up to 2 weeks ahead.
- Fried dough ribbons (*coscorões*): up to 1 week ahead, in a well-sealed tin.
- Sweet shortcrust pastry: freeze the raw bases you will need.
- Make your shopping list and check your tins, baking parchment and frying oil.

Day 22: shopping and preparation

- Shop for fresh items: milk, cream, eggs, butter, fruit.
- Move the frozen sweet shortcrust pastry to the fridge.
- Put the raisins and glacé fruit to soak for the king cake.
- Make the chocolate biscuit salami (it keeps for 1 week).
- Bake the pavlova meringue, if you have chosen it, and store it in a sealed container.
- Buy or set aside the bread for the festive French toast and the bread pudding (*formigos*): it should be hard by the 24th.

Day 23: the big baking day

- **Morning:** make the dough for the king cake or queen cake. While it proves, line and bake the tart base.
- **Afternoon:** bake the king cake. Then make the tart (almond, walnut or apple).
- **Late afternoon:** cold desserts that improve overnight: crème caramel, cheesecake, tiramisu, biscuit cake, mousse and milk custard (without caramelising the sugar).
- Make the pears poached in port, if you have chosen them: they keep in the fridge, in the syrup.

Day 24: Christmas Eve

- **Morning:** rice pudding and vermicelli pudding (they cool over the course of the day). Bread pudding (*formigos*), if you have chosen it.
- **Early afternoon:** yule log (it needs 2 hours in the fridge) and chocolate tart, if you did not make them the day before.
- **Late afternoon:** fried treats. Start with the choux puffs and pumpkin fritters, then the festive French toast (they are best freshly made). Turn off the hob and put the oil away before dinner.
- **At the last minute:** assemble the pavlova, caramelise the sugar on the milk custard, turn out the crème caramel and dust the tiramisu with cocoa.

Day 25: Christmas Day lunch

- What is left from Christmas Eve is almost always enough for lunch. Take the cold desserts out of the fridge 20 minutes before serving.
- Reheat the festive French toast and fritters for 5 minutes in the oven at 160°C (fan 140°C / gas mark 3), to crisp them up again.
- If you want a new dessert, the biscuit, cream and orange glasses can be made in 20 minutes in the morning and are ready for lunch.

What you can do in advance

Sweet treat	How far ahead	Where to keep it
Simplified honey spice cake	Up to 3 weeks	Wrapped, in a cool place
Port, fruit and nut loaf cake	Up to 2 weeks	Wrapped, in a cool place
Fried dough ribbons (*coscorões*)	Up to 1 week	Well-sealed tin
Chocolate biscuit salami	Up to 1 week	Fridge
Raw sweet shortcrust pastry	3 days (2 months frozen)	Fridge or freezer
King cake, queen cake	1–2 days	Wrapped, at room temperature

Sweet treat	How far ahead	Where to keep it
Almond and walnut tarts	2 days	Sealed container, in a cool place
Crème caramel, cheesecake, tiramisu, biscuit cake	1 day	Fridge
Pavlova meringue	Up to 3 days	Sealed container, never in the fridge
Festive French toast, choux puffs, fritters	On the day	At room temperature

How to serve

- **Vary the heights:** the king cake on a cake stand, the tarts on boards, the spoon desserts in bowls. The table looks prettier and it is easier to reach everything.
- **Cut ahead:** the honey spice cake and the fruit and nut cake in thin slices; the king cake in wide slices. Leave a knife next to each whole cake.
- **Cold desserts kept cold:** serve them in small amounts and top up from the fridge. Do not leave desserts with cream, cheese or eggs out of the fridge for more than 2 hours.
- **Label the desserts** with small tags, especially those containing nuts, alcohol or raw eggs, with allergy sufferers, children and pregnant women in mind.

- **Simple decoration:** sprigs of rosemary, cinnamon sticks, orange segments, pomegranate seeds and a little icing sugar work wonders.

Storing leftovers

Type of sweet treat	Where	How long
Dry cakes (king cake, sponge, spice cake)	Sealed container or wrapped	3–4 days
Dense cakes (honey, fruit and nut)	Wrapped, in a cool place	2–4 weeks
Tarts with fruit or custard	Fridge	2–3 days
Spoon desserts (rice pudding, vermicelli pudding, milk custard, bread pudding)	Fridge, covered	3–4 days
Desserts with cream or cheese	Fridge, covered	2–3 days
Mousse with raw eggs	Fridge, covered	2 days at most
Fried treats	Container with kitchen paper	1–2 days (fried dough ribbons up to 1 week)

What you can freeze

- **Yes:** king cake and queen cake (in slices), fruit and nut cake, honey spice cake, chocolate and orange cake, sponge cake (*pão de ló*), raw sweet shortcrust pastry, chocolate

biscuit salami. Up to 1–2 months, well wrapped. Thaw at room temperature, still wrapped.

- **No:** pavlova, mousse, milk custard, crème caramel, rice pudding, custard tarts and fried treats. They turn watery or lose their texture.

> **Tip:** slices of king cake that are two or three days old are delicious toasted in a frying pan with a little butter, for breakfast on Boxing Day.

And now only the most important thing is left: sit down at the table and enjoy it. Happy Christmas!