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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

MONDAY, December 21, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "A Colorful Christmas Dinner." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletins available: "Rabbit Recipes," and "Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes Revised."

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So many things to think about this week, one right after another. But one of the most important considerations for the housekeeper and hostess is the Christmas dinner.

"Shop early and mail early", urges the Post Office Department.

"Make menus early," say I. It's such a big relief to have the dinner for December 25 planned well in advance and the market order all made. Once the menu is settled, you can go about the other business of this busy week without that annoying question forever popping up from the back of your mind--"What shall I give my guests to eat?"

Uncle Ebenezer says that one of the greatest Christmas tragedies is the harassed woman who left all her plans until the last minute and had to work so hard over the dinner that she lost her appetite and her disposition doing it.

So, first thing today, let's get out our pencils and consider the bill of fare for Christmas. The Menu Specialist has been extra thoughtful and given me two fine Christmas day menus--each featuring a red and green color scheme in every course.

Why two Christmas dinners? Because, Arabella, most housekeepers of my acquaintance like to be able to make a choice in menus for a big occasion like this. And they used different menus to suit different sized purses.

The first menu is a typical Christmas turkey dinner. A dinner beginning with a fruit appetizer and ending with good, old-fashioned plum pudding.

Did I say a turkey dinner? Let me qualify that statement. This menu will be quite suitable with any sort of roast fowl you please--goose, duck, chicken or turkey. Yes, any sort of fowl--or even rabbit, if you like.

If you serve turkey we're suggesting chestnut stuffing for it. If you serve goose or duck, however, apple stuffing is especially good. So is mashed potato stuffing with raisins.

The second menu is for a thrifty dinner--less expensive than the first, but just as Christmasy. You can take your pick from these two. I'll give you the thrifty dinner tomorrow. Today it will take all our time to discuss Menu Number

One.

Everybody ready to write down these dinner plans?

First course: Chilled fruit appetizer. Fruit appetizers are very popular today and are of many different kinds. There's fruit cup or cocktail, for one kind. A mixture of chilled tart fruit, cut in pieces and usually served in a sherbet glass or perhaps in an orange shell or apple cup. Then there's a tart, frosty fruit juice, served in cocktail glasses. Or, finally, there's fruit served in a large section or piece on a small plate. Every good fruit appetizer has three characteristics--it's chilled, it's tart, and it's dainty and tempting in appearance. The Menu Specialist suggests for today's fruit appetizer a slice of white honeydew melon, chilled, of course, flavored with a bit of lemon juice, and decorated with a red and green garnish. For this garnish a red cherry and a sprig of mint would be attractive, or a few thin slices of red and green cherries. If you find it difficult to buy the melon, or would rather have something else, why not use a half grapefruit or canned pear, also decorated with red and green? If you use the pear, squeeze a bit of lemon juice over it, to make it pleasantly tart, as an appetizer should be.

So much for the first course.

The second course is: Roast turkey with chestnut stuffing--or any other roast fowl; Buttered cauliflower; Harvard beets; Mixed savory greens or some other green vegetable; and tiny crisp rolls.

"That, no potatoes for Christmas dinner?" I hear somebody exclaim.

Potatoes aren't necessary with this meal, but, of course, you can serve them if Uncle Peter and Aunt Polly insist on having them. With the stuffing, the rolls and the plum pudding for dessert, potatoes just add unnecessary starchy food. The Menu Specialist has planned this first course especially light to accommodate the rich plum pudding coming for dessert. That's an idea worth considering always, if you're interested in perfect menus. Whenever you're serving a rich pudding, be sure to plan the first course accordingly. Otherwise, your guests will over-eat and feel stuffy all Christmas afternoon. The chances are that they'll have unhappy dreams all Christmas night also.

Have you a picture of that main course as it will look served on your best dinner plates? I have. At one side of the plate will be a piece of roast fowl, done just to a turn. Next to it will be some delicate stuffing with brown gravy over it. Then cubes or slices of those delicious bright red Harvard beets. Next, some delicate white pieces of buttered cauliflower, with perhaps a dash of red paprika over the top. Then, mixed savory greens or other pleasant green vegetable. See the color scheme of red, white and green.

Of course, half of the attractive appearance of that plate will depend on the way the vegetables are treated. If the green vegetable, for example, is to keep its bright, natural color, and if the cauliflower is to be white and not greyish or brownish in tone, correct cooking is necessary. Drop the vegetables in boiling salted water, keep the lid off the green vegetables while they're cooking, cook rapidly until just tender, but not a moment longer, drain thoroughly, add butter, and serve immediately. Vegetables lose their attractive looks and taste if they're allowed to stand in the warming oven while you're waiting for other things to get done. If you treat your vegetables well, they will reward you by keeping their color, flavor and food value.

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Let's see. Where was I on the menu? Oh, yes. We've finished writing down.

Now, let's discuss the salad. There's a choice of salads for this meal. Either one will give that crisp, tart, fresh green that is needed between the main course and dessert. Naturally, with a big meal like this, we don't want a rich or elaborate salad. So, serve either plain lettuce, cut in slices or quarters, or watercress with novelty dressing over it, or tomato and green pepper slices on lettuce. For the plain lettuce or cress salad, make French dressing and add red chili sauce and finely chopped parsley or chopped green peppers. The dressing, you see, helps carry out the Christmas color scheme. The other colorful salad suggestion is simply slices of fresh red tomatoes and thin rings of green pepper with French dressing.

That brings us to dessert, which is good, old-fashioned hot plum pudding to remind us of Tiny Tim and all the other old friends who carried on the Yuletide customs of Merrie England. I hope you made your plum pudding some time ago, and so will only have to warm it up on Christmas day. If not, any day this week before Christmas will do for making it.

Have I a good recipe for plum pudding? Indeed I have, and so have you, if you own a green cookbook. Right on page 99 is a pudding recipe that calls for suet and raisins and citron and nutmeats and every other good thing that belongs in a plum pudding.

Whipped cream is good with plum pudding. So is hard sauce, made of butter and sugar creamed together. If you want a hard sauce that is a little different, use brown instead of white sugar, and grate in the rind of an orange for flavoring. Any one of the liquid or foamy sauces is also suitable for plum pudding. And some people like best of all to serve a spoonful of vanilla ice cream or mousse, on the plate with the hot pudding.

Let's go over the menu once again, now, to see that we have everything that belongs to this meal.

First course: Fruit appetizer

Second course: Roast turkey or other fowl with stuffing; Giblet gravy; Buttered cauliflower; Harvard beets; Mixed savory greens, or other green vegetable; and small crisp rolls.

Salad course: Either lettuce with novelty French dressing; Or, Sliced tomatoes and green peppers on lettuce. You can serve tiny, crisp, salty crackers with this salad, if you prefer.

Dessert course: Hot Plum pudding with whipped cream or other sauce; Coffee; Red and green candies; and Nuts.

Tomorrow we'll discuss the menu for a less expensive dinner. Also we'll have a recipe for jellied plum pudding--something different in the plum pudding line. And, if we have time then, we'll take up that matter of table decorations.

