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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

FRIDAY, December 22, 1933

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

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The job on the calendar for today is planning the Christmas dinner. "And high time, too," I can hear you say. As a matter of fact, today really is the deadline for planning. And tomorrow is the deadline for marketing, stocking up with provisions for both Sunday and Christmas Day.

Whenever I sit down to plan a holiday dinner, I thank my lucky stars that I'm living in modern times instead of in the old days when huge feasts and groaning tables and overeating were the style. I'm glad I live in an age when most people plan meals with a thought for digestions and dispositions, for good complexions and also good figures. Fortunately, these modern menus are easier on the pocketbook than old-style twenty-course dinners. Most of us don't go in for great quantities in the line of food anymore and we don't go in for lavish spending and costly dishes. Thrift is popular even for the Christmas meal. But that doesn't mean that the dinner is any less delicious or satisfying or festive than old-style feasts. A clever cook with an artistic eye can dress up the everyday, low-cost foods so they suggest gayety and good cheer at the first glance.

One way to create the Christmas atmosphere at your dinner table is to feature a red and green color scheme not only in the decorations but also in the food, from the fruit cocktail at the start to the dessert at the end. In the old days the Christmas feast often had course after course of meat and poultry and even fish occasionally. And these heavy foods were topped off with a great boiled or steamed pudding at the end of the meal. That old-time pudding was a pudding--a great hearty mass of starch and fat with some sweetening, spices, and dried fruit. No wonder that some of the quaint old accounts of Christmas Day mention the fact that many of the feasters went to sleep promptly after the meal, some dozed gently, others even snored in their chairs. Well, my personal opinion is this was not a very lively way to spend a Christmas afternoon or evening. I'd rather eat less and feel up to family games or a walk in the snow or a song-fest of Christmas carols. Present-day eating habits have changed a great deal from these old days of heavy feasting. Our Christmas dinners can be far more attractive and colorful and also far more digestible because they feature fruits and vegetables. Nowadays we usually serve just one main dish of meat, instead of a whole series. And we don't go in too heavily for starches or sugars or fats. As a result, we can feel just as cheerful when we get up from the table as when we sat down. If the first course at our meal is hearty, we usually serve a light dessert to balance it. The great old plum pudding, so heavy with flour and suet, is generally modified for present-day use.



But let's get down to details now on our dinner for Monday. Let's start the meal with a tart and colorful fruit cup to whet the appetite. A red apple hollowed out makes a very attractive container for the diced fruits. Keep the inside of the apple from discoloring by rubbing it with lemon juice. The mixture of cut-up fruits that you put inside might be grapefruit, or peeled and seeded white grapes, or pineapple, candied cranberries with perhaps a sprig of mint by way of garnish. Choose red or white fruits for the sake of the color scheme. And make your selection from your own canned fruit or from the inexpensive fruit in the market. Be sure the fruit mixture is tart and chilled and be sure it is carefully prepared so that it appeals to the eye.

Now for the main course. We've had several requests for a duck dinner for Christmas Day this year so the Menu Specialist suggest roast duck with peanut stuffing. As we mentioned on Monday, all poultry is cheap this year. Ducks in New York City were retailing at seventeen cents a pound at Thanksgiving time. So a duck dinner this year will fit even a lean pocketbook. If you've never tried peanut stuffing for fowl, you're in for a treat. It is novel, delicious and inexpensive.

The next item on the list is glazed sweetpotatoes. Yes, I know that sweet potatoes are slightly off our color scheme, but they're so good with duck and they're so inexpensive that we're putting them on the list. Green peas come next--new green peas, if they're available, or canned green peas from your pantry shelf. Serve them hot with butter and a bit of paprika over the top. Next, little red molds of bright cranberry jelly--individual molds to go on the bread and butter plates. Then, white celery curls. There are the first two courses, all planned. Fruit cocktail in apple cups; Roast duck with peanut stuffing; glazed sweetpotatoes; green peas; little molds of cranberry jelly; celery curls.

Now about the salad--a light, crisp, green salad. Let's have a slice of head lettuce served with French dressing. And let's make the French dressing gay by adding chopped red and green pepper to it. Tiny crisp crackers will be nice with this salad. So would cheese straws.

For dessert how would you like a snowy mold of Spanish cream enlivened with chopped red and green cherries? Or how would you like this same Spanish cream plain but served with a red fruit sauce, perhaps red currant or red cherry sauce or strawberry preserves? Spanish cream, you know, is just soft custard molded with gelatin. You can prepare it the day before. It's a dessert that will be suitable for all ages around the table. With it you might serve lady fingers or little sponge cakes. With the after-dinner coffee you might serve homemade mints or homemade nut candies.

Monday: "Christmas Customs in Many Countries."

