



Christmas Day menu and countdown to Christmas dinner plan

Breakfast:

Eggs, mushrooms and tomato, a slice of wholemeal toast

Snack:

Coffee and mince pie

Lunch / Dinner:

Asparagus soup <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/asparagus-soup/>

Seafood salad (for example, smoked salmon, prawns and crab claws with lemon and black pepper served with mixed organic salad leaves and a little balsamic vinaigrette - very simple and delicious) or try a delicious, fresh and crisp celeriac remoulade <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/celeriac-remoulade/>

Roast turkey (pre-marinated in herbed buttermilk brine), cranberry sauce (homemade or bought) and gravy <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/roast-buttermilk-brined-turkey-gravy-serves-16-18-portions/>

Celery, walnut and apricot stuffing <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/celery-walnut-apricot-stuffing/>

Baked ham <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-cook-and-prepare-gammon-and-ham>

Spiced red cabbage <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/spiced-red-cabbage/>

Carrot and parsnip mash

Steamed Brussels sprouts

Roast potato

Cheese and crackers

Christmas pudding flamed with Irish whiskey and served with whipped cream (I cheat here and buy a good quality, small pudding!)

OR other dessert of choice (in my house it's my teenagers' choice and they will be making it - the last few years it's been Banoffi Pie - very easy to make and they love it - but it won't be appearing on this blog, sorry!) A nice alternative dessert is this Festive Apple Cake with Christmas Spices <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/festive-apple-cake-christmas-spices/> - loaded with apples it's not as rich as the traditional Christmas desserts but is delicious and has a wonderful flavour from the apples, dried fruit, brandy and spices.

See over for the countdown to Christmas dinner...

The countdown....

December 22nd (or sooner!) Make a shopping list. Make sure you have everything you need for the table (flowers or centrepiece / candles / tablecloth / cutlery, plates, bowls, glasses etc) as well as cooking equipment (for example you'll need 3 roasting tins / trays for turkey, ham and potatoes if you're cooking for more than 5-6 people). One thing I'd highly recommend is a digital meat thermometer, <http://www.homestoreandmore.ie/search?q=digital+meat+probe>

I find it invaluable for checking whether meat and fish are cooked, and it helps to ensure things don't get overcooked too – really useful and saves you prodding, poking and cutting to get a good look at your turkey (or salmon, steak, chicken etc...)!

December 23rd Shop for groceries and collect your turkey; take note of its weight, prepare brine and refrigerate turkey in the brine (marinade) for 24-48 hours. Make soup and braised red cabbage and refrigerate.

December 24th Get other members of the family involved as much as you can (make a list of jobs in advance or it can just seem easier to do things yourself when you're in the thick of it! And don't forget the washing up and tidying jobs after dinner too – just keep dessert for later until the main job's done!) Prepare a delicious Fish Pie <http://eatwise.ie/recipes/fish-pie/> or a simple baked salmon and salad for tonight's dinner with plenty of extra salad ready for tomorrow's starter.

Prepare dessert for tomorrow. Make stuffing and refrigerate. Make cranberry sauce (or make sure you have a jar of it bought!)

December 25th

9.00 Breakfast (remember to drink a pint of water as soon as you get up to wake up the kidneys!). Get your helpers to start their jobs – this list isn't designed for one person to do all the work!!

9.30 Take turkey out of the fridge, discard marinade and carefully insert some stuffing under the skin of the breast (or you can just cook it separately as I'm doing, see later). Calculate cooking time <https://www.bordbia.ie/consumer/recipes/christmas/pages/turkeytips.aspx> unless your turkey is like mine, a 6Kg (13lb) one, so you can copy my timings and if you're brining the turkey you can reduce it by 30-45mins as it cooks more quickly using this method. Prepare Brussels sprouts, carrots, parsnips, set table, make sure wine is chilling (white) and that your red wine is opened to allow it to breathe. Arrange oven shelves to accommodate the turkey and another roasting tin for potatoes. Prepare roasting tin (see my Roast turkey recipe for details). Cook & mash carrots and parsnips and leave to cool. Put ham on to cook. This is a good recipe if you want to follow one <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-cook-and-prepare-gammon-and-ham>

11.00 Go for a brisk walk (or run!)

12.00 Preheat oven and when it's reached 190°C (fan oven) put turkey on – these timings are for a 6Kg (13lb) bird (that's not including stuffing; I'm cooking that separately). Enjoy a coffee and mince pie (or your preferred treat!)

- 12.30 Reduce oven temperature to 160°C then take a break to shower and change for dinner!
- 1.00 Put potatoes into cold, salted water to boil. Parboil for 3-4 minutes, drain, put back into the pot and shake over gentle heat to thoroughly dry them. Leave aside. Put stuffing into a shallow tin (about 5cm deep, like a small traybake tin) cover loosely with foil.
- 1.30 Heat, serve and enjoy the soup!
- 2.00 Put about 2tbsp olive oil into your roasting tin for potatoes and put into the oven to heat for about 5-10 minutes, then add potatoes to the hot oil, turning to coat and leave in to roast. Remove foil from turkey (fold and keep for later). Prepare cooked ham for glazing in the oven.
- 2.30 Remove turkey from oven and put stuffing (in shallow tin) and ham in. Increase oven temperature to 190°C. Use meat thermometer / probe to check temperature in thickest part of thigh (avoid the bone) and thickest part of the breast, it should be 74°C (165°F). If it's done, move turkey to a large platter or board and leave to rest for half an hour, very loosely covered with foil. Carefully pour fat off from roasting tin into a bowl to be discarded later when cold. Make roast gravy. Heat vegetables (carrot & parsnip mash and spiced red cabbage)
- 3.00 Remove roast potatoes and ham if they're done and put potatoes into a Pyrex dish. Turn off oven and place dinner plates in the oven to heat and veg to keep warm. Carve turkey and ham. Cover with foil and if there's space place in the oven to keep warm. Put on a steamer or water to boil, lightly salted, for the Brussels Sprouts.
- 3.15 Serve seafood salad, after you've eaten, get someone to clear plates while you put on Brussels Sprouts to cook. Heat gravy jug by filling with a little boiled water, heat gravy in the saucepan, skimming off any fat or foam that rises to the top with a deep spoon or ladle.
- 3.30 Everything should now be ready and hot: get plates and meat out of the oven and plate up, get helpers to serve veg and potatoes and take plates to the table and then sit down, pull a cracker and enjoy your dinner!

Get your helpers on their feet before dessert to tidy up, then later everyone can enjoy dessert / cheese and a well-earned rest by the fire!

