

MY PERFECT FOODIE Christmas

Cook and food writer Anna Barnett shares her favourite festive dishes and hosting tips

Food is at the very heart of Christmas, whether it's everyone gathered together in the kitchen prepping the turkey and trimmings, lingering after dinner over decadent cinnamon-scented desserts topped with scoops of ice cream, or trying to snaffle that last sought-after strawberry cream from the sweet tin.

Here, food writer and chef Anna Barnett shares the most vivid food memories from her childhood Christmases, and reveals the dishes she loves to make for family over the festive period.

'I would always cook Christmas lunch with my dad growing up,' Anna recalls. 'He would have everything prepped, peeled and chopped the night before, which I think is how I learned that preparation is key. There were six of us kids, so it was chaos – but



always fantastic fun. We had endless pigs in blankets and so much bread sauce. It would really just be an entire day of eating – and that's what Christmas is still all about for me.'

'Christmas Day starts and ends with panettone.' My dad is a huge fan, so we'll have a couple of slices, toasted with lots of butter, for breakfast, followed by smoked

salmon and scrambled eggs with a Buck's Fizz. We aim to eat lunch around 3pm or 4pm. I always order a KellyBronze turkey because they don't dry out, and I'll pop onions, carrots and celery into the tray with it, so you're making up the base for your gravy as it cooks. We finish with a showstopper dessert, like my vanilla ice cream-filled panettone covered with glossy Swiss meringue.'

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'I don't stress about timings too much.' You should be taking the turkey out of the oven and letting it rest for a good hour, which gives you time to get everything else ready. Another insider tip is to make up your own herb salts to add to the roast potatoes five or 10 minutes before serving. Take herbs like rosemary and thyme, and muddle them with salt to use as seasoning – it gives an extra hit of fresh herbs.'

'Every year we have a Christmas cocktail party – it's become a bit of a tradition. We'll serve bramble cocktails and lots of fizz. I'll also do canapés made with little filo pastry cups – you can make them a few days in advance and fill them with smoked salmon and horseradish and cucumber, or melted Camembert with onion chutney and redcurrants. And I love big sharing dishes like my winter pie made with sage and onion stuffing, a vibrant green layer of leeks and cavolo nero, and a rich purple layer of butter-poached maple and balsamic heritage carrots. For dessert, I'll do something like poached pear and marmalade frangipane tart with spiced maple syrup and scoops of smooth Carte D'Or Vanilla ice cream. The parties always tend to get quite raucous – my husband Thom and I used to live with Dan Gillespie Sells [from the band The Feeling] and he'd often take to the piano and start playing Christmas songs at the end of the night.'

'I put big serving platters out on the kitchen island.' That means everyone can get up and serve themselves, and it frees up some space so I can decorate the table more. I love lots of greenery and candles, so it feels quite wild and rustic. I also adore Christmas scents. Penhaligon's does a lovely fern-scented candle, and it's nice to get decorative with cloves, clementines and seasonal fruits; they add those rich Christmas colours to the table as well.'



'FOR DESSERT I'LL DO A FRANGIPANE TART WITH SPICED MAPLE SYRUP'

'I think we're going to cherish being together even more after this tough year.' I'll be spending Christmas with Thom, my family (including my brother and my new niece, who's delicious) and his family. We also have some friends from Australia and New Zealand who won't be able to travel back there for Christmas, so we'll see them as well. We may have to do lots of smaller dinner parties rather than one big celebration, but we'll make it work.'



Carte D'Or Vanilla ice cream makes an elegant finishing touch for festive desserts. Made with 100% sustainably sourced Madagascan vanilla, it's smooth and indulgent – the ideal partner for brandy-steeped Christmas puddings, chocolate panettones or frangipane tarts.