

Carmella's Mom's Christmas Pudding

Carmella's note: Lots of people use suet – Mom hates it. She uses butter. (I concur.)

Mix in a large bowl:

2 lbs (900g) of any kind of dried fruit and nuts
4 oz (110g) ground almonds
1 large apple, peeled and grated (minus the core, of course)
½ tsp cinnamon
½ tsp nutmeg
A pinch of salt
¼ (110g) lb brown sugar
Juice and zest of one orange and one lemon
¾ lb (340g) of breadcrumbs (I like a rustic sourdough)
12 oz (360ml) of stout or porter (I prefer porter, with its fruity/chocolatey overtones)
1 glass of liquor of your choice (I use about a cup of Southern Comfort)

Let the above ingredients “marinate” for at least 24 hours.

Then, add the following:

½ lb (220g) of butter, melted
3 eggs, beaten

Stir until combined, then add:

½ cup (70g) self-rising flour (I never have this on hand, so I use the same amount of all-purpose flour and add a half teaspoon of baking powder)

Now, you need to steam this in the oven. I don't have dedicated pudding molds, but find that stainless steel bowls work great. The above recipe will make three or four one-quart puddings – or you could use larger bowls. (I've used a two-quart bowl and it worked fine.) A one-quart pudding will serve six.

Grease the bowls well, and cut rounds of waxed paper and aluminum foil to wrap over the top. Grease the waxed paper, too. Portion the pudding batter into the bowls (you can fill them up to three-quarters full), then cover with the waxed paper (first) and foil. Secure with kitchen twine.

Put the bowls in a roasting pan and pour in boiling water so the bowls are half to three-quarters submerged. Slow cook the puddings at 300° F / 150° C for 4-5 hours, checking the water level occasionally. Add more boiling water if needed.

After steaming, I let the puddings cool in their containers, coverings intact. Once they're cool, I take the covers off and either unmold them and wrap in cheesecloth (if I'm going to store them) or just leave them in the bowl and pop them into the frig to cool further. (Do this uncovered so you don't get condensation inside the containers. Moisture causes spoilage!) After the pudding is cold, cover it again with new waxed paper and foil. For any you've put in cheesecloth, wrap them in foil and return to the refrigerator. Do not put them in plastic – they need to breathe a bit. If you're storing for a long period, you can moisten the cheesecloth occasionally with liquor (not too much).

I leave the pudding I plan to use for Christmas in the bowl. It makes it easier to steam it again before serving. Follow the same steaming routine as before, only this time, do it just long enough for the pudding to be heated through.

Unmold it and – just before serving – douse it with liquor and set it on fire. Some people like to make a hard sauce for the pudding – I like it with homemade vanilla ice cream.