

Baking Blind Christmas booklet.

Happy Christmas from Baking Blind.

During the months of the pandemic, I've been posting recipes for my "Covid cookbook" and, with the support of Open Sight Hampshire https://youtu.be/m__1GwKxOII, running a series of on-line cooking demonstrations. These aim to get back to basics for visually impaired beginners and rebuild kitchen confidence for those recently coping with sight loss. I've been blind for over 20 years but am still happily at home in the kitchen. The videos show just how easy it can be to cook even with no sight at all.

This is a selection of seasonal recipes to bring Christmas cheer and even create special homemade gifts for your family and friends. Each recipe has links to YouTube video demonstrations. Although video is a visual medium, they all focus on my spoken explanation of what is happening.

We had people from all over the world dropping in on the demos but, often, the time differences didn't work for them. This collection means you can use all the material whenever best suits you.

You can see my regular recipes on [Facebook](#) or my [Blog](#).

In Spring 2022, I'll be publishing my book about the Baking Blind world tour with all the recipes and tales (including two near-death experiences!) through Amazon and Kindle. If you want to be kept in touch for the publication, please drop me an e-mail.

There are also hundreds of recipes, including my world tour, on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWTJYx7jGA3xaR4830wJSRg?view_as=subscriber

The Open Sight baking play list is at: <https://youtu.be/jRIznF2wFAY>

Feel free to send me your comments or questions: penny@laylands.co.uk

Have a wonderful Christmas,

Best wishes,

Penny Melville-Brown

Index.

All the recipes are in this simple Word document, starting on a different page, with the electronic links so I hope that everything is as accessible as possible. For obvious reasons, I haven't included images.

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Key equipment:

As a blind person, I rely on my talking scales and a talking thermometer (worth auditioning them for clarity if you get the chance). Weighing liquids on the scales is so much easier than using a measuring jug. The thermometer has a long probe that can be inserted to test whether cakes and bread are cooked (I prefer them to reach over 95C) and meat (aim for 70-75C). I like a sturdy apron to keep me clean and a bowl of hot soapy water for the

constant handwashing needed when relying on touch. Otherwise, all my equipment is the same as that used by any sighted cook.

Seasonal basics.

Ideally, the raisins, sultanas and currants for these three recipes should have been soaking in brandy, port or sherry for weeks or, possibly, months but even a couple of days will help. I weigh out this dried fruit into separate jars for each recipe, cover with brandy and make sure that they are labelled.

Christmas mincemeat.

Video: https://youtu.be/Tijj2w_ONhs

I like to make a stock of mincemeat for the whole year when the apples are falling, and it makes great presents too.

340g raisins.

170g currents.

170g sultanas.

brandy, sherry or port to cover.

170g glace cherries, halved.

450g prepared weight cooking apples, peeled, cored and diced.

170g suet, can be vegetarian.

340g dark brown sugar or honey.

2 oranges, zest and juice.

2 lemons, zest and juice.

110g almonds, chopped or flaked.

4 heaped teaspoons ground mixed spice.

half teaspoon ground cinnamon.

half nutmeg, grated.

additional brandy for potting (optional).

Mix all the ingredients together in a large ovenproof bowl or pan.

Place the bowl in a preheated oven at 95C, Gas Slow or one quarter, 200F for 3 hours. After stirring, the mix should reach at least 76C in the centre.

Cool and stir in the additional brandy if using.

Place in sterilised jars and seal

My Tips:

I've made a tropical version by reducing the weight of currants, sultanas and raisins soaked in rum but, when making the mix, adding dried mango, crystallised or dried pineapple, dried coconut, dates etc.

Add a couple of heaped tablespoons to a simple apple crumble.

Use the savoury tart pastry recipe (later) to make mince pies.

Here's a shorter early video of this recipe made for the local "Talking Newspaper" team:

<https://youtu.be/vCNMLQN37mE>

Christmas puddings.

Video: <https://youtu.be/HUv9-V089e4>

This is very simple: mainly mixing before putting into bowls after which the Blue Peter bit starts.

225g raisins.

225g currants.

450g sultanas.

brandy and rum to cover.

450g soft brown sugar (or honey).

335g chopped cherries.

110g dried apricots

55g dried apple (optional)

225g chopped almonds

2 small apples – peeled and chopped.

1 orange, zest only.

1 lemon, zest only.

5eggs

225g suet (can be vegetarian).

110g self-raising flour.

225g white breadcrumbs.

2 level teaspoons mixed spice.

half teaspoon nutmeg.

2 Good pinches cinnamon.

Soak the raisins, sultanas and currants in the brandy and rum for a few days.

Mix all the ingredients (leave overnight if time).

Place mix in individual 0.15 litre heat proof basins.

Cover with a double layer of greaseproof paper then a layer of tinfoil and make a single pleat in the three layers. Place the layers (foil on top) with the pleat over the middle of the filled pudding bowl. Tie the layers to the bowl with string and knot tight. Trim the paper and foil to about half an inch below the string.

Place plates or other heatproof items in pans to keep the bottom of the bowls away from direct heat.

Top up the pans with water to about two thirds up the height of the bowls and cover the pans.

Simmer and steam for three hours.

Cool and store. Re-heat for at least an hour in the same way before serving or re-heat on Defrost in the microwave for 3 minutes.

My Tips:

This amount made 11 small (0.15 litre which feeds two comfortably) and 2 family size (0.5 litre) puddings. The larger puddings were cooked for 4 hours.

Cut strips of greaseproof or baking paper wide enough to lap over the top of the bowl on all sides once folded in half. Cut squares of cooking foil to do the same. Take a break and cover and tie down all the covers, trim off any excess and refrigerate (up to 24 hours) any puddings you aren't cooking immediately.

Use silicone mats or make your own heat diffuser for inside the pan: place all the paper and foil trimmings in an envelope of foil, crimped all around the edges. Switch off the heat at the end of the cooking time and remove the puddings once they are cool enough to handle.

Once cooked and cool enough to handle, when completely cold: clean the bowls; re-trim the paper and foil; top with a plastic lid; store in a cool place for up to a year.

An individual pudding with re-heating instructions makes a super Christmas present.

I don't bother with heating brandy and setting alight on the pudding when serving - just too dangerous!

Christmas cake.

Video: <https://youtu.be/Y81yGF72dUQ>

This is a quarter of my usual mix and I weigh out days before the mixing and cooking to make life easier. These were the first Baking Blind videos I made and are embarrassingly amateur! They got better later.

110g currants

110g sultanas

225g raisins

brandy, port or sherry to cover.

225g butter

225g soft brown sugar or honey

4eggs

225g self-raising flour (12 oz if using honey).

2 heaped teaspoons mixed spice

1 teaspoon grated nutmeg

half teaspoon salt

250g glace cherries

55g (home-made) candied peel

55g soft dried apricots

55g dried apple flakes (optional).

55g dates, chopped.

85g whole almonds chopped

85g Brazil nuts, chopped.

1 orange, zest and juice.

1 lemon, zest and juice.

Soak the raisins, sultanas and currants in the brandy for at least a couple of days, turning daily.

Cream butter and sugar (or honey) until light and fluffy.

Beat in eggs one at a time with a little flour.

Gently fold in all the flour, spices and salt followed by the remaining ingredients until evenly mixed.

Place in a 10-inch silicone cake mould (or buttered and lined cake tin).

Cook in a preheated oven at 140C, Gas 1, 285F for 135 minutes and then reduce heat for a further 45 minutes (covering with a double layer of foil if getting too brown).

Allow to cool before turning out.

My Tips:

I make small individual cakes in a loose bottomed bun tin as gifts.

If dividing the mixture into two or more smaller cakes, cook on a lower shelf at the same temperature for 135 minutes.

The cake(s) should reach 95C when cooked.

Inject or brush with more brandy over the next week (if time). Brush with apricot jam glaze before covering with marzipan and allow to dry for at least 48 hours. Cover with royal icing and allow to dry for a day or so. Alternatively, brush the top of the cake with apricot jam glaze and decorate with dried fruit and nuts (apricots, cherries, Brazil nuts and almonds etc) before reglazing the decoration. Allow to dry for at least a day.

Video: <https://youtu.be/hNudculfGeg>

Holiday entertaining.

Often, when life is busy, it is good to have dishes that can be made ahead or are quick to set before your guests.

Pork pies.

Video: <https://youtu.be/s55WD5Ph-G4>

Once you have tried these warm from the oven, cold shop-bought ones will seem like pale imitations!

Hot water pastry:

100ml water.

90g lard.

200g plain flour.

50g strong white bread flour.

flat teaspoon ground mace (optional).

flat teaspoon salt.

50g butter.

Filling:

about 300g sausage meat.

ground black pepper.

fresh thyme leaves.

1 lemon, zest only.

1 egg, beaten.

Place the water and lard in a pan and heat gently until the lard has just melted.

Meanwhile, mix the flours, salt and mace (if using) in a bowl.

Rub in the butter.

Pour in the water and lard and stir with a wooden spoon.

Use your hands to make a dough ball and allow it to cool (press out and put on a cold plate in the fridge).

Preheat oven to 200C, Gas 6, 390F.

Mix black pepper, the herbs and lemon zest into the sausage meat.

Line the pie tins with the pastry (either roll out or mould with your hands).

Fill with sausage meat and press out a lid and mould over the pies.

Make a hole in each pie top to let steam escape, brush with the beaten egg.

Place on a tray in the oven for 10 minutes and then reduce the heat to 140C, Gas 2, 285F for 20 minutes. If you have a probe thermometer, check that the filling has reached 70-75C. Cover with a loose double layer of foil to stop the pastry over-cooking if necessary.

My Tips:

I prefer to use a bun tin with loose bottoms or small foil containers with high sides.

It is difficult to be accurate about the amount of filling you will need as it depends on the size of your pie tins, how thin you get the pastry etc. The above quantities made three generous individual pies.

The beaten egg brushed over the pastry is primarily for those who eat with their eyes - it makes no difference to the taste.

There are many variations once you are confident: try a layer of chicken pieces marinated in lemon juice with lemon zest and fresh chopped herbs; add a layer of ham, rabbit, pheasant or other game; a whole soft-boiled egg; roasted vegetables.

I also make these pies ahead and freeze before cooking, de-frost before putting in the oven.

Mini cocktail versions also work well for parties but will take less time to cook.

Savoury tart.

Video: <https://youtu.be/jRlznF2wFAY>

An excellent pastry with many uses plus a tart that has endless variations.

Pastry:

110g butter, frozen, grated and re-frozen.

220g plain flour, chilled in the fridge overnight.

1 teaspoon salt.

1 egg.

a little cold water.

Filling:

4 leeks, finely sliced and washed.

4 eggs, beaten.

2 heaped tablespoons crème fraiche.

salt and pepper.

(To prepare the butter: freeze the block then coarsely grate before placing in a bag or box and re-freezing)

Mix the frozen butter into the chilled flour and salt, breaking down the butter to about the size of a grain of rice.

Beat the egg in about the same volume of water and gradually mix into the flour mix, adding a little more water, until the pastry comes together.

Press the pastry into a disc-shape and chill for at least 30 minutes.

Roll out the pastry and line a large loose-bottomed tart tin. Press the pastry into the corners and prick all over with a fork.

Line the pastry-filled tin with kitchen foil, pressing down in the corners and covering the edges.

Chill for 30 minutes.

Bake at 180C, Gas 4, 355F for 12 -14 minutes - this is "baking blind".

Break the eggs for the filling into a bowl and beat.

Remove the foil, brush the base and internal sides of the pastry with some of the beaten egg and return to the oven for another 3 minutes.

Remove the pastry case and brush again with beaten egg. Leave for at least 5 minutes for the final egg coating to set - it will feel smooth and shiny.

Ideally, allow the pastry case to cool and rest for an hour.

Meanwhile, cook the leeks in a little water in the microwave until soft and allow to cool.

Beat the crème fraiche and seasoning into the eggs.

Squeeze as much liquid as possible from the leeks and place in tart

Place the whole tart tin on a large piece of kitchen foil.

Fill the tart with the egg mixture.

Fold the foil over the tart to make a loose tent and bake for at least 40 minutes until the centre is just setting. The foil catches any spills and protects the pastry from getting overcooked.

Allow to cool a little before serving warm.

My Tips:

This seems a long recipe but keeping some frozen and/or grated butter ready in the freezer makes it simple. I also make the pastry and freeze it for using later and even freeze the pre-cooked tart cases too. A little time on this preparation makes the final stages quick and easy.

There is no end to the fillings with the savoury custard but most need to be at least part-cooked e.g. mushrooms with the leeks; smoked salmon or trout with chopped dill and a spoonful of horseradish sauce; asparagus and chopped ham; courgettes, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, black olives.

The pastry case has other potential: make mince pies or fill with cooked apple puree, top with slices of eating apple plus a dusting of sugar and butter knobs before returning to the oven for about 20 minutes.

Tarragon chicken

Video: <https://youtu.be/vmNpKI-h0PQ>

A simple dish that can also have different variations: use different herbs; replace the wine and lemon with tinned tomatoes; throw in some courgettes, mushrooms, olives etc.

- 3 onions peeled and diced
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 knob butter
- 7 or 8 (1kg) chicken thighs, skinned
- 1 large glass dry white wine
- 1 lemon, zest and juice.
- 2 chicken stock cubes
- 1 tablespoon fresh French tarragon leaves, chopped
- 3 heaped teaspoons cornflour
- salt and pepper to taste.

Sauté the onions and garlic in the oil and butter until soft.

Place the chicken thighs in the pan and cover with the wine, a mug of water, add the lemon zest and juice, stock cubes, tarragon leaves, black pepper and bring to a very gentle simmer.

Cook for 1-two hours on the smallest gas ring, on a heat diffuser, on the lowest setting on an electric ring or in the oven on a very low temperature. The thickest part of the chicken should reach 70-75C.

Remove the chicken thighs to a serving dish and keep warm.

Slake the cornflour with a little water and whisk into the juices in the pan and keep stirring overheat until thickened. Adjust the seasoning to taste.

My tips:

Accompanied by some green vegetables and rice or potato, each thigh will serve a guest. The thighs in their sauce also freeze well to make dishes for the future when you want

something without slogging in the kitchen. Just de-frost in the fridge overnight and then heat in the microwave on a low/medium power.

Dried tarragon will also work well but use about a heaped teaspoonful.

Soda bread.

Video: <https://youtu.be/d2OfawOg-uk>

This is an excellent warm fresh crusty bread to serve with any meal - try with a homemade soup.

250g self-raising flour (or plain or all-purpose flour and 2 teaspoons baking powder or bicarbonate of soda).

200g plain natural yoghurt.

1 level teaspoon salt.

Pre-heat the oven to 200C, Gas 6, 400F.

Line a baking tray with parchment paper and spray with a little oil.

Mix all the ingredients together to form a dough ball.

Place the dough on the tray and cut a cross on the top.

Cook for 25 minutes then turn the bread over and cook for a further 5 minutes so that the centre reaches over 90C.

My Tips:

I've found self-raising brown wholemeal flour that works well.

Add a handful each of sunflower and pumpkin seeds.

Try adding a handful of a mix of dried tomatoes, chopped thyme and rosemary, garlic and black olives.

Eat the same day or slice and store in a plastic bag for toasting for tomorrow's breakfast.

Fruit crumble.

Video: <https://youtu.be/KLoqXRAN1QA>

One of my favourite stand-bys and this video includes Gary, a blind neighbour.

230g butter (one pack).

230g soft brown sugar (or honey).

230g hazelnuts, roughly chopped.

460g porridge oats.

about 1 kg prepared weight cooking apples, peeled, cored and diced.

2 or 3 handfuls raisins, soaked in rum or whisky (optional).

Rub the butter into the oats in a large bowl.

Rub in the sugar or honey and the nuts.

Place a layer on top of the prepared fruit in an ovenproof dish.

Bake for about 40 minutes in a preheated oven at 180C, Gas 4, 355F.

Freeze any left-over crumble mix.

My Tips:

Whatever the weight of your pack of butter, use the same weight of sugar/honey and nuts plus double the weight of porridge oats.

Break up the mix when using from the freezer.

Add some tablespoons of mince meat to apples for a Christmas crumble.

This basic crumble mix will top whatever fruit is available: apples; pears; rhubarb and crystallised ginger etc. Try a fruit salad crumble: apples, pears, apricots, pineapple and banana pieces, a handful each of raisins or sultanas, crystallised ginger, a couple of star anise and some apple juice.

Lemon Victoria sponge.

Video: <https://youtu.be/AeHMSdVDLzU>

A classic cake that keeps moist with the extra lemon syrup.

2 lemons, zested and juiced.

1 tablespoon sugar.

3 eggs – weighed in their shells.

same weight butter.

same weight sugar.

same weight self-raising flour (or plain/all-purpose flour with a teaspoon of baking powder)

Place the lemon juice in a microwavable bowl with the tablespoon of sugar. Heat on medium power until the juice is warmed and stir the sugar to dissolve. Put aside to cool.

Place the butter and sugar in a bowl and whisk until light and fluffy.

Break in an egg with a teaspoonful of flour and whisk.

Repeat with the second and third eggs.

Mix the remaining flour and lemon zest and then fold into the mix in the bowl.

Spoon into a loose bottomed bun tin and cook at Gas 4, 180C or 355F for 20 minutes.

Remove tin from oven and prick buns with a toothpick. Spoon the lemon syrup over the buns and allow to cool.

My Tips:

I made small individual cakes but you could make larger cakes that will need longer to cook and reach at least 90C.

Try different variations with other flavours: vanilla bean extract; coffee; spices; orange and other fruits.

Cooking for the International Women's Group in Chongqing, China, I just threw in a handful or two of fresh raspberries. Video: <https://youtu.be/OH0jPBwpD1M>

Microwave ginger cake.

Video: <https://youtu.be/myfVZVzVfIU>

A cake or pudding for unexpected guests using the recipe given me to me by one of the Blind Veterans UK team.

145g milk.

115g butter.

85g syrup and treacle (about 2 tablespoons of each).

85g brown sugar.

115g self-raising flour.

1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda.

2 level tablespoons ground ginger.

1 teaspoon mixed spice.

pinch of salt.

2 eggs, beaten.

Gently heat the milk, butter, syrup, treacle and sugar until warm and the sugar has dissolved either in a pan or the microwave.

Mix all the dry ingredients in a bowl.

Add the heated ingredients and mix in (I used a hand whisk).

Add the eggs and mix well.

Pour into a microwave-proof ring container that has been lightly buttered and floured.

Cook on High Power for 9 minutes.

The cake should feel barely done: soft and spongy but it will get firmer as it rests and cools before turning out.

My Tips:

This cake doesn't keep long but makes a delicious pudding with custard, cream and/or stewed pears.

I used a silicone ring mould that worked perfectly.

Party canapes and nibbles.

Many of the previous recipes can be turned into smaller versions as finger food for a buffet or party:

Cocktail pork pies.

Savoury tartlets.

Soda bread pieces spread with pate or a fish mousse.

Mince pies and sausage rolls - unedited video:

<https://youtu.be/LYGHcAUkbPk>

Your aim is to offer a selection of flavours, textures and shapes. I suggest a simple hummus with vegetable crudites adds new freshness while the pepitas have savoury crunch.

Hummus.

Video: <https://youtu.be/C5r0EtbDPlw>

1 400g tin cooked chickpeas, drained and water reserved.

1-2 cloves of garlic, peeled.

1 lemon, juice and zest.

45g tahini.

2 tablespoons olive oil.

1 tablespoon parsley (or mint).

salt and pepper.

Place all the ingredients in a food processor and pulse.

Adjust the texture to suit you: completely smooth or with some chunkier pieces. Add a little of the reserved liquid from the tin to make runnier and smoother.

Adjust the flavour to taste: more lemon, garlic, herbs, salt and pepper to suit you.

My Tips:

Tahini is ground sesame seeds and can separate a little in the jar. Gently stir with a spoon to re-combine the oil into the paste.

Garnish with black olives and lemon wedges.

Serve with sticks of carrot, pepper and celery, florets of cauliflower and broccoli to give colour and crunch.

Try with pitta bread - you can make your own using a basic bread dough:

Video: <https://youtu.be/d5PQ-TDYav0>

Pepitas.

I learned this simple snack from fellow blind cook, Maribel, in Melbourne.

a couple of handfuls of pumpkin seeds.

a couple of slugs of dark soy sauce (preferably sweet).

In a dry pan, heat the seeds until they are popping.

Add the soy sauce and continue heating and stir until all the seeds are coated and the liquid has evaporated.

Remove from the pan and allow to cool. The seeds may need separating as the soy sauce can stick them together.

Delicious gifts.

My Baking Blind adventure started one Christmas when I was making about 50 mini-Christmas cakes as part of annual hampers for friends and family. I often also include crystallised Seville orange peel, jars of Christmas mincemeat, marmalade, chutneys, damson gin and more. Even if time is too tight this year, you could plan for next.

Ginger biscuits.

Video: https://youtu.be/4lkmaV_8Yx0

A perfect last-minute present.

50g butter.

50g sugar (white or soft brown).

50g golden syrup or honey.

100g self-raising flour.

1 heaped teaspoon ground ginger.

Heat the oven to 180C, Gas 4, 350F.

Melt the butter, sugar and syrup in a pan, stir until the sugar has dissolved. Allow to cool.

Put the flour and ginger in a bowl then add the melted butter and sugar mix.

Use a scraper to clean the pan and start mixing the dough.

Finish mixing the dough with your hands and roll about 10 small balls.

Line a baking tin with baking parchment and place the balls on it about two fingers apart, pressing down a little to flatten the bases of the balls.

Cook for 15 minutes. The biscuits should feel firm to touch and will crisp more as they cool.

My tips:

If you want a milder flavour, just add half the ginger at the start and then add more to taste.

Other variations include: small pieces of crystallised ginger in the centre of each ball; ground coffee and walnut pieces; mixed spice and raisins.

Shortbread.

Video: <https://youtu.be/oaKxOGEXldI>

Co-cook Karen shared this classic recipe, insisting on both metric and Imperial measures.

250g butter.

4 ounces caster sugar.

300g plain flour.

Pre-heat the oven to 180c, Gas 4, 355F.

Cream the butter with a wooden spoon until soft.

Add caster sugar and beat until pale and fluffy.

Stir in flour until the mixture binds together.

Knead lightly to form a smooth dough.

Lightly butter a loose-bottomed bun tin (or baking sheet).

Press portions into the bases of the bun tin (or press out the shortbread and cut into circles or triangles and place on baking sheet). Prick each biscuit several times with a fork.

Bake for 12-15 minutes for individual biscuits.

They will look pale gold and feel softly firm to touch.

Cool and finish as you wish.

My Tips:

Try these variations to finish the biscuits:

1. Simply dredge with caster sugar and wrap for gifts.
2. Top with a generous layer of caramel (tin of caramelised condensed milk) and a layer of melted chocolate for Millionaire's shortbread. Chill.
3. Slices of strawberry marinated in a dash of Cointreau plus the juice of an orange with its zest (or use good strawberry jam), top with a layer of double or clotted cream. Chill.

Happy Christmas and, if you make all of these recipes, the New Year will need more exercise and less chocolate. Bah, Humbug!