

CHEFS' SECRET INGREDIENTS

Eight top chefs choose their must-have foods, drinks and spices to turn Christmas lunch into a gourmet feast

BY AMY BROOMFIELD



BRUNO LOUBET

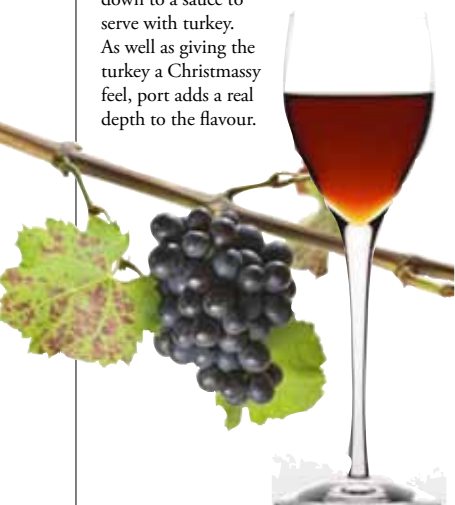
Head Chef, *Bistro Bruno Loubet*



The one ingredient that no chef should be without at Christmas is a bottle of port. Conventionally, port is the perfect accompaniment to cheese at the end of

a meal – especially Stilton – or it can be served as an aperitif when your guests arrive. A clever trick is to reduce the port down to a sauce to serve with turkey.

As well as giving the turkey a Christmassy feel, port adds a real depth to the flavour.



ANDY NEEDHAM

Head Chef, *Zafferano*



Christmas means so many different things to the world's many cultures. I feel that preparing food and spending time with family is a perfect way of showing and

receiving the Christmas spirit.

For me, there is nothing more Christmassy than roast chestnuts; their aroma evokes memories of Christmases past. Their taste of flame-toasted sweetness is one we only really experience during this festive period. However by incorporating them into the main meal, we can capture some of those fond memories. Preparing them from scratch is a lengthy process but fortunately you can buy them ready peeled and cooked. Mix them with cranberries to make a stuffing or add a few to buttered Brussels sprouts for extra sweetness and texture. You can also find them in syrup for use in desserts, perhaps in poached winter fruits served with lightly whipped cream.



TOM AIKENS

Chef & Restaurateur



My luxury ingredient for Christmas is saffron. You can use the spice in lots of recipes, from savoury to sweet.

Make a simple dressing by warming a little olive oil with saffron to release the spice's flavour, then add more oil and lemon juice. This mixture can be used to marinate fish before baking it, or in a lovely risotto accompanied with smoked salmon, chives and saffron. Saffron is also great with a Israeli couscous, served with some chopped dried apricots, toasted flaked almonds and coriander, as an accompaniment for baked cod or lamb rump. For sweets, use the spice to create a delicious saffron, almond and pistachio ice cream, or a saffron and white chocolate mousse.



MICHEL ROUX JUNIOR

Chef Patron, *Le Gavroche*



The addition of truffle would turn any Christmas meal into a gourmet dining experience. Truffles are in season over the festive period and are one of my favourite ingredients. They are so versatile – you can grate them over practically anything that takes your fancy. If you use the very best – I personally like black Périgord truffle – you will only need to add a touch.

You could, for example,

add a few shavings of truffle to a simple salad, which will instantly transform the dish into something much more exuberant and indulgent. Alternatively, for a very decadent cheese course, you could grate truffle over a beautiful slice of Brie. The family are sure to be impressed.



VALENTINE WARNER

Chef & TV presenter



Turkey has never been a welcome guest in the Warner household as I have always found them dry to some degree and I don't care for the flavour. No, we Warners are "goosers" year after year and, despite ideas of forays into chicken or pork, we just can't break with tradition. Apart from the obvious connotations, Christmas Day is also a celebration of our year-long wait for this bird.

Oh the taste! That delicious dark, fullsome, rich meat and crispy skin that leaves one with a smile and a greasy chin.

Be careful though when you are ordering your bird, as I would advise choosing a goose bigger than the one you think you need, as although they self-baste well the fat takes up a lot of the weight.

Goose is left-over heaven; the carcass makes a rich soup, the meat is great for a making a delicious variation on Coronation Chicken, and the fat is excellent for future roasts.



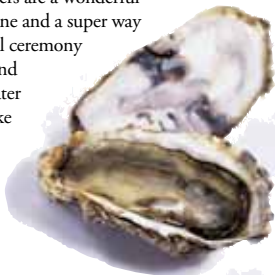
CHRIS GALVIN

Chef Patron, *Galvin Restaurants*



A great way to make Christmas more luxurious is to buy a box of Maldon rock oysters. British native oysters are probably the best in the world, and many of our French staff buy a case to take home to France. Oysters are a wonderful accompaniment to Champagne and a super way to start off lunch. There is real ceremony involved in opening oysters and sharing them with friends. Later in the day, there is nothing like

Angels on Horseback, where you roll the oysters in Pancetta and enjoy them as a mid-evening treat with a glass of chilled, flinty Chablis Premier Cru. Or for the perfect Christmas supper, serve Angels on Horseback with a plate of scrambled egg and Irish wild smoked salmon.



THOMAS KELLER

Chef Patron, *The French Laundry*



During the holidays, there is no better way to capture the spirit than with Champagne. No other beverage denotes true luxury and generosity. Champagne elevates any gathering into a special occasion and creates such a sense of celebration. Whether

it is poured at the table, or given as gift to the host or hostess, it is always welcomed with anticipation and given a place of honour.



PAUL KITCHING

Head Chef, 21212



The one ingredient that I would use to make a traditional Christmas dinner into a gourmet one is fresh dates.

Harrods Food Hall has the best, smooth, fresh dates I have ever tasted – they are the biggest, juiciest and ripest dates

and perfect to complement so many dishes during the festive season and Christmas dinner itself.

Dates are quite filling and I would suggest using them as the main aspect of the dish. We cook with dates a lot in the restaurant, especially during the festive season. I would suggest rolling them in curry powder and olive oil to start as an *amuse-bouche*, followed by Egyptian beef or Moroccan trout with dates for a starter. They can also complete the traditional main course of turkey so well – rolled in olive oil and saffron, and cooked under the grill.

The obvious choice is

to add them to your Christmas pudding, but I also love them dipped in chocolate as a petit fours – a delicious way to round off Christmas dinner.



Available from Food Halls, Ground Floor