

**Master Gardener Series
A MEXICAN CHRISTMAS
December 2008**



- 7 Pearl Harbor Day**
- 12 Poinsettia Day**
- 21 Winter Solstice (shortest day of the year)**
- 22 Chanukah lasts 8 days**
- 25 Christmas**
- 26 Boxing Day**
- 26 Kwanzaa**
- 27 National Fruitcake Day**
- 31 New Year's Eve**



In Mexico, Christmas festivities begin on December 16 with Las Posadas. Children gather every afternoon for 9 days to reenact Mary and Joseph's travels and attempts to find lodging for Jesus birth. The reenactment consists of a parade including angels and the wise men, and ends with a traditional litany that is sung, whereby the holy family requests shelter for the night.

Holiday festivities culminate on Noche Buena, or Christmas Eve. Traditional evening mass, called a rooster's mass, is attended, and followed by a simple meal of tamales and atole or other regional dishes. Well to do families will have turkey and other rich foods. Sometimes children will

have a piñata to open, and sparklers to light, but toys are reserved for Three Kings Day, or Reyes Magos, which is always on January 6.

LOS REYES MAGOS - The Christmas season continues unabated in Mexico through Epiphany, which is called Día de los Reyes (Three Kings Day). Echoing the arrival in Bethlehem of Wise Men bearing gifts for the baby Jesus, children throughout Mexico anxiously await waking up January 6 to find toys and gifts left by the Reyes Magos (Magi). In some regions it is customary to leave out shoes where treasures may be deposited by the visiting Wise Men.

A special treat served on this day is the Rosca de Reyes--a crown-shaped sweet bread decorated with jewel-like candied fruits. Tiny figures of babies are hidden in the dough before baking. There is much excitement as each partaker cuts his or her own slice, for whoever gets a piece containing a baby is obliged to host another party on or before Candlemas, February 2, when Mexico's holiday season finally comes to an end.

LA FLOR DE NOCHE BUENA



Its Latin name is Euphorbia Pulcherrima. Its Mexican monikers include the ancient r), along with Catarina (Catherine), Flor de Pastor (Shepherd's Flower) and, most

commonly, Flor de Noche Buena (Christmas Eve Flower).

In the English-speaking world, this illustrious holiday bloom is called the Poinsettia, named after Dr. Joel R. Poinsett, a U.S. diplomat who served as Minister to Mexico in the 1820's. Like many newcomers to Mexico, he was no doubt enthralled by the sight of the gargantuan shrubs covered in mid-winter with brilliant vermillion blossoms. After experimenting with various methods of propagation, he returned home to Charleston, South Carolina with enough cuttings to begin the cultivation of these stunning plants in northern climes.

The bright petals of the poinsettia are not really flowers, but bracts or leaves that surround the true blossom, a rather inconspicuous cluster of yellow florets. The bracts may be solid creamy white, salmon pink or scarlet, variegated or double blooms.

Among pre-Hispanic tribes of ancient Mexico, the Cuitlaxochitl was more than just a pretty face. The blood-red bracts were often placed on the chests of those suffering afflictions of the heart to help stimulate circulation. They were sometimes crushed to a pulp to be used as a poultice for the treatment of skin infections.

http://www.mexconnect.com/mex/_christmas.html

See the December 2008 issue of the Morgan County Master Gardener Newsletter for more information about the Poinsettia.

TURKEY DE LOS PASTORCITOS

1 turkey of 6 or 7 kilos
4 big onions
2 cups lemon juice
1 cup water
salt and pepper

Wash and dry the turkey. Sprinkle with salt inside and out. Place it on a deep oven tray. Blend the onion with the lemon juice and water, baste the turkey with the blend. Let it rest for 3 hours.

Bake at 220 Celsius degrees from 6 to 7 hours spraying it every 20 minutes with cold water and when it starts getting brown, baste it with its own juice. It must be brown and with little liquid.

Take it out of the oven, place it on a big tray and serve it with apple sauce.

CAPIROTADA DE NAVIDAD

4 sliced bolillos (Mexican rolls)
2 brown sugar cones
½ cup peeled peanuts
½ cup raisins
1 cup añejo cheese diced
1 cinnamon stick
1 spoon color sprinkles
frying oil

Boil the brown sugar with cinnamon in 2 cups of water to make syrup. Fry the slices of bread in oil and remove the grease excess placing them on a paper napkin. Put one layer of bread slices in a pot, cover it with raisins, peanuts and pieces of cheese. Then put another layer of bread, raisins, peanuts, etc. Pour syrup on it. Put the pot in a double boiler for half an hour to soften the bread. Decorate with color sprinkles.

CHRISTMAS CAKE

2 ¼ cups wheat flour, sifted three times
4 cups pecans in halves
4 cups pitted dates
¾ cup brown sugar
4 fresh eggs
3 spoons baking powder
2 spoons powdered clove

Put on heat 2 cups of water and clove to make a syrup. Beat the yolks until they get foamy, add the sifted flour with the baking powder. Always beating. Also add the syrup (cold), dates, pecans and beaten egg whites.

Mix everything and pour the mix in a poundcake dish previously greased with butter and covered with wax paper. Put it in the oven at 300 Celsius degrees and cook it for half an hour. Stick a straw or tooth-pick in it and if it comes out dry and the bread is lightly brown, take it out of the oven. Turn it over and remove the paper carefully. Make a light syrup with ½ cup of sugar and a little water. Take it away from the heat and let it cool. When it is warm, add 2 shots of cognac or brandy. Prick the bread with a tooth-pick, which by that time must be almost cold.

MEXICAN WEDDING CAKES



1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
2 cups powdered sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 cups all purpose flour
1 cup pecans, toasted, coarsely ground

1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Using electric mixer, beat butter in large bowl until light and fluffy. Add 1/2 cup powdered sugar and vanilla; beat until well blended. Beat in flour, then pecans. Divide dough in half; form each half into ball. Wrap separately in plastic; chill until cold, about 30 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Whisk remaining 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar and cinnamon in pie dish to blend. Set cinnamon sugar aside. Working with half of chilled dough, roll dough by 2 teaspoonfuls between palms into balls. Arrange balls on heavy large baking sheet, spacing 1/2 inch apart. Bake cookies until golden brown on bottom and just pale golden on top, about 18 minutes. Cool cookies 5 minutes on baking sheet. Gently toss warm cookies in cinnamon sugar to coat completely. Transfer coated cookies to rack and cool completely. Repeat procedure with remaining half of dough. (Cookies can be prepared 2 days ahead. Store airtight at room temperature; reserve remaining cinnamon sugar.) Sift remaining cinnamon sugar over cookies and serve.

Mexican Wedding Cakes:

<http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/photo/Mexican-Wedding-Cakes-108073>

Other recipes were copied from:

<http://www.uv.mx/popularte/flash/scrip.php?sid=241&len=1n>