

Master Gardener Series December 2008



A fruitcake is a geological homemade cake. Charles Dickens

- 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 England by the end of the 18th century there were laws restricting the use of plum cake (plum being the generic word for dried fruit at the time) to Christmas, Easter, weddings, christenings, and funerals because the cakes were 'sinfully rich.'
http://www.ingestandimbibe.com/Articles_p/fruitcake_p.html

TWELFTH NIGHT CAKE - At Christmas, the plum pudding or cake was called a Twelfth Night Cake. Twelfth night is the 5th of January, and has been for centuries the traditional last day of the Christmas season. It was a time for having a great feast, and the cake was an essential part of the

festivities. This was slightly different in different countries and in different social levels.

In the GREAT HOUSES a dried Bean and a Pea were baked into the cake, one on the left side of the cake and one on the right. The cake was decorated with sugar, like our icing, but not as dense. As the visitors arrived, they were given a piece of the cake, ladies from the left side, gentlemen from the right side. Whoever got the bean became King of the Revels for the night. The lady was his Queen for the evening.

In smaller homes, the cake was a simple fruitcake, with a bean in it, which was given to guests during the twelve days of Christmas. Whoever got the bean was supposed to be a kind of guardian angel for that family for the year, so it was an important task, and usually, it was arranged that a senior member of the family would get the bean!

In Britain, the cake was served as part of the refreshments offered to the priest and his entourage who would visit on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6th, to bless each house in the parish. This custom died out after the Reformation in the late 16th century.
<http://www.christmasarchives.com/christmascake.html#intury>

PLUM TREES

Some gardeners recommend whacking a non-fruiting tree with a hoe or axe. We are supposed to remind the tree that it may be cut down for fire wood or building wood if it does not produce fruit.



Prunus domestica - A Plum, plum

Here is what the Royal Horticultural Society has to say about the care of Plum Trees.

"Early summer is the best time to prune plum trees to avoid infection by silver leaf disease. Growing them as a fan or a pyramid is useful where space is limited.

Minimizing disease risk

Although plum trees are getting ready to crop in early summer, it is important to prune them at this time instead of during the dormant season. Pruning cuts expose the plant to the risk of infection by silver leaf disease; most of the spores of this fungal pathogen are released during wet and cool winter weather. Pruning in summer, when there are not so many spores around, minimizes the risk of the disease entering through the pruning cuts. To further reduce the risk, treat each cut with proprietary wound paint and disinfect pruning tools between trees.

Plum trees

Pruning of plum trees does not need to be as frequent nor as precise as for apples and pears. It can usually be

limited to removing crossing, weak, vertical and diseased material. Thin the tree out further, if it still appears crowded, by removing three or four branches back to a natural fork. Thinning of branches on old, neglected plum trees should be staged over several years. Aim for a well-balanced tree with an open centre. Trees respond to larger pruning cuts by sending up a mass of new shoots. Where this happens, the shoots will need to be thinned in the summer to leave just one or two.

Fan-trained and pyramid plums

When pruning an established fan-trained plum remove any dead, diseased or damaged shoots and, if necessary, some of the older wood if there is a strong young shoot lower down to tie in to fill in gaps in the fan shape.

http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0605/plum_pruning.asp

Wiki-how adds the following warnings:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Prune-Plum-Trees>

- Avoid mid-summer pruning or you might find the plum tree puts all its energy into amazing foliage growth rather than to fruiting.
- Never prune in the winter; the cold and/or damp weather increases the chances of silver leaf disease.

- Dispose of all cuttings to avoid transfer of disease.

Obtain more information about Plum Trees from Purdue University

<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/BP/BP-45-W.pdf>

PLUM PUDDING -A VERY OLD RECIPE

1 cup sugar
 1 cup butter, room temperature
 1 cup milk*
 2 eggs, beaten
 2/3 cup molasses
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 3 teaspoons baking powder
 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour plus 2 tablespoons
 1 1/2 cups raisins, finely chopped
 1 cup dates, chopped
 1/2 cup nuts, chopped
 3 tablespoons candied orange or lemon citron, finely chopped
 1 1/2 cups chopped apples
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 Boiling Water
 Nutmeg Sauce

* 1/2 cup fruit juice and 1/2 cup brandy may be substituted for the milk if desired. Grease two 2-pound coffee cans, two 2-quart pudding molds, or two 2-quart oven-proof deep dishes.

In a large bowl, combine sugar, butter, milk, eggs, molasses, salt, baking soda, baking powder, and flour; add raisins, dates, nuts, candied orange or lemon citron, apples, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg.

Fill each greased pan 1/2 full of batter. Cover tops of pans with lids or 2 layers of aluminum foil. In a large pot or roaster, place molds on trivets or a rack and add boiling water 2/3 up the side of the mold; bring rapidly to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover pot or roaster, and boil gently 4 to 4 1/2 hours (add more boiling water as necessary) or until fork comes out clean when put into center of pudding. Remove from heat and cool. Store in refrigerator, covered, until time to serve. NOTE: These also freeze well.

To serve, steam for 1 hour before serving to heat thoroughly. Unmold and serve hot with Nutmeg Sauce.

Yields two puddings.

Nutmeg Sauce

2/3 cup sugar*
 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
 1/8 teaspoon salt
 1 cup boiling water
 1 tablespoon butter
 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
 In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, combine sugar, cornstarch and salt. Add boiling water and cook, stirring constantly, 3 minutes until ingredients are well blended.