

# The Yule log: Festive dessert

No custom is more evocative of the spirit of the Christmas season than the Yule log. Burning brightly in the hearth, it traditionally signifies the triumph of warmth and light over winter's cold and darkness.

And, because each Yule log is kindled with a piece of the log from the year before, it is an essential part of the continuum, whose part in holiday ritual dates back to pre-Christian times.

Borrowing a bit from the Roman sacred hearth fires—tributes to each household's ancestral spirits, its particular gods—as well as from Druidic lore, which located its gods, vegetation spirits, within trees, particularly oaks, the Yule log provided a focal point for Christmas celebrations in many countries for centuries, until falling into virtual disuse in modern times.

Today, we remember the Yule log chiefly through the French dessert, *Bûche de Noël*, a rich jelly roll cake filled with chocolate cream and covered with a dark chocolate glaze whose surface is manipulated to mimic bark.

Traditionally served at *Reveillon*, the late supper which is eaten after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, the *Bûche de Noël* would in fact be appropriate fare for any Christmastime revel.

A bit complex to prepare, it is equally rewarding for the dedicated cook—not to mention the lucky people who get to share the fruits of the cook's labors!

An excellent recipe for *Bûche de Noël* is Jacques Pepin's for Chocolate Yule Log with Mint Leaves. It's reproduced below, reprinted from Volume 2 of Pepin's *The Art of Cooking* (Alfred A. Knopf), a seminal work which is meant for the novice as well as the more experienced cook, setting out classic recipes in a format that alternates text and photographs to facilitate learning.

## CHOCOLATE YULE LOG WITH MINT LEAVES

Yield: 10-12 servings  
Jelly Roll Cake

- 8 eggs, separated
- 1/2 c. granulated sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 c. flour

### Chocolate Pastry Cream Filling

- 3 egg yolks
- 1/2 c. granulated sugar
- 2 Tb. cornstarch
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1/2 c. milk
- 5 oz. bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate, broken into pieces

### Rum-Chocolate Ganache or Glaze

- 4 oz. (1/2 c. melted) bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate
- 1/2 c. heavy cream
- 1 Tb. dark rum

### Chocolate Bark with Leaves

- 12 to 15 mint leaves + extra larger leaves for imprint

### Decorations

- Confectioners' sugar for dusting cake
- Autumn leaves or holly

1 To make the jelly roll cake: Beat the 8 egg yolks, 1/2 c. sugar, and 1 tsp. vanilla together for about 1 minute, until very fluffy and smooth. Then add the 1/2 c. flour and mix well with a whisk until smooth.

Beat the 8 egg whites by hand or with an electric mixer until firm. Pour the egg yolk mixture on top of the whites.

2 Fold the yolks gently into the whites to retain most of the volume.

3 Butter a parchment paper-lined jelly roll pan 12x16 in. Spread the cake batter on the paper, making it of equal thickness all over.

4 Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for approximately 13 minutes. The cake will be puffy when removed from the oven. It will deflate and shrink slightly as it cools but will still remain quite soft and pliable.

5 For the chocolate pastry cream filling: Beat the 3 egg yolks, 1/2 c. sugar, 2 Tb. cornstarch, and 1 tsp. vanilla together with a whisk.

Meanwhile, bring the 1/2 c. milk to a boil. Pour the boiling milk into the egg yolk mixture, stirring, then return it to the saucepan. Bring to a boil, stirring with a whisk so the pastry cream doesn't stick and burn on the bottom. Boil for about 10 seconds. Remove from the heat. The mixture will be quite thick.

6 Add the chocolate pieces to the saucepan and stir gently with a whisk to

help melt the chocolate. After 5 minutes, stir again.

7 The mixture should be very smooth. Transfer to a bowl, cover and refrigerate.

8 Slide a spatula under the cooled cake and remove it to a board with the parchment paper underneath still intact. When the chocolate pastry cream is cold, spread it on the top of the cake—the part exposed in the oven—which has visible cracks.

9 Using the paper lining underneath, lift up the cake and begin to roll it on itself.

10 Keep rolling, still using the paper, until the jelly roll is rolled up tightly.

11 The pastry cream is now completely enclosed in the cake roll. Roll the cake up in the same parchment paper and refrigerate it for up to a day or so.

12 To finish the yule log, remove the paper and place the cake on a serving platter. Cut off both ends of the log at an angle. These pieces will be used to simulate stumps on the log.

To make the rum-chocolate ganache: Melt the 4 oz. bittersweet chocolate in a double boiler. Place the 1/2 c. cream and 1 Tb. rum in a bowl and, when the chocolate is melted, add it and beat with a whisk for 15 to 30 seconds, until the mixture lightens slightly in color and becomes about the consistency of a buttercream. Do not over-whisk because incorporating too much air will whiten the ganache and make it set too hard as it cools. If this should happen, re-melt slightly and beat again.

13 Using a spatula, coat the whole cake with a thin layer of the ganache.

14 Place the two end pieces of cake on top to simulate tree stumps.

15 Continue coating the cake and stumps with the ganache. When thoroughly coated, draw the lines of a fork through the soft ganache to create a bark design. Using the point of a knife, make circular designs on top of the stumps and at either end of the log to simulate the design on a tree. At this

point, the cake can be refrigerated. When cold, cover loosely with plastic wrap. It is usually served at this point.

16 For a more elaborate serving variation, chocolate bark can be added.

For the chocolate bark: Melt the 12 oz. bittersweet chocolate in a double boiler and pour a strip of it about the length of the cake onto parchment or wax paper.

17 With a narrow, flexible spatula, spread the chocolate to a thickness of about 1/4 in., smearing the chocolate out at intervals to make a jagged edge along the length on one side to simulate broken pieces of bark.

18 While the chocolate is still warm, press the mint leaves and larger leaves into the surface. The mint leaves will be left in the chocolate and the larger leaves removed at serving time.

19 Press another strip of parchment paper on top of the chocolate and turn the package over onto a tray so the side with the leaves is touching the tray. Refrigerate. Repeat to make a strip of chocolate bark for the other side of the cake.

20 When the chocolate bark has hardened, remove the layer of paper from the top. The chocolate should have curled up a little at each end, which at this point will help it fit the contour of the cake.

21 Cut through the chocolate and paper along the straighten side to trim it to a clean edge.

22 Place the chocolate (still attached to the paper), straight-edge down, alongside the cake, pressing it lightly against the cake. If the coating of the cake is still somewhat soft the bark strips will stick to it. (The bark can be made ahead and arranged around the cake before it is refrigerated.) The heat of your hand pressing against the paper may soften the chocolate slightly and make it adhere better to the cake. Peel off the paper.

23 Remove the larger leaves from both strips of the chocolate bark; they will have left leaf imprints in the chocolate, which was the desired effect.

24 Sprinkle a very light dusting of confectioners' sugar on the log to simulate snow.

25 Arrange fall leaves or holly around the cake, cut into slices, and serve.



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Santa's Workshop, The North Pole, HOH OHO

Dear Children,

Well the big day is almost here and I've never seen it so busy around the workshop. The elves are scampering everywhere trying to fill the last minute orders we've received. It's been busy for me, too. I've been in the Halton Hills area several times now and I don't think there's any other place I have more fun. (And I've been to a lot of places boys and girls. Ho! Ho! Ho!)

We're still not sure what the weather will be like for Christmas Eve, but Rudolph's nose is all polished up in case it's foggy, and we've got scarves for each of the reindeer in case it turns cold.

Mrs. Claus and I were a little concerned about Prancer last week. It seems he sneaked out with Dancer one night and they got into a little break dancing. Dancer can handle it, but Prancer's a little older and he's not the high-stepper he used to be.

But the whole team will be ready and the sleigh will be loaded when we take off from the North Pole this Christmas Eve.

Santa and Mrs. Claus hope everyone has a Merry, Merry Christmas.

Ho! Ho! Ho!

Lots of Love and Kisses, Santa

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Dear Santa Claus,  
How is Mrs. Santa Claus doing? How are your elves doing? This is what I want for Christmas, a Barbie car and a Cheer leader popple and now I wish for a puppy.  
Love, Holly Dickinson, Grade 2

Dear Santa,  
How are your Reindeer? I might like a Care Bear. I hope it is Tender Heart or Brave Heart. I hope that Julia will get some beads. Please come to our house. How is Mrs. Claus?  
Your friends, Cameron Sissett and Julia Sissett

Dear Santa,  
Mommy is helping me write this letter because I'm only 2 1/2 years old. First I want to say I'm sorry that I don't come and sit on your lap when I see you. But I'm scared of your beard. Mommy says I'm being silly, but I'm still scared. Maybe next year I won't be. This year I would like a Little Tikes frog to go with my stove, and also a measure tape just like Daddy's. I'm going to leave homemade cookies and milk on the fireplace for you, so don't forget to take them. I hope it doesn't snow Christmas Eve or Day, so you have a safe trip and so Daddy will be home for Christmas. Give Mrs. Claus a hug for me.  
I love you, Adrianna Burton

Dear Santa Claus,  
How are you, the reindeer and the elves? Are you all ready for Christmas? I am. If it's not too much trouble with you I would like a computer and electronic battleship. I wish that no one would ever get sick again.  
Love, Kendell, Grade 3

P.S. I'll leave you some milk and cookies and some carrots for the reindeer.

Dear Santa Claus,  
How are Rudolph and the other reindeers, Santa Claus? How are your elves? I would like a computer and a keyboard for Christmas. I wish there was no cancer. I'll leave you pop or Milk and I'll leave cookies and carrots for Santa Claus.  
Love, Markus, Grade 3

Dear Santa,  
How are you? My name is Jeffrey. I am 6 years old this year. For Christmas could you please bring me a GT Snowracer. Thank you.  
Jeffrey Godin

Dear Santa,  
I am looking forward to seeing you. How is Mrs. Claus? Are you going to phone? I would like a computer for Christmas and a typewriter. I wish that no one will get sick again.  
Love, Katie, Grade 3

Dear Santa Claus,  
How are you doing? I hope Mrs. Claus is doing good. If it is not any trouble I would like a Jill doll and a computer. I wish I could see you on Christmas. I hope it is no trouble. I hope you are having a good time at the North Pole. How old are you and Mrs. Claus? Do you have a new suit? Are your elves doing good and are they working good? Do you have a lot of elves? How long is your beard? I am going to go soon. But I will talk to you some more. My mom and dad put on your record some times. Well I have to go now. I will leave some milk and cookies for you and Rudolph.  
By Amy, Grade 3

Dear Santa Claus,  
What are you doing up at the North Pole? Are you cold up there? It's hardly snowing up here. Where ever Mrs. Claus is tell her that I said Greetings. How do you make your reindeer fly? I would like to have the Segs for Christmas. I wish I could see you.  
From Chad, Grade 3

Dear Santa,  
For Christmas could you please bring me a doll stroller? I have been a good girl this year. Here is a picture that I colored for you. Thank you.  
Shawna Godin, 4 years old

Dear Santa,  
I don't want to be greedy. All I want is a Nintendo and a hockey net. I wonder how your smart reindeer can carry you and your beautiful sleigh. And I'm very proud that your hard working little elves can get the toys done before Christmas eve. And I bet that night every year Mrs. Claus looked so pretty. I bet your sac is very heavy. Merry Christmas and have a good year.  
Love, Brian and Justin, Grade 3

Dear Santa Claus,  
How is Mrs. Claus doing and Rudolph? How many children wrote to you? I hope not much. How fat are you going to be this year? I hope you can come to my house. By the way, how are the Elves doing? Is it fun at the North Pole? I hope so. Is Rudolph's nose still glowing? What are your reindeer names? What are your Elves names? Do you have school in the North Pole? Do you have dogs up there? I would like a new pony and a fish. I wish I can see you.  
From Kristy, Grade 2

Dear Santa Claus,  
I bet you are working hard. How is Mrs. Claus? I want the Cobra Bug and Micro-Machines. I wish for the Sega.  
Christopher Martyniak, Grade 2

Dear Santa Claus,  
I am looking forward to seeing you. I hope you are feeling well. I love you ho ho hoes and your stomach that shakes like a bowl full of jelly. How is it down there at the North Pole? Oh, and I all most forgot. How is Mrs. Santa Claus doing, too? If it would not be too much trouble, I would like a computer. Just maybe a spellmaster. I hope you like the goodies. Oh, and the carrots are for Rudolph and the other reindeers.  
Love, Sarah Robson, Grade 3

Dear Santa,  
I hope you are having a good time. How is Mrs. Santa Claus? For Christmas I would like a watch and a computer. How are the elves? I wish for a watch. How are your rain deers? I will leave you some cookies and milk. I will leave 8 carrots. I hope you will bring me lots of toys.  
Love, Matthew Key, Grade 3

Dear Santa Claus,  
I hope you are feeling good to day. How is Rudolph? I would like some Nintendo games and micro-machines. I hope we get lots of snow in Georgetown.  
Love, Wesley Whitlam, Grade 3

Dear Santa Claus,  
How are you and Mrs. Claus and the Elves and the reindeer? Is it cold up there? Is there lots of snow up there? I will leave cookies and milk for you. And carrots for the reindeer. I would like Maxie and a chair for Christmas. I am sure that you would like those things too. I wish that I could live on a farm because I like animals and especially horses. I love you and Mrs. Claus. I hope that I will see you on Christmas.  
Love, Michelle, Grade 2

Dear Santa Claus,  
Merry Christmas Santa. How is Mrs. Claus? I would like lots of My Little Ponies. And I would like some Smooches. I wish I could have my own computer.  
Love, Amanda, Grade 3

Dear Santa,  
I hope you are having a good time. I wish I could see you. Are there lots of snow storms there? Are your elves almost finished making toys? I hope so. I would like to get a new video game. I will probably give you a present too. I know you are very small. Is Mrs. Santa alright? Is she sewing right now? How do you make your reindeers fly? Do you get presents all the time? How many elves do you have? I guess I'll never know. But I want to know.  
From Devin, Grade 3

Dear Santa Claus,  
I'm looking forward to seeing you and the Reindeer. How are the elves doing making all of the things? The two things I really, really, really would please like are a Lady Lovely Locks and a Dolly Surprise. I wish to have some more Sylvanian animals.  
Heather Sanderson, Grade 3

## Create your own Christmas stocking

Who hung the first Christmas stocking, and why? According to legend, the Christmas stocking dates back to the times of Bishop Nicholas. After hearing about the plight of a local nobleman with three daughters and no money for dowries, St. Nicholas secretly threw a bag of gold into the window as each girl became of marriageable age. One of the bags fell into a stocking hung near the chimney to dry. Thus, this gift giving tradition was born.

This Christmas, parents and children can make their own stockings from everyday materials such as felt, bits of ribbon and glue. To create a personalized stocking, follow these simple directions:

For each stocking, either purchase a stocking or cut one out from cloth or felt, and glue front to back with Elmer's Stix-All. Clamp with clothespins or paper clips until set.

Cut circles, triangles, rectangles, squares, ovals and other shapes from felt, and glue to stocking with Elmer's Tacky Glue to form figures. Glue pom poms, rhinestones and sparkles to add dimension and glitz.

An interesting stocking cuff can be formed by gluing eyelace and ribbon to stocking top. Also, a strip of contrasting fabric can be glued around top of stocking to form cuff.

