

Colorful and flavorful, sweets with candied fruit have seasonal flair

Studded with glistening bits of candied orange peel and glazed cherries, desserts like fruitcake and stollen are traditional Yuletide treats. Colorful and intensely flavored, their distinctive sweet, yet slightly bitter aroma and taste—a result of the candied fruits and peels that are added—are as much a part of the holiday season as the Christmas tree.

Often storebought, desserts made with candied fruits are ideal for the home baker, particularly around the hectic holiday season, because many of them can be prepared in advance, and actually improve—their flavors mellowing and blending neatly together—as they age.

Even if they've not been a part of your regular holiday dessert repertoire, they deserve consideration because of the festive air they impart, and because they bring to contemporary Christmas celebrations the flavor of the past, tradition at its most appealing.

The recipes below range from classic candied fruit recipes to ones that are more unusual. The simple, elegant Fruitcake, *Hedelmakakku*, is a Scandinavian variation, the recipe for which is reproduced from *The Great Scandinavian Baking Book* (Little, Brown) by Beatrice Ojakangas.

FRUITCAKE (Hedelmakakku)

Makes one 10-inch cake

- Vanilla wafer crumbs for coating pan
- 1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 5 eggs
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups golden raisins
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped candied orange peel
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped candied fruit-cake fruits
- 1/4 cup finely chopped blanched almonds

Butter a 10-inch fluted tube-cake mold and dust lightly with vanilla wafer crumbs. Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a large mixing bowl, cream the butter and sugar until blended; add the eggs and beat until light and fluffy.

Mix the flour, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, combine the raisins, orange peel, cake fruits, and almonds. Add 1 tablespoon of the flour mixture to the fruits and toss to coat each piece well.

Blend the flour into the creamed mixture, then add the raisin mixture, blending well. Turn into the prepared cake pan and smooth out the batter.

Bake for 50 to 60 minutes or until a wooden skewer inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool 5 minutes before removing from the pan.

Also reproduced from *The Great Scandinavian Baking Book* is the recipe for Danish Rocks, chewy drop cookies redolent with spices and filled with a myriad of good things—three kinds of nuts plus candied pineapple and cherries or raisins.

DANISH ROCKS (Rokkekager)

Makes about 8 dozen cookies

- 1 cup butter, room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups light or dark brown sugar, packed
- 3 eggs
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 cups mixed candied pineapple and cherries or raisins
- 2 pounds pitted dates, cut up
- 1 cup whole filberts
- 1 cup whole pecans
- 1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts

Cover baking sheets with parchment paper or lightly grease them. Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla and beat well. Combine the flour, salt, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. Add to the creamed mixture to make a smooth dough. Mix in the fruits and nuts. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto the prepared baking sheets about 2 inches apart. Bake 8 to 10 minutes until lightly browned. Remove from baking sheets and cool on racks. Store in an airtight tin. These cookies keep well.

The recipe for the yeasty, filled Fruited Braid, a dessert as decorative as it is delicious, is culled from *Trim a Treat: Edible Christmas Decorations* (Irena Chalmers Cookbooks), by Sylvia Schur.

FRUITED BRAID

Makes 1 long loaf

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

- 1 package active dry yeast or one cake (1/2 ounce) fresh yeast
 - 1 cup warm milk
 - 1/4 cup granulated sugar
 - 1/2 cup (1/2 pound) butter or margarine, melted
 - 2 teaspoons ground cardamom
 - 4 tablespoons very finely ground blanched almonds
 - 3 eggs, beaten
 - 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- Filling**
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
 - 1/2 cup apricot preserves
 - 1/2 cup sliced blanched almonds
 - 1/4 cup diced candied orange peel
 - 1/4 cup glazed cherries, halved
 - 1/4 cup yellow raisins, plumped in ho sherry or liquor
 - 1/4 cup quartered pitted prunes

Dissolve the yeast in the warm milk (105 degrees if fresh, about 120 degrees if dried) in a bowl. Add the sugar, butter, salt, cardamom and almonds; combine.

Set aside 2 tablespoons of the egg. Add the remaining egg and 2 cups of the flour to the yeast mixture; beat until smooth. Add the remaining flour gradually, beating until a soft, pliable dough has formed. Beat until the dough is smooth and not sticky.

Sprinkle the dough with a little flour; cover and let it rise in a warm place until it has doubled in volume (about 1 1/2 hours), or cover and refrigerate it to let it rise overnight.

When the dough has doubled in volume, punch it down, then turn it onto a lightly floured board; knead it until smooth.

Roll out the dough into a rectangular strip about 10 inches by 18 inches. Spread the melted butter, then the apricot preserves, over the rolled-out dough; sprinkle the nuts and fruits to within 1 inch of the long edge. Roll up the dough lengthwise.

Place the roll, seam down, on a greased 12-by-18-inch cookie sheet, setting it diagonally (to accommodate its length) and tucking the ends under. Make incisions with sharp scissors, about 1 inch apart, going almost—but not completely—through to the bottom. Pull the slices alternately left and right, then pinch the top outside of each slice to a point. Let the roll stand in a warm place for about 30 minutes to rise. Brush the top with the reserved beaten egg.

Bake at 350 degrees for about 25

minutes, until it is golden. Cool. Wrap the bread in transparent wrap on a base of foil-wrapped cardboard or wood.

Finally, from *Candies & Goodies* (Allen D. Bragdon Publishers, Inc.), a tiny jewel of a book filled with appealing recipes for a wide range of confections, come two candy recipes: Orange Poppy Seed Candies and Fruit and Nut Divinity.

ORANGE POPPY SEED CANDIES

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 3 cups honey
- 1 1/2 pounds poppy seeds
- 1 cup candied orange peel, diced
- 2 cups walnuts, finely chopped
- Confectioners sugar

In 2-quart saucepan cook honey and sugar over moderate heat until sugar dissolves. Add poppy seeds and boil until mixture reaches hard-crack stage (300°F), about 30 minutes. Add orange peel and nuts and stir until mixture boils. Turn out onto a large platter that has been moistened with cold water. Flatten with a spatula dipped in hot water. Sprinkle with confectioners sugar. Allow to cool 8 to 10 minutes. Cut into small squares.

FRUIT AND NUT DIVINITY


- 3 cups sugar

- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1 cup water
- 3 egg whites, beaten stiff
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts
- 1/4 cup candied fruit


In a 2-quart saucepan combine sugar, corn syrup, and water. Cook, stirring, until sugar dissolves. Then cook to hard-ball stage (260°F). Pour syrup in a thin stream into beaten egg whites, beating at medium speed until mixture begins to thicken. Add vanilla, candied

fruit, and nuts. Then beat with wooden spoon, lifting high to incorporate air until candy is very stiff. Pour into buttered square pan to cool. Cut into squares. Let dry until firm and wrap individually in waxed paper or store in a tightly covered tin.

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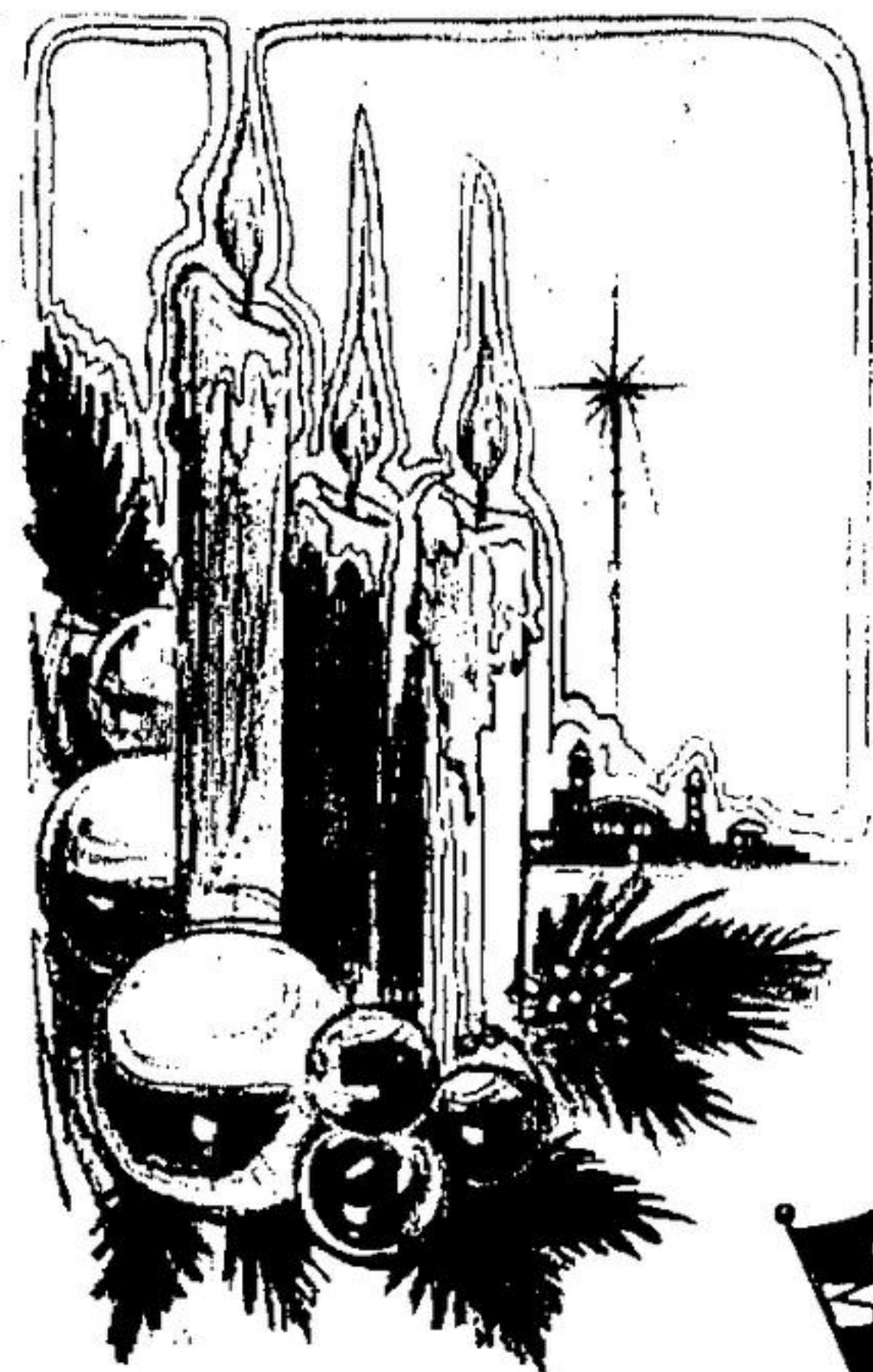
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