

# Diversions

## English trifle a piece of cake

BY ANDREW HIND  
Special

My favourite part of Christmas meal is the trifle served for dessert in my mom's heirloom bowl. I can live without the glazed cherries, but the rest is simply divine.

At the time, I'm always too busy gorging myself to think much about my food, but the so-called "traditional English trifle" we find today actually bears little resemblance to those of yesteryear.

The word trifle implies something small or insignificant. And yet, the modern trifle that has a place on the Christmas table — layers of cream and custard, cake and fruit — is anything but.

This isn't simply a product of typical English understatement. Rather, it's indicative of the evolving nature of this dessert.

First invented in the 16th century, trifle was originally a much lighter dish. In fact, it consisted of little more than sweetened cream, spiced with cinnamon and thickened by slow heating. During this period, it was served as part of an elaborate final course alongside fruit, jellies, nuts, sweet meats, cream cheese and syllabubs.

The latter has become inextricably linked with the trifle, so much so that they eventually came to be all but inseparable.

The earliest syllabubs were little more than bowls of cider or ale into which a cow was milked, forming a unique creamy dessert. By the 16th century, wine or sherry (or both) had replaced ale and cider in wealthy households and real cream took the place of milk. The mixture was whisked and then allowed to stand.

After a day or two, the cream had thickened and the liquid drained to the bottom of the bowl. People would eat away the top layers and then drink the wine sauce.

Syllabubs became increasingly popular in the 17th and 18th centuries, largely replacing trifle at the Christmas table. And yet, trifle did not disappear. Rather, it evolved, moving toward the more solid form we are familiar with today.

New ingredients were also added. Almonds, extremely popular in the 17th century, were added

in the shape of small macaroons. As jam became more widely available, thanks to the plentiful supply of sugar from the Caribbean cane fields, it, too, was included.

Finally, the creamy syllabub was added to the top of the concoction, creating for the first time a dessert we would recognize today.

In the 20th century, we've made a number of substitutes to the recipe, however. Custard powder replaces the rich mixture of eggs and cream that is the true custard sauce, sherry flavouring replaced the real deal, synthetic whip creams appeared on top and glazed cherries replaced fresh fruit.

While my mom's trifle may not resemble that which Queen Elizabeth I enjoyed back in the 16th century, I love it just the same.

Look for more recipes from our readers in this section.

### Authentic Custard

2 cups milk

1/2 teaspoon of pure vanilla

2 tbsp of sugar

4 egg yolks

Warm the milk and vanilla in a saucepan, then remove and cover, allowing it to stand for 10 minutes. Stir in the sugar. Whisk the egg yolks thoroughly and add to milk. Return to heat and allow it to cook slowly, stirring all the time until the custard is thick enough to coat a spoon. Add to trifle.

### Real Traditional Trifle

*This is actually based on a recipe found in one of England's earliest cookbooks, The Good Huswife's Handmaid, published in 1594. Modern ingredients have been substituted where required.*

2 tbsp of sugar

2-1/2 cups heavy cream

3/4 tsp ground ginger

1 tsp rosewater

Heat the cream over a very low flame, making sure not to let it come to a boil. Allow it to cool and then whip. As it thickens, slowly add sugar, rosewater and ginger. Serve with fruit.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Readers have answered our call for trifle recipes, submitting a variety of tasty desserts. This trifle was prepared by Newmarket's Audrie Sanderson.

## Try these tasty recipes

### Aileen Moreton's Trifle Recipe

*This recipe has been in our family dating back to when I lived in southern Ireland. It has now become a must at our Christmas table. It has also won two red ribbons at the Markham Fair.*

1 jelly roll

raspberry jam

slivered almonds

Birds Eye custard

whipping cream (1/2 pint)

sherry 1/4 cup (your best)

red maraschino cherries

Cut jelly roll into bite-size pieces. I spread extra jam on these pieces. Place a layer on the bottom of your best glass bowl. Sprinkle with some of your best sherry. Repeat this until all of the jelly roll has been used and make sure all pieces are covered with sherry. Make custard according to instructions on tin. When ready, pour over jelly roll and make sure it gets through to the bottom of the bowl. Cool and let set at room temperature. Before serving, sprinkle some almonds on top of custard and then the whipping cream. Dot with some red maraschino cherries. This trifle always tastes better served at room temperature. I think it's because you can taste the sherry. The more sherry you use, the better the trifle (so they say).

SANDY STRONACH  
STOUFFVILLE

### Old English Trifle

*This is my late mother's recipe for old English Trifle — I ate it for breakfast Christmas morning. She made it every Christmas without exception.*

1 large jelly roll — vanilla with raspberry or strawberry filling

1 large can of fancy fruit cocktail

1 strawberry Jello powder

Sherry — enough to soak the jelly roll — 3/4 cup

See page 18.



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