

DRAFT



## Christmas Ham – Serves 8-10

*This is a classic Christmas ham. The maple-spice mixture adds a nice sweetness to the smoky ham flavor and doesn't mask it. Don't bake the ham too long. It's already cooked, and all you really need to do is warm it. Also don't forget to let the ham stand for at least 15 minutes before trying to slice it. The standing time will help the ham juices stay in the ham and not flow out into the pan or onto your countertop when you slice it.*

*6-8 pound fully cooked, smoked, bone-in ham, preferably reduced sodium*

*½ cup of maple syrup*

*¼ cup of dark brown sugar*

*¼ cup of orange juice*

*½ teaspoon of cinnamon*

*¼ teaspoon of cloves*

*¼ teaspoon of allspice*

*1 tablespoon of grainy Dijon mustard*



*Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Place the ham, cut side down, in a shallow roasting pan coated with nonstick cooking spray (a cast iron skillet also works well). Add ½ cup of water to the pan, cover the ham loosely with aluminum foil, and bake the ham for an hour. Mix the remaining ingredients in a bowl and reserve ½ of the mixture. Brush the other half of the mixture over the ham and return the ham to the oven, uncovered, for 20 more minutes. Remove the ham from the oven, cover it loosely with foil, and let it stand for 15 minutes before slicing it. Heat the remaining maple syrup mixture until warm and drizzle it over the sliced ham or serve it on the side.*



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## Cinnamon Apples – Serves 6-8

*People will come back for more of this dish. It's an easy and old-fashioned accompaniment to any kind of pork. The apples also are fantastic served as a warm dessert with low-fat vanilla yogurt or ice cream. Toss in some dried cranberries if you like.*

*6 large apples*

*2 tablespoons of lemon juice*

*¼ cup of dark brown sugar*

*2 tablespoons of flour*

*1 teaspoon of cinnamon*

*¼ teaspoon of nutmeg*

*¼ teaspoon of cloves*

*2 tablespoons of melted Smart Balance (or butter)*

*Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Core and cut the apples into slices. Put them into a large casserole dish or 9 x 13-inch pan coated with non-stick cooking spray. Drizzle the apples with lemon juice. Sprinkle them with the brown sugar, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. Drizzle on the Smart Balance. Mix the ingredients in the pan a bit to distribute the flour, sugar, and spices among the apples. Cover the apples and bake them for 20 minutes until they start softening. Uncover the apples, stir them, and continue baking them until they are tender and their sauce has thickened, about 15 minutes. Serve the apples with ham, pork, or low-fat ice cream or yogurt.*





## Coconut-Pecan Sweet Potato Bake – Serves 8-12

*This simple sweet potato bake is great with holiday roasts and ham. The small amount of brown sugar combines with the pineapple and orange juices to bathe the potatoes in moisture, and the pineapple and coconut add a bit more sweetness and texture. The dish is easy to put together, and you can certainly make it early in the day (or the day before) and refrigerate it until you want to bake it. Just give the potatoes a little extra time in the oven.*

*½ cup of chopped pecans, divided*

*½ cup of shredded coconut*

*1 cup of canned pineapple chunks plus ¼ cup of the juice (reserve the remainder of the juice for another use)*

*1/3 cup of dark brown sugar*

*1 teaspoon of cinnamon*

*½ teaspoon of nutmeg*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*2 tablespoons of Smart Balance (or butter), melted*

*¼ cup of orange juice*

*1 teaspoon of grated orange zest*

*½ teaspoon of vanilla extract*

*6 medium or 4 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 inch chunks*

*Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Combine ¼ cup of the pecans and all the remaining ingredients in a 2-quart casserole or a 9 x 13-inch dish coated with nonstick cooking spray. Cover the dish with aluminum foil and bake the sweet potatoes for 45 minutes. Uncover them and sprinkle on the remaining ¼ cup of pecans. Bake the potatoes another 15 minutes or until they are soft and beginning to brown on top.*



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## Peas With Onions – Serves 6+

*You can't get much easier than these peas and onions for a side dish. The little onions are quite cute and dress up the peas. If you like your onions softer, cook them a few minutes before adding the peas. You don't want to cook the peas for long. They should be barely tender (not gray and mushy!). Choose a serving bowl or dish that you can microwave, and you'll have less cleanup.*

*1 16-ounce package of frozen small peas*

*½ 16-ounce package of frozen pearl onions*

*1 tablespoon of Smart Balance (or butter)*

*¼ teaspoon of salt (if you must)*

*3 tablespoons of water*

*Combine all the ingredients in a microwave safe bowl or casserole, cover the container with plastic wrap and microwave the vegetables for 5-6 minutes on high. Stir and microwave the peas and onions an additional minute or two if necessary or until the peas are just barely tender. Do not overcook them!*





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## Green Bean Casserole – Serves 6+

*No, this casserole doesn't qualify as "health food" with canned soup and French-fried onions involved. Nonetheless, this old standby is good, comforting, simple, and a holiday tradition. So make it and enjoy it as a special treat that you have rarely. And enjoy the crunchy onions on top!*

*1 16-ounce bag of frozen French-style green beans*

*1 can of reduced sodium condensed mushroom soup*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*½ cup of low-fat milk*

*2 cups of French fried onions*

*Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a 2-quart casserole or 11 x 8-inch dish with nonstick cooking spray. Cook the green beans as directed on the package but only until crisp tender. Stir in the soup, milk, pepper, and 1 cup of the French fried onions. Pour the mixture into the casserole dish and scatter the remaining French fried onions on top. Bake the casserole for about 30 minutes until bubbly and the onions on top are golden brown.*





# D R A E T Christmas Date Cake – Serves 15+

*Many variations of this cake have been passed down through the decades. This is the one I prefer. The cake is simple but incredibly good. Chopped dried dates provide plenty of sweetness and moisture, and chocolate chips, maraschino cherries, and crunchy pecans create a special topping. Serve the cake plain, perhaps dusted with a little confectioners' sugar. Or you could let some low-fat ice cream befriend squares of the cake. I do.*

*1 cup of chopped dried dates*

*1¼ cups of boiling water*

*1¾ teaspoons of baking soda (divided)*

*½ cup of canola oil*

*¾ cup of sugar*

*2 eggs*

*1 teaspoon of vanilla extract*

*1 cup of flour*

*½ cup of white whole-wheat flour*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*1 cup of chocolate chips (divided)*

*1 cup of chopped maraschino cherries*

*1 cup of chopped pecans*

*Confectioners' sugar (optional)*

*Mix the dates, boiling water, and 1 teaspoon of baking soda in a glass bowl. The mixture will foam a bit, but don't worry, it knows what it's doing. Let the mixture stand until it's lukewarm. Meanwhile preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a 9 x 13-inch pan with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, mix together the canola oil, sugar, eggs, and vanilla extract. Add the cooled date mixture and combine the ingredients thoroughly. Add the flours, salt, 1 teaspoon of baking soda, and ½ cup of chocolate*



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*chips, stirring them into the date mixture until everything is combined. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Sprinkle the top of the batter with the remaining chocolate chips, maraschino cherries, and chopped nuts, pressing them slightly into the batter. Bake the cake for 50-60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean or with just a few crumbs attached. Let the cake stand for 10 minutes before cutting it. Serve the cake warm or cool, dusted with confectioners' sugar, if you'd like.*





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## A “Dickens Christmas Dinner?”

Charles Dickens in his 1843 novella, “A Christmas Carol,” described the Christmas dinner eaten at the home of Bob Cratchit, the clerk of main character, Ebenezer Scrooge. The Cratchit family was poor, and their dinner was modest, even by 19th Century London standards. Nonetheless, the dinner was one that, cooked and shared by the loving and kind Cratchit family, was a “sufficient” feast. Even the special Christmas drink was, as Dickens wrote, “adequate,” a mixture with gin and lemons that the Cratchits drank from “the family display of glass. Two tumblers and a custard-cup without a handle. These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done.”

What did the Cratchit family eat for their Christmas dinner? They had, according to Dickens, roast goose with sage and onion stuffing, mashed potatoes, applesauce, a small (particularly for a large family, Dickens noted) Christmas pudding “blazing in brandy,” apples, oranges, and a “shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire.” And Tiny Tim offered the prayer, “God bless us everyone.” As Dickens wrote, “They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty...But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time...”

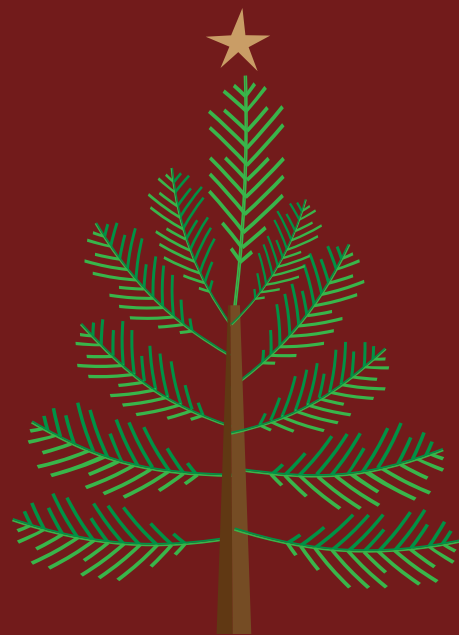
God bless you and yours and let your Christmas dinner, whether extensive or modest, be shared in an abundance of love.





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# PART II: Wait, There's More...



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# Joy

TO THE WORLD

## December 26

The news doesn't stop. War. Terrorism. Disease. Hunger. Racial and sectarian violence. Political oppression, bombast, and ineptitude. Lawlessness and injustice. Environmental degradation and industrial catastrophes. Fires. Floods. Homelessness. Mental illness. Cynicism. Alienation. Families torn apart. Loneliness.

Darkness and doubt exhaust our souls, magnify our fears, and erode our hopes.

And into this bitter world comes a child. What has God done?

*"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel,"  
which means, "God is with us."*

Matthew 1: 23

More than a decade ago now, I was driving my son to a December evening soccer practice—during rush hour and in the dark, of course. The northern Virginia road we needed to take was packed with cars alternately stopped and speeding to try to make the traffic lights. I was tired and grumpy. I had begun my day at 4:30 AM, rushed home from work, dropped my work things in the laundry room, and collected my son to drive him to yet another soccer practice that would delay dinner until 9:00 PM or later. As I interrogated my son about his day and tried to listen attentively and sympathetically while keeping up with the traffic, I noticed movement along the side of the road. It was hard to see what was there in the mixture of darkness and glare from vehicle headlights. Maybe nothing. Then I detected more movement and saw a large doe running along the shoulder of the road, beside the traffic. She dodged between several cars into the median separating our two lanes from those going in the opposite direction.

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