

Christmas 2009

Helping us to make a real feast of Christmas

IF there's one time when food shops really come into their own, it's Christmas. Christmas is a feast in the very real sense of the word.

It is a time when eating and drinking plays a very large part in the festivities. Anyone who doesn't end the day feeling more over-stuffed than the turkey, really hasn't been trying. So take a walk down your High Street and have a look at what's on offer this Christmas.

The butcher is a first call for the basic meats of the season. Butchers are knowledgeable people if only their customers would realise it. Whether you want a traditional turkey or goose, or a succulent joint of meat, you can rely on the advice your butcher gives you, to ensure a thumping good roast on Christmas Day. Mind you, that is only part of the picture. Butchers sell sausages, and sausage meat which you'll need to stuff the bird. Then there are their fragrant pies and pasties, delicious cooked meats, juicy hams, hocks and gammons, all well able to do justice to your Christmas table, and keep the gastric juices running well into the New Year.

Next there's the grocery shop that supplies all the things that keep your household running smoothly, the basic staples of life as it were. Such a shop will also carry a large range of some of the more exotic contents of your store cupboard, and Christmas isn't Christmas without many of the things they stock.

Look for the Continental jams now coming into the country from our neighbours. Did you know we have the largest range of biscuits made and on sale here in Britain to be found anywhere in the world? Don't be content with those, however, because most grocers also stock the traditional Continental biscuits and cakes, that add that extra spice to the Christmas table.

Grocers stock all the makings of that big, almost ceremonial breakfast, people usually have on the Great Day - bacon, butter, marmalade, rusks, crispbreads, and many, many more. There will certainly be a large delicatessen section too, where cooked meats, salads and cheeses of all sorts make for a staggering display.

Cheese is one of those timeless foods that appear on every table on every occasion in some guise or another. Great, 'bodiful' English cheeses, as classic as the countryside they come from, such



■ Selecting the best cuts of meat and quality ingredients play a big part in making festive food a real highlight of the season

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as Cheddar, Cheshire and Stilton, sit beside the smooth and subtle Continental cheeses made from the milk of every domesticated ruminant to be found on the farm.

For the cook, the grocer's shop is a cavern full of mouth-watering ingredients, exotic dried fruits, nuts, spices and flavourings, enough to make a banquet fit for a king, or two.

From the baker's shop come some of the most Christmassy delights imaginable - beautiful cakes, iced to perfection; Christmas puddings, spicy and full of dark, fragrant richness; mince pies made from pastry light-as-a-whisper and filled with sumptuous flavour as only traditional mincemeat can be.

Then there are the many dozens of different types of cakes, pies and puddings only bakers really know how to bake, as well as fabulously-rich gateaux in the Continental fashion.

Finally, we mustn't overlook, the staff of life - good, honest bread. Real British baker's bread can hardly be bettered anywhere, there is nothing like it. You only need to smell the fragrance of baking bread to know that nothing else in the whole world can make your taste



buds tingle.

Perhaps there's a dairy in your High Street? Milk and cream, yoghurt and curd, all await your pleasure. Semi-skimmed and fully-skimmed milks for those diet days, and full cream or Channel Island when you have to taste the luxury.

The dairy today carries an enormous stock of items. Butters of every sort and from all over the world, low fat and polyunsaturated fat spreads, creams for whipping, for cooking, for coffee or just for pouring.

You will find some new developments, too, like the delicate creamy cheeses that are as sweet as double cream and can be used in its place. A well-stocked dairy or creamery is hell for the diet, but heaven for those taste buds, and at Christmas, who cares anyway?

Greengrocers these days are truly gateways to the world. In them you will find almost every fruit and vegetable known to man. The colours, the scents, of a greengrocer's shop make it so very inviting. Whether you are buying juicy oranges from the Middle East, mangos from India, limes and lemons from the West Indies, grapes from South Africa, or vegetables

from East Anglia, you can be sure of getting them fresh. The miracle of air flight means fruit and vegetables from all over the world can be picked and on our tables the very next day. Of course Christmas dictates its own traditions in fruit and

vegetables. Has anyone ever dared forget the tangerines, or to serve Brussels sprouts with the roast?

Finally, we must never overlook the off-licence for those heady brews and distillations that for many people, cap the Christmas festival. Wines from everywhere, excellent vintages, or cheap and cheerful table wines; sherris from Spain, port from Portugal, Madeira from the islands in the sun, rich Burgundies, aromatic cognac, drinks from Europe, Asia, the Far East, Australia, Africa, North and



South America, are all to be found in a range of prices that ensure there is something for everyone on the shelves of your wine merchant.

And the best thing of all, as you end your walk in the High Street, is the realisation that, not only do your shops provide the widest selection you can expect to find anywhere in the world, you can be sure the quality and value for money is indisputable.

So go on, tickle your taste buds this Christmas, it really never has been easier.