



Taking the stress out of Christmas

I Make Christmas Day entertaining stress-free with these top tips from high profile chef Adam Gray ...

CHRISTMAS is a time of giving, sharing time with family and friends and reflecting on the year that has just passed.

I also love to contemplate what lies ahead for me in the forthcoming year.

As a chef, the run up to Christmas is the busiest time of the year. It seems that everyone wants to come out for lunch or dinner to celebrate the festive season with their work colleagues, friends or family and generally enjoy the Christmas spirit.

As you can imagine, by the time Christmas Day comes around I, and I'm sure the majority of all chefs in this land, have really had enough of preparing and cooking food.

Prepare and cook vegetables in advance and refresh them in ice cold water

I'm sure there are thousands of people everywhere that get totally stressed out by the daunting task of preparing and serving a full Christmas lunch or dinner to their families and friends.

The expectations of this once a year meal are so high that the pressure becomes immense, even for the more competent cooks.

Everybody seems to buy so much food and drink for Christmas just in case they fancy a little something they wouldn't normally eat.

I am convinced that most households will probably throw 30 per cent of their

Christmas food away due to the fact that they cannot actually consume it all.

I think that if you are organised and treat it like a military operation, the Christmas lunch or dinner experience can be as smooth and stress-free as you want it to be. There are many ways that this can possibly be achieved. The main one is preparation before service or, as we say in the industry, "mise-en-place".

This means you get as much of the preparation as you can done in advance without compromising the quality of your ingredients.

I would always prepare and cook my vegetables, sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, peas and so on in advance and then refresh them in ice cold water (to stop them cooking any further).

The vegetables can then either be reheated in a microwave or in boiling water, seasoned, buttered

and then served with the meat.

I would suggest removing the legs from a turkey and de-



boning them, ensuring there is no sinew left in the meat.

The stuffing would be made either with sausage meat, dried apricots, chestnuts and sage or a classic breadcrumb, sage and onion.

Fill the leg meat with the stuffing mix, roll the legs up and tie them with string. Brush the stuffed legs with butter and wrap them in foil, ensuring that both ends are folded tightly. The legs should be placed in the oven with the rest of the turkey from the start.

This should take less than half the time, so these can be removed and kept warm until they are needed.

The reason I go to this length is so that I can control the cooking for the remaining turkey crown (the two breasts left on the bone), and thereby ensure it remains succulent and moist.

If the legs remain on the bird you would have to cook it for longer,

and the turkey breast meat would inevitably become dry and flaky.

Now that the leg bones have been removed, I would suggest adding them with the giblets to make a good flavoursome stock, which, in turn, would make great turkey gravy. This could even be made a day in advance.

I would try and do as much as possible before the big day and I am sure you will have a relatively stress-free Christmas, although I can't speak for all the relatives who come to visit!

I know I've mentioned that by the time Christmas eventually arrives I've had enough of all the food and festivities, but I really do love sitting down to a beautifully-prepared, leisurely Christmas dinner with my wife and family, enjoying some good wine and having long, lengthy discussions about all sorts of varied topics.

Merry Christmas and Happy Stress-free Cooking!

■ Adam Gray, head chef, Rhodes Twenty Four. Visit www.adamgraychef.co.uk for more information and seasonal recipes.

