

QUICK CHRISTMAS HAM

Not everyone has a lot of time and energy to spend on Christmas, let alone Christmas dinner. And although I've done it a couple of times, I've never particularly been a fan of going out to a hotel dining room for Christmas dinner. But while I love the Christmas cooking and baking and planning my Christmas feast, there have been a few times when I had to come up with a quick and easy Christmas dinner for my family. Nowadays you can get a Christmas dinner to go at the supermarket that is not too bad, but I still prefer a home-cooked meal.

First of all, you need to pick a main dish that will be easy to do. For me, that means ham. If you can afford it, a Honeybaked ham from the Honeybaked Ham store is an excellent solution. They are tasty and are already spiral sliced so carving is a snap. The downside is that because the ham is already sliced, if you don't use it up for Christmas dinner, leftovers tend to dry out more quickly than an unsliced ham.

Even if you can't afford a Honeybaked ham, the meat section of your local supermarket has hams suitable for baking. A half ham weighs between 5 to 7 pounds and is cooked in little more than an hour. Fully cooked hams need only be warmed through, by bringing the internal temperature to 140 degrees. Partially cooked hams need to be fully cooked. And you can easily add a glaze towards the end for an attractive finish. I prefer bone-in hams as they stay moister and you can use the hambone to flavor a split pea soup.

Put the oven rack in the lower third of your oven and preheat your oven to 325 degrees. Place a fully or partially cooked ham or half bone-in ham in a shallow roasting pan and bake for 10 to 12 minutes per pound, until an instant-read thermometer reads 140 degrees for the fully cooked ham and 160 for the partially cooked ham.

If you're glazing the ham, remove the ham about 45 minutes before it will be done and score the top of the ham by making a grid pattern with the tip of a sharp knife, cutting about 1/16th of an inch deep. Brush the ham with the glaze and return to the oven to finish baking for another 45 minutes. Take it out, place on a warmed platter, cover with aluminum foil, let it stand for about 10 to 15 minutes and serve. Garnish the platter with some parsley and some spiced crabapples for color and you'll be fine.

One of the most common glazes is a simple brown sugar glaze. Mix ¾ cup of packed brown sugar with 2 teaspoons of dry mustard. Slowly mix in enough orange juice until the sugar is of a spreading consistency. I like a marmalade glaze. Simply heat ¾ of a cup of orange (or any other flavor) marmalade in a glass measuring dish in your microwave until easy to spread and spread it on the ham. And then there's the pineapple glaze. Stir together ½ cup of drained canned crushed pineapple with ¾ cup of packed brown sugar and ½ teaspoon of ground ginger and spread it on the ham.

Or you can bake the ham unglazed, and serve it with a Cumberland sauce to pass at the table. This is a little trouble but can be made several days ahead. You'll need an orange, a lemon, some port, powdered sugar, currant jelly, Dijon mustard, ground ginger and white pepper. Peel the zest of the orange and the lemon with a vegetable peeler in wide strips, trying to avoid as much of the white pith as you can. Drop the strips into a pan of boiling water and boil until soft, anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes. Drain, discard the water, slice the wide strips into thin strips, and return the strips to the pan. Add ½ cup red currant jelly, the juice of the lemon, 1 tablespoon of port, up to 1 tablespoon of powdered sugar if needed, 1 to 2 teaspoons of Dijon mustard, a pinch of ground ginger, and a little white pepper to taste.

Cook over the lowest heat, stirring constantly, until the jelly is melted. Don't let it scorch as there is a lot of sugar in this mixture. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk until smooth. The sauce will thicken as it cools, and if it gets too thick, just add a little more port. The sauce is served cold to pour over slices of ham.

Hoping your Christmas dinner is everything you want it to be, this is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.