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Try These Finnish Holiday Treats

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Try These Finnish

Holiday Treats

by Lea Juvonen
as told to
Marian Ismert

Miss Lea Juvonen has been a food specialist in Finland. After the war, she was in charge of the food for the Finnish lumber camps. Miss Juvonen has been at Iowa State since the fall of 1948 and expects to receive her master's degree in Institution Management. She will return to Finland early next summer.

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IT'S CHRISTMAS Eve and you're sitting on the floor gazing at the glistening tree, wondering what's in that candy striped or red-cellophaned package. You're home. That's what Christmas is—home, whether in the United States or Helsinki, Finland.

Let's pretend we're in Helsinki, spending Christmas Eve with my family.

The people of Helsinki have originated some of the classic crunchy pastries and flaky cookies that are your Christmas favorites. The Karjalan Piirakat, a filled pastry, is a must in my family's celebration dinner on Christmas eve. Karjala province, where I spent my childhood, is famous for its Piirakat.

In my home—and I guess everywhere else in Finland, too—everything is cleared and cleaned and preparations are made the day before Christmas Eve. That is so everybody will be ready to greet Christmas Juist—Christmas Eve. First we all go to Sauna, the Finnish Bath. Then we come home and we're ready to eat.

A year from Christmas I hope to be sitting around the Christmas Eve table with my family. We'll be stuffing ourselves with pickled herring, Karjalan Piirakat, sardines, salmon, several kinds of bread, herring salad, dressed meats with pickled beets. Christmas ham, potatoes, carrots, peas, cabbage, boiled lutefisk fixed with white sauce with black pepper, potatoes and Christmas rice porridge mixed with one almond and served with sugar, cinnamon and milk. Coffee is served afterward with a variety of coffee breads, Christmas star and half-moon cookies.

The dinner is always eaten by candlelight. Then our nimble Santa Claus comes. After he tells stories about his journey from Lapland, the children sing songs and folk dance with him. He gives the gifts from his sledge to everyone. The rest of the evening

is spent giving parcels, opening gifts and singing Christmas carols.

For the newlyweds, we have a special tradition in Karjala. Or maybe I should just say, it is a special tradition for the bride. In Finland, the bride who has been married during that year will visit her parents for Christmas, staying from 4 to 6 weeks—but not the husband. This custom is called Jouluoljami—Joulu means Christmas.

Perhaps I won't be able to make some of our Christmas treats until next Christmas, when I'm home again in Helsinki. But you don't have to wait until next Christmas. You can try some of our pastry treats this season.

Finnish Christmas stars are an old country classic, fit for a king.

Sift $\frac{2}{3}$ cup flour to baking board.
Cut in 1 cup butter with 2 knives or pastry blender.
Add 4 tablespoons water gradually and work until blended.
Chill for 30 minutes.
Roll on floured baking board to rectangular shape.
Fold and repeat 2 or 3 times, chilling 30 minutes each time.
Roll out quickly to desired thickness and cut in 4-inch squares.
Place teaspoon of cooked prunes or apples in middle of dough.
Cut each corner $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Fold alternate corners in and press edges together.
Brush with beaten egg and bake in hot oven.
Or cut with a round cutter. Place filling in middle and make a half moon.

And you will not be trying a bit of Finnish Christmas for your family without making the Christmas Rice Porridge.

To make this:

Scald 1 cup rice in 1 cup boiling water.
Melt $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon butter.
Add rice and water and boil 10 or 15 minutes until water disappears.
Add 5 cups milk and cook slowly 45 minutes or until rice is tender.
Put one almond in middle of mixture.
Pour into deep dish and serve cold with cinnamon and sugar.

The one almond in the recipe brings you the fun. The person who gets the almond will get married before the next Christmas, according to our country's legends. Or if the person who finds the almond is married, a baby is promised.

May you have good luck with your Finnish baking. *Hauskaa Joula*, (Merry Christmas) and *Onnellista Uutta Uuotta*, (Happy New Year).