

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Karen Davison Offers Holiday Traditions to Try in 2020

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Traditions are synonymous with the holidays, as families throughout the nation experiment with new methods of cooking and imaginative recipes, hoping to amplify the family celebrations.

Certain families will opt to make traditional dishes with their own unique twist. Others, through their choice of cooked-up meals, are more concentrated on introducing children to the family's heritage. And there are families willing to adopt traditions from another culture altogether.

[Karen Davison](#), a master chef from Plano, Texas, whose niche is in fine dining, underlines a few holiday traditions and inspirational Christmas recipes that will delight all family members.

### Lutefisk

A winter delicacy mostly enjoyed by the locals in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, lutefisk is a dried or salted whitefish that is treated with lye, Karen Davison says. Wait, lye as in the corrosive chemical found in soap? Yes, but it plays a pivotal part in breaking down proteins and giving the fish a jelly-like texture. Any corrosive qualities are thoroughly soaked out and the fish is cooked with salt before reaching your plate. This is a tried-and-tested and delicious approach that many swear by, so consider it for one of your forthcoming inspirational holiday recipes.

### Hallaca

For the budding and bullish chef unafraid of a culinary challenge, hallaca, a customer Christmas food in Venezuela, is quite the project. As a matter of fact, one batch is typically sufficient to hold a family over for the duration of the season, Karen Davison states, calling on all household hands to assist. Hallacas are made with corn dough wrapped inside a plantain leaf, holding a mixture of meats, like pork, beef, chicken, and pork rinds. Add on some raisins and olives, then the leaf wrap is firmly tied with string and the hallaca is cooked in boiling water.

### Feast of the Seven Fishes

This Italian-American tradition celebrates Christmas with seven or more seafood dishes, Karen Davison notes, commemorating the Vigilia di Natale (the vigil held until the midnight birth of baby Jesus). Plenty of Roman Catholics refrain from eating meat during particular times of the year, electing to instead serve seafood on Christmas Eve. Nowadays, the seafood that comprises the Feast of the Seven Fishes can be anything from calamari to baccalà or salted cod.

## Noche Buena

Noche Buena, celebrated by some Latinos on Christmas Eve, is built around food and alcohol, though lechón is the main dish in the typical fare. A pig is cooked over charcoal, above a fire rotisserie-like or in a Caja China roasting box. While countries may vary in how they season their lechón, there are two ways to determine if the pig was well-cooked and seasoned: it should be remarkably tender and tasty.

## Black Eyed Peas and Collard Greens

In the Southern United States, black eyed peas and collard greens receive display sections at the grocery stores due to the overwhelming belief that such a New Year's Day supper will afford you great fortune in the upcoming year. Apparently, serving peas with cornbread symbolizes gold, while stewing them with tomatoes signifies wealth and health. To take it a step further, some even place a penny or dime inside the pot of peas. The individual who finds the coin on their plate will supposedly be the luckiest of the bunch for the remainder of the year.

## Soba Noodles

Soba noodles are ordinarily eaten just prior to midnight in Japan and the culture suggests that failing to finish the dish will result in poor luck. A tradition that dates back roughly 800 years to the Kamakura period, legend has it that it commenced at one Buddhist temple that offered soba to impoverished people on New Year's. When the Edo period arrived, these New Year's noodles became a fixture within the culture, respected by people throughout Japan. To this day, that tradition has carried on, says Karen Davison.

## Green Grapes at Midnight

Superstitious people, and those who aren't necessarily overzealous to put their cooking garb on, can partake in the Spanish tradition of eating 12 grapes when the clock strikes on midnight. Nochevieja (Old Night) begins at the stroke of midnight, as everyone has a bowl of 12 uvas de suerte, or lucky grapes, by their side. A total of 12 bells will ring from the Real Casa de Correos in Madrid, one for each month, broadcasted on live television for the remainder of the residents who could not attend in person. As each two-second spell passes, you must put a new grape in your mouth and attempt to eat all 12 by the time the final bell tolls. Those who succeed will have great luck in el año nuevo (the new year).

## Creamy Rice Pudding

Christmas in Denmark is not complete without risalamande, a cold rice pudding with whipped cream and chopped almonds, topped off with a hot cherry sauce. On the evening of December 24, Danes celebrate Christmas and the pudding is served in a huge bowl, where an entire almond is added. Whoever locates the almond is entitled to a special present, but there have been instances of relatives hiding said almond and watching family members vainly overeat the rich dessert.

## Berlin Pancake

A donut filled with jam is referred to as a "Berlin pancake", a treat that most people in the country crave all year round, especially during New Year's Eve parties. For every eight donuts filled with jam, tradition insists that you slip mustard into one to disappoint an unlucky guest. Unless you

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aren't particularly fond of your visitors, stick to that ratio, says Karen Davison.

## Speculoos

Imagine the sweet scent of baked biscuits on Christmas Day. They indicate the beginning of the festive season in the Low Countries and speculoos, the crunchy biscuits made with brown sugar and cinnamon, are gorged all year. Worldwide, the miniature versions are savored with a cup of coffee. The biscuit was first associated with Saint Nicholas Day, a celebration in early December, as children would leave their shoes near the chimney with carrots for Saint Nicholas's horse and wake up to find biscuits in their place.

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