

There's No Reason To Mince Words When It Comes To This Traditional Treat

Posted by **Porsha Perreault** in **bakeries, holidays, pastries, pie** on December 17, 2009 at 12:33 pm



For some families, the arrival of the holiday season is heralded by houses made out of gingerbread, or dainty disks of iced and sugared cookie dough.

For others, it wouldn't seem complete without a hard-sauced plum pudding or airy panettone concluding their festive meal.

In my family, the occasion was always marked by the receipt of a jar of mincemeat lovingly prepared by Mamere (my grandmother). From as far back as I can recall, these care packages were sent across Canada to all of her 12 children, affording them a tiny taste of home no matter where their celebrations might be. Every year we longingly looked forward to the day that package would come, and then greedily consumed the pie in record time once it had been prepared. Mamere has since retired, but during the past few years I've taken the importance of upholding this tradition to heart.

Even though I now produce it for my kith and kin, it's been a very long time since I've felt the urge to enjoy any myself.

Mincemeat (for the uninitiated) is a melange of dried and candied fruit (think raisins, currants and mixed peel to start, all of which I'm not keen on) stewed to a thick and syrupy consistency, then baked into seasonal edibles like pies and tarts. Today most of what is available is vegetarian, but traditionally it included suet (the fat from around beef kidneys). My family's version is uber-traditional and includes not only suet but actual ground beef, partially owing to my decline in desire over the years, I'm sure. "Meat + fruit = dessert" is at best a questionable equation for most folks, it seems.

Preparing mincemeat has become a dying art, one that most people aren't even aware of anymore. While researching this story I reached out to the internet for recommendations and was met with some peculiar suggestions. One person waxed poetically about a brand of pie found in a well-known supermarket chain, while another declared a commercial jarred brand on grocery store shelves to be exactly what I was after.

They were both wrong.

I didn't want a soulless glop chockful of preservatives or things I can't spell.

What I wanted to find were bakeries that were taking the same time and care to make their mincemeat tarts as my family does with ours. The goal became to find the culinary torchbearers of this almost forgotten treat, as it were.

Once I started asking, I was astonished by the number of bakeries around town that still produced these festive wares. Though not available for sampling or purchase at the time of writing, I found that Wanda's Pie In The Sky (287 Augusta Avenue), Mabel's Bakery (332 Roncesvalles Avenue), The Healthy Butcher (565 Queen Street West) and Dessert Lady Cafe (20 Cumberland Street) would all have them in stock or for order closer to the holiday season.

Luckily, I was able to obtain 5 samples from several other bakeries, for which I've compiled my tasting notes.

The first stop I made was at Dufflet Pastries (787 Queen Street West) where the tarts were 1.5" (\$1.35) and 3" (\$2.75) respectively, with a flaky, crumbly, buttery crust. I found the blend of apples, lemons, oranges, raisins and apricots wonderfully balanced between the sweet, tart and spicy elements, producing a tart with the elusive taste of Christmas. Though both sizes were delicious, I much preferred the larger one because it had a better ratio of filling to crust than the smaller version, which was almost all crust by comparison. Nevertheless, it's hard to go wrong with any baked offering from Dufflet, and I would certainly return for these again.



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