

Dining on 'Downton' cuisine

Pastry chef, a native of England, gives tips for authentic meals.

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Nothing says English tea like scones with butter, jam and ...

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If you want to throw an impromptu viewing party for tonight's Season 3 premiere of "Downton Abbey," do not despair: You do not need to observe the proprieties.

We'll tell neither Mr. Carson nor Violet, the Dowager Countess of Grantham, if you cut some corners.

(Mr. Carson, of course, thinks that the worst thing in the world is for a maid to be in the dining room serving a duke. Countess Violet said once that Americans all reside in wigwams. They would not expect much of us anyway.)

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You can put off polishing the silver, and no one will faint if you put out paper napkins instead of linen. But strong cups of tea served in china cups — not mugs, please — are a must. Unless, that is, you prefer glasses of sherry. According to the Daily Mail, a British tabloid, "Downton Abbey" has made drinking sherry fashionable again.

A six-course meal, featuring quail, oysters, mutton and blancmange, is not at all necessary. And after the excesses of the holiday season, who needs truffles and champagne?

But you can serve a few British treats, if you heed the advice of Chef Susan Notter, director of the pastry arts program at the Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts, a division of YTI Career Institute-Lancaster.

Notter has a 9-year-old who dominates her television viewing, so her "Downtown Abbey" viewing has been sporadic. When she has watched, she's found herself wishing the cameras would linger in the kitchen, so she could see actual meals being prepared by Mrs. Patmore and Daisy.

But Notter doesn't need PBS period dramas to tell her what the English eat. A pastry chef who's appeared on several Food Network shows, she is a native of England.

She suggests that you create an evening version of the "ploughman's lunch," a traditional cold plate often served in British pubs. It consists of bread, sharp cheddar cheese, pickled onions and Branston pickle (it's a spiced pickle mixture sold in some grocery stores and specialty shops; if you can't find it, chutney, which is found in the international food aisles of most grocery stores, is a reasonable substitute).

Sliced roast beef served on a roll, with horseradish also would be a very English treat. Or you could make what the British call "Toad in the Hole," Notter said. It consists of sausages baked into Yorkshire pudding batter (a simple Yorkshire pudding batter can be made from flour, eggs and milk; recipes abound on the Internet).

Or, she said, you could serve pigs in a blanket and call them "sausage rolls," as they're known in England. Roll out puff pastry, wrap it around sausage links, brush the pastry-wrapped sausages with an egg wash, put them in the oven and bake them.

"Stuff on sticks" also would be very English, Notter said: Take a chunk of cheddar and put it on a toothpick with a piece of canned pineapple. Then take an orange, wrap it in foil, and stick the cheddar-and-pineapple toothpicks into the orange, so it looks like a hedgehog.

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You also could serve tea sandwiches: small sandwiches with the crusts removed, filled with thinly sliced corned beef or cucumber slices. And, Notter advised, use butter, not mayonnaise, if you want to create an authentically British sarnie (Brit-speak for "sandwich").

Scotch eggs also are simple to make: Simply wrap a hard-boiled egg with sausage meat, bread it with bread crumbs and deep-fry it — cholesterol levels be damned.

"Another thing English people do," Notter said, "is they put everything on toast." So serve eggs on toast or baked beans on toast. (Yes, really, baked beans on toast. It's a staple dish in Britain, where, apparently, one can never have too many carbs.)

If you want to go with an afternoon tea theme, even though it will be evening, serve the tea sandwiches with scones, jam and butter. In England, scones also are served with clotted cream, which is as rich and artery-clogging as its name suggests.

Clotted cream can be made at home, though it generally needs to be refrigerated for 12 hours or more, which is more time than you'll have before "Downton Abbey" airs. The website Allrecipes.com offers a recipe for Easy Clotted Cream: Whip 1 cup of heavy cream, using the whisk attachment on your mixer, until stiff peaks form; whisk in, by hand, 1/2 cup of sour cream and 1 tablespoon of confectioners' sugar. Store in the fridge until showtime.

As Mrs. Patmore, the "Downton Abbey" cook, once said: "Anyone who has use of their limbs can make a salmon mousse." Same goes for scones.

Notter's recipe for scones follows.

SCONES

2 cups flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

Pinch of salt

1/4 cup sugar

1/2 cup milk

1/2 stick of butter

Sieve the flour, baking powder and salt. Mix the sugar and the milk together. Rub the butter into the flour until it looks like fine bread crumbs. Add the liquid and mix lightly until everything is combined.

Roll 2 rounds to 1-inch thicknesses. Mark a cross in the middle of each to divide into 4 quarters and brush with milk. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown.

For fruit scones, add 2 ounces of dried fruit to the mixture.

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