

# Christmas 06



## Alsager Round Table organise the big switch-on

The festive season will be awash with a radiant glow this year in Alsager as the town gears up to switch on its new Christmas lights. Alsager and District Round Table have announced that they will be conducting a switch on ceremony to inaugurate the new lights that they have worked hard to install in time for this year's Christmas celebration. The event will take place on December 1 at 7pm outside the library on Bank Corner in Alsager and special guest, chairman Jakob Lindblad will preside. Proud event organisers have installed more than 25,000 bulbs on 2km of wire at Bank Corner and along Crewe Road towards the junction with Church Road. The spectacle simply has to be seen to be believed. This new addition to the Alsager

Christmas experience is thanks to a lot of generous donations collected by Alsager and District Round Table, including a superbly supported auction evening and a donation from the Town Council, achieving a total fund of £8,000. The organisers are also very grateful to all the shop owners who agreed to be part of this project, particularly those who are providing the power. So not only will Alsager look beautiful this Christmas, it will be a great place to shop. Paul King, press officer for Alsager and District Round Table, said: "We hope everybody continues to support the buy a bulb campaign, because we would very much like everybody to enjoy this year's display and help us towards making it bigger and better next year."



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# Christmas 06



# Talking turkey alternatives

**M**OST of us do it only at Christmas - serve turkey for dinner, that is. In fact, most people will probably confess they don't even like the taste, but sit down to the traditional roast simply because it's expected of them. It's probably the despair of turkey farmers and processors up and down the country, but of the 17 million or so turkeys consumed in Britain each year (an average of 6lb per person, according to the Turkey Information Service), around 10 million are eaten at Christmas. Of the rest, nine per cent are dished up at Easter and 10 per cent at other bank holidays. It all adds up to millions of pounds in sales each year. Whether they enjoy the taste or not, the big question for most housewives is whether to choose a frozen or a fresh bird for that Christmas blow-out.

When you think about it, it's much easier to select a frozen turkey weeks in advance and forget about it until the big day than it is to battle with the crowds on Christmas Eve and hope there is something left when you make it to the front of the supermarket fridge.

And is it worth the effort to get your hands on a fresh turkey? Can you really tell the difference between fresh and frozen once the bird has been cooked and served up with all the trimmings? According to sources within the industry, blind tests indicate that it is very hard to tell any significant difference. But there could be a good reason for that, adds chef and restaurant critic Egon Ronay, who says: "There is no difference between fresh and frozen turkey, because the fresh turkey is just as tasteless, unless it's a free-range turkey, and they are rare, because there are only a few farms producing free-range birds."



"I wouldn't dream of eating a mass-produced turkey, because it doesn't taste of anything. For Christmas dinner, I have either roast suckling pig or roast goose." But since the majority of their customers prefer turkey to the esoteric delights of goose, what do the top hotels choose to serve at Christmas?

One maitre chef plumps for free-range turkeys and fresh rather than frozen. The flavour and texture of the meat changes once it has been frozen, becoming much drier, he says. This doesn't deter a large proportion of housewives from buying their turkeys in the most convenient format as around 80 per cent of birds sold are frozen rather than fresh. The price probably has as much to do with choice as the convenience frozen turkey usually costs less than fresh. If you do choose a frozen turkey, do take care how you set about turning it into Christmas dinner. About this time of year, doctors start dusting off their annual warning to careless consumers about how not to get food poisoning from your turkey. Turkeys, like chickens, can carry salmonella, and you are particularly at risk if you don't thaw a frozen bird properly before cooking. This can take up to three days for a very large bird.

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# Christmas 06



# The key to a great festive feast

**W**HETHER one admits it or not, one of the biggest features of Christmas is the food. But this is as it should be, because it is a feast in every sense of the word. One of the most difficult things about providing food for Christmas is providing the 'difference'. Most of the traditional Christmas foods are eaten throughout the year, so have lost their novelty value. The secret, therefore, is to treat the foods in a different and imaginative way, while perhaps providing a few rather more luxurious items to add the finishing touches.

Turkey is first choice for most for the festive dinner. Ring the changes here by concocting some imaginative stuffings for it. Or get your butcher to bone it out, leaving the skin intact and the drumsticks in place. Stuff it then with a pork tenderloin, 'cemented' into place with ordinary sage and onion stuffing enhanced with chopped walnuts, cranberries and apricots. Or you could stuff it with a small, boneless chicken — itself stuffed with cranberries, dates and chopped onions — in a fine, thick, white bread sauce.

Goose, of course, is coming back into fashion and this too can be boned out and stuffed with whatever takes your fancy. There is less need to be imaginative with goose, since it's not generally on the menu during the rest of the year.

As well as these traditional birds, there are a whole host of other alternatives. Cockerels are popular in some parts of the country, as are capons. Game is gathering popularity too and at Christmas most of it is in season. If you would prefer to stray from the



feathered meats, however, you'll be spoilt for choice. There are some wonderful cuts of beef, tender succulent legs of pork, the best lamb in the world, and venison — the up-and-coming celebration meat. Christmas dinner vegetables come in a wide variety. A dish of carefully cut root vegetables can be enhanced by a chopped watercress and butter sauce, poured over just before serving. Serve lightly cooked sprouts with button mushrooms and chopped chestnuts. To mashed potato, add beaten egg, black pepper, mixed chopped nuts and tiny pieces of chopped, fried bacon. Spoon in convenient lumps into a good batter and deep fry fast. Starters can be a problem and soup does lack that certain something. Again, be imaginative. Try putting chopped chestnuts and cream into whatever soup you make; the improvement can be startling. On the other hand, for something really different, try jacket potatoes topped with fromage frais or sour cream, and caviar. Use smaller than usual potatoes and cook them in the microwave. Christmas isn't Christmas without its mince pies. Try mixing cranberries into the mincemeat — it makes a wonderful change. Cranberry sauce is the easiest sauce to make. Make it really special, however, by using golden syrup instead of sugar, and whisky instead of water.

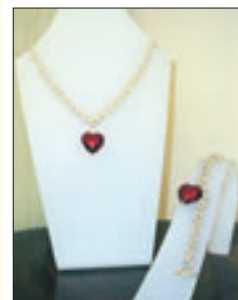
Whisky can also be used instead of brandy in the butter sauce. The difference is subtle and very, very good. Christmas pudding is the crown of any Christmas meal, as it comes flaming to the table. However, it can be eaten in many other ways. Put a thick slice at the bottom of a sundae glass and pour a frothy syllabub mixture over the top. Chill just before serving and the slight separation of the mixture will enhance the pudding below. Or eat it cold with cheese! You may of course want a change from the pud. Try a trifle, made with mincemeat enriched with preserved ginger in a wine jelly. Top with white custard and generous amounts of whipped cream. Decorate with silver and gold balls for the festive effect. Do remember Christmas is special though.

Treat your family to a few unaccustomed luxuries. It isn't as extravagant as it may seem. A little smoked salmon goes a long way and makes delicious sandwiches. Special cured hams have a taste your taste buds will remember all year through. Provide a bowl of exotic fruits. A jar of fruit preserved in brandy will make a desert topping to remember. Clotted cream straight from Cornwall will dress Christmas pud to perfection. Start your Christmas menu planning now, before the rush, while the shops are still stacked full of wonderful Christmas fare. Remember, a little of the best goes a long, long way, and a little of what you fancy always does you good!

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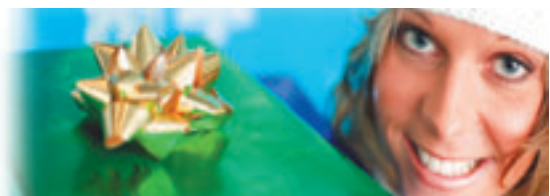
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# Christmas 06



## Now is the time to sort out the party details

**C**HRISTMAS decorations will be going up all over the place before very long. And it is certainly not too soon to be thinking about Christmas meals or office parties to celebrate the season's message. Restaurants are already becoming booked up, so get in there and place your order soon!

**Here are a few tips if you are organising the office outing, or indeed, any Christmas party...**

### Take a head count

Do not take it for granted that everyone you work with will be able to attend the firm's Christmas party. Many people go to relatives for Christmas or have problems getting sitters.

### Decide on a date

Christmas is a hectic time for everybody, so it is wise to decide now what date is best for your Christmas party. If you organise it now, those involved can make a note in their diaries.

### Decide on your budget

Before you start to look around for a suitable venue, have a word with your colleagues and workmates or friends and family. Ask them how much they are prepared to spend on an evening out and try to agree on a figure per head that suits the pockets of those in the party.

### Check out past successes

Many people will have attended local Christmas functions in the past, so it is useful to listen to workmates' advice.

It may be that they had a great evening out at a certain restaurant and that it has a good reputation. Try and find a place that has something to suit everyone's palate.

Pub meals are always great value for money, most offering traditional meals ranging from steaks and meat and two veg at dinner with starters and puddings to meals in a basket and ploughman's lunches.

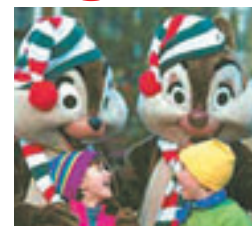
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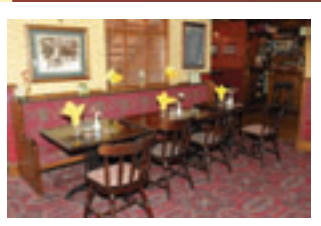
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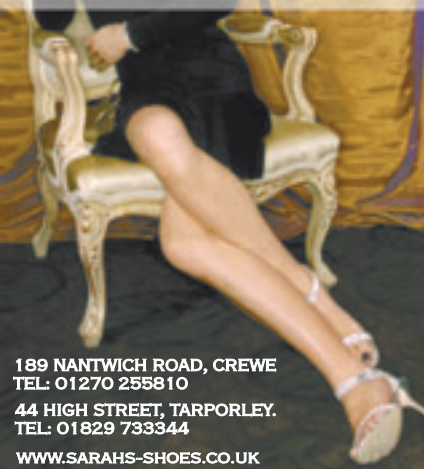
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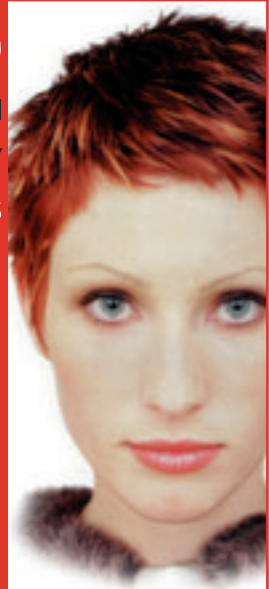
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# Christmas 06



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**S**HARP frosts will herald the start of the winter season ahead. Most cars will start without any difficulty — only the windows of those left out in the open need any real attention before safely setting out.

But the stresses and strains of the winter weather on our cars will certainly get worse before it gets better.

From now until next spring make sure your car is in tip top order so that you aren't let down.

At one time drivers had to check their batteries every week — nowadays they can be maintenance-free for life.

It takes a battery 10 miles to recover from the pounding it receives on starting and if regular winter-time journeys of this distance are made, be on your guard.

Keep all connections clean, for even specks of dust or dampness can easily prevent a car from starting.

Batteries, incidentally, deteriorate even when they are not being used.

A home charge of two or three hours a week can maintain it in good condition. Acid can be removed from terminal leads by dipping them in piping hot water.

A simple thing like failing to close the boot lid properly can cause a battery to run down. The partly open lid activates the boot light which over a couple of days can completely drain the battery.

Petroleum jelly should be smeared around

the terminals to prevent corrosion and a film of this on the headlamps stops snow from collecting on the glass.

A smear can also help thaw out of a door lock — but don't give it the kiss of life. If your lips touch the metal, they might freeze to it!

Tyres should be kept in good condition and inflated according to the manufacturers' recommendations. Soft tyres grip poorly. Dampness in a car's electrics can be prevented by using any number of proprietary sprays that can dry out an ignition system.

It can also be used on engine linkages, hinges and window winder mechanisms. Keep the anti-freeze solution up to strength and don't forget to add a non-freeze solution to the washer bottle and keep it topped up every week. Check also that the wiper blades are in good condition.

Most drivers take with them de-icing sprays, ice scrapers and a torch, while a cartridge for thawing door locks is also worth having. A spare can of fuel can come in useful if one runs out of petrol.

Warm and brightly coloured clothes are another obvious safeguard.

On a long journey into a snowy hinterland, as it were, it may be worth taking a hot drink and energy giving food like chocolate. Remember that accidents are twice as likely to happen on a wet day and that their incidence can quadruple in snow.



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