

# ABSOLUTELY DELICIOUS

Leading caterer and event organiser Lyndy Redding creates a Christmas tea, shares her tips on entertaining and offers recipe ideas for home-made gifts

Lyndy Redding is a culinary dynamo. Whether she is organising events for the Queen, refuelling the likes of Lewis Hamilton and the Vodafone McLaren Mercedes race team, or simply putting on a Christmas tea at home, her delicious and beautifully presented menus have ensured she is one of London's busiest and most sought-after caterers and event designers. Lyndy's company, Absolute Taste, was launched in 1997 in conjunction with McLaren boss Ron Dennis and is renowned as much for its professional expertise at planning, event production and chic room- and table-dressing as it is for its fabulous food.

As well as the party and event side of the business, Lyndy looks after two Absolute Taste cafés – one situated in Harvey Nichols in Knightsbridge and the other at Design Centre Chelsea Harbour – plus Absolute Taste's in-flight catering service. The company has also recently won the contract for all the catering at Burghley House, in Stamford, Lincolnshire, along with a permanent café, The Orangery, which is a great place for events too. She is rarely in one place for long and has just returned from South Africa on a site visit for a Gary Player Invitational golf tournament. Having had huge success looking after one of its tournaments last year, it has now become another regular client.

To find Lyndy at home, therefore, is rare. And you would think that here at least, she might put her feet up. But no: 'I love cooking at home,' she laughs. 'Because here I can do things in my own time and I don't have to stick to a tight schedule. I can also play around with recipe ideas. This Christmas is extra special as my son, Joshua, is now nearly two and able to appreciate it more. I love entertaining at home and this year will be inviting

friends over to share the excitement of Christmas.'

The savoury canapés on offer at Lyndy's tea include smoked salmon stack sandwiches, turkey, sage and prosciutto skewers with orange and cranberry compote, and the lightest Stilton tartlets, which melt at the first bite. The sweet treats on offer include cinnamon-dusted doughnuts, toffee and almond popcorn, a gingerbread family, cupcakes and blueberry and lemon teacakes. 'At Absolute Taste, we have been catering for a lot of teas lately. They are a popular choice for celebrating weddings and christenings.'

It is important to Lyndy that the food she serves, whether at home, or through Absolute Taste, looks as good as it tastes and that the table is beautifully

decorated. Here she has created a contemporary Christmas theme using white linen, glassware, gold and silver. The beaded baubles were bought back from her recent trip to South Africa. They are made by local women and sold for charity. I couldn't resist them! Lyndy has also made snowflake biscuits dusted with sugar that hang from the ceiling with ribbon – an inexpensive and delightful touch. 'For a special tea like this, I would put all the food on the table at once so it looks generous, like a feast, with so many delicious things that guests don't know where to start!'

At this time of year, Lyndy also makes sweets to give as gifts. 'Giving something you have made yourself, and presenting it in a pretty tin or box can mean so much more than a shop-bought present,' she says. This year's lucky recipients will be unwrapping luxury nut brittle, toffee and almond popcorn, marshmallow chocolate swirl and lavender chocolate drops – beautiful to look at and utterly delicious – I am crossing my fingers that I am on her Christmas list.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JON DAY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT An innovative table setting. Cinnamon-dusted doughnuts. A gingerbread family. Turkey, sage and prosciutto skewers with cranberry and orange compote

## LYNDY REDDING'S TIPS FOR ENTERTAINING AND IDEAS FOR HOME-MADE GIFTS

Lyndy's recipes for home-made gifts are not only delicious, but are also very simple to make. The following recipes can be found on the Absolute Taste website at [www.absolutetaste.com](http://www.absolutetaste.com) – cheese sable biscuits, rich nut brittle, gingerbread family, chocolate marshmallow swirl, toffee and almond popcorn, lavender chocolate drops and white chocolate peppermint crunch. The blueberry and lemon teacake recipe is shown here.

■ All these sweets will keep for around a week. If you have time, it is always nice to deliver them personally or hand them out after a party for guests to take home.

■ Try putting the toffee and almond popcorn in mini cones to offer around after a dinner party.

■ If you are feeling artistic, you can add individual characteristics to the gingerbread people using icing. Adding a name or initials is fun too. I made ones for my son Joshua and husband, Otis. They sat and ate them together, which was very cute.

■ Cheese sable biscuits are a good stand-by for when guests drop by. When cool, put them in an airtight container and they will stay fresh for a week (if you can resist them for that long). Alternatively, prepare the recipe and then pop them in the oven just as guests arrive and they will be ready to serve in 10 minutes. The smell of them baking will get appetites going too.

■ You can buy all sorts of different boxes and tins and then use tissue paper or layers of greaseproof paper to create a soft base for the gift box. Try serving the sweets in boxes like this at a Christmas tea party for a particularly festive theme.

■ Display food at different heights on the table by using cake stands and bowls as well as plates and wooden boards. It creates a much more visually stimulating table.

■ Relax and enjoy the party. Entertaining at home should be fun, not arduous and your friends are there first and foremost to see you.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Rich nut brittle. Lavender and chocolate drops. White chocolate and peppermint crunch. Chocolate marshmallow swirl. Cheese sable biscuits and toffee and almond popcorn. A gingerbread family



### LEMON AND BLUEBERRY TEACAKES

MAKES 14

#### INGREDIENTS

280g unsalted butter

280g caster sugar

65g plain flour

280g ground almonds

5 eggs

Grated zest of 2 lemons

100ml lemon juice

120g blueberries

#### GLAZE

50ml lemon juice

150g icing sugar

Preheat the oven to 170°C/mark 3. Grease 14 mini loaf tins.

Cream butter and sugar until pale and fluffy.

Add the eggs gradually until incorporated.

Mix flour and ground almonds and fold into the mixture.

Add the lemon zest, 100ml of lemon juice and blueberries.

Bake for 30-35 minutes.

Make glaze by mixing 50ml of lemon juice and icing sugar. Drizzle over the teacakes once cooled.



#### LYNDY SAYS TRY THIS...

'Everyone loves the aroma and flavour of mulled wine and this year I am trying something different with a hot fruit toddy. Chop some apple, pear and orange and place in pretty glasses. Add a squeeze of lemon juice to prevent the fruit discolouring if preparing in advance. Pour on warm mulled wine once your guests arrive and serve with a cinnamon stick – delicious. My other favourite Christmas cocktail is a mulled fruit Bellini! Visit [www.absolutetaste.com](http://www.absolutetaste.com) for all recipes

