



## Pam's Glögg

by Gail Nickerson

Part of being Swedish has to do with family, food and celebrating... well... just about everything.

My best friend Pam is Swedish and her husband is Finnish – a very Scandinavian household. Every year, in preparing to celebrate Christmas for her immediate family of about fifty or so people, Pam makes Glögg, which is the Swedish answer to Drambuie, Benedictine, twenty year old Scotch or Louis Roederer, Cristal Brut 1990, Millenium 2000, Methuselah (6L), which at \$17,625 a bottle, is the most expensive champagne in the world. I looked it up.

Samuel Johnson, author of the first English dictionary, wrote "Claret is the drink for boys, port for men, but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy." Glögg encompasses all three plus the addition of a very good whisky.

Contrary to Scandinavian wannabees, Glögg is not pronounced glug, which sounds tacky at best. It's pronounced more akin to glerg, but with an almost silent 'r', hence the umlaut.

It is traditionally drunk for the first time on Christmas Eve, which is a much bigger holiday in Sweden than Christmas. After all, Christ was born in the evening, not the next morning, right?

On Christmas Eve, in Pam's house, as well as millions of other Swedish households around the world, the family is assembled, their number swelled by the addition of friends, neighbors and significant others.

Then a magnificent feast is served: Swedish meatballs, brown beans, medwurst (which is kind of a Swedish salami), liverwurst, roasted pork spareribs, Christmas ham, hardtack, limpa bread amongst other things, and of course the obligatory rice pudding containing one lone almond. There is also pickled herring but I'd rather not elaborate on that.

After everyone is sated, they travel en masse to the Lutheran church for Candlelight worship. Upon return to the house, presents are opened. The little ones, though tired, are usually able to stay awake for presents. With fifty people in residence, the tree, a honking big spruce, is barely visible behind the gifts.

But I digress. The preparation of the Glögg is what we're interested in here.

In order to give it time to age properly, it's usually made right after Thanksgiving. Every family makes Glögg slightly different. Some recipes have been handed down from generation to generation and some have been experimented with for only a few years to discover what everyone likes the best. I think Pam's was passed down to her from her grandmother Bette Bjorklund who did the housekeeping for the old Hornblower estate before it became Plimouth Plantation.

The day after Thanksgiving, while Pam's husband and sons are cutting down the Christmas tree and lugging it back up to the house, she gathers her sister, daughters, daughters-in-law and maybe a friend or two and begins the ritual of the Glögg making.

The rest is history.

Gail Nickerson has lived in Harwich for over twenty years where she and her husband raised two daughters. She is currently working on a cozy murder mystery and also on an historical fiction novel about the Salem Witch Trials.

## Glögg Recipe

1 bottle of decent brandy, black current is really good, but use whatever is your favorite

1 bottle of port wine, I like Taylor port myself, it's the same wine we use for communion

1 bottle red Bordeaux wine – this is kind of claret, but they don't really make claret any more

1 bottle of decent whisky, if you don't like whisky Russian vodka works well

1Tbs freshly grated raw ginger

1 palm full (not handful) of whole cloves

1 palm full of cardamom pods

Peel of one large orange, scrubbed and cut very thin

1 vanilla bean

1 cup of raisins, you can use golden, but the dark seem to be tastier

3 or 4 whole cinnamon sticks

1 cup of whole almonds, not salted or smoked

1 or 2 cups of sugar, depending upon how sweet you want it to be, brown sugar can be used instead of white if you like

Heat the spices and fruits (except for almonds and raisins) in water and set to boiling; then turn off the heat and let it stand overnight.

Add to the liquid the wine and brandy, and then add half the sugar and simmer in an enamel pot or better still a crock pot, but don't get anywhere near boiling. You don't want to burn off the alcohol, that would be a disaster. It should become a golden syrup (or other color if you chose a different flavor brandy) and the sugar should start to caramelize a bit. This should simmer for about an hour.

Brown a cup of sugar just before the Glögg is done, and add it to the pan. Fire it with a match, closing the cover very quickly. You don't want any lost eyebrows or arm hair.

Turn off the heat and let it cool a bit. Add almonds and raisins. Then add the whisky or vodka.

Now you're ready to bottle it. Pam uses pint and quart size Mason jars in order to have room to leave the fruits in so the flavors can meld and marry until Christmas. Make sure the jars are perfectly clean and keep them hot in a hot water bath until you fill them. If they are cold when you fill them with the hot Glögg, they will crack.

Cap them with hot sterilized lids and let the jars stand on a dishtowel on the counter overnight.

Now you can give them to friends or let them sit in your cupboard (in the dark) and age until Christmas.

## THE PROPER WAY TO DRINK GLÖGG

Find someone else to be a designated driver, because it's not going to be you.

Strain the Glögg into an enamel pot, or better yet, a crock pot and do not discard the fruits, spices and nuts that were in the jar. Some will be used to garnish the servings; the rest can be used in baking stollen or julekaka.

Heat the Glögg gently. DO NOT BOIL. You don't want to lose any of that alcohol.

In tiny thimble like glasses, smaller than those used for sherry or cordials,

put in an almond and a raisin. Give all your guests a tiny demitasse spoon with their Glögg so they can fish these out and eat them. This is a bit of a ceremony in Sweden, a time to toast the holiday and one another.

Do not knock them back like shots or chugalug them. Glögg is made to sip and savor.

If you're planning on having Glögg in a cup, like a hot toddy, make sure you're sitting down first and that your host will let you stay the night.

You may garnish Glögg with a sliver of fresh orange peel.

Pepparkakor (a crisp spicy cookie) is usually served with this, to nibble on the side.

Capped tightly, any leftover Glögg (yeah, right) will last almost indefinitely.

Don't operate any sharp implements.

Gud jul!