

Waitrose weekend



Weather forecast
with Rob McElwee

Friday + Saturday Sunday

GALES 5-6
7°C

BECOMING COLDER AND SUNNIER

5°C

SOUP SALAD

Pollen count: Trees LOW, Grasses LOW

Restless atmosphere

This weather report is based on information available on 15 December when Waitrose Weekend went to print. For more information, visit metoffice.gov.uk

'An educated guess for Christmas Day: wet, windy and mild'

A sparkling frost with clear blue skies is the right start to a proper winter's day and, so the received wisdom goes, parsnips will taste better in these conditions.

With no Waitrose Weekend until next year, I wish you all the bonhomie that is your due in this season. There is no new Rob forecast until there is a '5' in the year, so here's an educated guess for Christmas Day: wet, windy and mild.

Now, is there more evidence on which to base a winter prediction? The likelihood of an El Niño event, which can cause temperatures to dip and snow to fall, is 65% - and even then weak. Arctic Sea ice cover is average, but here's one you may not have heard about: the Stratospheric Polar Vortex.

Normally in winter it's spinning above the North Pole, and this means we should expect an 'average' winter. Rarely, in an event known as 'sudden stratospheric warming', it disintegrates. And why does this matter? Well, each action has an equal and opposite reaction, as Newton said. The stratosphere affects the troposphere, our home, and if nothing spins in the stratosphere, nothing much spins in the northern hemisphere and the wind stops blowing. Then it gets cold. But that's not in the forecast. Yet.

British charcuterie

Bacon and thick-cut honey-roast ham have long ruled the roost. But this looks set to change as increasing numbers of artisan producers turn to making continental cured meats using traditional British breeds. Standout products include The Real Boar Co's Wiltshire salami, Bath Pig's spicy chorizo and Deli Farm's air-dried prosciutto. Restaurants are at it too, including Leeds gastropub The Reliance and east London Italian eatery Lardo.

Back to basics restaurants

If the Waitrose Good Food Guide is anything to go by, 2015 is the year of the underdog. This year's edition is dominated by great value pubs and mid-market eateries that give Michelin-starred restaurants a run for their money. Must-visits include: The Ox in Bristol, Timberyard in Edinburgh, Coast near Saundersfoot in Pembrokeshire, Beachhouse on South Milton Sands in Devon, Freemasons at Wiswell, Lancashire, and the Upton Fish Shop in Lincolnshire, Britain's only chippie with a coal-fired range.

Bean-to-bar chocolate

With coffee, bread and beer all being transformed in recent years, it is now the turn of chocolate. Bean-to-bar chocolate producers source high-grade cocoa direct from single estate farmers before making small batches of handmade chocolate. The results have been compared to fine wines, with different seasons, soils and cocoa varieties offering different flavours.

Bitter cocktails

Mixologists are increasingly swapping fruity, tropical cocktails for shorter, punchier types like negronis, Aperol spritzers, vermouth martinis and ultra dry gin and tonics (right). And in an attempt to give their cocktails more bite, some bars, such as The Ritz's Rivoli, are going as far as crafting their own botanical bitters.

April Lily Partridge

This talented 21-year-old chef (below) from Essex has just finished a stint as chef de partie at The Club at The Ivy in London's West End. In 2014 a roster of highly respected chefs and food writers, including Tom Kitchin, Nathan Outlaw and Angela Hartnett, selected Partridge as Britain's most promising young chef - an accolade that will not have gone unnoticed by the owners of some of the country's top restaurants. Definitely one to watch...

A little bit of luxury

Customers will indulge with quality not quantity as premium ingredients prove a hit. Already popular are über-special cupcakes made with an Eton mess twist or premium jams. Waitrose plans to explore this next year, launching new ready-to-drink cocktails with premium ingredients and a range of doughnuts with alternative fillings.



Hottest food trends for 2015

Fancy getting ahead of the curve? Check out next year's fashions now

Birmingham

England's second city is the only one outside London, Dublin and Edinburgh to boast four Michelin-star restaurants. The city has down to Earth dining covered, too: Carters of Moseley, a small neighbourhood eatery 15 minutes' drive from the city centre, beat off stiff competition from across the country to be crowned the Waitrose Good Food Guide's readers' restaurant of the year 2015.

Retro revamps

Classic recipes will get a rethink with 70s dinner-party favourites such as beef bourguignon made with alternative ingredients, according to the Waitrose Food & Drink Report. 'Rather than having a really rich beef stock and red wine, people might make it with a vegetable stock and a lighter-textured wine,' says Waitrose executive chef Jonathan Moore.

Open breweries

Increasing numbers of breweries are inviting the public in to brew their own beer. One of the first to do this was Stewart Brewing in Edinburgh, home to the Craft Beer Kitchen, where visitors are taught to make any beer they like from scratch. The best bit? Users get to leave with around 120 bottles of their own bespoke beer.

Edible insects

The West may finally be coming round to eating insects. Several US and UK start-ups are now selling chips, flour and energy bars made from ground crickets. Insects are not only sustainable (there are a whopping 10 quintillion insects alive at any one time) but are low in fat and packed full of protein. With around 80% of the world's population already eating 1,700 species of insects, isn't it time we caught on?



Drip coffee

Expensive domestic espresso machines could be a thing of the past. Instead, coffee lovers are turning to 'drip cones' and filter papers. It's cheap, easy and, according to experts, the best way to appreciate the flavours and aromas. For best results use freshly ground, recently roasted beans (no older than 21 days) at a coffee/water ratio of 8/100ml of 95°C water.

Friendly fine dining

After years of non-stop pop-ups, burger joints and street-food stalls, Britain's obsession with casual eating may finally be on the wane. Instead, customers are increasingly treating themselves to meals at fine-dining restaurants - especially those adopting a warmer, friendlier, more laid-back atmosphere. Leading the charge are restaurants such as Tom's Kitchen in Chelsea, which has recently launched a kids' menu, L'Enclume in Cartmel, praised by critics for its welcoming service, and The Hand & Flowers, Tom Kerridge's two Michelin-starred pub in the Buckinghamshire town of Marlow.

Let's make it quick

In 1980, the time taken to prepare and cook a main meal was 60 minutes. By 1990 that had dropped to 45 minutes, and by 2013 it was just 32. So shoppers are turning to semi-prepared meal kits that contain a recipe card and all the components of the meal, including fresh produce like meat or fish and vegetables. Sales of Mexican meal kits were up 20%, and Thai meal kits up 15% this year, and Waitrose is gearing up for that trend to continue. 'The bags have everything you need for a quick and easy meal to be prepared in 20 minutes,' says Waitrose's brand and new product development manager Helen Heighes. 'Customers are looking for a bit of inspiration to add to their own repertoire.'

Smart shopping

Last year, Waitrose became the world's first retailer to trial a hi-tech gadget that allows customers to scan items at home and add them to their waitrose.com shopping basket. Users of the Hiku device can scan a product barcode at home, tell the gadget a product name or update their shopping basket using a smartphone app. Although currently unavailable to Waitrose customers it is being trialled by Waitrose partners and an extensive in-home trial is planned for early 2015. Watch this space.

Staying healthy on the go

Time-poor Brits are increasingly grabbing lunch on the hoof, al-desko or in the car, according to the Waitrose Food & Drink Report. But they are becoming more conscious of nutrition. Waitrose nutritionist Joanne Lunn says: 'People tend to make poorer choices when they are hungry and they rush to the canteen or vending machine. It is possible to make good food choices if you're eating on the go - you just need to plan ahead.'

Polenta

Cheap, filling and ultra-versatile, polenta has long been popular in rustic northern Italian cooking. But this humble cornmeal ingredient (that also happens to be gluten-free) is now beginning to capture the imagination of Brits. Angela Hartnett combines it with chard and blue cheese for a hearty midweek meal. Chef Florence Knight has hers with pigeon and button mushrooms, and TV cook Nigel Slater uses his to make delicious lemon syrup cake. Meanwhile, a restaurant in the heart of Soho has opened called La Polentaria that only sells, you guessed it...



MEINE GÜTE! Continental treats such as stollen and panettone are widely available in the UK

It's beginning to look a lot like... Germany

It is one of the highlights of the Christmas season - a trip to a Christmas market in a beautiful European city to bring back delicacies such as lebkuchen and stollen to British tables.

Now, not only can you visit one without leaving the country, their influence is so strong, it has changed the way we eat during the festive season with many households adding panettone and spiced gingerbread to their festive offerings.

At Waitrose, sales of stollen are up 94%, while the Italian panettone is up 60%.

Marianne Robson, Waitrose Christmas bakery buyer, said: 'Once considered delicacies found only on trips to Christmas markets, German-style cakes and bakes such as stollen and lebkuchen are now thought of as

festive staples in British shopping baskets.

'Our customers are snapping up ready-made gingerbread houses with sales up 127% versus the same time last year.

'Home cooks are also wanting to try their hand at recreating their own German sweet treats in the kitchen.

'The Waitrose gingerbread activity kit is one of our bestsellers this year, being so popular we've had to increase our order to meet demand.'

People are increasingly keen to learn just how to cook them the traditional way, too.

A German Christmas market course held at the Waitrose Cookery School in London in November was sold out, even though there were two others planned for this month.

Participants spent the day

making market fare including stollen and lebkuchen, and enjoyed a traditional bratwurst lunch in the afternoon.

Cookery School pastry chef Eleni Tziriki said: 'Our first German Christmas market course went really well, and we were told by a German woman that the lunch was extremely authentic.'

Stollen and Christmas markets are the most recent festive imports from Germany, a country that has also given us the yule log, baubles and, of course, the tree.

In 1848 the *Illustrated News* published a picture of Queen Victoria and her German husband Albert with their children standing around their beautifully decorated Christmas tree.

At the time, people wanted to emulate the royal family and the tradition caught on.

#BakeItForward

Spread some goodwill this festive season in the form of a bread, bun or biscuit by getting involved in our campaign. Bake something for a friend, share your photos on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram using the #BakeItForward hashtag and nominate your friend to do the same (waitrose.com/bakeitforward).

@Saminzki
Gorgeous gingerbreads #BakeItForward nominate @JustinePinky