

# blue tomato

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Just Desserts

## Cool Britannia

Forget global relations, green credentials and financial strategies, the best way to judge a nation is by its desserts

Everyone knows the French are chic: their glossy pastries and gravity-defying gateaux show that the proof really is in the pudding. The red-blooded Italians have perfected seductive tiramisu, the Austrians put Willy Wonka to shame with their chocolate artistry and the Germans can turn out a crackling torte.

The sex-factor of British treats, on the other hand, is on a par with other peculiarly English phenomena: sunburn, Songs of Praise, socks 'n' sandals. Even the word 'pudding' sounds lumpen and inelegant.

The majority of British sweetmeats fall into two categories, *stodgy*: Roly Poly, crumble, scones, bread 'n' butter pud, or *wobbly*: blancmange, trifle, jelly, custard. Cobbled together from the mundane ingredients lurking in every British housewife's pantry, the sexiest these desserts get is an extra dollop of jam or (lumpy) custard.

But this looks set to change. Unfashionable English puddings are experiencing a renaissance. In keeping with the appetite for all things vintage, old-fashioned, British desserts have been revitalised with retro sparkle.

Don't believe us? Wander into Brit foodie institution, Marks & Spencer. Forget tastes of the exotic; a current bestseller is custard, which has seen a mouthwatering 140% surge in sales. To accompany their star performer, M&S have cannily launched a range of retro puds, including rhubarb and apple cobbler, and sticky toffee pudding. It's their 125th anniversary in May – to celebrate,

they're resuscitating Swiss roll and cherry and Madeira cakes.

These retro products are low in effort, low in cost, high in flavour – a back to basics approach reflecting the nation's tightened purse strings. Childhood treats are a source of comfort for us stressed-out Brits, as we navigate this recession. April Preston, Head of Product Development at M&S agrees: "We've noticed a big trend for consumers craving warming, comforting treats. British puddings fulfil this need perfectly, they're the ultimate taste of nostalgia".

We agree; a bit of nostalgia never hurt anyone, and if it tastes good, then we'll have seconds.

Best of British... Pudding Places

• Soho treasure, *The Stockpot*, has brilliant retro puds: golden syrup sponge, banana split, rice pudding, fruit salad, apple crumble, at ridiculously cheap prices (£1.95-£2.65). Stockpot's manager, Marina Orgulan, told Blue Tomato: "Apple crumble and the golden syrup sponge pudding are our most popular desserts. They're traditional and



people love the custard. It reminds them of school dinners."

• West Kensington's deliciously retro *Betty Blythe Tea Shop and Fine Food Pantry*, presided over by delectable vintage queen Lulu. Goodies are displayed on old-fashioned cake-tiers, tea comes in granny-chic bone china, sugar lumps occupy dainty glass bowls with antique tongs and food is quintessentially British – Victoria sponge, egg and watercress sandwiches, sugar mice.

• *The Covent Garden Real Food Market* has returned to the Piazza this April and features some of the UK's finest food producers. The Crumbs & Doilies cupcake stall and Sugar Grain's gluten-free treats will satiate sugar cravings.

■ Sarah Jappy

