

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

Lidl's £2.99 Christmas pudding trounced many pricier rivals in our latest taste test

Food bills soar at Christmas so our taste test experts love nothing better than finding great festive food that's also nice and cheap. They got a good result in our taste test of premium Christmas puddings for 2010, with the top scorer beating other luxury puds that cost, weight-for-weight, more than twice the price.

Lidl produced a winner with its bargain pudding, costing £2.99 for 454g. At the other end of the price scale, our experts also loved Waitrose's pudding at £13.99 for 907g. The Co-operative's Truly Irresistible pudding lived up to its name and was also a Best Buy.

Bringing up the rear were Sainsbury's and Aldi pudding. Our experts felt that the Aldi offering 'lacked depth of flavour', while the Sainsbury's 2010 edition tasted too strongly of alcohol.

WHAT'S ON THE TOP?

You may not think there's much room for innovation with the humble Christmas pudding, but three supermarkets – including Best Buy Waitrose – put forward topped versions this year. The Marks & Spencer and Tesco toppings divided our experts. One thought the Tesco pud, topped with glacé fruits and nuts, was 'very indulgent', while another found it too much and 'had to drink several gulps of water to remove the cloying stickiness of the glaze'. Meanwhile, M&S

opted for glacé orange – one of our experts thought this was a great taste bonus but another was left scratching his head wondering why it was necessary at all.

If you don't live near to a store that sells a Best Buy, take a look at the scores in 'Also tested', and read 'The perfect pud', right, to help you choose the best pudding this Christmas.

HOW WE TEST

We asked the nine of the biggest supermarkets to nominate a premium Christmas pudding for our test. The puddings were microwaved in accordance with pack instructions* at Orwell's restaurant in Shiplake near Reading – a Good Food Guide recommendation. The puddings were then blind tasted.

Our expert tasters scored each pudding out of ten for taste, texture, aroma and appearance and the 108 individual scores were then weighted, with greatest emphasis given to taste. This overall score was converted to a percentage.

Our experts were: Ryan Simpson who won The Good Food Guide's 'up and coming chef' award in 2010; Megan Oliver, grocery buyer at Fortnum & Mason; and Quentin Fitch, executive head chef at Searcy's restaurant in London's Barbican Centre, also recommended in The Good Food Guide.



LIDL DELUXE MATURED CHRISTMAS PUDDING

TASTE TEST SCORE 82%
PRICE £2.99 (454g)

THE PERFECT PUD

OUR EXPERTS GIVE YOU THEIR TOP CHRISTMAS PUDDING TIPS

The perfect pudding should taste of Christmas – alcohol, fruit, gentle warming spice and dark sugars. Look for a pudding that has been matured over several months – this allows time for the flavours to develop. For instance, Sainsbury's said before the test that theirs was best left until Christmas.

You also want lots of plump, large pieces of fruit (rather than an unidentifiable mush), as well as nuts that are still crunchy. The right texture for a pudding is not too bready and it should still be moist. And the alcohol used is crucial – some of the puddings on test had too much and were overpowering.

Once you've bought the perfect pudding, make sure you get it onto the table with style. Warm brandy flames better than cold, so heat your brandy in a separate pan before you pour it over the pudding and light it.

DO YOU LIKE BRANDY BUTTER, CREAM OR CUSTARD?

When we asked you what you eat on your pudding rum/brandy butter was your favourite followed by cream, custard and then the traditional white sauce.*



Chef Ryan Simpson

GREAT TASTE AND PRICE

Lidl, Deluxe Matured Christmas Pudding
82% (£2.99, 454g)

A bargain pudding that had our judges praising its 'great taste and brilliant texture'; 'moist but not too sticky'.

The fruit was described as plump and the nuts crunchy. While our experts felt that some of the puddings on test had too much or too little alcohol, this was deemed to be 'well balanced'. A half-size pudding, this would be good for a smaller party. A 100g mini pudding is also available costing £1.19.



LARGE AND LUXURIOUS

Waitrose, cherry and pecan topped Christmas Pudding with Rémy Martin
81% (£13.99, 907g)

This was a hit with our experts who thought its topping made it one of the best looking puds on test. It had a good overall taste, getting the alcohol level 'perfect' and the fruit was also praised. With its ceramic bowl, this was the most expensive pud we tasted, but we think it's worth splashing out on. At just over 900g, it's ideal for a large family gathering.



FRUITY AND WELL-BALANCED

Co-operative, Truly Irresistible Christmas Pudding
80% (£5.50, 454g)

One of our experts summed this up by saying 'it just smells of Christmas'. We enjoyed the fruity taste, well-balanced alcohol and moist texture. It may be slightly too sweet for some, but if you have a sweet tooth, this could be for you. The price was in the mid range and it would be good for a smaller party. A mini size is also available at £1.75. It's the only pudding we tasted that's suitable for vegans.



ALSO TESTED

■ Marks & Spencer Collection Orange Topped Christmas Pudding, 907g, £12.99, 75%
■ Morrisons The Best Matured Christmas Pudding, 454g, £5.99, 74%
■ Tesco Finest Ultimate Matured Christmas Pudding with Courvoisier, 907g, £12, 64%

■ Asda Extra Special Pudding 907g, £6.75, 61%
■ Sainsbury Taste the Difference Cognac Laced Christmas Pudding, 900g, £8.99, 49%
■ Aldi Holly Lane Specially Selected Christmas Pudding, 750g, £4.99, 49%