

# CUISINE DE CRITTERS

BY MUTT-STER CHEF, LISA TREEN



A friend on Facebook, (and yes she's a real friend), posted something recently that I LIKED. It was a sign that read:

## WANTED

People to take control of their money

### THIS CHRISTMAS

- Show the banks who is boss!
- Don't use credit cards
- Take cash out of your banks and pay cash whenever you can
- Buy from independent shops and service providers
- Upcycle
- Make gifts
- Spend time more than Money

I like the idea of spending time more than money, and I would always try to buy from independent stores than from large chains. Making gifts, too, is always high on my things to do.

My Christmases always have a nice wind-down to the festive season. About a week out from Christmas Day, my work tends to shut down and I have more time to get the house and garden in order. We tend to be very social over the holiday season and it's a perfect time to catch up with friends and family.



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Last year, we moved into our new house just five days before Christmas. We also managed to have houseguests and 13 people over for Christmas lunch. Quite a feat and a little crazy but it was a really nice time.

In the lead up to Christmas I try to bake Christmas treats like ginger bread cookies, assorted chocolate truffles and cathedral cake. I like having these treats on hand as they're easy to box and finish with pretty ribbon as gifts to neighbours and acquaintances and unexpected visitors.

This year I'm making up chocolate mice for dog walking friends. I've included the recipe as it's simple and these little mice look quite sweet, poking out from some tissue paper.

Christmas is also a time where I try to find something nice to make up for my two dogs. They're banned from getting the bad people food — like the fat trimmings off the ham. So many dogs end up in emergency rooms of vets because they've consumed quantities of bad stuff. We're always very careful to ask our guests not to feed anything to the dogs. One simple reason is that we would have no idea of what was being slipped to them, and another is that we cannot easily monitor the amount of calories they may have consumed.

There are always accidents that happen. Last year, my Christmas guests were all assembled for a group photo we were taking with the timer on the camera. My dog

Scooter, took this opportune and unguarded moment to filch the remaining piece of pavlova!

There is one cake that I do bake as a treat to be shared with the dogs. It has apple, wheat germ, wholemeal flour and the fragrant aromas of vanilla and cinnamon. The cake's only sweetening agent is molasses. I prefer using molasses in my home cooked pet treats because it is much healthier than refined sugars.

Molasses is derived from the cane of the sugar plant by first crushing it, extracting the juice and then boiling it. The third boiling of the sugar syrup makes blackstrap molasses. Unlike refined sugars, blackstrap molasses contains trace amounts of vitamins and minerals. It's a source of calcium, potassium and iron.

Up until the 1880s, molasses was the most popular sweetener in the United States, because it was much cheaper than refined sugar. After the end of World War I, refined sugar prices dropped drastically, resulting in consumers switching from molasses to white sugar crystals.

Molasses has long been used as an ingredient in cattle feed. In winter, we used to feed it to our horses, so that they would retain their condition through the colder weather.

It's not hard to find as health food stores stock it, and you can even find it in Coles or Woolworths but you'll have to look in the health food aisle, close to the where you would find the wheat germ.

## MOLASSES CHRISTMAS DOG CAKE

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups wholemeal flour
- ¼ cup wheat germ
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 cup molasses
- ½ cup lactose free milk
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 2 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 apple, cored and chopped



### Method:

Preheat the oven to 180C.

Oil a small cake tin with a thin coating of vegetable oil and then flour. Shake out the excess flour.

In a bowl, mix the flour, wheat germ, baking powder and cinnamon and set to one side. In another large bowl, mix the molasses\* and oil, then add the eggs one by one, beating until blended. Add the vanilla with ½ cup of the milk. Add the flour mixture to the wet mixture, mix until smooth then add in the chopped apple.

Add the mix to the tin and place in the oven. Bake for around 30 to 40 minutes, testing it with a toothpick to make sure it's cooked through. Cool cake before serving.

Store leftovers in an airtight container for no more than 3 days, or wrap in plastic wrap and store in the freezer for up to 60 days.

\* as molasses is a thick, viscose syrup, you may need to warm it in the jar under a hot tap before pouring.





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## CHOCOLATE MICE (FOR HUMANS ONLY)

### Ingredients for the mice bodies:

- 115g of semisweet cooking chocolate (about half a block)
- 1/3 cup of sour cream
- 1 cup ground up \*chocolate cookie crumbs

### Ingredients for the mice decorations:

- 1/3 cup chocolate cookie crumbs
- packet of cachous (for the eyes)
- sliced blanched almonds (for the ears)
- thin strips of red licorice or cherry sour strips cut thinly

### Method:

Melt the chocolate gently in a small bowl over simmering water. Allow to cool slightly and then add in the sour cream. Stir in 1 cup finely ground cookie crumbs. Cover and refrigerate until firm.

Roll teaspoonfuls of mixture into balls and shape a sloping, pointing nose. Roll in the remaining cookie crumbs. Position eyes, ears and insert tail.

Refrigerate until ready to package and gift.

\* I find that Tiny Teddy cookies are the best for this recipe. But it's a little disconcerting when you're tossing their little smiling face into the blender or kitchen whiz! 🐾

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# THE LEXICON OF LENNY

BY LISA TREEN



**I sit here writing this with my right thumb dressed in a couple of Band Aids. I've just sustained an injury from the newest member of our family, a Little Corella that we've adopted, called Lenny. Lenny has quite a bite to unsuspecting hands that get in his way!**

We weren't looking to add a bird to our family. and to be honest, I certainly wouldn't have looked at getting a Corella. I prefer smaller birds like Indian Ringnecks or Lorikeets. But sometimes fate comes knocking on your cage and you've got to answer the call.

Lenny's a rescued parrot and it's estimated that he's between 50 to 60 years old. He has quite a story, which was retold to us by the nice people who run the Sydney branch of Parrot Rescue.

I had phoned Parrot Rescue, as we wanted to feature a rescued parrot in our last spring edition. Over the course of the conversation, Naomi, Parrot Rescue's coordinator, almost jokingly asked me if I would consider adopting a geriatric bird which needed a new home. And then she told me the Legend of Lenny.

Lenny was a much-loved companion of a man who lived in Epping. He was besotted by his bird, and over many years, had taught Lenny to say all sorts of words and phrases. Then, sadly, Lenny's owner found out he had a terminal illness and wanted to find a safe home for the bird.

Lenny's owner was so worried about what would happen to his bird, that he called upon the ladies who owned the local café. He begged them to take Lenny in, for fear that his bird would not find a good home or his fate would be uncertain. They promised to adopt him and look after him. They took Lenny to their home and tried to settle him into their lives. The only problem was they just weren't bird people, and probably sustained a few nips and bites from a cranky Corella. After a while, Lenny became too much to handle and too noisy for them to keep in the house. So Lenny's Cockie cage was moved into the garage. And that's where he's been living since 1996.

I mentioned the story to my boyfriend Paul, and he seemed to take on the idea of adopting Lenny. I'm more cautious, so I made arrangements with Parrot Rescue that we would trek out west to meet Lenny's current owners, and if we felt comfortable in taking him then we would. If we didn't feel it was right, then no hard feelings, and they would continue to look for a new home.

We arrived at the house in the west and were warmly greeted by the current owners. They ushered us into the garage where we found Lenny in a dark corner. His cage had recently been upgraded from an old Cockie cage to a nicer, more modern one – but it was still pretty small for a medium to large bird. Their garage had only one window with no view, and we got the impression that it was cold in winter and blazingly hot in summer.

We chatted about Lenny's history and how they had taken him in. They're good people, who out of the kindness of their hearts, took in a bird whose future would have been uncertain. Sometimes obligation rules over what's good for an animal and its care and happiness. Looking around the dark garage and imagining how devoid of company, light and laughter Lenny's daily existence was, we realised obligation had become the winner over better judgement.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Paul making moves on evacuating Lenny. He unloaded the bird carrier from the back of the car and started packing Lenny's bits and pieces. There wasn't even a chance for me to ask whether he was all right with taking in this bird — Paul was making the decision there and then.

The ladies told us that Lenny was now on a better diet of seed. Previously he only ate sunflower seeds and this was the reason why a few years back, a fatty cyst had to be removed. They also wanted to give us a couple of handtowels, and explained that one hangs from the top of Lenny's cage and he uses this as a security blanket. We were a little mystified by this but took the towels anyway.

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