

# CHRISTMAS AFLOAT

A festive feast fit for a king and queen:  
Peppercorn-crusted beef tenderloin



JENNIFER HAMILTON PHOTOS

**W**e've spent Christmas holidays afloat for the past five years. We've toured the Gulf Islands, and docked at Victoria's Inner Harbour. With the Parliament Buildings and the Empress Hotel all lit up, the Inner Harbour is a truly magical place to spend Christmas. The past two winters we've ranged farther afield, to Desolation Sound and the Broughtons, where we had to supply our own Christmas dinner and festivities.

To bring a little Christmas spirit afloat, we always decorate our powerboat Dirona for the season. Our favourite decoration is a miniature fibre-optic tree that glows different colours when plugged in. The tree is simple and effective. We also tape big red ribbons to various flat surfaces and hang Christmas bells and other shiny decorations from hooks above the windows.

We run a string of white Christmas lights and a gold tinsel rope below the front windshield, and have permanently installed



a ribbon light above. Candlelight is the final touch.

We couldn't find anything suitable at the nautical stores, but eventually found some scented candles that come in stable wide-bottom jars, which we set on Scoot-guard when lit.

We could never consume a whole turkey, even if we could get one that fit in our little onboard oven. And a chicken substitute just didn't seem to cut it. Instead, our traditional Christmas dinner for the past two years has been peppercorn-encrusted beef



tenderloin. It's an elegant main course that is easy to store and prepare aboard.

For side dishes, we typically toss potato and onion wedges, peeled garlic cloves, and root vegetables such as carrots in a little olive oil, salt and pepper, and distribute them in the pan to cook with the roast. Or, if we're feeling more energetic, we'll make potatoes "Da Delfina," where boiled creamer potatoes are crushed, then browned in olive oil and garlic, and tossed with lemon zest and parsley. And we usually have artichokes with lemon butter with our fancier meals.

With the boat decorated for the season, a fine bottle of wine opened, and a delicious meal on the table, Christmas dinner afloat is a real treat.

## PEPPERCORN-CRUSTED BEEF TENDERLOIN

Makes 4 to 6 servings

- Ingredients:
- ¼ cup whole mixed peppercorns
  - 2 tbsp kosher salt
  - 2 pound whole beef tenderloin or filet mignon
  - 1 cup beef broth
  - ¾ cup dry red wine
  - 2 to 3 medium shallots, peeled and cut into slivers
  - 1 ½ tbsp flour
  - 1 tbsp softened butter

Lay a sheet of wax paper on a flat surface and spread the peppercorns on top. Lay a second sheet over the peppercorns. Place a heavy frying pan on top and press down, cracking the peppercorns into coarse bits. (You may also use a spice grinder if available.)

WITH THE BOAT DECORATED FOR THE SEASON, A FINE BOTTLE OF WINE OPENED, AND A DELICIOUS MEAL ON THE TABLE, CHRISTMAS DINNER AFLOAT IS A REAL TREAT.

Rub the salt over the surface of the beef. Roll the beef in the cracked peppercorns until the outer surface is coated.

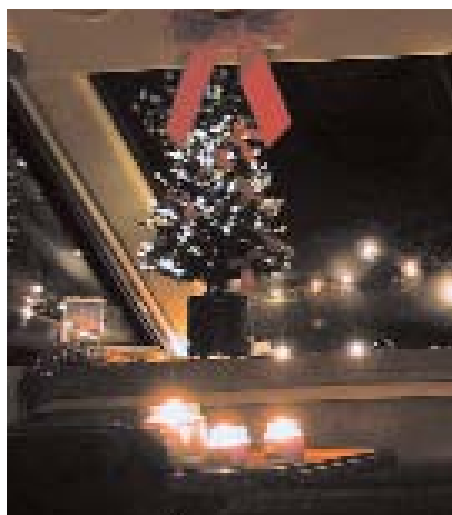
Put the beef on a rack in a roasting pan. Roast in a preheated 350° F oven about 20 to 25 minutes per pound, or until a meat thermometer inserted in the thickest part reaches 150° F for medium-rare. Remove the beef from the oven and transfer to a carving surface. Tent with foil to keep warm. Degrease the pan drippings.

While the beef is cooking, combine the broth, wine and shallots in a large saucepan and bring to a boil. Cook until the mixture reduces by about a third. Combine the flour and softened butter, working to a paste. Whisk into the sauce and simmer five minutes to thicken. Pour drippings from roasting pan into sauce, whisking well. Keep warm.

Slice the beef and serve the sauce on the side.

Notes: We have our butcher prepare, vacuum-seal and freeze the roast, then we pick it up the day we head out. It's a compact package that fits easily in our small freezer or would keep for several days in an icebox.

Recipe adapted from *Sophisticated Entertaining: Spirited Food for Grown-Up Parties*, by Jeanne Benedict, HP Books.



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