

THE DETECTIVE CLUB MURDER

A Murder Mystery Dinner Game by

RUTH WARE

For 4–8 players



The setting is Mistletoe Manor, the ancient country-house home of celebrated crime writer Sir Aubrey St Clair.

You are one of the hand-picked members of the Detective Club, the crème de la crème of the crime-writing elite, here to toast the club's fiftieth anniversary.

AMONG THE GUESTS:

Valerie Chime – Sir Aubrey's mousy, long-suffering secretary

Alex Masters – former marine turned bestselling thriller writer

Dolores de l'Amour – ageing glamour puss and author of steamy romantic crime novels

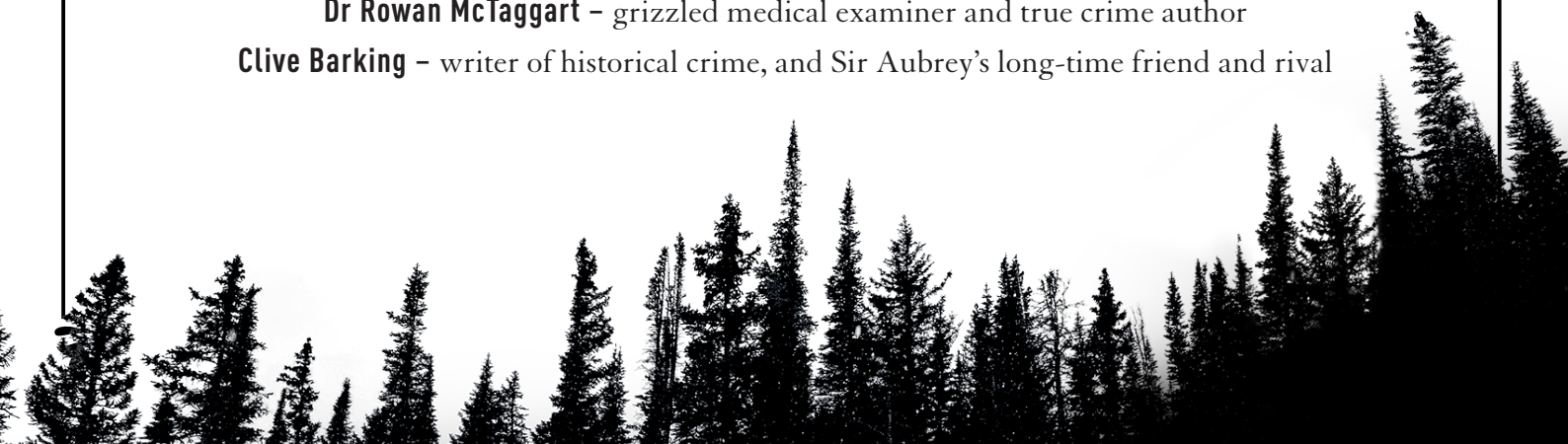
A. N. Andrews – the serious young author of this year's hottest psychological thriller debut

Kick Carmichael – ex-professional tennis player, now celebrity children's writer

Tuffy Farqueson – Sir Aubrey's port-swilling agent and man about town

Dr Rowan McTaggart – grizzled medical examiner and true crime author

Clive Barking – writer of historical crime, and Sir Aubrey's long-time friend and rival



INSTRUCTIONS

Hello, dear host! Thanks for downloading this mystery. It may be a little different from murder mystery parties you have played before, so even if you're an experienced player, please read these instructions to understand how this particular game works.

There are eight possible guests, but the murderer is decided on the evening, so you can have anywhere from four to eight players and the host can play as one of the guests. Don't worry if you don't have the right number of male or female guests – most of the writers have unisex names, and some could be using pen names that don't match their actual identity.

Before the evening begins, print out a character booklet for each player, as well as the correct number of innocent and guilty cards, depending on the number of participants (for instance if you have five players, you will need to print out four innocent cards and one murderer card). If you, the host, are playing then do NOT read past the first page of the booklets when you print them. It's fine to read the first page, as this contains information that will help you match the guest to the character, but the subsequent pages contain spoilers that will enable you to guess the murderer.

Begin the evening by drawing lots to find out who the murderer is. The guests should keep their status strictly to themselves! However, when they get to the appropriate section in the narrative, if they have drawn the murderer card, they should read out the section marked 'If you are the murderer, read this'. Everyone else should read out the sections marked 'If you are innocent, read this'.

The action is divided into an introduction and three chapters, each one punctuated by a short section of narrative from me to set the scene. I have recorded these sections as YouTube videos, but a transcript is included in the pack, so you can either read these sections out yourself or play your guests the videos (available at www.ruthware.com/murdermysterypartygame)

After the second chapter, discuss your solutions and vote to find out the killer! In the third chapter, find out if you are correct. If you are innocent, then you win by collaborating with your fellow bystanders to correctly guess the murderer in a majority vote. If you are guilty, then you win by pulling the wool over the eyes of the other guests and escaping detection.

Part of the fun is getting into character so send your guests their character booklets in advance, and encourage them to read the character introduction, and to dress up and bring props along to enhance the evening.

If you are meeting in person, you could try setting the scene with an old-fashioned English dinner of the kind Aubrey St Clair would appreciate. Traditional starters might include smoked salmon on thinly sliced brown bread, watercress soup or Sussex smokies, followed by a main course like roast beef with parsnips and roast potatoes, spinach roulade, or a good hearty stew with mustard mash. If you have room for dessert, then you could try an English pudding like Eton mess, apple crumble or sticky toffee pudding. Some of my favourite recipes are included at the end of the download pack, but if takeaway pizza is more your thing, don't worry, Sir Aubrey won't be here to complain!

Murder mystery games also work brilliantly over Zoom or Skype, so if you can't be with your friends in person, don't let that stop you. Remember, the host can screenshare the YouTube videos for added atmosphere! (If you are running the game remotely then you will need to draw the murderer in a slightly different way. If the host doesn't want to play alongside, then the easiest solution is for them to choose the murderer and send a private message to that person. If the host wants to play they can either ask a friend to make the pick, or the host can put the innocent and guilty cards into identical envelopes a few days beforehand and post one at random to each guest - saving one for themselves.)

Now, turn the lights down low, and pour a glass of your favourite beverage, for the game is afoot!

NARRATOR'S INTRODUCTION

When your guests have finished drawing lots to find out who is the murderer, play them the Introduction video at www.ruthware.com/murdermysterypartygame, or read aloud the transcript below.

Hello and welcome, hapless guests. Hapless because despite the good food, pleasant surroundings and even better company, tonight you find yourself invited to step inside the pages of a Ruth Ware mystery – which means that none of you will escape unscathed. Deception is a certainty, danger more than likely. Painful pasts will be unearthed to face the light of day, and lies exposed for what they are.

For one thing is sure: one of you sitting around this table is a murderer. The task of the innocent appears simple – solve the mystery, and expose the guilty party. But you have secrets of your own to protect – and no one is entirely what they seem.

For now, close your eyes, and imagine yourself standing in a great vaulted hall – beams arching overhead, polished boards beneath your feet. A fire roars in the hearth, the logs spitting and occasionally sending out sparks with a noise like a firecracker. The wind moans in the chimney, and somewhere in the depths of the house a door bangs ceaselessly to and fro. This is Mistletoe Manor, the country-house home of the bestselling crime writer Sir Aubrey St Clair, author of more than forty novels starring his famous sleuth Eric Argent, and three times winner of the Bloody Nib Award for best crime novel of the year.

Tonight is the fiftieth annual meeting of the Detective Club, that celebrated gathering of the crème de la crème of murder mystery writers. You, who are gathered here in the vaulted great hall of Mistletoe

Manor, represent the best, brightest and most illustrious modern mystery-mongers. From venerable old scribblers to up-and-coming new voices, you have each been hand-picked for membership by the club's chairman and founder, Aubrey St Clair himself.

Sir Aubrey's annual dinner is the highlight of the year – and this year, being the fiftieth anniversary of the club's founding, promises to be something rather special. As you gather before dinner, waiting for Aubrey to make his grand entrance, you look around the circle and realise that there are some new faces among the guests. Perhaps now would be a good time to introduce yourself to your fellow scribblers?

Instruct your guests to pick up their booklets and read the paragraph marked introduction

CHAPTER 1

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD

When your guests have finished introducing themselves, play them the Chapter 1 video at www.ruthware.com/murdermysterypartygame, or read the transcript below.

As the last of the guests introduce themselves, the sound of a gong reverberates through the great hall and Stebbings, Sir Aubrey's butler, appears as if by magic.

'Dinner is served, ladies and gentlemen,' he announces. You set down your glasses, looking at each other with pleasurable anticipation, and follow Stebbings through into the magnificent medieval dining hall of Mistletoe Manor. The long oak table is set with pristine white linen, a fire burns in the huge Tudor chimney, and the silver serving dishes and crystal glasses sparkle in the soft light from the candles in the chandeliers high above.

One by one you take your seats, inhaling the delicious scents wafting through from the kitchen – but then comes a dawning realisation. There is a space left at the top of the table – where is Aubrey? You glance at each other, wondering when your host will appear. Aubrey's tradition has always been to be seated at the head of the table, ready to welcome members as they enter. Is something wrong?

Your suspicions are confirmed as a blood-curdling scream rends the quiet night air. It dies away, and you hear the noise of running feet on the stairs, before the door to the dining room flings open and a distraught-looking maid bursts into the room, her cap askew and her face white with shock.

'Clara!' expostulates Stebbings, shocked at this breach of good manners. 'What is the meaning of this disturbance?'

'It's the master!' Clara cries. Her eyes dart from guest to guest, full of shock and terror. 'All over blood, he is. Stabbed through the heart in his own study with his very own letter opener!'

'Stabbed?' gasps Stebbings. 'But this is terrible! We must call the doctor!'

'Doctor?' The maid gives a hysterical laugh. 'He's past that, sir. It's the police you'll be needing. He's dead as a doornail. Poor Sir Aubrey has been murdered in his own house – and it's one of them as done it, mark my words!'

With these words she points an accusing finger around the table of diners, coming to rest ... on you.

Well. You can't let this stand. It's time to defend yourself. Read aloud the Chapter One section in your character booklet.

CHAPTER 2

A QUESTION OF MOTIVE

When your guests have finished explaining their whereabouts on arrival, play them the Chapter 2 video at www.ruthware.com/murdermysterypartygame, or read the transcript below.

Scarcely has the voice of the last guest died away, before there is the sound of tyres on gravel, and the deep sonorous chime of the doorbell echoes through the house.

‘Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen,’ Stebbings murmurs, and he leaves the dining hall, returning with two grim-faced police officers.

‘Allow me to present Detective Sergeant Smith and Detective Constable Weston,’ he says, and then bows.

‘Good evening, all,’ DS Smith says. She is a formidable-looking woman with dark hair and glasses. Her colleague, DC Weston, is a small sandy man who hitches nervously at his trousers. DS Smith turns to Stebbings. ‘Mr Stebbings, if you could take us upstairs to see the crime scene, then we’ll return down here to speak to the maid Clara and the other witnesses. Please don’t go anywhere,’ she adds, addressing you and the other guests assembled around the table. ‘I’ll be needing to ask you some questions.’

With that, Stebbings and the two police officers disappear out of the room. You hear their footsteps retreating to the first floor and then the squeak of a door as they enter Aubrey’s study, and a clunk as it closes after them. An ominous silence descends on the dining hall, broken only by the squeak and rustle of the diners shifting in their chairs.

Questions. The word has been smouldering at the back of your mind, and looking around at your fellow guests you can see you are not the only person uncomfortably wondering what might be asked of you. And as it happens, you have a few questions of your own. Who will be the first to break the silence?

Turn to Chapter 2 in your character booklets, and take a look at the list of potential questions you might want answered. You’ll have to be quick – Smith and Weston will be returning any minute. You have time to ask two questions each. So choose wisely!

CHAPTER 3

J'ACCUSE!

When your guests have finished asking and answering questions, play them the Chapter 3 video at www.ruthware.com/murdermysterypartygame, or read them the transcript below.

A persuasive set of answers – but were they completely convincing? And was it your imagination, or did you notice holes in a few alibis, a few people skirting around the truth?

Slowly, you look around the table at the faces of your fellow guests. Their expressions are full of mingled shock, indignation, and more than a little guilt. As you sit back in your chair, you wonder what your own expression is revealing. Clearly you are not the only one with a secret to hide – but only one person in this room is a murderer. The question is ... who?

From up above you hear the door of Sir Aubrey's study close, and the voice of the female police officer filter down the stairs.

'Well, he's certainly dead, poor bloke. And since all the servants have alibis, it must be one of that precious lot downstairs. I'll call it in, and then seal the crime scene for the forensics chaps, and then we'd better go down and question the suspects. It's going to be a long night ...'

Well. You can't have that. Who knows what you might confess under pressure? It would be much better if you could sort this out among yourselves and present the police with the murderer's confession. But you'll have to act fast – Smith and Weston will be downstairs as soon as they've finished sealing up Sir Aubrey's room.

I hope you've got a plausible theory – because you're going to need it.

It is time for you to share your theories with the other guests. The murderer will be decided by majority vote – so you might have some work to do to convince the others. When you have voted, the accused should turn to Chapter 3 in your character book, and read out their confession or denial. If you were correct – bravo! If you were wrong, then find out who was the guilty party, and why.

EPILOGUE

When your guests have voted on their theories and discovered the truth of their accusation, play them the Epilogue video at www.ruthware.com/murdermysterypartygame or read them this transcript.

Scarcely has the killer's confession finished echoing around the rafters, when you hear the sound of footsteps from above, and DS Smith's brisk booming voice comes floating down the stairwell, cutting through the stricken silence of your fellow guests.

'All done,' she says. 'Thank you, Stebbings, you've been most helpful. I don't think we'll have too much trouble with the case – even without the evidence we found in Sir Aubrey's diary, there's DNA all over the shop, and the blood splatter alone should ensure a conviction.'

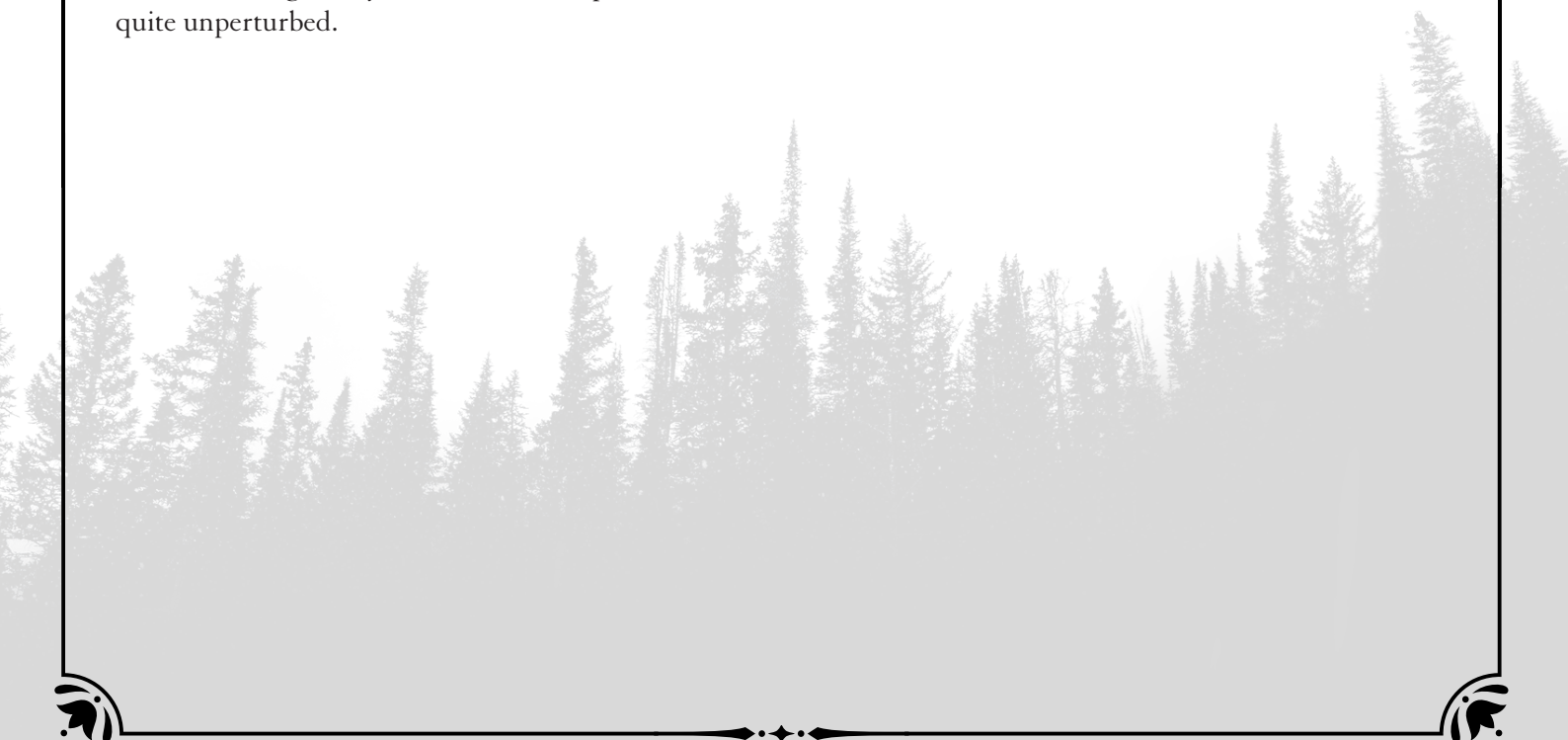
The silence in the hall is deathly. All eyes come to rest on the murderer in their midst, but no one says anything, as the sound of the footsteps on the stairs grows louder.

As Smith, Weston and Stebbings enter the dining hall, there is a strangled cry, but DS Smith steps forward, quite unperturbed.

'I am arresting you on suspicion of the murder of Sir Aubrey St Clair,' she says, and a great sigh of something halfway between relief and exhaustion escapes your lips. 'You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something which you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.'

It is over. It is really over.

Aubrey's final mystery, the Murder at Mistletoe Manor, has been solved.



RECIPES

There is no need to do Murder at Mistletoe Manor as an actual dinner, you could play it just as easily over drinks or coffee.

But if you do want to set the scene, then it is structured so that you can do a course per section (Introduction during the pre-dinner drinks, Chapter 1 over the first course, Chapter 2 during the main course, Chapter 3 during dessert, and the Epilogue over coffee). You may find it convenient to play your guests the narrator videos while you serve up.

Here are a few of my favourite traditional recipes that go well with a bottle of claret, but you should feel free to go offpiste.

Sussex Smokies

This is a traditional Sussex dish that can be eaten as a starter, or as a main course with crusty bread. It is very rich, so if you are serving as a starter then a ramekin-sized portion will be plenty.

One advantage of this dish is that you can make it ahead up to the point where you add the cheese and breadcrumb topping, and then refrigerate until you're ready to cook them. They will keep a day or two in the fridge.

Serves 8 as a starter or 4 as a main course.

- 400g smoked haddock fillet (ideally the white, undyed kind)
- 500ml milk
- 40g butter
- 40g plain all purpose flour
- 1tsp English mustard
- 150g mature Cheddar cheese (sharp cheddar), grated
- 200ml crème fraîche (you can sub full fat sour cream)
- 100g of breadcrumbs (optional)

Remove the skin and any stray pin bones from the haddock and place into a saucepan together with the milk. Bring to the boil, and continue to simmer gently until the fish is completely cooked through and is firm and flaky to the touch. Take off the heat and remove the fish onto a plate to cool. Keep the milk for the next stage.

In a new pan, melt the butter over a gentle heat and add the flour. Stir until totally mixed. Add about ¼ of the milk you used to cook the fish, and stir vigorously until you get a thick ball of batter. Add in another ¼ of the milk and stir until completely combined. Continue until all the milk is used up and the sauce is smooth (you can whisk it if there are stray lumps but the odd one doesn't matter). Then add the mustard and 100g of cheese and stir until completely combined.

Remove from the heat and stir in the crème fraîche.

Take the cooling fish and crumble an equal portion into 8 ramekins (or four dishes if you are serving as a main course). Pour over the cheese sauce until each dish is almost full. Top with breadcrumbs (if using) and the remains of the cheese.

Cook in a fairly hot oven until bubbling, and the top is beginning to brown and crisp. This will take about 10 minutes if you are cooking straight away, or longer if you are cooking them from the fridge.

Serve with crusty bread, and (if you're serving as a main course) perhaps a green salad or some steamed asparagus.

Asparagus Hollandaise

This is a delicious, light vegetarian starter, which handily uses up the egg yolks from the meringue recipe below. The sauce is not a true hollandaise but a cheat's version that is a little easier to make. It comes out slightly thicker, which is perfect for dipping the asparagus spears.

Serves 8

- approx. 800g of asparagus
- 4 tbsp white wine vinegar
- 4 egg yolks
- salt
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 250g of butter, cold from the fridge, cut into small cubes – about 2cm square

First, prepare your asparagus. You do this by taking a stem gently at each end, and bending until it snaps. Discard everything below the point where it snaps as this is the woody part. If your asparagus is very young and tender you may be able to simply cut the end off. Bring a large pan of water to the boil ready for cooking your asparagus, but don't put the spears in just yet. Turn it off, and get on with making your hollandaise.

This sauce is made in a bain-marie, a heatproof bowl placed over a pan of gently simmering water. The bowl should be large enough to rest on top of the pan without touching the water – the idea is that the heat comes indirectly from the steam.

Into the bain-marie bowl put the white wine vinegar and the egg yolks (reserve the whites for meringues or the spinach roulade below). Whisk them with a spoon until they are combined, and then add the Dijon mustard and a pinch of salt to taste (if you are using unsalted butter you will need more like a teaspoon of salt).

Now, drop two or three cubes of cold butter into the egg and vinegar mixture, and beat with the spoon until the butter has completely disappeared.

Continue adding butter until you have a thick golden sauce that is still just pourable. You may not need all the butter. At this point remove from the heat.

If you overheat the sauce or add too much butter, it may split and become lumpy. You can rescue it by beating in another egg yolk, so it's a good idea to have a spare egg to hand in case of emergencies.

Now, add your asparagus to the pan you boiled originally. Boil for just a few minutes or until the stems are tender but still have some bite.

Give each guest a handful of spears, and a pool of hollandaise. Dip and enjoy!

Hunters' chicken stew

This is a rich hearty stew, which is similar to chicken chasseur – unsurprisingly, English and French cuisine have a lot of overlap. Its great benefit is that it's nearly hands-free, so you can put it in the oven and largely forget about it.

In terms of what type of chicken to use, this is a matter of personal taste. I prefer to use skin-on, bone-in portions which are fiddlier to eat, but make for a much richer sauce, and which stand up to long cooking better. If you are using whole leg portions, 8 should be plenty. If you are using just thighs, you may need more like 12–16 depending on how hungry your guests are.

It's also fine to use breast fillets, but be aware they will dry out more quickly in the oven so will need less cooking time.

Serves 8

- 8–12 chicken portions
- olive oil
- 150g sliced bacon or diced pancetta
- 8 banana shallots (or sixteen regular ones)
- 250g chestnut mushrooms
- salt and black pepper
- 3 cans chopped tomatoes
- 500ml chicken stock
- 500ml red wine

Take a large roasting tray, big enough to comfortably hold all your chicken, and lightly oil with olive oil.

Place the chicken in the tray along with the sliced bacon or diced pancetta.

If you are using banana shallots then cut them lengthways through the root, remove the skin, and toss them in with the chicken. If you are using small shallots then simply peel them and put them in whole.

Remove any woody stems from the mushroom and cut them into halves or quarters depending on size. Place in the roasting tray.

Drizzle everything with more olive oil, salt and pepper and then put into a medium-hot oven (about 200 degrees c / 400 degrees F / gas mark 6), turning occasionally until the chicken is crispy brown and cooked through and the vegetables are starting to caramelise. This will depend what cut you are using, but probably about 30 minutes for breast, a bit longer for thigh or leg portions.

When the chicken is brown and bubbling, then into the hot tin pour 3 cans of good-quality chopped tomatoes, 500ml chicken stock, and 500ml of red wine. Gently combine. If you are using skin-on chicken then lift the joints to the top of the vegetables so the skin can continue to crisp.

Return to the oven and cook for a further hour, or longer if you like, in which case lower the heat.

Serve with mashed potato and French beans.

Spinach roulade

This is my mother-in-law's recipe and is a delicious vegetarian centrepiece. It's perfect for using up a glut of spinach in the summer, but it works equally well with frozen spinach year round. You can also do a smoked salmon filling which looks beautiful when sliced.

Serves 4

- 500g spinach
- 15g butter
- salt and black pepper
- 4 eggs
- 100g Parmesan
- vegetable oil

Mushroom filling

- 150g mushrooms
- 15g butter
- 1 tbsp flour
- 150ml milk
- 3 tbsp cream
- nutmeg (optional)

First take a Swiss roll tin and line it very well with baking parchment. Lightly brush the parchment with oil.

Cook the spinach, drain very well in a tea towel, squeezing out the excess water, and then chop finely (unless you are using pre-chopped frozen spinach).

Place the warm spinach in a bowl and add the butter, salt and pepper.

Separate the eggs, and add the egg yolks to the spinach mixture, stirring in very well.

Now whisk the whites until they form stiff peaks, and fold slowly into the spinach mixture, a spoon at a time.

Pour into the Swiss roll tin and scatter the grated Parmesan on top. Bake in a medium-hot oven (about 200 degrees c / 400 degrees f / gas mark 6) for about 10 minutes until risen and firm to the touch.

Meanwhile, make your filling. Slice the mushrooms thinly and sauté them in the butter until cooked, then add the flour and stir to form a paste. Add the milk little by little, and stir until it's combined to make a thick sauce.

Remove from the heat and add the cream and a grating of nutmeg (optional).

When the roulade is cooked, turn it out upside down onto a sheet of baking parchment, and peel off the paper it was cooked on. Spread the mushrooms on the roulade, and then use the parchment to roll it up into a Swiss roll. Serve while still warm, in slices, with a green salad or some buttered new potatoes.

Variations: instead of the mushrooms, you can spread the roulade with 200g of cream cheese, topped with 100g of smoked salmon. The green and pink looks particularly pretty when rolled up and sliced.

Eton mess

Eton mess is a particularly easy English pudding, said to have originated from the boys' public school Eton. You can use bought meringue or make your own, but either way, it's important not to assemble the dish until the last minute, or the meringue will go soggy.

Serves 8

For the meringue

- 3 egg whites
- ½ tsp white wine vinegar
- 170g caster sugar / superfine sugar
- 1 tsp cornflour
- ½ tsp vanilla essence
- ½ tsp white wine vinegar

For the filling

- 500g ripe strawberries
- 300ml double (heavy) cream or whipping cream

Making the meringue is much easier if you have an electric beater, though you can do it by hand.

First ensure your bowl and whisk are scrupulously clean, as any kind of fat will cause the meringue to sink.

Whip the egg whites and white wine vinegar together until very stiff, and you can hold the bowl upside down without anything sliding out.

Next, mix together the caster sugar and cornflour and add them to the eggs spoonful by spoonful, whisking well between each addition. Pinch a little of the mixture between your fingers – if it's still gritty, you need to keep whisking.

When the mix is glossy and completely smooth then beat in the vanilla essence.

Line a baking tray with baking parchment and spoon the meringue mixture onto it in clumps – it doesn't matter how they look as you will be crunching them up later. If you prefer, you can also spread it out into a flat disc to make a Pavlova. Place in a pre-warmed oven at 140 degrees c / 275 f / gas mark 1 for about an hour. The meringues should be firm on top when removed, but still have a little bit of mallowy softness inside.

Peel the meringues off the baking parchment and allow to cool on a rack.

Now, slice the strawberries into bite-size chunks and whip the cream until it forms soft peaks.

When you are ready to serve, break the meringue into pieces and slowly fold the strawberries, cream and meringue together.

It is important not to mix everything together until just before you are about to serve the dish, or the meringues will lose all their crunch.

You can serve either in individual portions or in one big dish for guests to help themselves.