

Filipino Holiday Candy

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Filipino Catholics celebrate the world's longest Christmas, beginning on Dec. 16 (the date of the first of nine consecutive *missas de gallo*, or dawn Masses) and ending the first Sunday in January with the Feast of the Three Kings. It's a time of church, prayers and family but also, as I learned when my husband and I spent Christmas in a rural Philippine town a few years ago, an excuse for Filipinos to indulge their joyously insatiable appetites.

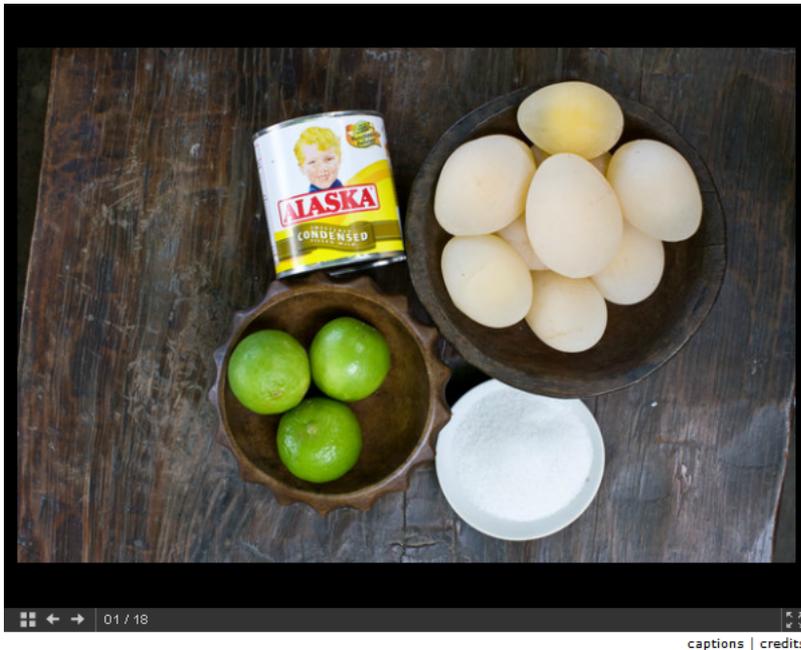
"For Filipinos, Christmas is about two things: Mass and eating," a denizen of Arayat, in Pampanga province, explained to me on my first evening in town.

An ongoing feast

That Christmas it seemed that for nine days my husband and our friend Marc, whose father's family had a century-old Arayat home that became ours for the holiday, did little else but eat or anticipate eating. Before meals, after meals and in-between meals we sat at the weathered wooden table in the nipa thatch-roofed kitchen watching Lucia, the family's beloved septuagenarian cook, move nimbly over a wood-fired stove, conjuring feasts from humble local ingredients.

Only hours after rib-sticking breakfasts of *campurado*, delicious rice porridge flavored with Filipino cacao, and coffee with butterfat-rich **buffalo milk**, there were multi-course lunches of dishes such as pork and chicken *adobo*; *pinakbet* (an umami-rich vegetable stew flavored with *bagoong*, Filipino shrimp paste); *estofado*, a Spanish-influenced stew; and huge freshwater prawns stewed in **coconut**. Dinners described by Marc as "light" before we arrived were nothing of the sort; though they were often composed of leftovers and perhaps some *sinigang*, the Philippines' beloved sour soup. We were never left hungry.

If, during the day, we left our roosts at the kitchen table (I was in Arayat to write **an article** on Lucia's culinary prowess, so it was only natural to stick close), it was for outings to the homes of bakers and to pastry shops elsewhere in Pampanga, a province renowned for its sweets. We always returned with souvenirs.



A treasure with only four ingredients

One morning, midway between breakfast and lunch, Lucia's school friend, Damiana, a spry silver-haired woman wearing a shy grin and a turquoise flowered housecoat, stepped through the kitchen door carrying a bowl of strangely soft-shelled fresh eggs and three *dalayap* (a local lime similar to key limes). It was time to make *yemas*, candy-coated milk balls scented with lime. Prepared with just four ingredients — including sweetened condensed milk, which was probably introduced to the Philippines during the post-World War II occupation years — *yemas* are a favorite Filipino holiday treat.

As Lucia carried cans of the milk to the table, Damiana smiled and beckoned me to join her. Stuffed after a few days in Arayat, I was certain that I couldn't bear to look at another sweet. But journalistic duty compelled me. I'm glad it did. In the intervening years, Damiana's *yemas* have made more than a few holiday appearances in my own home.

Lime-Scented Candy-Coated Milk Balls (Yemas)

Filipinos make yemas any old time, but especially around local fiestas and holidays like Easter and Christmas. They require few ingredients and no special skills, but a bit of time. Wrapped with cellophane in colors of the season, they make a festive addition to the holiday table. Use key limes if you can get them, but regular limes will do.

Ingredients

grated zest of 3 key limes or regular limes
13 egg yolks
2 14-ounce cans sweetened condensed milk
vegetable oil, for greasing
1 cup white sugar
parchment paper and cellophane paper for wrapping

Directions

1. In a medium saucepan place the lime zest, eggs and sweetened condensed milk. Stir until the ingredients are just combined.
2. Place the pan on the stove and turn the heat to medium. Use a wooden spoon or spatula to stir the mixture continuously, scraping it away from the bottom and sides of the pan. Curds may form – don't worry, just keep stirring. The mixture will gradually thicken and become paste-like. After 12 to 15 minutes, when a piece of the mixture holds to the spatula when it's turned on it's side, remove the pan from the heat and turn the mixture onto a lightly oiled plate. Use the spatula to spread it out into a thin layer. Set aside.
3. Lightly oil a cookie sheet. When the yemas paste is still warm but just cool enough to handle, rub your hands lightly with oil and roll pinches of the paste between your palms into smooth balls approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter. Place them on a lightly oiled tray or cookie sheet. Depending on the size of the yemas you will have about 90 to 100 pieces.
4. In a small saucepan, melt the sugar, stirring over medium heat, then turn the heat off. Working quickly, drop a yema into the sugar syrup, give it a quick turn with a fork to coat, remove it and place back on the oiled cookie sheet. If the sugar begins to thicken return it to the heat until it thins. Repeat as necessary until all the yemas are coated. Set aside to cool completely.
5. While the yemas are cooling, cut parchment paper into 2-by-2½-inch rectangles. Cut the cellophane into 4-inch squares, then cut each square in half on a diagonal. Each square will give you two triangles whose longest edge is 6 inches. There should be 1 piece of parchment and 1 piece of cellophane for each candy.
6. To wrap the candies, hold a cellophane triangle in your palm, the longest edge parallel to your wrist, the point facing your body. (See slide show.) Place a piece of parchment paper on top of the cellophane, one of its short edges flush with the cellophane point. Place a yema low on the parchment and roll both the parchment and cellophane up and over the candy (the yemas should be enclosed in parchment). Twist the ends of the cellophane to seal.
7. The yemas will keep at room temperature for about a week. If you live in an especially humid climate you will want to store the candies in an absolutely air-tight container, or in the refrigerator.

Ref.: <http://zesterdaily.com/recipe/candy-recipe/filipino-holiday-candy/>

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