



CELEBRATE
Swedish
Midsummer

It might be the middle of winter in Sydney, but that doesn't stop the Humphreys family from celebrating the longest day of the year in Sweden with schnapps, songs and a heaped *smörgåsbord*.

“I hope everyone likes fish!”

laughs Kajsa Humphreys, carrying a plate of home-cured gravlax and pickled herring potato salad outside. She places the dish carefully onto the table, where it joins a collection of other seafood dishes.

It's a clear June afternoon with just the slightest chill in the air and, in this neat backyard in eastern Sydney, celebrations for *Svensk Midsommar* (Swedish Midsummer) are kicking off joyfully. The freshly adorned maypole (a symbol of fertility) takes pride of place in the backyard, surrounded by children who have grabbed each other's hands and begun to skip around it. Floral headbands are already askew as the children cackle wildly and tumble onto the grass.

“This is our favourite holiday,” smiles Kajsa. Like other countries in Northern Europe, Swedish Midsummer marks the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. Originally a pagan festival, this ancient harvest celebration dates back to pre-Christian times.

“Let me know if you need to borrow something warmer,” the host calls out. Kajsa's guests have largely ignored dress conventions dictated by the calendar and, instead, wear white, pastels and florals – just as they would in Sweden. Her Tasmanian-born husband, John, is dressed impeccably in a blazer from iconic Swedish brand Tiger of Sweden.

The pair met in 2000, just weeks after Kajsa arrived in Australia on a six-month university exchange program. They're now married and parents to six-year-old Alva and three-year-old Fred. “For the first few years, I had a lot of Swedish friends here, but over time, most of them have gone back to Europe,” says Kajsa. “Often I'm visiting home in June, but now that the kids are getting older, we really make an effort to celebrate Midsummer properly, wherever we are.”

Today, before the feasting begins, Kajsa takes her daughter's hand and encourages her to lead her friends in the traditional (and very amusing) song and dance called *Små Grodorna*

(*The Little Frogs*). The action only slows down when Alva spies John carrying a dish, and the word soon spreads that lunch is served.

“It's not Midsummer food, but the kids would be devastated if we had a Swedish party and didn't serve meatballs,” says John. The children sit down and tuck in at a table near their parents, who linger over *Jansson's frestelse* (Jansson's temptation), *Gubbröra* (Old man's mix) and other traditional Swedish dishes. Strawberry cream cake and cinnamon scrolls follow. “If we were in Sweden, there'd be bowls of strawberries everywhere,” says Hanna, Kajsa's friend and fellow-Swede. “Luckily, pickled herring is never out of season!”

The sun begins to set and a small bonfire is lit. The children toast marshmallows and the adults enjoy shots of home-infused aquavit and lingonberry schnapps. No-one needs any encouragement to launch into *Helan Går*, which is Sweden's most famous *snappsång* or drinking song.

“I do still miss the midsummers of my childhood, which the whole family spent in our summer house, a little red cottage in the county of Värmland,” says Kajsa. “But a day like this, with blue skies and great friends, really helps to make up for it!”

Despite the chill, host Kajsa Humphreys dresses in summery florals for the occasion.



THE MENU

Gubbröra
(egg and anchovies
on crispbread)

*Chat potatoes with sour
cream & pickled herring*

Toast skagen
(prawn and caviar
on toast)

Jansson's frestelse
(potato and
anchovy gratin)

Laxtårta
(salmon tart)

Jordgubbstårta
(strawberry cream cake)



**Gubbröra
(egg and anchovies
on crispbread)**

*Meaning 'Old man's mix',
this egg salad is a popular light
meal in Sweden. The dill, which
is at its best in summer, is an
essential garnish.*

recipe page 60

Chat potatoes with sour cream and pickled herring

This classic Swedish Midsummer meal features the first potatoes of the season and sometimes also includes boiled eggs.

recipe page 60





**Toast skagen
(prawn and caviar
on toast)**
recipe page 60



**Laxtårta
(salmon tart)**
recipe page 60



Frog-hopping around the maypole. Clockwise from left: Family friend Hanna Soderlind serves lingonberry schnapps. Alva wears a garland of flowers, as is the tradition for young girls.



Clockwise from left: Toasting marshmallows over the bonfire; enjoying a slice of strawberry cake; a selection from the smörgåsbord.



Swedish Midsummer food

"It may look time-consuming, but there's actually not a lot of cooking involved with this kind of Swedish food; it's nearly all preparation of cold ingredients," explains Kajsa, surveying her packed smörgåsbord (literally a 'table of sandwiches'). "I grew up helping my mum make these dishes and most of our recipes are inspired by *Bonniers Kokbok*," she adds, holding up a well-loved copy. "I'd compare it to Stephanie Alexander's *The Cook's Companion*. We all get one for our 18th or 21st birthday in Sweden; I don't know anyone who doesn't own a copy."

JORDGUBBSTARTA★ STRAWBERRY CREAM CAKE

Serves 8 • Prep 45 mins • Cooking 40 mins, plus 25 mins cooling
You will need a 20cm-round cake pan for this recipe.

2 eggs
165g (¾ cup) caster sugar
185g (1¼ cups) plain flour
2 tsp baking powder
100ml milk
50g unsalted butter, melted, plus extra, to grease
2 tsp vanilla extract
1½ tbs dried breadcrumbs
125ml (½ cup) thick vanilla custard
300ml thickened cream, whipped to soft peaks
1 small banana, sliced (optional)
250g strawberries, 125g sliced, 125g halved

1 Preheat oven to 170C. Using electric beaters, whisk together eggs and sugar in a large bowl until thick and pale. Sift flour and baking powder into another

bowl. Combine milk, butter and vanilla extract in a jug. Alternate folding dry ingredients and milk mixture into egg mixture in 3 batches, until just combined.
2 Grease a 20cm-round cake pan with extra butter. Scatter with breadcrumbs, shaking pan to coat base and sides evenly and discarding any excess. Pour cake batter into prepared pan, then bake for 40 minutes or until a skewer inserted in centre comes out clean. Cover with foil if cake is browning too quickly. Cool in pan for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.
3 Using a serrated knife, cut cake in half horizontally. To assemble, place bottom half on a plate or cake stand. Spread with custard, then top with half the cream, sliced banana (if using) and sliced strawberries. Sandwich with remaining cake half, then, using a spatula, spread remaining cream over top and sides. Decorate with halved strawberries and serve. »



**Jordgubbstårta
(strawberry
cream cake)**

Kajsa's version of this iconic dessert is extra luscious with thick custard and bananas.

GUBBRORA★
EGG AND ANCHOVIES
ON CRISPbread

Makes 4 • Prep 10 mins • Cooking 10 mins

- 6 hard-boiled eggs, finely chopped
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 tbs finely chopped red onion
- 2 tbs finely chopped chives
- ¼ cup finely chopped dill, plus extra sprigs, to serve
- 6 anchovies in oil, 1 tbs oil reserved
- 4 slices crispbread
- Lime or lemon halves, to serve

1 Combine eggs, egg yolks, onion, chives, dill, anchovies, anchovy oil and ½ tsp ground white pepper. Spread on crispbread, scatter with extra dill and serve with lime halves.

CHAT POTATOES WITH SOUR CREAM AND PICKLED HERRING★

Serves 4 • Prep 20 mins • Cooking 20 mins

- 10 small (400g) chat potatoes
- 240g pickled herring, drained, cut into 2cm pieces
- 10 small pickled onions, thinly sliced
- 200g sour cream or crème fraîche
- ½ bunch chives, finely chopped

1 Place potatoes in a saucepan of salted cold water, bring to the boil and cook for 20 minutes or until tender. Drain, cool and cut into 1cm-thick slices.
2 Place potato slices on a platter in a single layer. Top each with a piece of herring and pickled onion, then add a dollop of sour cream. Scatter with chives, season with salt and pepper, and serve warm or cold.

TOAST SKAGEN★
PRAWN AND CAVIAR ON TOAST

Makes 8 • Prep ½ hr • Cooking 5 mins

- 400g cooked prawns, peeled, chopped into 2cm pieces
- 100g (½ cup) mayonnaise
- 2 tbs chopped dill

- 4 slices rye bread
- 1 tbs butter
- Thinly sliced lemon quarters and black caviar, to serve

1 Place prawns, reserving several pieces for serving, in a bowl with mayonnaise and dill, mixing to combine.
2 Using a 4cm-round cutter, cut 2 rounds from each slice of bread, discarding the trimmings. Melt butter in a non-stick frying pan over medium heat and cook bread, turning halfway, for 3 minutes or until evenly toasted. Cool slightly.
3 Spoon prawn mixture on each piece of toast and serve topped with a lemon slice, reserved piece of prawn and a little caviar.

LAXTARTA
SALMON TART

Serves 6 • Prep 20 mins, plus 2 hrs 15 mins chilling • Cooking 5 mins
You will need a shallow 23cm tart pan with removable base for this recipe.

- 200g (about 4 slices) dark bread, such as pumpernickel
- 50g butter, melted
- 2 tbs Dijon mustard
- 200ml light sour cream
- 5 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
- 200g smoked salmon, chopped
- 2 bunches chives, chopped, plus extra, to serve
- 100g black or red caviar

1 Process bread in a food processor to fine crumbs. Transfer to a bowl and stir in butter until combined. Press into base and side of a shallow 23cm tart pan with removable base, then refrigerate for 15 minutes to firm.
2 Combine mustard and sour cream in a large bowl. Add ½ tsp salt, ¼ tsp ground white pepper, eggs, salmon and chives, carefully folding through sour cream mixture. Spoon mixture into tart shell, cover surface with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2 hours or until firm. Keeping tart on the base, remove from pan. Just before serving, top with a layer of caviar and scatter with extra chives.



Unlike most of the Swedish Midsummer dishes, this potato and anchovy gratin (*Jansson's Frestelse*) is served warm.

JANSSON'S FRESTELSE
POTATO AND ANCHOVY GRATIN

Serves 12 as a side dish • Prep 20 mins
• Cooking 1 hr 45 mins, plus 20 mins standing
You will need a 2.5L baking dish for this recipe.

- 100g butter
- 3 onions, thinly sliced
- 1.5kg (about 6) sebago potatoes, thinly sliced
- 200g anchovies in oil, drained, 80ml (⅓ cup) oil reserved
- 200ml milk
- 400ml pouring cream
- 2 tbs dried breadcrumbs

1 Preheat oven to 170C. Melt 40g butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and cook, stirring, for 10 minutes or until golden brown. Set aside.
2 Lightly grease a 2.5L baking dish. Layer half the potato slices in prepared dish, then top with onions and anchovies. Add the remaining potato slices.
3 Place milk and cream in a saucepan and bring just to the boil. Remove from heat, stir in reserved anchovy oil, then pour over potato slices. Scatter with breadcrumbs, then dot with finely chopped remaining 60g butter.
4 Bake gratin for 1 hour, then cover with foil and bake for a further 30 minutes or until potatoes are cooked through and tender. Stand for 20 minutes before serving. 🕒