

'I'm on the buck's fizz and Quality Street at 8am'

Presenter Julia Bradbury tells us about her culinary Christmas traditions and why she needs enough bread sauce for three days to see her through the festivities

For Julia Bradbury Christmas is all about kids, gin and lots of food. And while the former *Countryfile* presenter is unsure of how the festivities will look this year, one thing won't change – and that's the annual visit from Father Christmas. Julia, who has three children, Zephyrus, nine, and five-year-old twins Xanthe and Zena, with partner Gerard Cunningham, admits to sprinkling flour on the floor to give an illusion of snow then adding "Santa's footprints".

"The children come down in the morning and they're always slightly bamboozled by the footprints and by the fact it's not real snow and hasn't melted," she laughs. "It's a sweet tradition we might not be able to get away with for much longer."

Another tradition is the festive tippie and this year Julia will be settling down with a gin she made herself. She's teamed up with sister Gina, who runs their walks website, The Outdoor Guide, to create their own bevvy.

"I got to shove my big nose into a huge goblet of gin and take in the wonderful fragrances of all the fruits, flowers and berries," Julia recalls. "I'm big into aromatherapy and essential oils, so that's a joyous part of the drinking process."

Here, the 50-year-old star fills us in on the joys of gin, the fun of a family Christmas and foods she can't do without on the day...

So Julia, do you have any Christmas traditions?

Christmas has completely changed because we have young children, so it's very different.

As every parent will tell you, it becomes even more magical. You do put in more effort and you do spend a lot more time trying to create that magic for the little ones. A friend of ours, her father used to sprinkle flour on the kitchen floor or the fireplace, if there is one, and leave footprints. They'd leave half a mince pie or half an eaten carrot – so that's part of our Christmas experience. It's sweet while it lasts.

What about the festive dinner? Who's the cook?

It's usually done between my mum and I. She's an exemplary cook. She dresses the bird and then we do the veggies and everything together. Christmas pudding is down to her. I'm into organic Christmas puddings. I refuse to boil a Christmas pudding in a plastic tub because I think about all the microplastics and toxins. So it's



Julia and sister Gina have created their own gin

got to be in a glass bowl for me or a ceramic bowl. Lots of brandy butter and as many chocolates as you can possibly eat. As far as I'm concerned the kids can eat chocolate from the morning until the evening. It's the only day they're allowed to do it. I'll start on the Quality Street at 8am with a buck's fizz!

Who else is there on Christmas Day?

Normally, we're open house. So it will be my mum and dad, my sister and nephew, any aunts and uncles who are around, although most live in Ireland or all over the world. So any aunts from that side of the family are welcome. I usually have my friend, Amanda, and her kids, who are my godchildren.

Are you into TV in a big way on the day?

No. We'll let the kids watch a Christmas movie but we're not slaves to the schedule. I think you've got so much activity in the house, so many people, that we entertain each other. We get the kids to help with stuff or they're playing with toys. It might be in the evening when the grown-ups sit down. We're big games fans. We play charades.

Is there an evening menu among the fun?

We'll have a sandwich on Christmas Day evening and it's bubble and squeak on Boxing Day for us. I make enough bread sauce to last two or three days because I love it cold with the bubble and squeak.

What about the period between Christmas and New Year's Eve – how do you spend that time?

Normally, Boxing Day would be the day we'd have other people round again. Obviously, that's probably not going to be happening this year. And then we'll go into hibernation



a bit and have a couple of PJ days – time just with the kids on our own.

And on New Year's Eve?

Normally, it would be with other friends who have kids and we'd have some sort of sleepover. Have a lovely dinner... gone are the days where you stay up to the wee small hours as the kids don't know that it's New Year's Day. They don't lie in until 10am.

Have you thought about logistics this year in terms of Covid?

My parents are high risk – they are in their eighties – so we are being very cautious and careful and we will not take any risks. It is just Christmas. The most important thing is we see them beyond Christmas and for many more years. You don't want to kill your parents for Christmas.

What are your great hopes for 2021?

I don't think there's going to be a normal after this – the next year means just being realistic about these things.

You've created The Outdoor Guide Gin, with your sister Gina. Tell us about that...

We've taken gin to a new place. You often think of a G&T as a comfortable cocktail to have at home or while lazing in the garden. However, we're proving that it can also be a fantastic companion when you're out in the hills. A little botanical spritzer is the perfect pairing for when you reach the end of a hike. It's a drink inspired by our passion for one of my favourite places, the Peak District.

Sounds intriguing...

It's delicious. It's bursting with fragrant lavender and marigold with touches of blueberry and mint – and I'm passionate about the nettles in it. They're something we should all learn to love. They're packed with vitamins and fantastic for the central nervous system as well as arthritis and rheumatism. I doubt we'll get a medicinal certificate for it, but I'm sure if you have enough you'll reap some benefits. 🍷

Julia and Gina Bradbury's The Outdoor Guide Gin, £39 for 75cl, is made in collaboration with Derbyshire Distillery. Available from derbyshiredistillery.com.