

Holiday Flavors



Christmas Cake

It's not quite the holidays without at least one towering confection on the table, covered with clouds of frosting.

With a little practice, you can turn out delicious and gorgeous Christmas cakes that will steal the show at any holiday party.

THINGS TO PAY ATTENTION TO

It seems obvious, but when you set out to bake a cake, follow the recipe. Make sure you have all the ingredients on hand ahead of time, measure carefully and properly, and follow directions as to the temperature of the ingredients. If it says room-temperature butter, use room-temperature butter. Baking is just as much a science as it is an art, and the temperature and order of your ingredients make a difference in the finished product.

DANISH CHRISTMAS CAKE WITH ORANGE COCONUT TOPPING

Recipe is from Taste of Home.

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 3/4 sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon orange juice
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 3 cups flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 cups chopped dates

- 1 1/4 cups chopped red candied cherries
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Topping

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup orange juice
- 4 teaspoons grated orange zest
- 2 cups sweetened shredded

coconut

1. In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each.

2. Combine the buttermilk, vanilla, orange juice and zest. Combine the flour and baking soda, then add to the creamed mixture alternately

with buttermilk mixture, beating well after each addition. Fold in the dates, cherries and pecans.

3. Pour batter into a greased and floured 10-inch tube pan. Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 60-70 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before remov-

ing from the pan to a wire rack.

4. For the topping, combine the sugar, orange juice and zest in a large saucepan. Cook and stir until the sugar is dissolved. Stir in the coconut and cook for another minute. Slowly pour over the warm cake and let stand overnight before serving.



Perfect Pies

The holidays are the perfect time for pies.

According to the American Pie Council (yes, there is one), pie has been around since ancient Egypt.

The first pies were sometimes made in reeds, used for holding the filling and not for eating with the filling. One of the first pie recipes was published by the Romans, and it was for a rye-crustured goat cheese-and-honey pie.

Sweet fruit pies didn't come around until the 1500s, and English tradition credits Queen Elizabeth I with the first cherry pie. Pies came to the New World with European settlers, and the crust was still usually not eaten with the filling. That's a fairly recent — and delicious — development.

CHRISTMAS TREE BERRY HAND PIES

Recipe is from Driscoll's Berries.

- 2 cups mixed fresh berries
- 1/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar, divided
- 2 tablespoons quick-cook tapioca
- 1 package double pie crust
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 large egg
- 1-2 tablespoons flour

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350



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degrees Fahrenheit. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.

2. Place a round of pie dough onto a lightly floured surface. Cut out six Christmas tree shapes using a medium-to-large Christmas tree cookie cutter. Cut star shapes out of dough scraps using a small star cookie cutter.

3. Set aside the dough stars and move the dough trees to a cookie sheet.

4. Whisk the egg thoroughly and add the milk, then whisk to combine. Brush the egg mixture lightly around the border of each tree.

5. Place the second round of dough onto your work surface, then cut out more trees and stars. Dish a rolling pin with flour and roll the cut shapes to make them slightly larger than the first round of shapes.

6. Cut steam vents into the dough trees using a ravioli cutter. Cut them in semi-circles to look like

garland. Using a straw, cut small holes to look like ornaments. Set aside the top crusts.

7. Place two cups berries into a medium bowl, cutting large berries into smaller pieces. Add 1/3 cup sugar and two tablespoons tapioca. Stir the berry mixture gently, then spoon it onto the tree bases, leaving a 1/2-inch border around each.

8. Lay the top crusts over the bottom crusts, and then crimp the edges with a fork to look like tree

branches. Brush the pies with the egg mixture and decorate with the dough stars. Brush with the egg mixture again.

9. Place two tablespoons sugar into a small bowl. Add the cinnamon and stir to combine, then dust the pies. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until golden brown. Allow to cool on the pan. Trim away any berry juice that leaked during baking before transferring the pies to a cooling rack. Serve when cooled.

Tantalizing Tarts



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A tart is a smaller, shallow pie with no top crust. Typically, tarts have a crown-like edge rather than the fluted edges of a traditional pie.

Tarts have a fruit or custard filling — really any filling you can put in a regular pie can go in a tart — and sometimes are served in a personal size, like these bite-sized cranberry tarts that get their form from a miniature muffin pan. No specialized cookware, such as a shallow tart pan, needed here.

These festive treats would be perfect at a holiday party or piled on a platter passed around your next get-together. Their ingredients include seasonal favorites like cranberries and pecans, and a sprinkle of zested citrus would add a fragrant garnish. Also consider a bright herb such as lemon thyme for a bright spark of flavor on a cold winter's day.

BITE-SIZED CRANBERRY TARTS

Recipe is from Land O' Lakes.

Crust

- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 3/4 cup butter, softened
- 3 ounces cream cheese, softened

Filling

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 1 large egg
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3/4 cup fresh cranberries, washed, drained and cut in half

Glaze

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2-3 tablespoons milk

Directions

1. Heat your oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Combine flour, 3/4 cup, butter and cream

cheese in a small bowl. Beat at medium speed until the dough forms a ball.

3. Divide the dough into 36 pieces. Place a piece of dough into each ungreased mini muffin cup and press the dough evenly onto the bottom and up the sides of the cup.

4. Combine sugar, pecans, egg, 1/4 cup butter and vanilla in a small bowl. Place four to five cranberry halves in each pastry-lined cup. Spoon two teaspoons sugar and pecan mixture over the cranberries.

5. Bake 22-25 minutes or until golden brown. Loosen the tarts from the pan while hot by running a knife around the inside of the rim. Cool completely and remove from the pan.

6. Combine the powdered sugar, vanilla and just enough milk to make a drizzle in a small bowl and drizzle over the cooled tarts.

A Bounty of Brownies

Brownies are chocolate treats that are baked — typically more dense than a cake but thicker than a cookie.

Bloodies are one variation made with brown sugar and vanilla rather than chocolate. It's an all-American creation, believed to have originated in the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago in the late 1800s. The traditional Palmer House Brownie has walnuts and an apricot glaze.

FUDGE BROWNIES

Recipe is from King Arthur Flour.

- 4 large eggs
- 1 1/4 cup Dutch-process cocoa
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon espresso powder
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter at room temperature
- 2 1/4 cups sugar
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 2 cups chocolate chips

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit and lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch pan.
2. Crack the eggs into a bowl and beat them at medium speed with cocoa, salt, baking powder, espresso powder and vanilla for about a minute or until smooth.
3. In a medium-sized microwave-safe bowl, melt the butter and add the sugar. Stir to combine. Continue to heat the mixture is

about 110 to 120 degrees, Fahrenheit but it shouldn't be bubbling. It'll become shiny as you stir it. This will help produce a shiny top crust on your brownies.

4. Add the hot butter/sugar mixture to the egg/cocoa mixture and stir until smooth.

5. Add the flour and the chocolate chips, stirring until combined. Spoon the batter into the pan.

6. Bake for 28-32 minutes or until the edges feel set. The center

should look very moist but not uncooked. To check for doneness, poke a toothpick or a sharp knife into the center of the pan. You should see moist crumbs but not uncooked batter.

7. Cool on a rack before cutting and serving.

APPLE BROWNIES

Recipe is from AllRecipes.
1/2 cup butter, melted
1 cup white sugar

- 1 egg
- 3 medium apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 9x9 baking dish.

2. In a large bowl, beat together the melted butter, sugar and egg until fluffy. Fold in the apples and walnuts.

3. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, salt, baking powder, baking soda and cinnamon. Stir the flour mixture into the wet mixture until just blended. Spread the batter evenly into the prepared dish.

4. Bake 35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.



Cornucopia of Cookies

The holidays and cookies just go together, from platters at Thanksgiving all the way until leaving cookies and milk out for Santa on Christmas Eve.

According to NPR, the Dutch are responsible for cookies (thanks, guys!). During the Victorian era, hospitality demanded hostesses and hosts with the most would offer visitors something — like cookies — to eat. Parents of the time would leave cookies and milk out for Santa because that's exactly what they'd set out for visiting children. It was a way of extending the magic of Christmas.

CHRISTMAS COOKIES

Recipe is from Williams Sonoma.

1 1/2 cups unsalted butter
2 cups sugar
2 eggs
2 egg yolks
4 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 teaspoons almond extract
4 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt

Icing

1 cup confectioners sugar
1 drop fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon light corn syrup
1 tablespoon milk, or as needed
Sanding sugar for decorating



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Directions

1. In a bowl of a stand mixer, beat the butter and sugar together until well combined and creamy, about two minutes. Add the eggs and egg yolks and continue beating until thoroughly combined, then beat in the vanilla and almond extracts.

2. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt. Slowly add the flour mixture to the butter mixture, about a cup at a

time. Mix, using a wooden spoon or the stand mixture on low speed, until just combined. Beware of over-mixing.

3. Transfer the dough to a work surface and divide it into four equal portions. Shape each into a ball, then flatten the ball into disks. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour and up to overnight.

4. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

5. Roll out a dough disk to about 1/4 inch. Using cookie cutters, cut out shapes from the dough. Arrange the shapes on baking sheets, spacing them about an inch apart. Gather up and refill scraps and cut out more cookies. Repeat with the other dough disks.

6. Bake the cookies until golden at the edges, about 6-8 minutes. Transfer the cookies to racks to cool completely.

7. Make the icing but stirring together confectioners sugar, lemon juice and corn syrup in a small bowl. It should be thick. Whisk in the milk a few drops at a time until you reach the desired consistency. For outlining, leave the icing thicker. To cover the cookies, make it more liquid.

8. Decorate the cookies as desired using a pastry bag with the appropriate tip. Cover with sanding sugar.

Fabulous Fudge

Not all candy is created equal, and fudge is arguably at the top of the pile.

Fudge is made from sugar, butter and milk cooked to around 240 degrees Fahrenheit. The mixture is then beaten while cooling to create a smooth, creamy candy. It's an American food, first made in the end of the 19th century, and helped along in popularity by the declining cost of refined sugar. It can be made in a variety of flavors, not just chocolate, and is easy enough for anyone to make.

CHOCOLATE FUDGE

Recipe is from Pillsbury.

- 1 12-ounce package dark chocolate baking chips
- 1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Directions

1. Line an 8-inch square pan with foil and spray it with cooking spray.

2. In a large microwaveable bowl, microwave the baking chips, sweetened condensed milk and milk uncovered on high for two to three minutes, stirring every minute, until smooth.

3. Stir in the vanilla until well blended. The mixture will be thick. Spread it evenly in the pan and refrigerate at least two hours until firm. Cut it into 6 rows by 6 rows and store covered in the refrigerator.



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MAPLE PECAN FUDGE

Recipe is from McCormick.

- 1 12-ounce can evaporated milk
- 3 cups firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 1/4 cups butter, cut into chunks
- 1 cup confectioner's sugar
- 1 tablespoon maple extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 1/2 cups pecan halves, divided

Directions

1. Line an 8-inch square pan with foil, allowing the foil to extend over the edges of the pan. Spray the foil with cooking spray.

2. Mix evaporated milk, brown sugar and butter in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil on medi-

um-high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring frequently, until the mixture reaches 236 degrees Fahrenheit on a candy thermometer. The mixture will darken in color as it cooks.

3. Remove from heat. Gradually beat in confectioner's sugar with an electric mixer on low speed.

Increase the speed to medium and beat until thickened and smooth. Stir in the extracts and a cup of pecans. Spread evenly in a prepared pan and top with the remaining 1/2 cup pecans.

4. Refrigerate at least an hour or until firm. Use foil to lift it out of the pan into a cutting board. Cut it into 25 squares and serve.

A Plethora of Puddings

On this side of the pond, a pudding is usually a sweet, milk-based dessert that's similar to custards or mousse.

In other countries puddings can describe both sweet and savory dishes. We're not concerned with those here, because holidays mean treats and treats mean sweets. Puddings in the States can also refer to bread puddings and rice puddings, all great choices for your holiday table.

PRALINE FRENCH TOAST BREAD PUDDING

Recipe is from Epicurious.

- 1 pound of challah or brioche
- 8 extra-large eggs
- 2 cups heavy whipping cream
- 1 1/2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Praline Topping

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 3/4 cup coarsely chopped pecans
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup

Directions

1. Generously butter a rectangular baking dish. Set out a large shallow pan for a water bath.
2. Cut the bread into 3/4-inch-thick slices. If not using a braided



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bread, cut the slices into four triangles each. Arrange the bread slices in rows, leaning and overlapping them if necessary.

3. In a large bowl using an electric mixer, beat the eggs on high until light golden and slightly thickened, about three minutes. Beat in the cream, milk, sugar,

vanilla, salt and nutmeg.

4. Pour over the bread in the dish, lifting the bread up slightly to pour between the slices and letting the custard soak in.

5. Using a pastry cutter or two knives, combine all the ingredients for the praline topping except the syrup. Spread the mixture over the

top of the soaked bread, pushing some down between the slices. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour or overnight.

6. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove the plastic wrap and drizzle the maple syrup over the top. Place the dish

in the larger pan and pour hot water into the larger pan until it covers an inch of the sides of the bread pudding dish. Bake until the pudding is puffy and golden brown, about 35-40 minutes. Do not overbake. The top should be spongy, not dry or crusty. Serve hot.