

DINNER PLANS

Prelude to a Torte

By PHIL ANDRES

At my dinner table at least, Apple Bavarian Torte is known as the Seventh Proof for the Existence of God.

And why not? Cakes and pies are called a slice of heaven; other sweet things are said to be the tears of angels. And let's not forget Divinity fudge. But when you stumble upon a dessert that makes your soul sing in a new, more glorious way, you have to take the appellations to another level. Cheesecake as theological argument is the only answer.

The "Seventh Proof" reference comes from my imperfect recollections of a college class in European culture. Were there six proofs? Even that number seems fuzzy sometimes.

How then could I make such a bold assertion if my knowledge of such matters is so suspect? The answer is simple: It is the best dessert I have ever had.

The slightly sweet shortbread crust, the classic cheesecake filling and the cinnamon-apple topping covered with a sprinkling of walnuts produce a wonderful marriage of flavors that could be made in only one place--besides the kitchen.

This may sound like the height of arrogance, but it's not as if I came up with the recipe myself. Apple Bavarian torte comes from "The Joy of Cheesecake" (Barron's, 1980) in a recipe submitted by Adeline Brown of Michigan.

And it's actually pretty easy to make. The components of this small miracle themselves are not particularly striking, but when combined they reveal a sweet complexity that could well convert you.

Are the preliminary courses in this menu nothing more than a prelude to dessert? Perhaps. But don't underestimate them.

Menu

Tossed Green Salad with Radishes, Green Onions and Crumbled Blue Cheese

Sauteed Green Beans and Red Bell Peppers

Lemon and Garlic Potatoes

Herbed Red Snapper with Aioli

Apple Bavarian Torte

Wine suggestion: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc or Champagne

STAPLES

Dijon mustard

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

White wine vinegar

Extra-virgin olive oil

Butter

Garlic

Eggs

Cayenne pepper
Dry mustard
Hot pepper sauce
Canola oil
Flour
Sugar
Vanilla extract
Cinnamon
Herbes de Provence

SHOPPING LIST

6 shallots
1 bunch radishes
1 bunch green onions
2 heads red leaf lettuce
4 ounces blue cheese
1 pound green beans
2 red bell peppers
1 1/2 pounds baby red potatoes
2 lemons
6 red snapper fillets
1 pound cream cheese
3 medium Granny Smith apples
1/4 pound shelled walnuts

GAME PLAN

Night before: Cut 1 pound green beans and 2 red bell peppers in 1 1/2-inch strips and separately cook in sated, boiling water until tender, 8 to 10 minutes. Drain, immerse in ice water to stop cooking and chill. Cook potatoes, peel and refrigerate until ready to finish. Prepare aioli and torte.

15 minutes before: Prepare vinaigrette of choice and toss with red leaf lettuce, blue cheese, sliced radishes and green onions. Brush fish with herbs and oil.

After salad course: Bake fish, saute green bean and red bell pepper strips with 2 tablespoons olive oil and 2 minced shallots. Finish potatoes and serve.

LEMON AND GARLIC POTATOES

1 1/2 pounds small red boiling potatoes
Salt
2 tablespoons butter
4 cloves garlic, minced
Juice of 2 lemons

Place potatoes in pot with just enough cold salted water to cover, bring to simmer and cook until easily pierced with fork, about 15 minutes. Drain and submerge in bowl of ice water, then peel.

When ready to serve, heat butter and garlic in saute pan 2 to 3 minutes and add potatoes. Cook potatoes until heated through and nicely browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Add lemon juice, cook 2 minutes more and serve.

Makes 6 servings.

Each serving contains about:

121 calories; 95 mg sodium; 10 mg cholesterol; 4 grams fat; 20 grams carbohydrates; 2 grams protein; 0.47 gram fiber.

HERBED RED SNAPPER WITH AIOLI

Several companies make the dried herb mixture, herbes de Provence, which is sold in supermarkets, gourmet shops and cookware stores.

HERBED RED SNAPPER

6 (4- to 6-ounce) red snapper fillets

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup herbes de Provence

2 tablespoons olive oil

Season fillets with salt and pepper to taste. Stir herbes de Provence into olive oil and brush onto surface of fish. Place fillets on sheet pan and bake at 375 degrees until fish is opaque white and is just beginning to flake apart, 8 to 12 minutes.

AIOLI

1 egg yolk

3 cloves garlic, minced

3/4 tablespoon white wine vinegar

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/4 teaspoon dry mustard

1/4 teaspoon salt

Hot pepper sauce

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 cup vegetable oil

1 tablespoon lemon juice, optional

Whisk together egg yolk, garlic, vinegar, cayenne, dry mustard, salt and hot pepper sauce to taste in small bowl. Continue to whisk while slowly pouring olive and vegetable oils into mixture. Pour oils very slowly at first until emulsion is established and stop periodically to ensure that all oil is incorporated. Thickness of aioli can also be adjusted with addition of lemon juice (to thin) or oil (to thicken). After desired thickness is reached, adjust seasoning to taste.

Makes 6 servings.

Each serving contains about:

494 calories; 227 mg sodium; 90 mg cholesterol; 44 grams fat; 1 gram carbohydrates; 25 grams protein; 0.05 gram fiber.

APPLE BAVARIAN TORTE

3/4 cup butter, chilled and cut into small pieces

1 1/2 cups flour, sifted

1 1/4 cups sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1 pound cream cheese

2 eggs

3 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and sliced

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 cup shelled walnuts, chopped

Process butter, flour, 1/2 cup sugar and 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract in food processor until mixture resembles coarse meal. Press dough into bottom and 2 inches up sides of 10-inch springform pan. Bake at 350 degrees 5 minutes and set aside.

Beat together cream cheese, 1/2 cup sugar, eggs and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract in large mixing bowl until completely

blended. Pour into prepared crust.

Mix apples, cinnamon, remaining 1/4 cup sugar and remaining 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract in bowl. Layer apples on top of torte filling and sprinkle with walnut pieces.

Bake at 450 degrees 15 minutes, reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake 45 minutes more. Cool torte to room temperature, then refrigerate until ready to serve.

Makes 12 to 16 servings.

Each of 12 servings contains about:

413 calories; 240 mg sodium; 108 mg cholesterol; 27 grams fat; 38 grams carbohydrates; 6 grams protein; 0.33 gram fiber.

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