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A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul

June 2017

HONEY CAKES

Greek Honey – Spice Cake

Norwegian Honey Loaf Cake

Paraguayan Honey – Nut Cake

My first taste of honey as a child was from what we called a “bear tree.” My grandfather admonished me to stand back as he thrust a stick, first rinsed in a nearby stream, into a hive in a hollow tree. As he withdrew the stick, dripping with pieces of comb and honey, a few bees flew out to defend the hive but soon tired of our swatting. Then came the taste thrill of my young life when Grandpa let me lick the honey from the stick. We sat down on the stream bank and licked the stick clean. And, to this day, a drizzle of honey over vanilla ice cream reminds me of the honey over snow that was a winter treat where I grew up, a treat we learned from our Iroquois neighbors.

Honey became the sweetener of choice during the 1970s. Natural was in, so honey was good; sugar was “rat poison.” You may laugh but a neighbor of ours did actually change the label on her sugar canister to read “rat poison.” It always troubled me that she did not denounce the white flour sitting in a canister next



to the sugar with the same enthusiasm . . . Nevertheless, life went on until vegans in the United States adopted the stand from the British Vegan Society Manifesto of 1944 about honey. Many vegetarians followed suit. I can understand the vegan position but I have not chosen to restrict my food choices to that degree. I view unfertilized eggs, milk and milk products, and honey as renewable animal by-products. No animal dies for my grated cheese; the cow is still employed as are the cheesemakers.

This rejection of honey led to a dilemma that is still a topic of debate. If you use sugar, you are passively condoning the processing of sugar which often filters the product through bone char. If you choose to use organic sugar, you will soon be poor as a church mouse. Then there is the sweet liquid of the *agave* plant. *Agave* nectar is an alternative to honey but its taste is very different. Each of the cakes featured here can be made with *agave* nectar if you prefer. Fruit purées are also used in baking as is maple syrup but you have to expect and accept a flavor change in your baked goods when using these sweeteners. Besides wrestling with your moral position, the biggest problem you will encounter is trying to substitute these sweeteners in baking recipes since sugar is a dry ingredient and the others contribute liquid to the equation.



Honey is food taken from a bee colony. The honeycomb will be repaired and/or replaced by the industrious residents. Yes, a few bees will die during the harvesting but since bees live only about 5-6 weeks, the community is constantly dealing with replacement of workers. Responsible honey harvest occurs in the spring and late summer and leaves sufficient winter nutrition for the hive. Responsible beekeepers would not starve their employees; keeping their bee families healthy, keeps the beekeepers' family in business. Sustainability is the operative word. Limiting harvesting to spring and late summer supports sustainability.

We use honey; we use local honey produced at an aviary just five miles away. In fact, the bees, presumably from this aviary, frequent our organic gardens, unsprayed fields, and the unfarmed woodlands in our area. Colony collapse syndrome is a problem even in rural, environmentally-conscious areas such as ours. Chemicals are used by local farmers and our beekeeper travels to Florida each year to participate in the pollination process so vital to our nation's food supply. He was one of the first to experience what is now called colony collapse syndrome and worked with researchers at Penn State University to try to isolate the cause and how it can be prevented. He even testified before Congress to bring the issue to the attention of the nation. Bees are too essential for pollination, too essential to the food supply to ignore this economic tragedy. Vegan activists, who rail against transport of bees for pollination purposes, are shortsighted in my view. The importance of bees in feeding the world is sorely under-recognized.

Arguments circulate about the over-winter deaths of bees due to the fact that beekeepers "steal" the bees' winter food supply. I saw recent research results that supported a 15-20% average bee loss during the winter in managed hives. Online blogs jumped all over this, waving the statistic as a black mark against beekeepers and honey consumption. If they had read the whole research paper they would have learned that the colony populations in wild hives, used as control populations by these researchers, showed natural over-winter losses ranging between 60-85%.

When I decided to share these honey cakes with you, my readers, I thought first of the heavy "hippy" cakes of the 1960s and '70s. Honey or applesauce were the sweeteners; the larger the percentage of whole wheat flour, the better. There are much better honey cakes than those depth charges. I have gathered recipes for honey cakes from cooks all over the world and these cooks have proudly contributed their own refinements, all of which might well also have begun with a trip to a "bear tree." You will note that all of the recipes employ sweet spices and that two of recipes I have selected for this column do not call for butter.



GREEK HONEY – SPICE CAKE

Melomacrons

TPT - 1 hour and 34 minutes;
20 minutes = in-pan cooling period;
30 minutes = out-of-pan cooling period

Until I found this recipe I was only acquainted with the desirably famous syrup cakes and yogurt cakes of Greece. There is neither milk nor butter in this cake yet there is a moist richness that belies the ingredient list. The addition of tea is unique.

1 cup cake flour
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground mace

6 tablespoons fat-free pasteurized eggs
1/2 cup honey [*Orange blossom honey would be our preference.*]
2 tablespoons safflower or sunflower oil
1 1/2 tablespoons orange blossom water
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

6 tablespoons strongly brewed tea—chilled

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Prepare a **7-inch cake pan** by lining with waxed paper and then coating with spray coating especially for baking.

In a mixing bowl, combine cake flour, whole wheat flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and ground cinnamon, ginger, and mace. Mix well to combine. Set aside until required.

Combine pasteurized eggs, honey, oil, orange water, and vanilla extract. Mix well. Add to flour mixture. Stir to combine.

Add *cold* tea and again mix until well-combined. Turn batter into prepared baking pan. Smooth to the edge of the pan. Bake in prepared 350 degree F. oven for 28-30 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Allow to cool for 20 minutes on wire rack. Remove from pan and return to wire rack to cool completely.

Serve, cut into wedges. Traditionally this cake is never frosted. It might be accompanied by a fruit sauce but, unless we are packing it into a picnic basket, we prefer to top it with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Yields 6 servings

Notes: This recipe can be doubled and prepared in a 9-inch round cake pan.

Even though this is a downsized cake, there will probably be leftovers. Since the cake freezes well, I usually freeze half of it for a future meal.

1/6 SERVING (exclusive of fruit sauce or ice cream) –
PROTEIN = 3.1 g.; FAT = 4.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 58.5 g.;
CALORIES = 285; CALORIES FROM FAT = 15%



NORWEGIAN

HONEY LOAF

CAKE

Honningkake

TPT - 2 hours and 25 minutes;
1 hour = cooling period

Pictures of layered cakes dripping with frosting do not represent the family weekday dessert. A slice of this Norwegian honey loaf can be a sweet ending just as it is and a wonderful way to enjoy the work of local bees but it can be a vehicle for fresh fruit or ice cream or frozen yogurt. We like to top it with whipped sour cream or mascarpone cheese folded into whipped cream. The loaf keeps well and freezes well so it can be an in-the-freezer dessert insurance.

3 tablespoons butter

1/3 cup orange blossom honey

3/4 cup unbleached white flour

1 1/2 tablespoons whole wheat flour

1/4 teaspoon ground ginger

1/8 teaspoon ground cloves

1/8 teaspoon black pepper

2 egg yolks

1/2 cup sugar

2 egg whites

Preheat oven to 300 degrees F. Prepare a **7 x 4 x 2-inch loaf pan** by coating with non-stick lecithin baking spray. Set aside until required.

In a small saucepan set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, melt butter. Remove from heat.

Add honey. Stir to combine. Set aside until required.

In a mixing bowl, combine white and whole wheat flours, ground ginger and cloves, and black pepper. Stir. Set aside until required.

In another mixing bowl, combine eggs and sugar. Using a wire whisk, mix until thoroughly combined.

Add *melted* butter and honey. Continue mixing until thoroughly combined.

Add dry ingredients. Using a wooden spoon or a spatula, combine thoroughly.

Using an electric mixer fitted with *grease-free* beaters or by hand, using a *grease-free* wire whisk, beat egg whites in a *grease-free* bowl until *stiff*, but *not dry*. *Whisk-fold* beaten egg whites *gently*, but *thoroughly*, into batter. Pour into prepared loaf pan, spreading it evenly to the edges of the pan. Bake in preheated 300 degree F. oven for 50 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely—at least 1 hour. Remove from pan and peel off parchment paper. Transfer to an oblong cake plate.

Garnish, if desired, with a sprinkling of sweetened cocoa, slivered almonds, or add a serving of fresh fruit, ice cream or frozen yogurt, or a dollop of whipped cream.

Yields 6 slices

Note: This cake can be doubled using a 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan, i. e., a classic bread pan.

1/6 SERVING (i. e., per slice exclusive of garnishes) –
PROTEIN = 4.1 g.; FAT = 7.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 52.6 g.;
CALORIES = 262; CALORIES FROM FAT = 26%

PARAGUAYAN HONEY – PECAN CAKE

Pastel con Miel y Pacanas

TPT - 1 hour and 42 minutes;
30 minutes = cooling period

A simple, very ordinary snack cake? Just try to find a cake with honey that is this subtle, this pleasing. The spicing used by a Paraguayan cook in the southern hemisphere is the same spicing my mother would have used in preparing a dessert for an autumn meal in the northern hemisphere.

3/4 cup unbleached white flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon
Pinch ground nutmeg
Pinch ground cloves
6 tablespoons *finely* chopped pecans

1 large egg
1 1/2 tablespoons sugar

1 tablespoon safflower *or* sunflower oil
1/2 cup honey [*Either clover or orange blossom honey would be our choice.*]
2 tablespoons *two-percent* milk
1 teaspoon freeze-dried coffee granules

Preheat oven to 325 degree F. Prepare a **7-inch cake pan** by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating for baking.

In a mixing bowl, combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, ground ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves, and *finely* chopped pecans. Stir to combine well. Set aside until required.

In the mixing bowl of the electric mixer fitted with a paddle, combine egg and white sugar. Beat until thoroughly combined.



Add oil, honey, milk, and coffee granules. Beat until integrated.

Gradually add dry ingredients, beating until a batter forms. Turn batter into prepared cake pan. Bake in preheated 325 degree F. oven for about 55 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Transfer to a wire rack. Allow to cool for 30 minutes. Turn onto prepared serving dish.

Serve warm, cutting into wedges to serve.

Yields 6 servings
adequate for 4 people

1/6 SERVING – PROTEIN = 3.8 g.; FAT = 10.5 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 37.8 g.;
CALORIES = 250; CALORIES FROM FAT = 38%

*We have found that when we were searching for a vegetarian meal in our travels
or even when we were invited for dinner by someone for the first time,
the inevitable question was, “Do you eat fish?”*

*For the next two months I will share with you vegetarian recipes which evoke the taste
of the sea but still allow you to answer the above question,*

”No, we don’t.”

Do stop by,

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

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