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

December 2018

Christmas Desserts:

Danish Christmas Rice Pudding

Rich Steamed Vanilla Custard

New York-Style Cheesecake

Cherry Cheesecake Parfaits

Cranberry *Strudel*

Christmas and New Year's celebrations give us the opportunity, yea the excuse, to fuss a bit and enjoy desserts in which we might not indulge during the rest of the year. Holiday desserts became the big challenge for homemakers during the post-war years of the 1950s. Tortes and elaborate cakes, gooey pies, mousses, and splendid fruit displays started to appear at Christmas celebrations. Grandma's fabulous pies and puddings were suddenly old-fashioned, just everyday desserts.

The Christmas season is a time to return to the comfort of home and family for most people. To me, Christmas desserts, even for the two of us, have to deliver a feeling of comfort not showmanship, of home not a pastry shop. My criteria for holiday desserts are simple. I require any dessert to add to the overall nutrition of the meal. All or part of the preparation must be easily accomplished ahead of time. Final assembly has to be uncomplicated. And, I have to love it. If I do, then the odds are that everybody at my table will also find that comfort and satisfaction that I want a dessert to give. In preparing the special menus for our holiday meals I cling to memories of past Christmas meals; I tend to favor the comfort of creaminess; and I try to include fruits.

The Danish rice pudding, first tasted on a Christmas trip to Denmark in 1986, always stars at the end of a meal somewhere during the holiday period. It is, yes, a celebration of a family visit to a country whose food knows no equal, in my opinion, but it is also a return to my grandmother's butler's pantry where a rice pudding, or a tapioca pudding, or a bread pudding cooled.

The rich vanilla custard is a favorite recipe from our trips to England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It is a special favorite for this cook since it can be made the day before. Gussied up with a fruit garnish, it is traditional and wonderfully satisfying for "Christmas lunch."

I always serve cheesecake with fruit on the side but never spread all over the top. There is no sour cream or ricotta cheese in this one. It is the same New York-style cheesecake that thrilled me as a child and makes me often consider moving back to Long Island where cheesecake is a carefully tended tradition, not just a dessert. At the last minute I added the cherry cheesecake parfait that we enjoy because it can be made at the last minute and there are no leftovers to find a space for in the groaning, holiday refrigerator.

The cranberry strudel, offered here, is a tribute to my grandmother, whose apple *strudel* is the perfect memory. Several past columns have guided you through the technique required to make a *strudel*. Now with mastery under your belt you can expand your repertoire with one more *strudel*, one that is perfect for the holidays.

I think you can anticipate from my notes above what I am going to recommend. Yes, your holiday desserts are most satisfying when they bring back delicious memories and, on a practical note, when they do not stress your schedule. Pretty simple plan . . .

DANISH CHRISTMAS RICE PUDDING

Risengrød

TPT - about 3 hours;
1 hour and 30 minutes = total chilling period

This is an updated version of an ancient porridge traditionally served as dessert at Christmas in Denmark. In fact, it is so loved that it may be the only dessert offered during Christmas Week! The person who finds the whole almond in their serving should, according to Danish tradition, be rewarded with a marzipan pig. Yes, it was on the menu, usually as “ris a l'amande,” in every restaurant in which we dined during that wonderful Christmas week that we anchored ourselves in Copenhagen; no, none of us found a whole almond in our serving, none of us won the coveted marzipan pig. We did, however, learn to love this dessert and now that we have downsized our family-sized risengrød, we can continue to enjoy a very memorable dessert every Christmas or any day without lots of leftovers.

- 2 cups skimmed milk**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 6 tablespoons long-grain white rice—do not use precooked/converted variety**

- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**

- 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream**
- 1 whole, blanched almond***

- 2 tablespoons blanched, slivered *additive-free* almonds**

- 1 cup canned, pitted sweet cherries, in light syrup**

- 1 teaspoon corn starch**

- 1 “marzipan pig with red ribbon about its neck,” if available***

In a large saucepan set over *LOW* heat, bring milk to the boil. Add the sugar and rice. Stir and simmer *uncovered* and *undisturbed* for about 50 minutes, or until rice is tender, but *not mushy*.

Pour rice into a shallow bowl. Stir in vanilla extract. Set aside in the refrigerator to cool for at least 30 minutes.

Using an electric mixer fitted with *chilled* beaters or by hand using a *chilled* wire whisk, beat heavy cream in a *chilled* bowl until it forms soft peaks.

Fold the beaten cream and the whole almond *gently*, but *thoroughly*, into the slightly cooled rice.

Turn into a serving dish, sprinkle slivered almonds over, and chill for at least 1 hour before serving.

Meanwhile, drain cherries, reserving liquid. Set cherries aside.

Pour cherry juice into a saucepan. Stir corn starch into juice. When completely in suspension, place over *MEDIUM* heat and cook, *stirring constantly with a wire whisk*, until mixture simmers and thickens. Remove from heat. Fold in cherries. Turn into a serving bowl or sauce boat and *chill thoroughly* until ready to serve.



Serve *risengrød* into sherbet glasses or other individual serving dishes. Pass cherry sauce to be spooned over rice.

Yields 4 servings
adequate for 2 people

Notes: *Raspberry sauce is also a fitting crown for this pudding, if preferred. Some even like Cherry Herring poured over. We especially like to serve this with lingonberry preserves.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 6.6 g.; FAT = 10.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 38.0 g.;
CALORIES = 261; CALORIES FROM FAT = 35%

RICH STEAMED VANILLA CUSTARD

Crème à la Vanille

TPT - 5 hours and 16 minutes;
30 minutes = room temperature cooling;
3 hours = refrigeration period

For someone like me, a soft, sweet custard is a divine ending to a meal. It is my favorite dessert for “Christmas lunch” and I always double this recipe so there will be another serving for an evening, “front-of-the-fire” treat. On special occasions, we used to visit a French restaurant that now has sadly closed. I never tried any of their other desserts; their crème brûlée was that good. The rich custard of a crème brulee can be revisited by anyone even if you do not have a crème brûlée “kit.”

A garnish of diced, softened, dried fruits or citron or the pear mincemeat that appears on pp. 441-42 of volume I of “A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Food That Nourish America’s Immigrant Soul” can be just the holiday touch you need.

3 large, organic egg yolks
3 1/4 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Few grains salt

1 vanilla bean—split
1 cup one-percent milk

3 tablespoons heavy whipping cream

Prepare **two six-ounce ramekins** by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating for baking.* Place them in a baking pan or roasting pan. Pour *hot* water into the roasting pan to about half-way up the sides of the ramekins.

In a mixing bowl, combine egg yolks, sugar, vanilla extract, and salt. Mix well. Set aside until required.

Scrape the seeds from the split vanilla bean into a saucepan. Add the one-percent milk and *one-half* of the vanilla bean pod. Set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat. Allow to come to the boil. *Gradually, tablespoonful by tablespoonful*, using a wire whisk, beat egg mixture into the hot milk. Cook, stirring constantly, until sugar is dissolved and the mixture begins to thicken. Remove from heat.

Add heavy cream. Whisk to integrate.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.

Set a sieve over a two-cup Pyrex measuring cup. Pour the milk–egg mixture through the sieve. Discard any vanilla pod residue. Divide the custard mixture between the two prepared ramekins. Loosely cover the roasting pan with aluminum foil. Bake at 325 degrees F. until custard is set but still soft in center when gently shaken—about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and allow to cool to room temperature. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours, or until well-chilled.

Yields 2 individual servings

Notes: *If you prefer, six-ounce *crème brûlée* dishes can be substituted.

These custards can be made several days in advance.

This recipe can be doubled or tripled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 8.7 g.; FAT = 17.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 29.5 g.;
CALORIES = 307; CALORIES FROM FAT = 51%



NEW YORK-STYLE CHEESECAKE

TPT - 8 hours and 53 minutes;
15 minutes = crust cooling period;
1 hour = in-oven cooling period;
1 hour = on rack, room temperature cooling;
4 hours = refrigeration period

There was a bakery and pastry shop on Joseph Avenue in Rochester, New York, back in the 1940s and '50s that sold a phenomenal cheesecake. It was rich with full-fat cream cheese and heavy cream. Although I have made many versions of this classic New York cheesecake over the years, trying always to make it healthier but still preserving that taste memory, I have never quite achieved that pure, unadulterated decadent mouth feel. My mother's cheesecake was as good as that made by that bakery but she has lost her original recipe. A recipe, given to me by my friend Steve, who also has a taste memory from his childhood, is a delicious cheesecake but it is less dense and is made with sour cream, making it lighter but with a tinge of that sour cream taste. The version I record here does transport me back those days in the blue Dodge heading home from the center of Rochester after we had stopped at the Joseph Avenue bakery for three slices of cheesecake—my brother and I shared one. We would sit down at the kitchen table to enjoy that cheesecake and that rich indulgence was dinner. The crust in that cheesecake and the crusts in those my mother and grandmother made were always made with Zwieback, now difficult to find since Nabisco stopped making those little toasts I've eaten since I was teething. If you want that wonderful crust taste of yore, Zwieback is available by mail order from a German company; otherwise use graham crackers for the crust.

If we have guests during the holidays and cheesecake is going to be on the menu, then I will surely bake this cheesecake for a dessert buffet but if there will just be just the two of us, cheesecake can still be an option. See the recipe for "Cherry Cheesecake Parfaits" which follows.



CRUST:

**1 cup Zwieback crumbs or graham cracker
crumbs, if necessary**
3 tablespoons sugar
1/4 cup melted butter

FILLING:

16 ounces low-fat cream cheese—brought to room temperature

2/3 cup sugar

Pinch salt

3/4 teaspoon freshly grated *organic* orange zest

3/4 teaspoon freshly grated *organic* lemon zest

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

2 eggs—brought to room temperature

2/3 cup heavy whipping cream—brought to room temperature

Butter a **6-inch springform pan**.^{*} Wrap the bottom and sides of the pan with two or three layers of heavy duty aluminum foil.

In a mixing bowl, combine rusk crumbs and 3 tablespoonfuls sugar. Mix well to distribute the sugar. Add *melted* butter. Using your fingers, work the butter into the dry ingredients until it clumps together. Turn into prepared springform pan. Press firmly and evenly across the bottom and about half way up the sides. Place the springform pan in the freezer for about 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Remove the springform pan from the freezer and place on a cookie sheet. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove from oven and set on a wire rack to cool.

Reduce oven temperature to 300 degrees F.

Using the electric mixer fitted with paddle, beat cream cheese for about 4 to 5 minutes at MEDIUM speed, or until soft and creamy.

Add 2/3 cupful sugar, salt, and grated orange and lemon zest. Continue to beat for about 4 to 5 minutes, or until the cream cheese is not only creamy but light.

Add vanilla extract and eggs. Beat mixture until light and aerated.

Reduce mixer to LOW. Add heavy cream. Beat until you have a smooth batter.

Place springform pan in a large baking pan. Pour the cheese filling into springform pan. Transfer the baking pan to the preheated 300 degree F. oven. Pour *boiling* water into the baking pan to a level of about half way up the springform pan but *not above the aluminum foil line*. Bake for about 1 hour and 30 minutes. The top will have begun to brown but the center will move a little if gently shaken. **TURN OFF THE OVEN AND PROP THE DOOR OPEN SLIGHTLY.** Allow cheesecake to remain in the slowly cooling oven for 1 hour. Remove baking pan from oven. Place springform pan on wire rack to cool to room temperature. Cover the top loosely with parchment paper and refrigerate at this point for at least 4 hours, or overnight. *Carefully* peel aluminum foil from springform pan.

Run a knife around edge to loosen side, release spring on cake pan, and remove ring.

Serve in wedges. Refrigerate any leftovers.

Yields 12 servings
adequate for 4-6 people



Note: *Small springform pans can be found in most kitchen stores or ordered from on-line mail order firms.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 6.0 g.; FAT = 13.8 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 23.3 g.;
CALORIES = 240; CALORIES FROM FAT = 52%

CHERRY CHEESECAKE PARFAITS

TPT - 46 minutes

A slice of real New York cheesecake . . . there is nothing like it. Even though I have cut my recipe time and time again and now bake it in 6-inch springform pan, it is too much cheesecake for the two of us; every day there was cheesecake for dessert and it got more and more dry and more and more disappointing. Cheesecake and pastries have always been a part of our holidays and I missed it so I decided to make a cheesecake parfait that would be quickly and easily prepared, would not take up much room in my refrigerator, would not dry out, and would never disappoint. This dessert is the perfect ending for a simple grilled vegetable or salad menu.

2 tablespoons graham cracker crumbs
1 teaspoon softened whipped butter

1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

2 ounces mascarpone cheese—softened to room temperature

2 tablespoons plain yogurt
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 cup sweetened, canned cherries—well-drained

In a small bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs and *softened* whipped butter. Using a pastry blender or a spoon, work butter into crumbs until you again have separate crumbs. Set aside until required.

Using the electric mixer fitted with *chilled* beaters or a whisk or by hand using a *chilled* wire whisk, beat heavy cream in a *chilled* bowl until soft peaks form. While continuing to beat, add confectioners' sugar. Beat until stiff peaks form. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside until required.

Using the electric mixer again fitted with beaters or whisk, beat softened *mascarpone* cheese until light and *very smooth*. Scrape down sides of mixing bowl as necessary.

Add yogurt and vanilla extract. Beat into whipped *mascarpone* until again *very smooth*. Scrape down sides of mixing bowl several times.

Add whipped cream and *gently whisk-fold* cream into cheese mixture.

Sprinkle 1 teaspoonful of the graham cracker crumbs into the bottom of each of two parfait glasses, wine glasses, or even old-fashioned glasses.

Spoon *one-quarter* of the cheese mixture on top of the crumbs into one of the glasses.

Spoon 1/4 cupful of cherries on top of cheese–cream mixture.

Sprinkle another teaspoonful of the graham cracker crumbs over the cheese mixture.

Spoon *one-third* of the remaining cheese mixture on top of the graham cracker crumbs.

Spoon 1/4 cupful of cherries on top of cheese–cream mixture.

Sprinkle another teaspoonful of crumbs on top.

Repeat, filling the second glass.

Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Set each parfait on a salad or dessert plate. *Serve chilled* with an iced tea spoon.

Yields 2 individual servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled or tripled easily.



1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 5.2 g.; FAT = 21.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 39.4 g.;
CALORIES = 382; CALORIES FROM FAT = 51%

CRANBERRY STRUDEL

TPT - 2 hours;
30 minutes = pastry rising period

Even if it is a small gathering, you want an impressive presentation for the holidays that does not stress the cook/hostess. This is a simple and rather quickly prepared holiday dessert that I evolved to take some of the busy out of the holidays. If it is just the two of us or if we have guests, it is just enough.

1/2 cup canned, whole berry cranberry sauce
2 tablespoons chopped, toasted hazelnuts (filberts)
1 tablespoon fat-free sweetened condensed milk

1/2 sheet frozen puff pastry (4 1/2 x 7 inches)
—defrosted, but still cool
1/2 teaspoon melted butter

Sweetened whipped cream, for garnish
Grated white chocolate, for garnish, if desired

Prepare a cookie sheet by lining with parchment paper.

On a cool surface, roll the puff pastry to double its size. Fold in half and roll again. Turn and roll the pastry again to double its size and then fold in half again. About *one inch* in from one of longest edges of the rolled pastry sheet spoon the cranberry sauce so that it is distributed from one end of the pastry to the other. Spread the cranberry sauce across the pastry, *leaving one inch all the way around*. Sprinkle the toasted hazelnuts evenly over the cranberry sauce. Drizzle the sweetened condensed milk over the cranberry sauce from one end to the other. Turn the left and side margins toward the center. Press gently. Take the pastry edge nearest to you and roll it *tightly* over the fruit. Continue rolling until you have a tight roll. Moisten the edge and ends and secure. Place sealed-side-down on prepared baking sheet.



Allow to the pastry to rise at room temperature for 30 minutes. Using a very sharp knife, slash two or three diagonal, two-inch cuts across the top to allow for venting.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. while pastry is rising.

Bake in preheated 400 degree F. oven for about 35-40 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove from baking sheet to a serving platter or cutting board. Allow to cool to room temperature.

Using a sharp knife, slice and transfer to a dessert plate. Garnish with whipped cream and grated white chocolate, if desired.

Yields 6 slices

Note: This can be doubled, using a full sheet of puff pastry, is required.

1/6 SERVING (i. e., per slice exclusive of whipped cream or chocolate garnishes) –
PROTEIN = 3.6 g.; FAT = 6.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 16.5 g.;
CALORIES = 145; CALORIES FROM FAT = 39%



Another year has passed and to those of you have visited this site throughout the year,

I wish you a very Happy New Year.

Next month's column will address planned leftovers.

We all need a break now and then.

*Thinking "planned leftover" can be a very helpful tool
if you ever want to finish that reread of "War and Peace."*

Judy

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

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