

Decadent Holiday Desserts

Story by Genevieve Northup



Every December from the time I was a toddler to my junior year of high school, my mother hosted a dessert buffet. At sunset, the house was bathed in soft candlelight and smelled of cinnamon as mulled wine simmered on the stove. I stayed out of the way as Mom rushed to put the finishing touches on the dozen or so desserts she'd been preparing for days.

From 8 p.m. onward, guests in beaded dresses and tweed suits arrived in waves to make small talk, sip spiked eggnog, and enjoy two-tone fudge, trifle, pralines and other surprises. Mom limited my portions when I was young, but I found grown-ups willing to sneak an extra slice of cake or scoop of pudding for me. In my teen years, I discretely served myself seconds and thirds.

Now in my 30s, I continue my mom's southern traditions and satisfy my dessert stomach by baking holiday treats for work, parties and dinners. **These are a few favorite recipes:**

DRUNKEN FRUIT BAKE

INGREDIENTS:

14 coconut macaroons	15.25-oz can sliced pears in syrup
15-oz can sweet cherries	21-oz can blueberry pie filling
15-oz can sliced peaches in juice	3 1/3 tablespoons coconut rum, divided
15-oz can cherry fruit cocktail in syrup	1/3 cup shredded coconut, toasted
20-oz can crushed pineapple in juice	

DIRECTIONS:

1. Crumble macaroons and toast in oven.
2. Drain all canned fruit (except pie filling).
3. Pour cherries into 2.5-quart baking dish. Top with two teaspoons rum. Repeat process with remaining four fruit layers. Add pie filling.
4. Bake 30 minutes at 350°F (175°C). Add crumbled macaroons and bake until bubbly.
5. Top with toasted coconut and serve warm.

Adapted from Hot Fruit Compote in December 1986 Southern Living.



CHOCOLATE COCONUT BREAD PUDDING

INGREDIENTS:

Bread Pudding

6 eggs	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 cups half and half	6-8 stale croissants (20 oz), torn into chunks
1 cup whole milk	1/3 cup mini semisweet chocolate chips
1 13.5 oz can coconut milk, divided	1/3 cup dried cherries, chopped
3/4 cup granulated sugar	1 tablespoon coconut oil, melted
1 tablespoon cinnamon	2 tablespoons dark brown sugar

Sauce

1 14-oz can sweetened condensed milk	Reserved coconut milk
1 tablespoon unsalted butter	1/2 teaspoon coconut extract

DIRECTIONS:

1. Combine eggs, half and half, whole milk, 12 ounces coconut milk, sugar, cinnamon and vanilla. Add bread, cherries and chocolate. Allow to sit at room temperature for one hour.
2. Coat 9x13 pan with coconut oil and add bread pudding. Sprinkle sugar over top.
3. Bake in 350°F (175°C) for 45-60 minutes. The pudding will brown on top, pull from the edges and swell in the middle when done.
4. Allow pudding to cool for 15 minutes and prepare sauce.
5. In a saucepan on medium heat, warm condensed milk, remaining 1.5 ounces coconut milk, butter and coconut extract. Pour over individual slices of bread pudding.

Adapted from New Orleans-Style Bread Pudding with Coconut-Praline Sauce in February 2011 Cuisine at Home and Easy Pecan Praline Sauce from www.callmepmc.com.

STRAWBERRY & BROWNIE CHEESECAKE TRIFLE

INGREDIENTS:

Cheesecake Brownie Layer

Prepared raw brownie batter (box or scratch)	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
16 oz cream cheese, softened and divided	1 egg
3 tablespoons granulated sugar	

Cheesecake Layer

Remaining cream cheese	2 tablespoons strawberry jelly
1/4 cup half and half	1 pint strawberries, hulled and sliced, divided
2 tablespoons powdered sugar	

Custard Layer

1 cup heavy cream	2/3 cup granulated sugar
1 1/2 cup whole milk	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 egg yolks	2 tablespoons strawberry jelly
1 tablespoon cornstarch	Remaining strawberries

Cream Layer

1 cup heavy cream	2 tablespoons powdered sugar
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DIRECTIONS:

1. Brownie Layer: Add batter to greased 9x13 dish. Beat 6 ounces cream cheese, sugar, vanilla and egg. Pour over batter and swirl with a knife. Bake according to brownie recipe. Cool, slice and put half in trifle bowl.
2. Cheesecake Layer: Beat remaining 10 ounces cream cheese, half and half, and powdered sugar. Pour over brownies. Spread strawberry jelly and half of strawberries on top. Place in fridge.
3. Custard Layer: In a large bowl, beat yolks, cornstarch and sugar. In a saucepan over medium heat, warm heavy cream and milk. Slowly pour heated cream into bowl of eggs, whisking constantly. Once combined, pour back into saucepan and stir over medium heat until thickened. Chill, then spoon over strawberry cheesecake layer. Top with remaining strawberries and brownies.
4. Cream Layer: In another bowl, beat cream and sugar until stiff peaks form. Spread over trifle.

Adapted from English Trifle by Julia Child and Trifle Custard by DrGaelion on www.food.com.