

## **Your Own French Toast Festival**

Last summer I was greatly blessed to find myself along with my wife, Ida Jo, and business partners, Ralph and Donna, in the wine country of California struggling through 10 days of tasting wines for our business. (Nice work when you can get it!) We experienced the very special charm of staying in bed & breakfast inns while there and enjoying foods that make me dizzy just reflecting on them.

We staged ourselves in Cambria south of San Francisco for a couple of days to investigate some wineries in Paso Robles and that's where I had to rethink French toast as I had always known it. My recipe was fairly straightforward until the innkeeper at J. Patrick House, who was also a local fireman, served up my first plate of "stuffed" French toast. It left me weak in the knees.

The combination of flavors and textures was absolutely decadent and the possibilities of how you might personalize the recipe endless. I know most of us stay so busy during the week that a real set-down family breakfast is impossible. I urge you to make it a priority.

Saturday or early Sunday morning is a great time to get together as a family and these recipes can help provide some of the motivation. Remember, lunch is for fuel for the day, supper is a time of reflection after your mad rush, but breakfast is a time for hope of what is to come that day!

There are a couple of approaches to this recipe and I want to show you both. Each offers its own advantages so take your pick.

### **Mini-pocket Stuffed French Toast**

(Serves four)



1 loaf French bread (cut into 1 ½ inch thick diagonal slices)  
(You'll need enough bread for 3 or 4 slices for each diner.)  
Butter or butter flavored cooking spray to cook in  
Powdered sugar

Mix for filling:

½ small jar of natural fruit preserves (your choice!)

1 8oz. package cream cheese (softened)

Whisk together for egg wash:

9 eggs

¼ cup half & half

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon cinnamon

Dash of nutmeg

Using a sharp paring knife, slice an opening to provide a pocket in each French bread slice leaving three sides intact. Into each pocket, fill with 1 ½ teaspoons of the cream cheese/preserve mixture. Once stuffed the slices should be placed into the freezer for 20 or 30 minutes, just long enough to thoroughly chill the stuffing, which will help to prevent it from running out of the slices during cooking.

Pour your egg wash into a large rectangle-baking dish and lay in the chilled slices of French bread just before cooking. Let each side soak for about one minute. Allow each slice to drain a bit and place them on a medium-high hot griddle, which has been prep'd with either butter or cooking spray. Cook until golden brown on each side. Serve with maple syrup on the side after lightly dusting each piece with powdered sugar.

### **Pecan Stuffed French Toast Casserole**

(Makes twelve 3" x 4 ¼" servings)



9 cups of French bread cut into 1-inch cubes. (Any combination of sweet bread or pastries can be used according to your personal taste.)

1 ½ (8 oz.) packages of cream cheese, cubed

8 eggs

2 ½ cups whole milk

½ cup white sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
½ cup chopped pecans  
½ cup heavy cream  
½ cup white sugar mixed with 1 teaspoon cinnamon

12 to 24 hours before serving:

Spray a 9" x 13" x 2" casserole with non-stick baking spray. Layer bread/pasty cubes into pan evenly, sprinkle cubed cream cheese and pecans on top. In a large bowl, beat eggs, sugar, milk, vanilla and baking powder until well mixed. Pour over bread and cheese mixture, cover, and refrigerate until ready to bake.

The next morning preheat oven to 350°F. Pour ½ cup heavy cream over mixture and sprinkle with sugar/cinnamon mixture. Bake for about 45 minutes or until a knife inserted comes out clean. Your casserole can also be served with homemade praline sauce.

### **Praline Sauce**

½ lb. butter  
2 lb. bag light brown sugar  
2 cups water  
1 can sweetened condensed milk

In heavy saucepan melt butter. Add brown sugar and water. Cook until mixture comes to a boil and continue on for about 5 minutes more. Add sweetened condensed milk and bring back up to boiling. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Our quest for great wines this week takes us to Spain where terrific wines have been produced for centuries but have been missed by the American market to a large degree. One fascinating note is that one of the largest importers of Spanish wines worldwide is interestingly enough, France.

Wines from Spain were recently featured in Robert Parker Jr.'s information newsletter, The Wine Advocate. The 2004 Bodegas Y Vinedos Del Jalon **Viña Alarba Old Vines** received a rating of 90 from Parker and a description that this wine has "a deep ruby/purple color, full body, and wonderful kirsch liqueur and raspberry aromas and flavors interwoven with hints of licorice as well as minerals. This stunning effort is almost too good to be true. Drink it over the next 1 to 3 years."

I want to stress to you that Parker rarely rates any wine 90 or higher and is generally believed to be the current "top dog" for wine evaluation in America. Our tasting only added even greater credence to his commentary. This is a phenomenal red wine, which comes in at a remarkably affordable price.

Please call us if you have questions at 888-288-0668 or visit us online at [www.winedog.com](http://www.winedog.com). Cheers.

