

Tastes of Home for the Holidays

Food is a solid connection to our past and if you're lucky, it triggers wonderful memories of family, friends and special experiences. Some of the best recipes I've collected over the years have history attached to them. I'm sure you have a few like that.

One of the greatest gifts I ever received came to me from an idea my wife put together for her "foodie" husband's 40th birthday. The surprise party invitations went out with one request. "Prepare your favorite dish as a gift along with a copy of the recipe." We really feasted that night and I expanded my personal recipe book with some great, unique creations.

Earlier in college I experienced foods after Christmas break that were amazing and reflected a bit of the ethnic heritage my friends and roommates brought back from family gatherings at home. My best friend from Cleveland was of Slovakian background and my first taste of *kolachi* was incredible. This pastry roll filled with sweet, nutty sesame seed paste was made by his grandmother who still refused to speak English in the kitchen. What a great image.

Today I'm blessed with a mother and maternal grandmother who have always prepared food as a means of expressing love. If I close my eyes and sniff as I walk into my grandmother's kitchen today I'm transported back to past gatherings of family and friends. Some of those special people are long gone but not forgotten thanks in part to great family foods.

We're a "pie" family originally from Kentucky and I'd love to share two recipes with you that go back many years. The first is a classic southern style dessert and from a category of pies call Chess Pies:

Southern Buttermilk Chess Pie

(Makes two 9" pies)

½ cup butter

2 cups sugar

3 tablespoons all purpose flour

3 eggs

1-cup buttermilk

1 ½ tablespoons vanilla

½ cup chopped pecans (optional)

½ cup chopped raisins (optional)

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Use your favorite flaky crust recipe or if buying premade be sure to use the best quality available. If you're serious about your pies you will be much happier with your results if you learn to make your own crusts. (Food processors have made the task a breeze!)

Prepare two 9-inch piecrusts in well-made heavy pie pans and set aside.

Allow your butter to soften to room temperature and cream butter with sugar and flour using a whisk until well mixed. Hand whisk eggs into the mixture one at a time. Finally mix buttermilk and vanilla in and blend well until mixture appears curdled.

Split mixture between your two piecrusts and if you wish to add chopped raisins and pecans do so now dividing them evenly between both pies making sure you gently mix them into the filling. (We rarely use raisins and pecans in our pies but the original recipe did offer them as an option.)

Place pies on a cookie sheet and bake them at 400° F. for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 325° F. and continue to bake 40 to 45 minutes longer. Pies are done when top is a golden brown crust and center is well set. Best served at room temperature with whipped cream!

This next pie is extremely simple to make and is a perfect choice if you're letting the kids have a hand at baking. They'll get great results every time and I've found it's a super way to get their attention away from television and video games.

Mom's Impossible Pie

2 cups milk
¾ cup sugar
2 eggs
½ cup all purpose flour
½ stick butter
2 tablespoons vanilla
1 dash salt
1 cup shredded coconut

Preheat oven to 350° F. Lightly grease a 9 inch deep dish pie pan with butter.

Mix all of the listed ingredients together and pour into pan. Place pie pan on a baking sheet in your preheated oven and bake until set...approximately 45 minutes. This pie actually forms its own thin crust. The coconut ends up on top over a creamy filling.

If you take your baking seriously there are a few things you can do to insure great results. First, allow eggs to come to room temperature before incorporating them into your recipe. They will blend into the other parts of your mix more efficiently and provide a better texture in your final results.

Secondly, I would advise you to take all of the great things you hear about convection ovens seriously. The even heat in a convection gives you better results in any baking project. You will normally be able to reduce bake time a bit and will not have to worry about the edges of your crust getting over baked while trying to get the filling to set properly.

Here's wishing you great times in the kitchen this holiday season and let's hope we're all doing a good job of providing our children with experiences they will remember fondly 25 years from now!

From the cellar...

We've found something special for peach lovers out there this holiday as the temperature drops and we look forward to a nice cordial at the end of a day in front of the fireplace. Made from tiny red "vineyard" peaches, *Weinbergpfirsich* is a blend of Riesling alambic brandy and the rich nectar of this very special peach. It has an incredible bouquet and is also delicious when incorporated into fruit tarts.

We're always happy to help if you need assistance finding this delightful liqueur or if you have questions about our recipe offerings. Feel free to contact us at 888-288-0668!