



Pure Pleasures

Using all-natural ingredients, you can make holiday classics like pecan pie, trifle and yule log cake lighter, but just as dreamy as ever.

Luscious, dark-sweet pecan pie in a flaky homemade crust, decorated with a spiral of nuts. That's the sort of treat my Mom liked to make for Thanksgiving. Grownups gasped with delight. Kids turned up their noses and wondered where the boxed cake and frosting from a can was. My sister Katie and I devoured it.

And so at an early age we learned that special occasions call for desserts baked from scratch, without any artificial coloring, trans fat or crazy stuff from a tube. Today Katie and I work closely—I'm the food editor of *Fixins*Wax and she develops recipes for the magazine. Her specialty: trimming recipes to cut calories and fat. When she suggested makeovers of an array of classic holiday desserts with the simple, natural approach that we learned from our mom, I jumped at the chance. These dreamy desserts are lighter than the ones we grew up with, but I know Mom will adore them too. —Jessie Price

photography by Corin Krasner | recipes by Katie Webster



This array of holiday treats is updated with slimmer profiles. You get the sweet richness you desire without the need for a post-holiday diet.

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Cranberry Coconut Trifle

Cranberry Coconut Trifle

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MAKES: 16 servings, about 1 cup each

ACTIVE TIME: 2 hours | TOTAL: 6 hours

TO MAKE AHEAD: Prepare the custard and cranberry filling, cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days; tightly wrap the cooled cake and store at room temperature for up to 1 day. Or prepare the trifle through Step 10, cover and refrigerate for up to 8 hours. | EQUIPMENT: Trifle bowl or similar 12-cup glass serving dish; 12-by-16½-inch rimmed baking sheet

No other dessert turns heads like a trifle. Festive in every way, this one glows from within with scarlet layers of juicy cranberries. The filling is made from an astounding 6 cups of antioxidant-packed cranberries! We made the custard "skinny" with a combination of low-fat milk and light coconut milk. From-scratch brown-butter sponge cake, made with whole-wheat pastry flour, stands in for store-bought ladyfingers.

CUSTARD

- 3 cups low-fat milk, divided
- ⅓ cup cornstarch
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon coconut extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 15-ounce can "lite" coconut milk
- ⅔ cup granulated sugar

CRANBERRY FILLING

- 2 12-ounce bags cranberries (6 cups)
- 1 cup unsweetened cranberry juice
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ⅓ cup honey or agave nectar

SPONGE CAKE

- 5 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 teaspoons coconut extract
- ¾ cup whole-wheat pastry flour (see Note, page 94)
- ⅓ cup cake flour, sifted
- ⅔ cup granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt

TOPPING

- ½ cup heavy cream or whipping cream
- ½ cup nonfat vanilla Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon coconut extract
- 3 tablespoons unsweetened coconut chips or flakes, toasted if desired (see page 95)

1. **To prepare custard:** Whisk ½ cup milk with cornstarch in a medium bowl; set near the stove. Whisk 3 eggs, 1 teaspoon coconut extract and ¼ teaspoon salt in another medium bowl. Combine the remaining 2½ cups milk, coconut milk and ⅓ cup sugar in a large saucepan. Heat over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until steaming but not bubbling. Whisk the hot milk into the cornstarch mixture, then return the mixture to the saucepan and bring to a full boil over medium heat, stirring constantly.

2. Gradually whisk the hot milk into the egg mixture. Strain through a sieve into a bowl or storage container. Cover and refrigerate until cold, 4 hours or up to 2 days.

3. **To prepare cranberry filling:** Combine cranberries, cranberry juice, 1 cup sugar and honey (or agave) in a large

saucepan. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring often, until most of the cranberries burst open, 7 to 10 minutes. Let cool to room temperature. Or transfer to a storage container and refrigerate for up to 2 days.

4. **To prepare sponge cake:** Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a large (12 by 16½-inch) rimmed baking sheet (half sheet pan) with parchment paper. Trim the paper so it covers the bottom of the pan completely, but does not curl up the sides. Coat the paper and pan sides with cooking spray. Place 5 eggs (in the shell) in a stand mixer bowl or large mixing bowl, add very warm tap water and set aside to warm the eggs and bowl.

5. Melt butter in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, swirling occasionally, until the white flecks of milk solids in the bottom of the pan start to turn golden brown, 4 to 8 minutes. Scrape into a medium bowl. Let cool to room temperature, then stir in 2 teaspoons coconut extract. Set aside.

6. Meanwhile, whisk whole-wheat pastry flour and cake flour in a medium bowl; set aside.

7. Drain the water and break the eggs into the warmed mixing bowl. Add ⅔ cup sugar and ½ teaspoon salt and beat with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until tripled in volume and very pale light yellow, 5 to 15 minutes (depending on the strength of your mixer). To test if it's beaten well enough, lift the beater from the batter: as the batter falls off the beater into the bowl, it should mound for a moment on the surface.

8. Gently fold the flour mixture into the egg mixture with a whisk, in two additions, until just incorporated. Gently fold about 1 cup of the batter into the reserved butter. Then gently fold the butter mixture into the bowl of batter with a whisk until just incorporated, being careful not to overmix. Spread the batter evenly in the prepared baking sheet.

9. Bake the cake until puffed and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with a few moist crumbs attached, 8 to 12 minutes. Cool in the pan on a large wire rack for 10 minutes. Gently run a knife around the edges and turn the cake out onto the rack; remove the parchment and let cool completely.

10. **To assemble trifle:** Cut the cake into 1-inch cubes. Spread about 1 cup of the custard in the bottom of a trifle dish. Top with about 3 cups cake cubes and 1 cup of the cranberry filling. Repeat the layering 3 more times.

11. **To prepare topping:** Just before serving, whisk or beat cream in a large bowl until soft peaks form. Whisk in yogurt, confectioners' sugar and 1 teaspoon coconut extract until smooth. Spread over the top of the trifle. Garnish with coconut.

PER SERVING: 356 calories, 10 g fat (6 g sat, 2 g mono); 111 mg cholesterol; 60 g carbohydrate; 39 g added sugars; 7 g protein; 3 g fiber; 180 mg sodium; 175 mg potassium.

Pumpkin Cheesecake with Gingersnap-Walnut Crust

MAKES: 12 servings

ACTIVE TIME: 30 minutes | TOTAL: 7 hours

TO MAKE AHEAD: Cover and refrigerate for up to 12 hours.

EQUIPMENT: 9-inch springform pan

We pulled out a few of our favorite EATINGWELL tricks to achieve plenty of creaminess without all the saturated fat of a typical cheesecake: *nutrient-packed canned pumpkin and pureed nonfat cottage cheese replace some of the cream*

GLUTEN-FREE HERE'S HOW

1. Use a gluten-free all-purpose baking flour or baking blend in place of all the flour (all-purpose flour, whole-wheat flour and/or cake flour).

2. Check to be sure the brand of extract you select is labeled gluten-free. For certified gluten-free extracts, look for Nielsen-Massey brand at specialty-food markets and online at kingarthurfLOUR.com.

3. For the pumpkin cheesecake, substitute gluten-free gingersnaps in the crust.



Dried cherries are a welcome surprise in this maple syrup-sweetened pecan tart. Sparkly mint meets dark chocolate in these über-creamy pots de crème (opposite).



Peppermint Pattie Pots de Crème



This dressed-up-for-the-holidays cheesecake is made with creamy, beta-carotene-loaded pumpkin. We also added heart-healthy walnuts to the crust. Decorate with more walnuts, plain or candied, for extra glitter.

cheese. A touch of pumpkin pie spice warms up the flavor. For the crust, shop the natural-foods section for gingersnaps without any hydrogenated oil. Simple toasted walnuts are an elegant garnish. Or try making candied walnuts (page 94). Just be careful not to eat all of them before they make it to the cake!

- 4 ounces gingersnap cookies (18-20 1¼-inch cookies)
- 1 cup walnut halves, divided
- 4 teaspoons walnut oil or canola oil
- 12 ounces reduced-fat cream cheese (Neufchâtel)
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 3 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 16-ounce container nonfat cottage cheese
- 1 15-ounce can unseasoned pumpkin puree

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Coat a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Tightly wrap the outside of the pan bottom and sides with heavy-duty foil to help keep the water bath from leaking into the cake. Put a kettle of water on to boil for the water bath.

2. Grind cookies and ½ cup walnuts to a fine meal in a food processor. Drizzle in oil and process, scraping the sides as needed, until the crumbs are evenly moistened. Press the crumb mixture firmly into the bottom of the prepared pan. Place the pan in a roasting pan and set aside. Clean the food processor.

3. Beat cream cheese, granulated sugar, brown sugar and pumpkin pie spice in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium-low speed until the spice is incorporated. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until completely smooth, scraping down the sides occasionally. Beat in eggs one at a time, scraping down the sides occasionally. Beat in vanilla.

4. Process cottage cheese in the food processor until completely smooth, about 2 minutes, scraping down the sides once. Gradually beat the cottage cheese and pumpkin puree into the cream cheese mixture on medium speed. Scrape down the sides and beat a final time to make sure no streaks remain. Pour the batter into the crust.

5. Pour enough boiling water into the roasting pan to come 1 inch up the side of the springform pan to create a hot water bath for the cake. Carefully transfer the roasting pan to the oven. Bake the cheesecake in the center of the oven until it's set around the edges but the center still jiggles slightly, 1½ to 1¾ hours.

6. Remove the roasting pan from the oven. Let the cake cool in the water bath until the water is room temperature. Coarsely chop the remaining ½ cup walnuts. Toast them in a dry skillet over medium-low heat until fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the water bath. Remove the foil. Place the nuts decoratively around the edge of the cheesecake. (Alternatively, turn the nuts into Candied Walnuts and decorate just before serving; see page 94 for a recipe.) Refrigerate, uncovered, until very cold, at least 4 hours. Wrap tightly and refrigerate overnight if desired.

7. To serve, remove the sides of the pan. Transfer the cheesecake to a cake stand, if desired.

PER SERVING: 307 calories; 16 g fat (5 g sat, 4 g mono); 70 mg cholesterol; 33 g carbohydrate; 19 g added sugars; 10 g protein; 2 g fiber; 295 mg sodium; 270 mg potassium. **NUTRITION BONUS:** Vitamin A (117% daily value).

Mocha Yule Log

WJW

MAKES: 14 servings

ACTIVE TIME: 1¾ hours | **TOTAL:** 2¾ hours (not including garnishes) | **TO MAKE AHEAD:** Prepare through Step 9 and hold at room temperature for up to 2 hours or refrigerate, uncovered, for up to 1 day. | **EQUIPMENT:** 12-by-16½-inch rimmed baking sheet

Some *bûche de Noël* cakes can be as heavy as a real log when they are decked out with sugar and buttercream. Our version, which is just as tasty served cold as it is at room temperature, is lighter-than-air. The chocolate brown-butter génoise cake made with whole-grain flour is easy to roll up and it's covered with a billowy espresso-spiked 7-minute frosting. We've substituted agave nectar for white sugar in the frosting. To go gluten-free, see 83. (Photograph: page 88.)

CHOCOLATE SPONGE CAKE

- 5 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ cup whole-wheat pastry flour (see Note, page 94)
- ½ cup cake flour, sifted
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted
- ⅔ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt

FILLING & FROSTING

- ⅔ cup agave nectar (see Note, page 94)
- 1 tablespoon instant espresso powder or coffee granules
- 4 teaspoons dried egg whites (see Note, page 94), reconstituted according to package directions (equivalent to 2 egg whites)
- ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup brewed coffee, room temperature or cold
- ¼ cup half-and-half

Meringue Mushrooms & Sugared Rosemary for garnish (eatingwell.com)

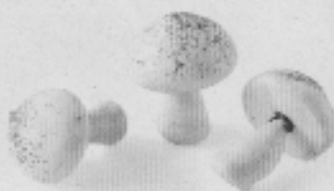
1. **To prepare cake:** Preheat oven to 350°F. Line the bottom of a large (12-by-16½-inch) rimmed baking sheet (half-sheet pan) with parchment paper; coat the paper and pan sides with cooking spray. Place eggs (in the shell) in a stand mixer bowl or large mixing bowl, add very warm tap water and set aside to warm the eggs and bowl.

2. Melt butter in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, swirling occasionally, until the white flecks of milk solids in the bottom of the pan start to turn golden brown, 4 to 8 minutes. Scrape into a medium bowl. Let cool to room temperature, then add 2 teaspoons vanilla. Set aside.

3. Meanwhile, whisk whole-wheat flour, cake flour and ¼ cup cocoa in a medium bowl; set aside.

4. Drain the water and break the eggs into the warmed mixing bowl. Add sugar and ½ teaspoon salt and beat with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until thick and pale light yellow, 5 to 15 minutes (depending on the power of your mixer). To test if it's beaten well enough, lift the beater from the batter: as the batter falls off the beater into the bowl, it should mound for a moment on the surface.

5. Gently fold the flour mixture into the egg mixture with



MERINGUE MUSHROOMS

are a classic decoration on the traditional yule log cake. Excessive humidity can ruin meringues, so skip making them if you are in a very humid environment. You'll find the recipe at eatingwell.com.

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a whisk, in two additions, until just incorporated. Gently fold about 1 cup of the batter into the reserved butter. Then gently fold the butter mixture into the bowl of batter with a whisk until just incorporated, being careful not to overmix. Spread the batter evenly in the prepared baking sheet, spreading completely to the sides.

6. Bake the cake until puffed and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with a few moist crumbs attached, 8 to 12 minutes. Cool in the pan on a large wire rack for 10 minutes. Gently run a knife around the edges and turn the cake out onto the rack; remove the parchment and let cool completely. Once cool, cover with 2 overlapping pieces of plastic wrap and a clean, damp kitchen towel to prevent it from drying out. (The cake can be held this way for up to 4 hours before assembling the Yule Log.)
7. **To prepare filling & frosting:** Bring 2 inches of water to a simmer in the bottom of a double boiler. (No double boiler? See Tip, page 95.) Combine agave nectar, instant coffee, reconstituted egg whites, cream of tartar and ¼ teaspoon salt in the top of the double boiler. Beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until well combined, about 1 minute. Place over the simmering water and heat on high speed until the frosting is glossy and has the texture of very thick shaving cream, 5 to 10 minutes (see photo, page 94). Remove from the heat and heat in 1 teaspoon vanilla until just combined.

8. Leaving the towel and plastic wrap over the cake, invert it onto a work surface with a long edge nearest you. The towel will now be on the bottom, with the plastic wrap directly beneath the cake. Combine coffee and half-and-half in a small bowl. Brush the top of the cake with the coffee mixture; let it soak in and continue brushing on more until all of it is absorbed.

9. Spread about two thirds of the frosting evenly over the cake. Using the plastic wrap, lift the long edge and roll the cake into a log lengthwise (see photo, page 94). Cut a 3 to 4-inch "branch" off one end at an angle. Place the longer log on a serving platter, seam-side down. Use a little frosting to attach the branch to the main log. Cover the cake and branch with the remaining frosting. Make decorative ridges in the frosting with a fork to resemble bark (see photo, page 94). Let the cake stand at room temperature for at least 30 minutes or up to 2 hours. Or refrigerate, uncovered, for up to 1 day.

10. Just before serving, garnish the serving platter with Sugared Rosemary and Meringue Mushrooms, if desired.

PER SERVING: 178 calories; 5 g fat (3 g sat, 2 g mono); 75 mg cholesterol; 30 g carbohydrate; 22 g added sugars; 4 g protein; 1 g fiber; 161 mg sodium; 89 mg potassium.



Have fun decorating your yule log: garnish with Meringue Mushrooms and Sugared Rosemary (recipes at eatingwell.com) or dust with cocoa and top with curls of chocolate "wood shavings." Turn to page 94 for helpful step-by-step photos.

Peppermint Pattie Pots de Crème

MAKES: 8 SERVINGS
ACTIVE TIME: 40 minutes | TOTAL: 3½ hours
TO MAKE AHEAD: Prepare through Step 5, cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days. | TOURNAMENT: Eight 4-ounce ramekins or custard cups

We love York peppermint patties and the flavor of these festive little gems is a dead ringer for the candy. Unlike traditional über-rich custard recipes, this custard uses low-fat milk, only 3 egg yolks and ½ cup of half-and-half for its creamy richness. Just ½ teaspoon of peppermint extract in the custard gives plenty of minty flavor, but if you want that icy mountain-breeze sensation, add a whole teaspoon instead. (Photograph: page 85.)

CUSTARD

- 3 large egg yolks
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon peppermint extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups low-fat milk, divided
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ½ cup half-and-half

CHOCOLATE GLAZE & GARNISH

- ⅓ cup nonfat evaporated milk
- ¼ cup bittersweet or semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 tablespoons honey

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup confectioners' sugar
- Small sprigs fresh mint for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Put a kettle of water on to boil for a water bath. Place eight 4-ounce ramekins or custard cups in a roasting pan.

2. **To prepare custard:** Whisk egg yolks, sugar, vanilla extract, peppermint extract and salt in a large bowl; set near the stove. Whisk $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk and cornstarch in a small bowl until smooth. Heat the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk and half and-half in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring until steaming hot. Whisk the cornstarch mixture into the steaming milk and continue cooking, whisking constantly, until the mixture boils and thickens, 2 to 4 minutes. Gradually whisk the thickened milk mixture into the egg yolk mixture.

3. Carefully pour the custard through a fine-mesh sieve into a large measuring cup or heat-proof pitcher. Evenly divide among the ramekins or custard cups. They will be about three-quarters full.

4. Pour enough boiling water into the roasting pan to come about halfway up the sides of the cups. Carefully transfer the roasting pan to the oven. Bake the custards until they are set but still jiggle a little bit, 35 to 40 minutes.

5. Remove the roasting pan from the oven. Let the custards cool in the water bath to room temperature, about 1 hour. Remove from the water bath and refrigerate until cold, about 1 hour more.

6. **To prepare chocolate glaze:** Shortly before serving, heat evaporated milk in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Place chocolate chips and honey in a heatproof medium bowl. As soon as the milk starts to bubble, pour it over the chocolate chips and whisk until completely smooth, about 1 minute. Sift in cocoa powder and confectioners' sugar while whisking; whisk until smooth.

7. Divide the chocolate glaze among the custards, tilting each to cover it completely. Garnish with mint, if desired.

PER SERVING: 254 calories; 6 g fat (3 g sat, 2 g mono); 78 mg cholesterol; 48 g carbohydrate; 37 g added sugars; 5 g protein; 2 g fiber; 123 mg sodium; 232 mg potassium.

Maple Pecan Tart with Dried Cherries

MAKES 10 SERVINGS

ACTIVE TIME: 40 minutes | TOTAL: 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours

TO MAKE AHEAD: Cover and refrigerate for up to 1 day. Serve at room temperature. | EQUIPMENT: 9-inch tart pan with removable bottom

This crust, made with heart-healthy pecans and canola oil, couldn't be easier to whip together. Just blend it in the food processor and pat it into your tart pan. Instead of corn syrup, which is

found in most pecan pie recipes, we've opted for maple syrup. *If you can find it, choose dark amber or grade B because it has the richest maple flavor.* (Photograph: page 84.)

- 1 large egg yolk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, divided
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 tablespoon water
- 2 cups pecan halves, divided
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, divided
- 2 large eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pure maple syrup
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons dark rum (optional)
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup dried cherries, chopped

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Generously coat a 9-inch tart pan with removable bottom with cooking spray.

2. Combine egg yolk, 2 tablespoons melted butter, oil and water in a small bowl. Process $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecans and sugar in a food processor to the consistency of coarse meal. Add flour and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt and pulse until combined. Drizzle the yolk mixture through the feed tube while pulsing and pulse just until the mixture is combined.

3. Spread the mixture evenly into the prepared pan, pressing it firmly into the bottom and all the way up the sides to form a crust. Place on a baking sheet. Bake until dry and just beginning to brown on the edges, 12 to 14 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, whisk eggs, maple syrup, brown sugar, rum (if using), the remaining 1 tablespoon butter and the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt in a medium bowl. Transfer $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the mixture to a small bowl. Chop $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecans and add to the medium bowl. Stir in cherries. Mix the remaining 1 cup pecans with the reserved maple mixture.

5. Remove the tart crust from the oven. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°.

6. If there are any cracks in the crust, sprinkle with a little flour and use a dry pastry brush to "seal" the flour into the cracks. Evenly spread the filling in the crust. Arrange the maple syrup-coated pecans decoratively on top and drizzle with any remaining maple mixture.

7. Bake the tart until it no longer jiggles in the center when gently shaken, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack for about 20 minutes. Remove the sides of the pan (use a butter knife to gently loosen the tart from the pan sides if it sticks in spots). Let cool completely, about 40 minutes more.

PER SERVING: 353 calories; 22 g fat (4 g sat, 11 g mono); 65 mg cholesterol; 36 g carbohydrate; 20 g added sugars; 5 g protein; 2 g fiber; 136 mg sodium; 157 mg potassium.

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