

EASY DOES IT

A Dozen Rounds

Enhance your holiday parties with rich, creamy Brie.

TIS THE SEASON FOR ENTERTAINING—make it easy and reach for a round of Brie. Its versatility and mild flavor make it infinitely flexible, so ... decorate it, wrap it, glaze it, fill it, box it, drizzle it, or top it with your favorite spread. Whether you bake it, microwave it, fry it, chill it, or serve it at room temperature, here are 12 ways to wow guests with your creativity.

■ **Glaze Brie with wine gelatin.** In a small saucepan, soften 1 envelope of unflavored gelatin in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cold water, transfer to stove, and cook over medium heat until gelatin melts. Stir in $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dry white wine. Set aside to cool slightly but not set. Drizzle 3 thin coats of gelatin over cheese, chilling 30 minutes between coats. Arrange fresh herbs and cranberries to form a wreath on the Brie. Serve chilled.

■ **Spread a thick layer of champagne or honey mustard over Brie, then top with toasted sliced almonds.**

■ **Spread a thick layer of cranberry chutney over Brie, then sprinkle with chopped cooked bacon.** Heat until the cheese begins to soften. Sprinkle with thinly sliced scallions.

■ **Thinly slice 1 large yellow onion, 1 large red onion, and 3 shallots.** In a large skillet over low heat, cook onions in 2 tablespoons olive oil or unsalted butter, stirring often, 20 to 25 minutes, or until mixture is caramel colored. Season with salt and pepper. Raise heat to medium high, then stir in 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar; cook until the liquid bubbles. Remove the skillet from the heat, then stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup golden raisins. Spoon the mixture over the warmed Brie. Sprinkle with chopped scallions.

■ **Top Brie with mango chutney.** Sprinkle with chopped roasted peanuts, toasted coconut, and chopped scallions. Serve at room temperature.

■ **Dip Brie in an egg wash** (1 egg white lightly beaten with 1 tablespoon water), then dredge in flour. Shake off excess flour; repeat procedure. Chill 1 hour. Sauté Brie in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup hot vegetable oil over medium heat 2 minutes on each side or until golden. Garnish with finely chopped plum tomatoes and chopped fresh parsley.

■ **Decorate outside edge of Brie with a ring of walnut halves; set aside.** Combine 1 cup sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in a heavy saucepan; cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until sugar dissolves. Do not stir (*continued*)



Brie Basics: Made from cow's milk, Brie has a sublimely smooth nature, characterized by a rich, creamy interior and a soft, edible rind. It is crafted in several countries, but Brie from its native France is considered the standard and is often referred to as the "queen" of cheeses.

Brie Bases: Baguette slices, bread cubes, and pita bread are excellent vehicles for toppings, as are flatbreads and crackers. Sweet-topped Bries do well on apple or pear slices.

Warming the Brie: Place a round of Brie on a microwave-safe dish and heat on high $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 minutes, or until cheese begins to soften. To warm Brie in an oven, place on a baking sheet and bake at 350° 12 to 15 minutes, or until cheese begins to soften.

EASY DOES IT

A Dozen Rounds *(continued)*

after this point. Bring the mixture to a boil and cook until it turns a light amber, about 3 to 5 minutes. Be careful not to burn. Immediately pour over Brie, allowing the glaze to drip down the sides. Cool 15 minutes before serving. The glaze will harden like a thin layer of candy. Crack with a knife to serve.

■ Unroll 1 store-bought (or homemade) piecrust onto a lightly floured work surface, then place Brie in the center. Pleat edges of pastry up and around the base. Unroll a second piecrust; cut a circle just large enough to fit the base of the Brie, reserving the leftover dough to decorate. Brush the outside edge of the pastry circle with water; place the moistened pastry over the pleats, pressing to seal. Using a leaf-shaped cookie cutter or a sharp knife, cut leaves or other shapes from the remaining dough. Moisten one side of the leaves with water; arrange the leaves (moist side down) to form a wreath on the outside edge. Cover and

chill 1 hour. Brush pastry-wrapped Brie with egg wash (1 egg white lightly beaten with 1 tablespoon water). Cut slits in the top crust for the steam to escape. Bake 20 minutes, or until pastry is golden. Let stand 15 minutes before serving. Garnish with additional leaves. Brie can also be wrapped with phyllo or puff pastry dough; follow baking instructions on the packages.

■ Score top of Brie into six pie-shaped wedges; brush with a small amount of melted apple jelly. Arrange a different topping (chopped dried fruit, toasted chopped nuts, toasted sesame seeds, poppy seeds, or chopped fresh herbs) on each wedge. Serve at room temperature.

■ Using a round loaf of bread large enough to accommodate Brie, slice off the top inch of the bread; set aside. Place Brie on bread loaf, then trace around the outer edge with a sharp knife. Make a “nest” for the Brie by hollowing out a 2-inch-deep cavity



within the traced line, reserving the excess bread. Cut the top and reserved bread into 1-inch cubes. Set aside. Place Brie in the bread cavity. Spread with seedless raspberry jam (or your favorite) and sprinkle with sliced almonds. Bake at 325° 20 minutes, or until Brie is softened. Serve with reserved bread cubes.

■ Cut Brie into three horizontal slices (place in freezer 20 minutes prior to slicing). Arrange thinly sliced smoked salmon over the bottom slice of Brie; sprinkle with chopped fresh dill. Repeat procedure with the second slice of Brie. Top with the remaining slice, rind side up. Wrap in plastic wrap, then refrigerate overnight. Garnish with cucumber slices and fresh dill sprigs.

■ Spoon finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes over Brie. Sprinkle with toasted pine nuts and chopped fresh basil.

– Judy Feagin



EASY DOES IT

A Holiday Favorite

Simple pan-fried potatoes are a delicious and meaningful treat this time of year.

WHETHER YOU AND YOUR FAMILY CELEBRATE CHANUKAH—the eight-day Festival of Lights—or simply love a good potato pancake, these latkes would make any Bubbe proud. Their crispy, brown exteriors offer a satisfying bite, while their tender, steamy insides are comfort food at its best.

It's important to grate the potatoes and onion by hand to get pieces of the right size. But remember, latkes wait for no one, so get your ingredients together and gather your family and friends, so that you can serve these traditional potato cakes the moment they're ready. —Annie B. Copps



Squash



Parsnips



Zucchini



Sweet Potatoes

GRATE IDEAS

Traditional latkes are made with russet potatoes, but many other vegetables can get in on the act. Try grating sweet potatoes or zucchini, or a mixture of potatoes and parsnips, corn, or squash. You might even want to add some cheese for extra flavor.

LATKES

total time: 20 minutes;

active time: 20 minutes

- 4 large russet (baking) potatoes
- 1 medium onion
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt, plus extra for seasoning
- Vegetable oil
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Sour cream or applesauce
- Garnish: fresh chives

Peel and grate potatoes and onion. Transfer to a sieve or kitchen towel and squeeze out excess water. In a large bowl, combine grated mixture, egg, baking powder, flour, and salt. Warm a thin layer of oil (about 2 tablespoons) in a large, heavy skillet over moderate heat. Drop batter into skillet one heaping spoonful at a time (but don't crowd the pan). Flatten gently; don't push potatoes too hard into oil. (Each



latke should be about 2 inches wide.) Fry in batches, turning once, 4 minutes per side or until golden brown. Drain on paper towels and season well with salt and pepper. Add a dollop of sour cream or applesauce, garnish with fresh chives, and serve immediately.

Yield: 12 servings

THE MIRACLE OF THE OIL



Latkes play an important role in traditional Chanukah celebrations not just because they taste so good—it's really all about the oil. Chanukah—from the Hebrew word for “dedication”—is a significant holiday because it commemorates the events of 168 to 165 B.C., when the Jews of Jerusalem led a successful revolt against Antiochus IV, ruler of the Greek empire, who had sacked and desecrated their Temple. When the Jewish rebels finally liberated the city and retook the Temple, they wanted to rededicate it by lighting an eternal flame—but they feared they didn't have enough oil. Miraculously, however, their small cruse of oil lasted not just a few hours but eight days (the time it took to press more olive oil for the lamps). Today, the lighting of the **menorah** (pictured at left) symbolizes the survival of the Jewish people throughout thousands of years of exile and adversity.

EASY DOES IT

Sensational Spuds

Our favorite tuber gets a taste of the good life.

EVERYONE LOVES MASHED POTATOES, RIGHT? But how many of us love our own mashed potatoes? Whether they're too lumpy or too soggy, or we like the taste but they're laden with butter, sour cream, and milk, there's always room for improvement. Potatoes are greedy little things, and they'll take as many rich additives as you offer them, but here's a recipe that'll keep things simple and balanced. One key to light and fluffy potatoes is to get rid of the excess moisture—so read the recipe steps carefully and you'll breathe new life into an old favorite. — *Annie B. Copps*



Bacon



Horseradish



Chives



Garlic

MIX IT UP

Favorite flavors and your own imagination are the only guidelines you need when selecting additions to spice up well-mashed spuds.

BASIC MASHED POTATOES

total time: 30 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

- 3 pounds baking potatoes (such as russets), peeled (or red bliss potatoes, unpeeled)
- 1/2 cup (4 ounces) light cream
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
- Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cut potatoes into 2-inch pieces. Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Cook potatoes until fork-tender. Drain well; then place them back in the warm pot. Swirl the cooked potatoes around the pot, until a thin film of starch appears.

In a small pan, heat cream and butter until butter melts. Pass potatoes through a ricer or food mill, or break up with a potato masher until smooth. Add heated cream and butter; mix well. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Yield: 6 servings



DO THE MASHED POTATO

Want to add a twist to your spuds? Here are some tasty extras:

- Toss peeled parsnips, chopped turnips, or a few handfuls of cauliflower florets in with boiled potatoes and mash according to the recipe above.
- Mince 3 or 4 garlic cloves and sauté in unsalted butter; fold into mashed potatoes with salt and pepper. (Bonus tip: To peel a whole garlic head easily, wrap in foil and bake 40 minutes at 400° the next time your oven's on; the cloves will slip out of their paper skins.)
- Add 4 tablespoons prepared (jar) horseradish or 3 tablespoons freshly grated.
- Mix in 1/2 cup minced chives or scallions.
- Crumble 4 strips of cooked bacon and add them with 1/2 cup crumbled blue cheese (you won't need extra salt).
- The Irish have long loved a dish called colcannon: bacon and cabbage mixed with mashed potatoes. Chop 1/2 pound bacon into half-inch pieces and sauté until browned. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside. Add 1/2 head cabbage, sliced, to the pan and sauté until wilted. Fold cabbage and bacon into mashed potatoes. Or make champ, another traditional Irish dish, by adding green onions to the cream and butter as they're heating.
- Leftovers? Form them into 3-inch rounds (like little hockey pucks—in shape only!), dust with flour, and pan-fry until well browned on both sides.

EASY DOES IT

Ham It Up

A new take on an old family favorite.

HAM STEAK, JUST ANOTHER NAME FOR THE CENTER-CUT HAM SLICE, is one of the easiest and most economical meats to prepare. It comes partially cooked (labeled “ready-to-cook”), which means that you can have dinner on the table in just 20 minutes. Bring the meat to an internal temperature of 160° (or simply reheat if your ham is labeled “fully cooked”) and you’re on your way. Just be careful not to overcook it.

To jazz up the dish, we wanted something other than the usual pineapple slices, raisin sauce, or sautéed apples, so we created this Jalapeño-Glazed Ham Steak with White Bean Salsa. Pork is an important part of Mexican cooking, and these flavors meld beautifully. It’s especially good with Skillet Tomatoes and Spinach Sauté on the side. Enjoy! – *Judy Feagin*

Jalapeño-Glazed Ham Steak with White Bean Salsa

total time: 20 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

- 1 15.5-ounce can great northern beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/4 cup chopped red onion
- 1/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- Vegetable cooking spray for skillet
- 1 1½-pound center-cut ham steak (about 1/2 inch thick)
- 3 tablespoons jalapeño pepper jelly

Combine the first 10 ingredients to make the salsa; set aside. Heat a non-stick skillet coated with cooking spray over medium-high setting. Add the ham steak and cook 2 minutes on each side. Brush each side with pepper jelly and cook, turning once, 1 minute, or until internal temperature reaches 160°. Serve with salsa.

Yield: 3 to 4 servings

Skillet Tomatoes

total time: 5 minutes; active time: 5 minutes

- 3 ripe tomatoes
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar

Cut ripe tomatoes into 1/2-inch slices; sprinkle with salt. Melt butter in a large skillet. Cook the tomato slices about 2 minutes on each side. Sprinkle with brown sugar, turn, and cook until sugar melts.

Yield: 4 servings

Spinach Sauté

total time: 8 minutes; active time: 8 minutes

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small shallot, chopped
- 1 10-ounce package fresh baby spinach
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Melt butter in a large skillet; add olive oil and chopped shallot. Cook over medium heat about 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add spinach and cook, stirring constantly, until the spinach wilts. Season with salt and pepper and toss again. Serve warm.

Yield: 4 servings



Cook It Your Way

Grill: Place ham steak on a grill rack over medium-high heat (350° to 400°). Grill 2 minutes on each side; brush with pepper jelly and cook 1 minute longer on each side, or until internal temperature reaches 160°.

Broil: Place ham steak on a lightly greased rack in a broiler pan. Broil 3 inches from heat and 2 minutes on each side; brush with pepper jelly and cook 1 minute longer on each side, or until internal temperature reaches 160°.

An Early-Fall Menu

Jalapeño-Glazed Ham Steak with White Bean Salsa

Skillet Tomatoes

Spinach Sauté

EASY DOES IT

The Feast Continues

We're all for the big meal, but the best food often follows the next day.

THANKSGIVING DINNER IS MY FAVORITE HOLIDAY MEAL. I love the preparations, the harvest decorations, the company, and the menu. But it's the leftovers I love most. My mother served turkey sandwiches for days, and later she prepared a down-home turkey hash. My mother-in-law's specialty was turkey soup. She picked the carcass clean, then boiled the bones in water with celery and onions, adding rice during the few minutes of cooking time. In our home, creating new recipes using chopped turkey has turned leftovers into "planned-overs."

Don't wait until Thanksgiving to buy a turkey. It's an impressive dinner anytime, and you'll stretch your food dollars by roasting the whole bird and enjoying a week of innovative meals. Enjoy Thanksgiving and the start of a new holiday tradition. — *Judy Feagin*

Hot and Spicy Turkey Spaghetti

total time: 25 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

- 1 8-ounce package spaghetti
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 8-ounce package sliced mushrooms
- 1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 10-ounce can diced tomatoes and green chiles, undrained*
- 1 8-ounce package Vermont cheddar, cut into cubes
- 2 cups coarsely chopped turkey
- 1 cup frozen green peas, thawed

Cook spaghetti according to the package directions; drain and set aside.

In a Dutch oven over medium-high heat, sauté onion, mushrooms, and bell pepper in hot oil 3 to 5 minutes or until tender. Add salt, cooked spaghetti, tomatoes and green chiles, cheese, turkey, and peas. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture is thoroughly heated. Serve immediately. *Yield: 4 servings*

* We used Rotel diced tomatoes and green chiles.



Play It Safe

Refrigerate turkey leftovers within 2 hours after cooking. Cooked turkey stays fresh in the fridge for 3 to 4 days, but immediate freezing will provide premium quality. Chop leftover turkey and wrap 1- to 2-cup portions in heavy-duty plastic wrap to seal in freshness. Next, place the airtight plastic-wrapped packages in a heavy-duty zip-top bag for double protection. Date the package and use the meat within 3 to 4 months.

Help Is Never Far Away

If you have questions about turkey or leftovers, experts are standing by to help.

Butterball Turkey Talk-Line:
800-288-8372. butterball.com

National Turkey Federation:
202-898-0100. eatturkey.com

Reynolds Turkey Tips Line:
800-745-4000. reynoldskitchens.com

USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline:
800-535-4555. fsis.usda.gov

Thanksgiving Stock Options

A classic French salad is an easy main course.

SOME PEOPLE PREFER TURKEY'S WHITE MEAT and some crave dark meat. My favorite part of the bird is the bones for soup—I can't pick the carcass fast enough following the feast. It doesn't have to be bone clean, for any meat left just adds more flavor. If you're not up to the task after the big meal, remove the meat from the bones and freeze the carcass and meat separately (don't forget to save some of the meat for sandwiches).

Making turkey stock at home is a simple process, but a lengthy one. All it takes is a few basic ingredients and a little time. The soup that you make is only as good as the stock that you use, so be patient and don't rush the process. If patience is not your virtue, try Turkey and Wild Rice Soup using canned chicken broth. — *Judy Feagin*

Turkey Stock

Total time: 4 hours 20 minutes, plus 6 hours for refrigeration; active time: 20 minutes

- Carcass of a roasted turkey
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 medium-size onions, chopped
- 3 stalks celery with leaves, chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh parsley, stems included
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon peppercorns

Remove legs, thighs, wings, and all of the stuffing from carcass. Remove any meat still on bones (chop and refrigerate for use in soup recipe). Place carcass, bones, and remaining ingredients in a stockpot (you may have to crack the bones to fit your pot). Add just enough cold water to cover bones by 1 inch. Bring mixture to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 4 hours, skimming surface frequently and discarding any white foam that forms on the surface. Remove from heat and cool.

Strain stock through a cheesecloth-lined colander or a fine sieve into a large bowl; discard bones, vegetables, and seasonings. Cool (see "Stock Tips"), then cover and refrigerate overnight. Once stock has cooled sufficiently for fat to solidify, remove and discard fat from top before using. *Yield: about 4 quarts*



Turkey and Wild Rice Soup

total time: 20 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

The addition of cream transforms this simple soup into a more filling meal. The flavors continue to develop, making the soup even better the next day. I love the flavor of wild rice, but 2 cups of cooked white rice works well, too.

- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 stalks celery, thinly sliced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 quarts Turkey Stock (or canned chicken broth)
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt

- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups cooked chopped turkey
- 2 cups cooked wild rice
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

In a Dutch oven or stockpot, melt butter. Add celery, carrots, and onion; cook, stirring constantly, over medium heat 5 minutes or until vegetables are crisp-tender. Stir in flour and cook, stirring constantly, 5 minutes. Add turkey stock and bring mixture to a boil. Add salt and pepper; reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes. Add turkey, rice, cream, and parsley; cook until soup is thoroughly heated—do not boil.

Yield: 9 cups

Stock Tips

Use turkey stock as you would chicken, beef, or vegetable stock—its rich, round flavors will surprise you.

- Never rush stock by boiling the liquid. A vigorous boil creates a cloudy stock.
- Simmer stock uncovered; the long simmering time reduces the liquid and concentrates flavors.
- Do not add salt to stock.
- Cool stock quickly to prevent the growth of bacteria. Place the stockpot in a sink filled with ice and stir occasionally, or pour stock into small containers to cool more quickly.
- Prepare turkey stock at least 1 day ahead; allowing it plenty of time to chill will make for easy removal of fat from the surface.
- Turkey stock can be stored in the refrigerator for 2 days or frozen in airtight containers for up to 3 months.

EASY DOES IT

Short and Sweet

Quick and easy desserts for the busy holiday season.

LOVE SPECTACULAR DESSERTS, but hate to spend hours in the kitchen preparing them? More than any other time of year, this is the season to take advantage of convenience products that reduce prep time without compromising quality.

The following recipes all start with ladyfingers, those light, delicate little spongecakes shaped like fingers that can be found in any supermarket. For these recipes, look for the unfilled variety; pick up several extra packages to stash in the freezer. These desserts all take less than 30 minutes to put together (some do require extra chilling or baking time). You'll have time to enjoy your guests and the holidays, too.

— Judy Feagin

Tipsy Puddings

total time: 1 hour 25 minutes;

active time: 25 minutes

Create a sensational presentation by serving this trifle-inspired dessert in individual wineglasses. To feed a crowd, double this recipe and fill a trifle bowl or a 2½-quart bowl.

- 1 3-ounce package ladyfingers
- ¼ cup seedless raspberry jam
- ¼ cup cream sherry, divided
- 2 cups milk
- 1 3-ounce package vanilla pudding mix (not instant)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons sliced almonds, toasted

Choose six individual wineglasses or serving dishes. Split ladyfingers in half lengthwise and spread jelly on bottom half of each ladyfinger. Replace tops, then cut each ladyfinger sandwich in half crosswise. Arrange 4 filled halves in each dish; drizzle each with 1 teaspoon sherry.

Combine milk and pudding mix in a heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a full boil; stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons sherry. Cool mixture slightly, then pour over ladyfinger sandwiches. Cover each pudding with heavy-duty plastic wrap; chill 1 hour. Beat heavy cream until foamy; gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until soft peaks form. Just before serving, top with whipped cream and sliced almonds.

Yield: 6 servings

Orange-Almond Crisps

total time: 30 minutes; active time: 10 minutes

Keep these on hand during the holidays to serve with coffee, tea, or after-dinner drinks.

- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- Zest of 2 oranges
- 2 3-ounce packages ladyfingers
- ⅓ cup sliced almonds

Preheat oven to 275°. Cream butter with confectioners' sugar and orange zest. Split rows of ladyfingers in half lengthwise and spread cut side with butter mixture. Place on ungreased cookie sheets, sprinkle with sliced almonds, and bake 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown and crisp. Cool crisps on wire racks. Store in an airtight container. *Yield: 48 cookies*

Miniature Éclairs with Kahlúa and Cream

total time: 10 minutes; active time: 10 minutes

For the children on your list, substitute ¼ teaspoon peppermint extract for Kahlúa and garnish with crushed peppermint candies.

- ¾ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons Kahlúa
- 1 3-ounce package ladyfingers
- ½ cup commercial fudge topping
- Garnish: chocolate-covered coffee beans

Beat heavy cream until foamy; gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until soft peaks form. Stir in Kahlúa. Spread the Kahlúa-cream mixture over the bottom half of each ladyfinger; cover each with the top half. Spread about 2 teaspoons fudge topping over the top of each éclair, and top each with a handful of chocolate-covered coffee beans.

Yield: 12 miniature éclairs



EASY DOES IT

Heaven-Sent

This true classic is also super-easy and deliciously low-fat.

THE NAME ALONE EVOKES IMAGES OF FLOATING CLOUDS and winged celestial beings offering sweet gifts from the oven. When made right, this cake is indeed an ethereal treat from your own kitchen. The key to a light and fluffy cake is in the ingredients: fresh egg whites, which you must whip to pillowy perfection for heavenly results; cream of tartar, which helps stabilize the whites so the cake won't deflate after it comes out of the oven; and cake flour, for a tender crumb. This recipe also calls for a mix of vanilla and almond extracts, but feel free to use all of one or the other or your own combination (just keep it to a total of 1½ teaspoons).
—Annie B. Copps

ANGEL FOOD CAKE

total time: 1½ hours (including cooling time);

active time: 30 minutes

- 7 large egg whites
- ³/₄ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¹/₄ teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¹/₂ teaspoon almond extract
- ³/₄ cup sifted cake flour
- Garnish: fresh berries

Heat oven to 375°. Using an electric mixer, beat egg whites, cream of tartar, and salt until the whites hold stiff peaks. With the mixer on, carefully add sugar, ¹/₄ cup at a time, until the mix becomes glossy and peaks still hold—do not overmix. Beat in extracts. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold in flour. Spoon batter into an ungreased 9-inch (10-cup) tube pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until a cake tester inserted comes out clean. Invert the pan onto a cooling rack. Let cool completely, then slide a thin knife around outer and inner edges of the cake to dislodge it from the pan. Slice and garnish with berries. *Yield: about 8 slices*



EGG-CELLENT TIPS

- Use the freshest eggs you can—the whites will whip up better and hold more strongly.
- Start with more eggs than you need. It's important that no yolks are in this recipe.
- Let the eggs come to room temperature before you use them.
- When breaking eggs, break the shell against a hard, flat surface—whacking them against the rim of a bowl may cause the shell to break in toward the center, increasing the chance of shell bits getting into the mix.
- When separating eggs, break them into clean, individual bowls. Be sure to keep the yolk whole; using clean hands, scoop out the yolk and let the white slip through your fingers back into the bowl, or use one half of the broken eggshell to scoop out the egg yolk. Save the yolks for custard.

EASY DOES IT

The Great Pumpkin

Spice up the dessert table with this luscious, make-ahead cheesecake.

AT THIS VERY TRADITIONAL TIME OF YEAR, I like to spice things up and surprise my family and friends with a new dessert. This year's choice, Pumpkin Cheesecake with Walnut-Ginger Crust and Caramel Sauce, has the familiar flavors of Thanksgivings past, but with a twist. This dessert takes a little time to bake, but the preparation is so easy. Follow the simple steps, let it chill, and you'll receive rave reviews.

An added bonus to this recipe is that cheesecake can be prepared well in advance of the celebration. All you need is a 10-inch springform pan, which is an inexpensive addition to your bakeware collection.

If you run short on time, just pick up a bottle of caramel sauce at the grocery store for drizzling. And if you're really in a bind, just buy a frozen cheesecake in any flavor, and top with the homemade caramel sauce. Don't get stressed over the holidays, just enjoy the season. Happy Thanksgiving! — Judy Feagin

Pumpkin Cheesecake with Walnut-Ginger Crust and Caramel Sauce

total time: 3 hours, plus chilling time;
active time: 40 minutes

- 2 cups gingersnap cookie crumbs
 - $\frac{2}{3}$ cup chopped walnuts, toasted
 - 3 tablespoons plus $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
 - 6 tablespoons butter, melted
 - 3 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup brown sugar
 - 5 large eggs
 - 1 15-ounce can pumpkin
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup whipping cream
 - 1 tablespoon pumpkin-pie spice*
- Caramel Sauce
Garnish: toasted walnut halves

Preheat oven to 350°. Place cookie crumbs, walnuts, and 3 tablespoons sugar in a food processor and pulse 3 or 4 times until combined; add butter and pulse 4 or 5 times, or until crumbly. Wrap the outside of a 10-inch springform pan with aluminum foil, then press cookie mixture into the bottom and 1 inch up the sides. Bake 8 to 10 minutes. Cool crust completely on a wire rack. Reduce oven heat to 325°.

Beat cream cheese with an electric mixer at medium speed 3 minutes, or until creamy. Gradually add brown sugar and the remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar, beating 4 minutes, or until blended.

Add eggs, one at a time, beating just

until yellow disappears. Add pumpkin, whipping cream, and pumpkin-pie spice. Beat on low speed with an electric mixer just until blended. Do not overbeat. Pour batter over prepared crust.

Bake 1 hour 15 minutes, or until almost set (it will still jiggle in the center). Remove from oven; run a knife around edge of pan. Cool on a wire rack 1 hour. Chill 8 hours or overnight. Garnish with walnut halves and serve with Caramel Sauce.

Yield: 12 to 14 servings

*Note: If you don't have pumpkin-pie spice, substitute 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground ginger, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground allspice.

CARAMEL SAUCE:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
- 1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whipping cream

Melt butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat; add brown sugar and corn syrup, then cook, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil. Gradually add cream, stirring constantly. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil. Remove from heat. Cool to room temperature. Yield: 1½ cups



Cheesecake 101

- Wrap the outside of a springform pan with heavy-duty foil. I've skipped this step more than once and had oil drip through the seam of the pan onto the floor of the oven.
- Soften your cream cheese before mixing; otherwise, the cheese will not blend into a smooth batter. And don't skip the step of beating the cream cheese for 3 minutes. It's impossible to remove lumps later in the process; you'll have better results if you make this your first step.
- Once you begin to add the eggs, beat at low speed just until the yolks are incorporated. Beating too much air into the mixture at this point could cause the cake to crack during baking. Continue beating on low speed as you add the remaining ingredients.
- Overbaking is another reason cheesecakes sometimes crack. Remove cheesecake from the oven as soon as it is almost set in the center (it will still jiggle a bit). The cheesecake will continue to firm up as it chills. Immediately use a small knife to loosen cheesecake from the sides of the pan.
- If your cheesecake does crack, just frost with sweetened whipped cream and grate some fresh nutmeg on top.
- Store cheesecake in the refrigerator up to 1 week or freeze up to 1 month. Thaw in the refrigerator 1 day before serving, then bring to room temperature.
- Use a sharp knife when cutting cheesecake, and wipe the knife clean after each cut. If the cheesecake is slightly underbaked, cut with a knife that has been dipped in boiling water.

EASY DOES IT

Pie Happiness

Great pies begin with a great crust. Here's the perfect one.

PIES ARE SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART of this holiday season—especially at Thanksgiving—and everyone has a favorite. In my family, we could go back and forth well until the football games are over before deciding on just one: For Dad, it has to be mincemeat; for Aunt Ginny, it's apple with sharp Vermont cheddar on the side; for me, it's pastry chef Erika Bruce's maple-pumpkin, **ABOVE RIGHT**. We make three or four pies for our family feast, and by sunrise on the fourth Friday in November, there's nary a one to be found.

Whatever the filling, we do agree that a flaky yet sturdy crust is the key to pie happiness. But as much as I love pies, I confess that baking them doesn't come naturally to me, and just thinking about it has led me to ruin a perfectly good manicure. The "ringer" ingredient used to be shortening, but with all the bad health news about hydrogenated fats, we don't go near it anymore.

What's a pie lover to do? I'm happy to report that after a lot of trial and error, I've finally cracked the pie-dough code. With some help from Ken Haedrich, author of *Pie* (Harvard Common Press, 2004; \$27.95), and the good folks at King Arthur Flour in Norwich, Vermont (800-827-6836; kingarthurfour.com), I figured out that it's really all about just three key steps:

ANNIE'S PIECRUST

total time: 20 minutes plus chilling;

active time: 20 minutes

- 1¾ cups pastry flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- 1 cup (½ pound, or 2 sticks) unsalted butter, very cold, cut into ½-inch pieces
- ½ cup ice-cold water, (approximately), divided

In the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade, pulse together flours, sugar, and salt. Add butter and pulse two or three times. Add most of the water and pulse two or three times, or until butter is in pea-sized pieces. Grab a handful of the dough; if it sticks together, turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface. If it doesn't stick together, add a bit more water, pulse two or three times, and test it again.

Grab the dough with both hands and push it into a ball (it may not hold very well). Using the heel of your hand, smear butter into streaks by pushing butter pieces away from you. Do this for a minute or so until the dough is mostly cohesive; it may still be a little crumbly. Divide the dough into two balls

and wrap them in plastic. Refrigerate 30 minutes before baking (or you may freeze them up to three months).

Yield: 2 piecrusts

ERIKA'S MAPLE-PUMPKIN PIE

total time: 1 hour 15 minutes

plus cooling; active time: 30 minutes

Use grade B syrup if possible; its robust flavor withstands the heat of baking better than more-delicate grade A.

- 1 15-ounce can pumpkin purée
- 3 large eggs
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon table salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 Prebaked Pie Shell

Garnishes: lightly sweetened whipped cream and toasted chopped pecans (optional)

Place oven rack in middle position and heat oven to 350°. In the bowl of a food processor, mix pumpkin purée, eggs,



- Keep your ingredients well chilled. It'll help prevent the butter from mixing uniformly with the flour, so that pockets can form among the flour particles. Translation: flaky crust.
- Use a combination of pastry flour and all-purpose flour. Different flours have different amounts of protein (a.k.a. gluten), which forms strands, which form layers, which form ... you guessed it ... flakes.
- The third trick is in the mixing. Once the butter gets down to pea-sized pieces, use the heel of your hand to smear them into streaks as you mix the dough. Try that, and you'll turn out delicious, flaky pies every time.

maple syrup, brown sugar, spices, salt, and pepper until smooth. Pour heavy cream slowly through the feed tube and continue processing until mixture is pale and homogenized; scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula if necessary.

Transfer mixture to Prebaked Pie Shell. Bake 35 to 45 minutes, or until the edges of the pie have puffed slightly and the center just barely jiggles. (Note, however, that it shouldn't look wet.) Cool on a wire rack until room temperature, about 2 hours. Add whipped cream and pecans if desired, and serve. *Yield: one 9-inch pie*

PREBAKED PIE SHELL

Heat oven to 350°. On a lightly floured surface, use a rolling pin to roll 1 dough ball out into a 12-inch round. Fold dough gently in half over the rolling pin. Lay it in the center of a 9-inch pie tin. Unfold dough onto the other half of the tin to cover the bottom and sides. Trim and crimp the edges.

Cut a 12-inch round of parchment, waxed paper, or aluminum foil, and place on top of dough. Weigh it down with baking weights or dry beans. Bake 30 minutes; then remove from oven and let cool completely.