Tips For Holiday Planning

Fruitcakes add spice to holiday entertaining

By The Associated Press
From Ann Criss well
The Houston Chronicle

HOUSTON (AP) — Fruitcake is the gift people most hate to receive, but it has its loyal fans — 85-year-old Mary Smith, for example.

She is among Chronicle readers who already have called to ask for the annual reprint of favorite fruitcake recipes. They include the Chronicle's most-requested fruitcake recipe of all time, a gift-giving size batch recipe from the late Chronicle oil editor Tom Lester, and a much-requested no-butter cherry-nut fruitcake from former Chronicle columnist June Benefield. Also among the recipes is a rich, dark Caribbean fruit cake from the Chronicle files.

But Mary Smith's favorite is the "Mystery No-Bake Fruitcake," which she says she has been making since 1966, the year the Chronicle Food Section started. She asked for a reprint because her copy of the recipe has succumbed to the wear and tear of 24 years.

Here it is:

MYSTERY NO-BAKE FRUITCAKE

1 2-layer size package honey spice cake mix
4 cups (two 1-pound packages) candied fruit mix
1/2 cup (one-half pound) package each red and green candied cherries
1 1/2 cups (one-half pound) seedless raisins
1 cup (6 1/2 ounces) pitted dates, chopped
4 1/2 cups (1 pound) pecan halves
1 package fluffy white frosting mix (Betty Crocker brand used in testing)

Make and bake cake according to package directions. Cool. Crumble into large bowl and add mixed fruit, cherries, raisins, dates and pecans. Make frosting according to package directions. Add to fruit, nuts and cake mixture. Stir with large spoon or toss with hands until mixture is damp and well blended.

Pack tightly into 2 (8 1/2-by-4 (9-by-5-by-3-inch) loaf pans or a 10-inch tube pan. Pat down with buttered hands until smooth. Cover with foil and chill in refrigerator at least 24 hours. Cake improves if stored longer.

Cake should be kept refrigerated. Slice with a sharp knife. Makes 6 1/2 pounds of fruitcake.

MYSTERY NO-BAKE WHITE FRUITCAKE

1 (2 layer-size) package white cake mix (see note)
1 cup each: candied pineapple, lemon peel, orange peel and citron; cut up
1 1/2 cups white seedless raisins
1 cup whole red candied cherries
1 cup flaked or shredded coconut
4 1/2 cups blanched almonds, chopped
1 package fluffy white frosting mix

Bake cake by package directions. Cool. Crumble into large bowl or pan. Add pineapple, lemon peel, orange peel, citron, raisins, cherries, coconut and almonds. Make frosting mix by package directions. Add to fruit, nuts and cake mixture.

Pack tightly into a foil-lined 10-inch tube pan or 2 loaf pans. Cover with foil and chill in refrigerator at least 24 hours. Makes 6 1/2 pounds fruitcake.

NOTE: Honey spice, yellow or devil's food cake mix or even gingerbread mix, may be substituted for white cake mix.

GEURGIA FRUITCAKE

Source: "New Southern Cooking," by Nathalie Dupree (Knopf, $22.95). The recipe comes from Anne Sterling, a young chef from Stone Mountain, Ga.

3 pounds chopped pecans
1 pound golden raisins
2 pounds sun-dried peaches, cut in half-inch pieces
4 cups all-purpose soft-wheat flour (see note)
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon allspice
1 tablespoon cinnamon
1 pound unsalted butter
1 pound light brown sugar
10 eggs
1 cup honey
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream
1 cup peach nectar
1 cup brandy

Oil and flour 4 (9-by-5-by-4-inch) loaf pans, insert a piece of wax paper in each to fit, and oil and flour again. Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

Dredge pecans, raisins and peaches with one cup flour, tossing to coat. Set aside. Sift remaining 3 cups flour with baking powder, salt, allspice and cinnamon.

Cream butter and sugar, and beat in eggs, one at a time. Add honey, cream, peach nectar and flour mixture; beat until smooth. Combine batter with nut-flour mixture and mix well. Pour evenly into pans and bake 1 1/2 hours at 300 degrees. Remove and pour brandy over cakes while still hot.

Note: Soft wheat flour such as White Lily brand is recommended. If not available, substitute one part all-purpose and one-part cake flour, but baked goods will not be as light. In this recipe, you would use 2 cups all-purpose mixed with 2 cups cake flour.

CARIBBEAN BLACK CAKE

(From Chronicle files)

In the Caribbean, black cake — so-called because of its rich, dark color — is served at Christmas and at other grand celebrations such as weddings.

1 pound each: dark raisins, currants, pitted prunes and glace (candied) cherries
1/2 pound mixed peel (available at West Indian markets)
1 quart white rum
1 pound dark brown sugar
1 pound butter, plus butter for greasing pans
1 pound eggs (approximately 1 dozen)
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 pound flour (about 4 cups all-purpose), plus flour for dusting pans
3 teaspoons baking powder
3 ounces burnt sugar (available in West Indian or Spanish markets) or substitute 6 ounces of gravy coloring (such as Kitchen Bouquet)
1 quart tawny port

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Fruitcakes .....

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Place raisins, currants, prunes, cherries and peel in a large plastic or glass bowl. Add 1 cup rum. Put through a meat grinder, using medium blade. Mix with remaining rum so that the ground fruit forms a smooth paste. (Do not let fruits sit in metal container. Use either a plastic or glass bowl.) Cover tightly. Let stand in a cool place at least two weeks, or as long as a year.

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Cream dark brown sugar and butter. In a separate bowl combine eggs, cinnamon and nutmeg, and whip until foamy. Combine egg mixture with butter-sugar mixture. Add ground fruits. Mix well.

In a separate bowl, mix flour with baking powder. Stir flour mixture into fruit mixture. Add burnt sugar or gravy coloring. Batter should be dark brown.

Grease and lightly flour 2 (10-inch) springform baking pans that are at least three inches deep. Fill with mixture and bake two hours, or until a tester comes out clean.

Take pans out of oven. Let cool 1 hour, then remove cakes from pans and cool completely. Pour 1 cup port over the top of each. Let it be absorbed. After 10 minutes pour on remaining port.

Wrap tightly in plastic wrap. Do not use foil; it will disintegrate. Let cakes age at least a week. The longer the better. Do not refrigerate. Make sure cakes remain moist. If they become dry, moisten with port.

The cakes can be frozen. Serve with wine, champagne or port. Preparation time (excluding aging time) 50 minutes.

TEXAS PECAN CAKE

This recipe will make a large tube cake or 2 large loaf cakes.

1 pound butter or margarine, softened
3 cups sugar
7 eggs, separated
5 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda dissolved in 4 tablespoons warm water
1 (2-ounce) bottle pure lemon extract
1 quart pecan pieces
1 pound candied pineapple
1 pound candied cherries

Cream butter and sugar well. Beat egg yolks well and add to butter and sugar mixture. Add a little flour, the soda dissolved in water, lemon extract and a little more flour. Dredge pecans and candied fruit with some of the flour. Stir into batter with remaining flour. Beat egg whites until stiff and fold in well. Bake in a lined tube pan 2 1/2 hours at 300 degrees. Place foil over and under cake while baking.

JUNE BENEFIELD'S CHERRY NUT CAKE

This recipe is a much-requested favorite from former Chronicle columnist June Benefield. Note that there is no butter in this cake.

1 pound candied cherries, cut in half (1/2 pound green, red, if desired)
1 pound chopped pitted dates
1/2 pound candied chopped pineapple
1 pound chopped pecans
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, divided use
4 eggs
1 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking powder

Mix fruits and nuts with 1/2 cup flour. Beat eggs. Add sugar, remaining flour, salt and baking powder to eggs. Beat slightly. Combine fruit-nut mixture and batter. Mix with hands (there's no other way to handle the mass, according to Benefield). Bake in large tube pan lined with two thicknesses of wax paper or with heavy brown paper that has been liberally greased or sprayed with non-stick vegetable spray. Bake 1 1/2 hours at 325 degrees.

Nicholas firemen need donations

By Karn Read
The Carlisle Mercury Staff

UPDATE: The Nicholas County firemen have collected only half as many toys as they had at this time last year. Your help is needed.

CARLISLE — The Nicholas County Fire Department is holding a drive for toys, food and clothes.

Mark Hughes, Nicholas County Fire Chief, said the department members is collecting these items to give to the underprivileged of the county.

Hughes said the department wants to collect enough toys to give each child at least one new toy for Christmas.

He said last year was the drive's most successful year in its almost 10 year history.

"Last year was the best year we've ever had," Hughes said. "We hope this year will be even better."

Hughes said the toys will be distributed by the firefighters Christmas Eve.

He said last year the firefighters were able to deliver toys to about 120 children.

"It gives you a good feeling," Hughes said.

He said sometimes the children are waiting for the firefighters when they arrive at the house with the gifts.

Hughes said the firefighters want new toys or toys that are in good condition.

He said they do not have enough time to repair old or broken toys.

Hughes said the department will also distribute food boxes throughout the county.

Carlisle Cleaners has offered to clean coats free of charge if they are to be given to the fire department for Christmas distribution.

Hughes said toys can be dropped off at Woody's Auto Shop. Anyone wanting to donate can call 289-2369 or 289-7226 for more information.

Cash donations are also accepted.

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