

Trifle—delightfully rich and frivolous



Byrd's Kitchen

by Vivian Byrd

The British have a reputation for being unimaginative cooks. The national cuisine involves few sauces and fewer subtle flavors.

It is plain cooking, uncomplicated, the familiar reassuring flavors of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, steak and kidney pie, lamb chops, game and sausages, Dover sole and mussels. Unadorned, stick-to-the-ribs food that warms the insides. Then there's trifle. Wonderful, fabulous trifle. The smooth custard, tart raspberries, rich cream and sherry-soaked cake make a delightfully sinful combination to end a meal, British or otherwise. It is a dish that makes me think someone grew tired of all that plain cooking and created a dessert that is rich and frivolous to counteract it.

The first time I had trifle was years ago at the International, a city club in Washington, D.C. It did not look impressive, but I was willing to taste it. There were others at the table singing its praises. The waiter brought the dessert cart around, dished out the trifle and after only a few bites, I was a confirmed fan.

It is not a dish that appears on a lot of restaurant menus so I began making my own. An old neighbor had a recipe, Judy's Trifle (below), which was a success. The first time I made it the amount of whipped cream called for did not sound like enough to me, so, without thinking very carefully about it, I quadrupled the amount, with the result that all the other ingredients were buried under the whipped cream.

I had made the dish for a dinner party and, if I recall, no one complained about the excessive amount of whipped cream, but it was definitely noticed.

Next time, I followed the recipe precisely and enjoyed some of the other flavors as well.

Some cooks get nervous about custard but all it needs is a little patience and care. Watch the heat and keep it at a point where the custard does not boil.

Judy's Trifle is an Americanized version; the other is authentically British.

JUDY'S TRIFLE

8 egg yolks, lightly beaten
½ cup sugar
4 cups milk, scalded
1 tsp. vanilla
24 lady fingers, or a comparable quantity of sponge cake, torn into bite-size bits
½ cup medium dry sherry
1 cup strawberry or raspberry preserves
½ cup sliced blanched almonds or crumbled macaroons
½ cup heavy cream, whipped
Glaze cherries
An additional teaspoon sliced, blanched almonds

1. Combine the egg yolks, sugar and milk in a heavy saucepan, beating with a wire whisk to mix well. Heat over medium heat until mixture thickens and coats the back of a spoon. Do not allow custard to boil.
2. Remove from heat and pour into cold bowl. Stir in the vanilla and cool to lukewarm.
3. Sprinkle the lady fingers or spongecake with the sherry and let stand five to 10 minutes.
4. Place a layer of the soaked ladyfingers in a two-quart serving bowl, preferably glass.
5. Spread with ½ of the preserves and ½ of the almonds or macaroons. Repeat the layers until all ladyfingers are used.
6. Pour the cooled custard over the ladyfinger

Dessert says 'It's spring'

If you're searching for an elegant dessert that says springtime, serve a delicate pink and white Strawberry Bavarian, with a special touch of coconut rum liqueur.

COCO-STRAWBERRY BAVARIAN CREAM

2 envelopes unflavored gelatin
½ cup sugar
¼ tsp. salt
2 eggs
1½ cups milk
¾ cup coconut rum liqueur
1 tbsp. lemon juice
2 cups fresh strawberries, divided
1 cup heavy cream, whipped
Strawberries (optional)

In a small saucepan combine gelatin, sugar and salt. Beat together eggs and milk; gradually stir into gelatin mixture. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly about 5 minutes, until mixture thickens and gelatin is completely dissolved. Cool; add liqueur and lemon juice. Chill until mixture thickens and mounds slightly. Meanwhile, puree 1 cup strawberries. Slice remaining 1 cup strawberries. Fold strawberry puree, sliced berries and whipped cream into gelatin mixture. Spoon into individual 6-oz. molds. Chill several hours or overnight until firm. Unmold and garnish with whole strawberries if desired. Yield: Eight 6-oz. servings.

Peaches, cream with pudding cake

Try to say "peaches and cream" without your mouth watering. Satisfy that craving with this quick and easy dessert.

PEACHES'N CREAM PUDDING CAKE

1 can (17½ oz.) vanilla pudding
1 can (16 oz.) peach slices
1 package (9 oz.) single layer yellow cake mix
Drain peaches, reserving juice. Arrange peaches in oiled 9x9-inch or 7x11-inch baking dish. Peaches may be cut into thinner slices if desired. Spread pudding over peaches. Prepare cake batter according to package directions, substituting peach juice for water. Spread batter over pudding and peaches. Bake at 350 degrees (325 degrees if using a glass pan) for 45-55 minutes or until cake tests done. Serve warm.

arrangements and chill several hours.

7. Decorate with the whipped cream, piped through a rosette tube, and garnish with the cherries and additional almond pieces. Serves 10.

TRIFLE

A piece of home-made pound cake about 5 inches long, 4 inches wide and 3 inches high, or substitute a 15-oz. packaged pound cake.

4 tbsp. raspberry jam
1 cup blanched almonds, separated into halves
1 cup medium dry sherry
¼ cup brandy
2 cups heavy cream
2 tbsp. superfine sugar
A double recipe of custard sauce (below), chilled until firm
2 cups fresh raspberries, or 2 packages (10 oz. each) frozen raspberries, defrosted and thoroughly drained

Cut the pound cake into 1-inch thick slices and coat them with the raspberry jam. Place 2 or 3 of

the cake slices, jam side up, in the bottom of a glass serving bowl about 3 inches across and 3 inches deep. Cut the remaining slices of cake into 1-inch cubes, scatter them over the slices, and sprinkle ¼ cup of the almonds on top. Then pour in the sherry and brandy and let the mixture steep at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.

In a large chilled bowl, whip the cream with a whisk or a rotary or electric beater until it thickens slightly. Add the sugar and continue to beat until the cream is stiff enough to form unwavering peaks on the beater when it is lifted out of the bowl.

To assemble the trifle, set 10 of the best berries aside and scatter the rest over the cake. With a spatula, spread the custard across the top. Then gently smooth half of the whipped cream over the surface of the custard. Using a pastry bag fitted with a large rose tip, pipe the remaining whipped cream decoratively around the edge. Garnish the cream with the 10 reserved berries and the remaining ¼ cup of almonds.

The trifle will be at its best served at once, but it may be refrigerated for an hour or two.

CUSTARD SAUCE

1 ½ cups milk
2 tsp. cornstarch
1 tbsp. sugar
1 egg yolk
½ tsp. vanilla extract

In a heavy 1- to 2-quart saucepan, combine ¼ cup of the milk and the cornstarch, and stir with a whisk until the cornstarch is dissolved. Add the remaining 1¼ cups of milk and the sugar, and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until the sauce thickens and comes to a boil.

In a small bowl break up the egg yolk with a fork and stir in 2 or 3 tsp. of the sauce. Then whisk the mixture back into the remaining sauce. Bring to a boil again and boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove the pan from the heat and add the vanilla.

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