

CELEBRATION DESSERTS FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Summertime officially ended last week. So let's celebrate the beginning of fall. Admittedly, we like to celebrate whenever we find an excuse. So if you want to celebrate the autumnal equinox, why not bake a cake and have a party with a few friends?

Here's a luscious spring or summertime dessert, California Sunshine Cake, that's perfect for special occasions or family desserts. It's easy-to-prepare, but guests will be impressed by its elegant appearance and delicious flavor. The secret is in blending some convenient foods from your pantry shelf — fruity sweet California prunes, crunchy California almonds and moist and delicious yellow cake mix.

The cake portion of the recipe mixes up in minutes, and because it has pudding built right into the batter, you'll be assured of delicious taste and a wonderfully moist texture every time. Chopped almonds, stirred into the cake batter and baked into the top layer, will add even more good flavor and a delightfully crunchy texture to this special dessert.

The luscious "prune-smooth" filling is just as easy to prepare; simply combine pitted prunes with amaretto or orange juice in a blender; stir in whipped cream and spread between cake layers. The naturally-sweet flavor and wonderful consistency of the prune filling is a perfect complement to the cake. Delicately-flavored whipped cream and garnishes of prunes topped with almonds complete your dessert and make for an elegant presentation.

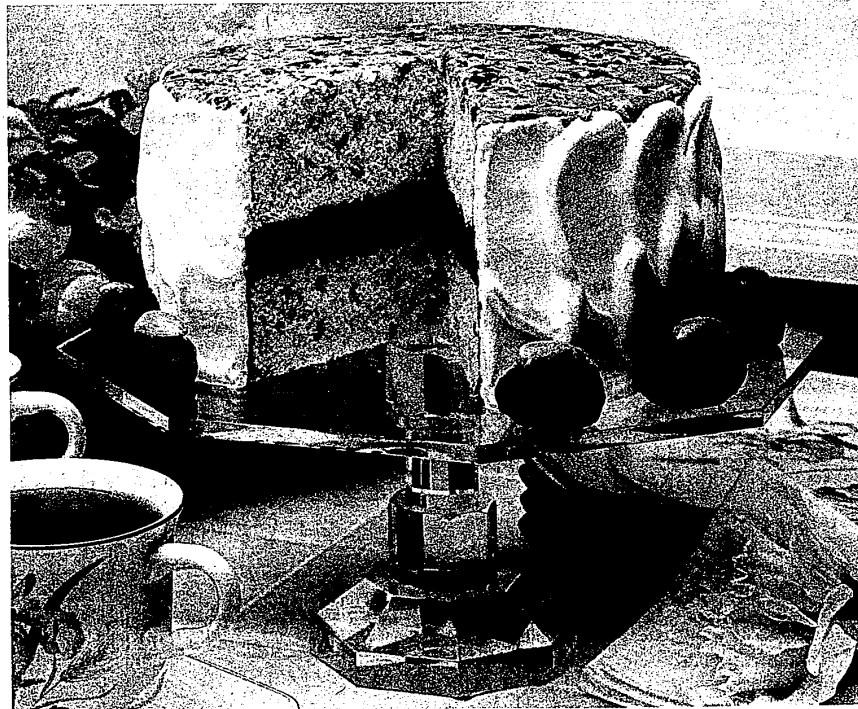
Whether you serve your California Sunshine Cake for bridal showers, Mother's Day, Sunday brunches or family dessert, its special flavor and extra appetite appeal will be a sure crowd-pleaser.

Best of all, because almonds and prunes are both rich in important vitamins and minerals, family and friends will enjoy an extra serving of good nutrition with every bite of California Sunshine Cake.

You also can count on these same versatile products — pudding-included yellow cake mix, California almonds and California prunes — in a whole variety of other dessert treats. French Prune Ice Cream, for example, combines naturally-sweet prunes with the tangy taste of orange to create an unusual and delicious dessert presentation.

Strawberry Tart Cake, which calls for pudding-included yellow cake mix, is an easy way to serve an elegant dessert to special guests on short notice.

Finally, a good supply of crunchy Chocolate Almond Oaties on the pantry shelf is perfect for special-occasion or more spur-of-the-moment entertaining. Whichever recipe you choose, these desserts are guaranteed to make any festive occasion extra special.



CALIFORNIA SUNSHINE CAKE

- Cake** 1-1/2 cups finely chopped almonds
1 pkg. Yellow Cake Mix
1 cup water
1/3 cup oil
1 teaspoon almond extract, if desired
3 eggs
- Filling** 12-oz. pkg. (about 2 cups) pitted prunes
1/2 cup amaretto or orange juice
- Frosting** 1-1/2 cups whipping cream
3 tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons amaretto or vanilla extract
- Garnish** Whole pitted prunes and whole blanched almonds, toasted or Amaretto Almonds (recipes follow)

Heat oven to 350° F. Grease and flour two 8 or 9-inch round cake pans. To prepare top layer of cake, sprinkle 1/2 cup chopped almonds in bottom of one prepared pan.

In large bowl, blend all cake ingredients except almonds at low speed; beat 2 minutes at highest speed. Stir in remaining 1 cup almonds. Pour batter into prepared pans. Bake at 350° F. for 30 to 40 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool cake in pans 15 minutes then invert layers on cooling racks. Cool completely.

In electric blend container, combine about half of each of the filling ingredients. Blend until almost smooth, turning blender on and off and scraping sides of container as needed. Repeat with remaining ingredients; set aside.

In small bowl, whip cream until foamy. Gradually add sugar and 2 teaspoons amaretto; continue whipping until stiff peaks form. Stir 1/2 cup whipped cream into prune filling.

Spread prepared prune filling between cake layers, keeping almond side on top. Frost sides of cake with remaining whipped cream; garnish with prunes and almonds. Store cake loosely covered in refrigerator. Makes 12 servings.

Toasted Almonds — Spread almonds in an ungreased baking pan or skillet. Place in a 350° F. oven or over medium-low heat on a range top for about 10 minutes, until almonds are a light golden brown; stir once or twice to assure even browning. Note that almonds will continue to brown slightly after being removed from the heat.
Amaretto Almonds — Heat oven to 300° F. Oil one cookie sheet. In small bowl, combine 1/2 cup blanched whole almonds and 4 teaspoons amaretto; arrange in single layer on prepared pan. Bake at 300° F. for 20 to 25 minutes, tossing often, until glazed and lightly browned; cool.

HIGH ALTITUDE — About 3500 feet: Add 3 tablespoons flour to dry cake mix. Bake at 375° F. for 25 to 35 minutes.

STRAWBERRY TART CAKE

- 1 pkg. Yellow Cake Mix
- 1 cup water
- 1/3 cup oil
- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons orange or cherry liqueur
- 1/2 cup currant jelly, melted
- 1 to 1-1/2 pints fresh strawberries
- 1 cup whipping cream, whipped
- Mint sprigs, if desired

Heat oven to 350° F. Grease and flour 10-inch springform pan or 10-inch angel food cake pan. In large bowl, combine cake mix, water, oil and eggs at low speed until moistened; beat 2 minutes at highest speed. Pour into prepared pan.

Bake at 350° F. for 40 to 50 minutes or until cake springs back when touched lightly in center. Cool cake in pan on cooling rack 15 minutes; remove rim. Pierce top of cake with long-tined fork; sprinkle with liqueur. Reserve 3 tablespoons jelly; brush top of cake lightly with remaining jelly. Arrange strawberries pointed ends-up, in center of cake; brush strawberries with reserved jelly. Spoon dollops of whipped cream around strawberries. Spread remaining whipped cream on side of cake. Garnish with mint. Store in refrigerator. Makes 16 servings.

HIGH ALTITUDE — Above 3500 feet: Add 3 tablespoons flour to dry cake mix. Bake at 375° F. for 40 to 50 minutes.

FRENCH PRUNE ICE CREAM

- 2 cups whipping cream
- 1-1/2 cups half and half
- 1/4 cup orange-flavored liqueur
- 3 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- Orange Prune Butter (recipe follows)

In large bowl whisk together cream, half and half, liqueur, sugar, egg, cinnamon and salt. Mix in Orange Prune Butter; blend thoroughly. Pour into container of ice cream maker; freeze according to manufacturer's instructions. To still freeze ice cream: Pour cream mixture into shallow bowl. Freeze until mixture is frozen about 1-inch around edge. Beat with electric mixer until evenly mixed. Place in freezer to ripen at least 2 hours before serving. Makes about 1-1/2 quarts.

ORANGE PRUNE BUTTER

- 12 ounces (about 2 cups) pitted prunes
- 1 cup orange juice
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons grated orange peel

In 2-quart saucepan combine all ingredients except orange peel. Bring to boil over medium heat; reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour into container of electric blender; blend until smooth. Return to saucepan; mix in orange peel. Cook and stir over medium heat 5 to 10 minutes, until mixture is the consistency of thick jam; cool. (Orange Prune Butter may be prepared in advance, covered and refrigerated up to 2 weeks before making ice cream.) Makes about 2 cups.

CHOCOLATE ALMOND OATIES

- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 3 cups quick-cooking oats
- 1-1/2 cups chopped or sliced almonds, toasted
- 1 package (6 ounces) regular semi-sweet chocolate pieces

Mix flours, salt and baking soda. In a large bowl, cream butter with sugars, eggs, vanilla and almond extract until fluffy. Blend in flour mixture. Stir in oats, toasted almonds and chocolate pieces. Divide dough in half. Turn each half onto a piece of waxed paper or plastic wrap. Shape into two 12 x 2-inch logs, using wax paper to help shape if necessary. Wrap; chill until firm. Slice thin. Place on lightly greased baking sheet and bake at 350° F. for 10 minutes. Makes 8 dozen cookies.