

MAKE IT BIG WITH BERRIES

Two's company, three's a crowd, four or more makes a party! As every cool, calm party-giver knows, the formula for a great dessert buffet begins (and ends) with sensational desserts. Naturally, innovative ideas are welcome — those in rhyme with today's life-style, which begs for convenience and easy preparation. Then what could be more ideally suited than fresh strawberry and fresh blueberry desserts? After all, berries are the original convenience foods, without fuss, peeling or waste!

Here are three superlative variations on a fresh berry theme that belong in your repertoire when a guest list reaches up to a dozen. Each dessert combines the best of seasonal fruit with dessert convenience foods that promise to make recipe preparation swift and snappy. Additionally, you'll appreciate the concept that these chilled desserts can be prepared ahead of time with just a final flourish or two before serving time. Scan the ingredient lines and you'll be delighted to see how store-bought cake and frozen pastry dough are used.

Without exception, these are streamlined desserts, beginning with the Trifle Torte. While you may think of the traditional torte as a complicated Continental dessert with a long ingredient line requiring several preparation steps, this torte is simplified to the nth degree. Flavored gelatin, instant pudding and pie filling and artificial whipped topping are the basis for a luscious mixture layered with fresh fruits over cubes of angel food cake. Chilled and molded in a bowl, the torte needs only the magic of thawed whipped topping as "frosting" and decorative garnish.

Today's version of a flan is different from the classic tart requiring special baking pans. Rather, a sheet of frozen puff pastry is cut and baked according to recipe directions. You might do this a day or two before the party and store. There's no rushing to this Pastry Fruit Flan because the mixture of lemon flavor instant pudding and pie filling and sour cream can be made hours in advance of the event. Assemble the elegant-and-easy flan just before serving time: arrange a "parade" of fresh fruit, glaze with apple jelly, complement with whipped topping garnish.

Icebox cakes, longtime classics in dessert lore, enjoy popularity this season with a newly developed recipe for Strawberry Icebox Loaf. This small-effort dessert deserves the most perfect, red-bright berries you can round up to show through a clear, sparkling top layer of fruit-flavored gelatin — strawberry flavor. Yes, traditional delicate ladyfingers line a loaf pan, surrounding a chilled layered mixture of fruit-flavored gelatin, frozen whipped topping and more fresh berries. "Fancied up" whipped topping frames the entire loaf.

Elegant looking, yet simple to prepare, these desserts are "frosted" with whipped topping in a way similar to how experts use icing. Practice makes perfect, and it's easily accomplished by using the back of a cake pan as practice ground. When decorating with frozen whipped topping, keep these tips in mind:

...Frozen whipped topping should be completely thawed.

...Make your own pastry bag by cutting a hole at the bottom corner of a medium size plastic storage bag. Fold top edge of the bag back about 2 inches and insert star tip tightly into the end. To hold the bag securely, place it in a jar or tall glass and fill with whipped topping. Unfold top of bag and turn corners to center; fold down top tightly.

...Hold one hand on top edge of bag, applying even pressure, and use other hand to guide tip to make decorations.

Now is the time to count your assets for a dessert party: three time-saving, energy-saving recipes that make the most of fresh strawberries and blueberries. They're foolproof finales!



Top: Trifle Torte. Center: Strawberry Icebox Loaf. Bottom: Pastry Fruit Flan.

Trifle Torte

- 1 package (3 oz.) strawberry flavor gelatin
- 1 cup boiling water
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 package (4-serving size) vanilla flavor instant pudding and pie filling
- 1 cup cold milk
- 2 containers (8 oz. each) frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1 baked angel food cake, cut into cubes
- 3/4 cup sliced strawberries
- 3/4 cup fresh or frozen blueberries

Dissolve gelatin in boiling water. Add lemon juice and chill until slightly thickened. Meanwhile, prepare pudding mix with 1 cup milk as directed on package for pudding. Chill; then fold in gelatin. Fold in 1 container of the whipped topping, blending until smooth. Place one third of the cake cubes in the 2-quart bowl. Top with one third of the fruits; add one third of the gelatin-pudding mixture, spreading evenly. Repeat layers. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and chill at least 6 hours. Unmold onto serving plate. Spread remaining container of whipped topping over mold, using part for decorations, and garnish with additional fruit, if desired. Makes about 6 cups or 12 servings.

Strawberry Icebox Loaf

- 12 ladyfingers, split
- 1 pint strawberries
- 2 packages (3 oz. each) or 1 package (6 oz.) strawberry flavor gelatin
- 2 cups boiling water
- 1 cup cold water
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract*
- 1 container (4 oz.) frozen whipped topping, thawed

*Or use 3 tablespoons orange liqueur.

Line sides of 9x5-inch loaf pan with ladyfingers. Halve 1 cup of the strawberries; slice remaining berries. Dissolve gelatin in boiling water. Add cold water. Measure 3/4 cup and chill until thickened. Spoon into pan and arrange strawberry halves, cut side up, in rows on the gelatin. Add extract to remaining gelatin and chill until slightly thickened. Fold in whipped topping and the sliced strawberries and spoon into pan over clear layer. Chill until firm, at least 4 hours. Invert onto serving dish. Garnish with additional whipped topping, if desired. Makes about 6 cups or 12 servings.

Pastry Fruit Flan

- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 package (4-serving size) vanilla or lemon flavor instant pudding and pie filling
- 1 cup cold milk
- 1 container (8 oz.) sour cream
- 1 pint strawberries, halved
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1/2 cup apple jelly, melted and cooled

Roll pastry on lightly floured board into 16x11-inch rectangle. Prick entire surface with fork. Cut 4 lengthwise strips, about 1-1/4 inches wide. Place rectangle on ungreased baking sheet and brush with egg. Place 2 of the strips on the longer edges, brush with egg and top with remaining 2 strips. Brush with egg. Bake at 350° for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden brown. Cool completely on rack.

Combine pudding, milk and sour cream in bowl. Beat until smooth and well blended, about 1 minute. Chill. Just before serving, spread filling in pastry shell and arrange fruits in rows on top. Brush fruit with jelly. Garnish with thawed frozen whipped topping, if desired. Refrigerate any leftover flan.