

Spring Dessert

Light, Luscious and Citrus



Plumptuous cakes and toothsome pies, the glamorous stars of Southern cooking, still draw raves from enchanted diners. Favorites such as pecan pie, bourbon cake, Lady Baltimore cake, spiced sweet potato pie and blackberry cake with caramel icing are served everywhere in the South.

Yet the national trend towards lighter, less filling meal-enders has gained a foothold in the sweet tooth South too. Both types of desserts are served at chic "dessert only" gatherings, which have become popular since women began to spend more time in the office than the kitchen. After dinner at home, people get together for dessert, coffee and relaxed conversation.

Hostesses who specialize in desserts flavored and garnished with citrus fruits have developed a number of lighter desserts refreshed with the taste of oranges or grapefruit. They might offer the traditional orange cake made with buttermilk, dates, pecans and orange juice and, on the same menu, a less caloric but delicious grapefruit sorbet. In fact, the lively appeal of citrus in both rich and light desserts goes far beyond the classic Ambrosia of the South.

Some of the newer desserts favored for dessert parties are airy pies and cakes made with fresh Florida grapefruit. For example, Gingered Grapefruit Souffle Cake teams ladyfingers with pink or white grapefruit juice, and Grapefruit Angel Pie is a true taste of paradise for lovers of featherweight meringue and a zesty custard filling. Calorie-watchers will both relish and appreciate icy Grapefruit Colada Snow.

Grapefruit are spring-sweet and plentiful now. They add that all-important vitamin C to your dishes and an interesting, come-alive taste. In fact, thin-skinned Florida grapefruit, juicy as can be, can be found in most markets until May, so you can enjoy these new desserts all season.

The traditional coffee and tea are served along with desserts, though the hostess who enjoys being different will include an herb tea or a flavored coffee. A sweet but potent liqueur often rounds out the dessert menu with the latest calorie-lowering trick — adding an ice cube for more volume and less liqueur.

Because last winter's adverse weather severely affected citrus crops in several states, the grapefruit in your markets now are primarily Florida grapefruit which were not in the cold-damaged areas. These grapefruit have been maturing on the trees for almost a year and are being picked undamaged and ready to eat. Strict Florida laws ensure that only top quality, juicy fruit is shipped to your market, usually within seven days of harvesting. Enjoy.

Gingered Grapefruit Souffle Cake

- 2 envelopes unflavored gelatin
- 1 cup sugar, divided
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 large eggs, separated
- 2 1/2 cups grapefruit juice
- 1 teaspoon chopped, candied ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon grated grapefruit peel
- 1 cup heavy cream, whipped
- 2 packages (3 ounces each) ladyfingers, split
- Whipped cream for garnish (optional)
- Grapefruit peel "knots" for garnish (optional)

In a medium saucepan mix gelatin, 2/3 cup sugar and salt. In medium bowl beat together egg yolks and grapefruit juice. Stir into gelatin in saucepan. Cook over low heat stirring constantly until gelatin dissolves and mixture thickens slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in ginger and grapefruit peel. Chill, stirring occasionally, until mixture mounds slightly when dropped from a spoon. Beat egg whites until soft peaks form; gradually beat in remaining 1/3 cup sugar; beat until stiff peaks form. Fold egg whites into grapefruit mixture. Fold in whipped cream. Turn into a 9-inch springform pan lined with ladyfingers. Chill until firm. Remove sides of springform pan. Garnish cake with whipped cream and "knots" of grapefruit peel, if desired.
YIELD: 8 to 10 servings.

Grapefruit Angel Pie

- 4 large egg whites, at room temperature
- 1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla

In a small bowl beat egg whites and cream of tartar until soft peaks form. Gradually add sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, beating until sugar is completely dissolved and meringue is smooth and glossy and stands in stiff peaks (about 20 minutes). Beat in vanilla. Pipe or spoon mixture into a 9-inch greased pie plate. Bake in a 275°F. oven 1 hour; turn oven off and let stand in oven 1 hour longer. Fill with Grapefruit Filling*. Chill several hours or overnight, if possible.
YIELD: 8 servings.

*Grapefruit Filling

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1 1/4 cups grapefruit juice
- 3/4 cup water
- 4 egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter or margarine
- 1 cup heavy cream

In medium saucepan mix sugar and cornstarch. Gradually stir in grapefruit juice and water; cook over medium heat until mixture boils and thickens. Stir constantly. Gradually beat hot mixture into beaten egg yolks; stir over low heat until thickened. Stir in butter; cover; chill. Beat heavy cream until soft peaks form. Add into grapefruit mixture. Spoon into meringue shell.

Grapefruit Colada Snow

- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1 can (6 ounces) frozen concentrated grapefruit juice; thawed, undiluted
- 1/3 cup canned cream of tartar
- 1/4 cup gin

Combine all ingredients. Pour into a metal 9 x 5 x 3-inch pan. Freeze until firm, 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Let stand 5 to 10 minutes at room temperature before serving. Spoon into chilled serving dishes.
YIELD: 6 servings.