

People are passionate about bread pudding

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Very little sugar goes into the croissant version of bread pudding at the Merchant of Vino, where people pay \$5.99 a pound to savor the flavor. The pudding is served with creme anglaise or vanilla sauce.

"IT'S ONE OF the biggest sellers," said Juliette Jonna, carry-out and catering coordinator for the specialty food and wine shops. "I always liked bread pudding, so I figured why not make it with croissants," said Jonna, who invented her recipe in 1985. "I'm surrounded by the best ingredients the world can offer, so I try to be innovative and put them to work."

BLOOMFIELD HILLS COUNTRY CLUB BREAD PUDDING

6 whole eggs
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
rind of half a lemon, grated fine
4 cups milk
Koeppelinger's cinnamon raisin bread butter

Butter a 9-by-9-inch pan and sprinkle raisins to taste over the bottom. Butter slices of Koeppelinger's cinnamon raisin bread, cut slices in half and lay in the bottom of the pan, over the raisins. Whisk together the eggs, sugar, salt, vanilla extract, lemon rind and milk to form a custard mixture. Strain and pour over the bread in the pan. Place pan in a larger pan filled with some water. Bake at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes or until browned and egg custard is set. Serve warm or cold. Serves 10-12.

PHYLLIS MARIA'S FAMILY RECIPE FOR BREAD PUDDING

4 ounces (1 stick) unsalted butter (softened)
1/2 cup sugar
6 eggs (beaten)
3 cups milk
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
dash of cinnamon
1/2 cup raisins
12 slices Italian bread, 1-inch thick

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Beat the butter and sugar until creamy. Add eggs, milk, vanilla and cinnamon and beat until thoroughly mixed. Stir in the raisins. Pour the complete mixture into a square baking pan.

Line the crusts slanted up in the pan on top of the mixture. Let stand for 5 minutes to absorb some of the liquid. Turn the bread slices over and let stand for another 10 minutes. Submerge the bread down into the mixture. (Don't break up the bread slices.) Also can be made with raisin challah bread.

Set the pan in the center of a larger pan. Pour in enough water to reach within 1/2 inch of the top of the inner pan.

Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 35 minutes. Uncover the pudding and bake for another 10 minutes, until the top is browned and the pudding is still soft.

Top with applesauce and serve. (Can also be served with whiskey sauce as a topping.) Serves 6-8.

BRIOCHE BREAD PUDDING

From "The Wooden Spoon Bread Book" by Marilyn M. Moore (The Atlantic Monthly Press)

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Butter a 2-quart casserole. In a mixing bowl, toss together:
1 cup dried currants
2 tablespoons Meyer's Dark Rum

Toss again with:
5 cups loosely packed day-old brioche bread cubes
Transfer to a buttered dish. Using the same bowl, with a wire whisk beat:

3 eggs
Beat into eggs:
3 cups milk
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract, preferably homemade
1/2 cup orange marmalade

Pour milk mixture over bread cubes and currants. Place casserole in a large, flat pan. Place on oven rack. Add almost-boiling water to pan to reach halfway up side of casserole. Bake at 325 degrees for 1 1/2 hours, or until knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Serve warm with rum sauce. Makes 8 servings.

Rum Sauce
In a heavy saucepan, combine:
1/2 cup butter
1 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup Meyer's Dark Rum

Heat to boiling, stirring all the while. Remove from heat. Stir in 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg. Serve warm. Makes 1 cup.

OLD-FASHIONED BREAD PUDDING

From "The Great Microwave Dessert Cookbook" by Thelma Dressman (Contemporary Books Inc.)
one 8-ounce package cream cheese
2 cups milk
2 teaspoons vanilla
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Depending on what is available, Jonna adds fresh berries, cherries or compotes as naturally sweet fillings. She said the fresh, wholesome dish is often ordered for brunch instead of dessert.

"The pudding is between a coffee cake and French toast. It could be used as a full meal for breakfast," Jonna said.

Bread pudding breakfasts are one of Marra's favorites, but she also loves to serve the dish as a memorable ending to a special dinner.

In the world of desserts, "Bread pudding is the Queen of the May," she said. "It's a sleeper, but as you remember it, it has the opportunity to try it again. It's the winner on the dessert table — the best one."

1/2 cup golden raisins
6 slices French bread, cut 1/4-inch thick, toasted and broken into pieces
1/2 cup butter
1 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 eggs, well beaten
powdered sugar (optional)

In a 4-cup glass measure, combine cream cheese and milk. Heat in microwave oven on high (600-700 watts) 3-4 minutes, stirring twice. Stir in vanilla, walnuts and raisins. Place bread in a 1-quart ring mold or a round casserole. Pour hot milk mixture over top. Set aside. Combine butter, brown sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon and salt in a 4-cup glass measure. Cook on high 1 minute. Stir well. Add eggs and whisk well. Stir into bread mixture and mix gently until combined. Cook on high 6-9 minutes, turning dish if it appears to be cooking unevenly. Sprinkle with powdered sugar if desired. Serves 4-6.

WALNUT CREAM CHEESE CAKE

1 1/2 cups walnuts
2 tablespoons sugar for pan coating
1 cup unsalted butter plus 2 tablespoons
6 ounces cream cheese
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
1 1/2 cups sugar
4 large eggs
2 cups sifted cake flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt

Chop 1/2 cup of the walnuts, flne, and reserve for coating pan. Chop remaining walnuts, medium fine, for batter.

Butter a 2-quart bundt pan heavily with 2 tablespoons of the butter. Sprinkle with the 1/2 cup fine walnuts, then 2 tablespoons sugar. Set aside.

Cream 1 cup butter with cream

cheese and lemon zest. Gradually beat in 1 1/2 cups sugar. Beat in eggs, one at a time until well blended. (Batter may appear curdled.)

Sift together flour, baking powder and salt; gradually blend into creamed mixture. Stir in remaining chopped walnuts. Spoon mixture into prepared pan.

Bake in a preheated 300-degree oven until a cake tester inserted in center comes out clean (baking time: 1 hour and 20-30 minutes). Cool on a rack completely before unmolding.

SPECIAL BANANA NUT CAKE

1/2 cup margarine or shortening
1 1/2 cup sugar
2 eggs
1 cup mashed bananas
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 cups sifted cake flour
1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 cup chopped pecans
1 cup flaked, toasted coconut

Cream together shortening or margarine and sugar until fluffy in electric mixer. Add eggs. Beat 2 minutes at medium speed. Add mashed bananas and beat an additional 2 minutes.

Sift together dry ingredients and add to creamed mixture along with buttermilk and vanilla. Beat 2 minutes, then fold in chopped pecans.

Spoon batter into two 9-inch greased and floured cake pans. Before baking, sprinkle each layer with 1/2 cup coconut.

Bake in a moderate 350-degree oven for 25-30 minutes. Remove from pan when cool and continue to

cool, coconut side up, on a rack. While the cake is cooling, prepare frosting.

FROSTING FOR SPECIAL BANANA NUT CAKE

1 egg white
1/2 cup shortening
1/2 cup unsalted butter
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon natural coconut extract
2 cups sifted confectioners' sugar
1 1/2 cup coconut, lightly toasted for decoration

Cream together egg white, shortening and butter, vanilla and coconut extract until well blended in electric mixer. Slowly add 2 cups confectioners' sugar. Beat until light and fluffy.

Coat cooled cake layers with an even layer of frosting. Assemble and decorate with toasted coconut.

These recipes are designed for a happy heart

If you're looking for a great source of low-cholesterol, low-saturated-fat and low-calories recipes, locate a copy of Jeanne Jones' "Diet for a Happy Heart" cookbook. These recipes are taken from her book.

'SKINNY' BEEF GRAVY

1 cup defatted beef drippings
1 cup beef stock
2 tablespoons cornstarch

1/2 cup water
salt and pepper to taste

Heat the defatted beef drippings and beef stock in a saucepan. Mix the water with cornstarch and whisk into the gravy. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally until thickened. Salt and pepper to taste.

GREEN GODDESS DRESSING

4 teaspoons arrowroot or cornstarch

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