

Chef Larry finds custard is soothing

STIRRED CUSTARD
(Creme Anglaise)
2 cups milk
4 vanilla bean or 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 egg yolks
3 tablespoons sugar

If using vanilla bean, bring milk to a boil with the bean in a heavy-bottomed saucepan, remove from heat and allow to stand or 10 minutes to infuse the flavor. If using extract, it is added later, bring milk without flavoring to a boil.

In a medium bowl, beat yolks and sugar together until thickened and lemon colored. Add milk, stirring to combine well.

Turn mixture into a double boiler and return to saucepan and cook over very low heat, stirring until it thickens, about 10 minutes.

Remove from heat and if desired, strain into a clean bowl set over a bowl of ice to stop cooking. If using vanilla extract, stir in now. Use immediately or cover with plastic wrap laid directly on the surface to prevent skin from forming.

BAKED CUSTARD
2 eggs
2 egg yolks

Turn mixture into a double boiler and return to saucepan and cook over very low heat, stirring until it thickens, about 10 minutes.

Remove from heat and if desired, strain into a clean bowl set over a bowl of ice to stop cooking. If using vanilla extract, stir in now. Use immediately or cover with plastic wrap laid directly on the surface to prevent skin from forming.

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2 cups milk
3 tablespoons sugar
Vanilla extract or fresh grated nutmeg to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl, beat eggs, egg yolks, milk and sugar. Stir in a drop or two of vanilla or a sprinkling of nutmeg. Strain through a sieve into a 1-quart baking or soufflé dish. (Individual cups can be used, if desired.)

Set pan in a larger pan filled with enough hot water to reach halfway up the sides of the baking dish. Bake until just set, about 30-35 minutes. Serve warm or refrigerate and serve chilled with crystallized sugar top.

To make creme caramel, combine 1/4 cup sugar with 1/4 cup water in a small heavy saucepan. Stir only until it dissolves, then stop stirring. Raise heat to a boil and boil, without stirring, for 8-10 minutes or until it turns a light brown.

Pour into the bottom of 1-quart baking or soufflé or individual dish and proceed to top with prebaked baked custard. Follow baking instructions.

Cool and refrigerate overnight for best results. Invert onto a platter or plate before serving.

Stuffed potatoes are colorful

AP — For a colorful side dish, serve stuffed potatoes combined with diced red bell pepper and zucchini.

MICROWAVE STUFFED POTATOES
4 large baking potatoes (about 10 ounces each)
1 cup diced red bell pepper
1 cup diced zucchini
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
1/2 cup margarine or butter
1/2 cup hot milk
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon white pepper

Scrub potatoes; prick each with a fork. Arrange potatoes in a circle on an absorbent towel. Cook on high

(100 percent power) 13 to 15 minutes, rotating 1/4 turn after 7 minutes. Let stand on counter 5 minutes.

Meanwhile combine red pepper, zucchini, onion and 2 tablespoons of the margarine in a 1 1/2-quart microwave-safe baking dish. Cook on high 4 to 6 minutes, stirring after 3 minutes. Cut potatoes in half lengthwise and scoop out centers, being careful not to break skins. Mash potatoes until light, whip in hot milk, remaining margarine, salt and pepper. Stir in vegetables. Spoon mixture into potato shells; place on a 12-inch microwave-safe platter. Cook on high 5 to 6 minutes or until heated through. Makes 8 servings.

(Recipe from: Beef Industry Council of the Meat Board)

Children make healthy snacks

PEANUT BUTTER BURRITO

Peanut butter is an old-time favorite for both children and adults. The traditional peanut butter and jelly sandwich can be updated by using a flour tortilla and adding many delicious ingredients in place of bread and jelly.

To make a peanut butter burrito, warm the tortilla according to package directions. Spread the desired amount of peanut butter on the warmed tortilla. Top with some of the following accompaniments to make a special treat and fold into a burrito.

Honey
Sesame seeds
Banana, thinly sliced
Apple, cored and thinly sliced (squeeze fresh lemon juice over slices to prevent from browning)
Applesauce
Carrot, grated
 Raisins
Canned pineapple, crushed or sliced, drained
Chopped dried fruit
Chopped nuts, such as pecans, walnuts and almonds
Coconut, shredded

Try a few of these combinations when making your burritos or use any of the above items to make your own creation.

Tropical Peanut Butter Burrito: banana, crushed pineapple, almonds sprinkled with shredded coconut.

Autumn Harvest Peanut Butter Burrito: applesauce, chopped walnuts, grated carrots sprinkled with cinnamon.

Honey Sesame Burrito: honey and sesame seeds.

EASY CHEESECAKE
Crust
1 1/2 cup vanilla wafer crumbs
1/2 cup melted butter

Filling
One 8-ounce package cream cheese
One 16-ounce Ricotta cheese
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 cup warm water
1 unsweetened gelatin packet
1/2 pint heavy cream
1/4 cup sugar

Optional toppings
Shaved chocolate
Crushed pineapple
Berries
Chopped maraschino cherries

Place muffin cup liners in muffin pan.

In a medium bowl, combine cookie crumbs with melted butter. Mix well. Press 1 tablespoon of cookie crumb mixture into the bottom of each liner or the bottom and sides of an 8-inch pie pan and set aside.

In a large bowl mix the first four

ingredients. Beat with an electric mixer until well blended, and smooth. Combine warm water and gelatin in a small bowl. Mix until gelatin has dissolved. Beat into cheese mixture and set aside.

In a medium bowl, whip the heavy cream to soft peaks. Add the remaining 1/4 cup sugar and whip until stiff peaks form.

Fold the whipped cream into cheese mixture. Then spoon cheese mixture over cookie crumb crust to fill muffin liners and refrigerate until it begins to set, about 45 minutes. The cheesecake can be eaten plain or topped with your favorite topping.

CEREAL SNACK MIX
3 cups toasted oat cereal, such as Cheerios
1 cup honey-roasted peanuts
1/4 cup marshmallows
1 cup chocolate-covered raisins

Add all ingredients to a large mixing bowl. Mix well. Store in airtight container. Makes 5 1/2 cups.

QUESADILLAS
5 flour tortillas
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
1/4 cup chopped mild green chilies, optional
2 tablespoons butter, melted
4 tablespoons oil
Salsa
Sour cream

Brush with olive oil. Cook in a large skillet over medium-low heat about 10 to 12 minutes per side or until crisp and golden. Or arrange tortilla pieces on a microwave-safe platter. Cover with waxed paper; cook on 70 percent power (medium-high) 4 to 6 minutes or until hot. Serve with Spicy Meat Sauce. Makes 6 servings.

Spicy Meat Sauce
Crumble 1 pound ground beef or turkey into a 2-quart microwave-safe casserole. Add 1/4 cup chopped onion and 2 cloves garlic, minced. Cook, covered, on 100 percent power (high) 5 to 7 minutes, stirring once. Drain meat; set aside. Wipe casserole with paper towels. In casserole combine 1 cup sliced zucchini, 1 cup chopped green pepper, one 8-ounce can tomato sauce, 2 tablespoons snipped parsley, 1/2 teaspoon salt, dried oregano, 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Cook, covered, on high 5 to 7 minutes or until zucchini is tender. Stir in hot meat, spoon over polenta. Makes 6 servings.

Polenta
Brush with olive oil. Cook in a large skillet over medium-low heat about 10 to 12 minutes per side or until crisp and golden. Or arrange tortilla pieces on a microwave-safe platter. Cover with waxed paper; cook on 70 percent power (medium-high) 4 to 6 minutes or until hot. Serve with Spicy Meat Sauce. Makes 6 servings.

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Wrap the flour tortillas in aluminum foil tightly and bake for 10 minutes until they are softened.

While tortillas soften, mix together the melted butter and oil in a bowl. Place the mixture to the side. Combine the cheeses in another bowl and set aside.

To make the quesadillas, sprinkle some of the combined cheeses on half of each tortilla. Add 1 tablespoon of the chopped chilies if desired. Fold the tortillas in half and pinch to seal. Brush the tortillas with the melted butter mixture.

The quesadillas can be either sautéed or finished in the oven. (For very young children I recommend the oven method.)

For the sauté method, heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Cook until golden brown, about 2 minutes on each side. Keep cooking quesadillas warm in a preheated 200-degree oven on a cookie sheet.

For the oven method, preheat oven 375 degrees and place quesadillas on an aluminum foil-lined cookie sheet and bake until the tops are golden, about 5 minutes.

Cut into thirds and serve with salsa and sour cream.

Note: For a different quesadilla, add sliced poached pear or apple to the tortillas before folding and omit the green chilies and salsa.

Makes 15 triangles.

Polenta can be made in the microwave

AP — Polenta can take your Italian-inspired cooking a step beyond pasta and pizza. A cooked cornmeal mixture, polenta is a convenient make-ahead base to serve with meat or vegetable sauces. Polenta and sauce can be adapted for microwave cooking without changing the terrific Italian flavor.

MICROWAVE POLENTA
3 cups water
1 cup yellow cornmeal
1 cup cold water
1 teaspoon salt
Olive oil
Spicy Meat Sauce (recipe below)

In a 4-cup microwave-safe mea-

sure, cook 3 cups water on 100 percent power (high) 4 to 6 minutes or until boiling. Meanwhile, in a 2-quart microwave-safe casserole stir together cornmeal, cold water and salt.

Slowly pour boiling water into cornmeal mixture, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until well-combined. Cook, uncovered, on high for 7 to 9 minutes or until mixture is very thick and just bubbles in center, stirring every minute.

Spread cornmeal mixture in a greased 12-by-7 1/2-by-2-inch baking dish. Set aside to cool for 45 minutes; cover with plastic wrap and chill overnight.

To serve, cut into 24 squares.

Brush with olive oil. Cook in a large skillet over medium-low heat about 10 to 12 minutes per side or until crisp and golden. Or arrange tortilla pieces on a microwave-safe platter. Cover with waxed paper; cook on 70 percent power (medium-high) 4 to 6 minutes or until hot. Serve with Spicy Meat Sauce. Makes 6 servings.

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