

## INVITING IDEAS

## Consider desserts when harvesting veggies



RUTH  
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JOHNSTON

There were no mysterious circles in the grass, no stones placed in circular configurations, no overhead beaming lights or pervasive overhanging objects, but the invasion of the rabbits occurred the same day as the release of the film — "Independence Day" — could there be a connection?

My garden has become a salad bar to a herd of fluffy cotton-tailed creatures, and my only recourse seems to be; quick pickings and developing a multitude of recipes for my Swiss chard, utilizing those deep green gorgeous leaves to their most delicious potential.

I've done the stuffed thing — stuffed sweet and sour Swiss chard with rice and meat, chard stuffed with veggies and rice, and stuffed with cheese and orzo. I've added it to salads, soups, and stews, but now, the grand finale — Swiss Chard Cheesecake.

We are all familiar with carrot cake generously topped with cream cheese frosting and sprinkled with pecans, spiced zucchini muffins as big as mountains, and the classic fall treat, simple

pumpkin pie. What about all those vegetables that have done their stint in serious healthy side-dishes and entrees, but never get top billing as a luscious dessert? What about gardens that are currently overflowing with green tomatoes? Seems a pity not to use some of those beautiful early unripened green orbs, or those left green at the end of the season.

Think of the possibilities. . . call friends and neighbors and find out what's growing in their gardens — unite, combine efforts and come up with some new tasty vegetable dessert treats. Make this a neighborhood event — do a block party. If your neighbors are not tending a garden this year, have them go to the local fruit market and come up with a few unusual vegetables to use.

This interesting twist to cheesecake is perfectly delightful for sweet summer endings.

This dessert is elegant, but simple enough to do for your own family, and the perfect way to use up some of those Swiss chard leaves!

#### SWISS CHARD CHEESE CAKE WITH PINE NUT CRUST

Crust ingredients:

2 1/2 cups pine nuts, chopped fine

4 tablespoons sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Ingredients for cheesecake filling:

1 pound low-fat ricotta cheese, at room temperature

2 cups Laban\* (strained heavy yogurt)

3 large eggs, room temperature

2/3 cup sugar

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1/2 vanilla bean, split and scrapped

2 cups firmly packed Swiss chard,

stems removed and finely

chopped (10-12 leaves)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. In a large bowl, combine the chopped pine nuts and the sugar, slowly add the melted butter and mix well.

In a 9-inch spring form pan press the filling evenly across the bottom and part of the way up the side of the pan with your fingers. Make sure the crust is evenly molded.

Bake the crust for 8-10 minutes or until golden. Remove the springform pan and let cool on a cooling rack.

Turn the oven heat down to 350 degrees F. In the mixing bowl of an electric mixer, add the ricotta cheese, heavy

yogurt, eggs, sugar, vanilla extract, and scrapings of vanilla bean — beat on medium speed for approximately 2 minutes, or until mixture appears well mixed and smooth. Add in the chopped Swiss chard leaves by mixing just until combined.

Pour the mixture into the pan with the pine nut crust — bake for 1 1/2 to 2 hours — making sure the filling is firm.

Remove from oven and let cool on the cooling rack. Transfer the cheese cake to the refrigerator — until well chilled (I usually do this the day before and let chill overnight).

Prior to serving, remove the springform outer circle and place on a serving dish. Yield: 10 generous servings

#### \* Making Laban:

Place plain low-fat or no-fat yogurt in either a commercial yogurt strainer or a colander lined with two layers of cheesecloth (secured to the inside). Place a large plate or pan beneath the strainer or colander to catch the liquid. Place in the refrigerator for 12 to 24 hours or until yogurt is thick (sour cream consistency) or cheese-like. Discard the liquid.

For the easy way out — Laban can be purchased at many grocery stores, Middle

See JOHNSTON, G4

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