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It's crunch time for apples

After living in Florida for six years, I am delighted to be in Michigan. I enjoy the change of seasons here and the crisp, cold air it brings. I've also discovered Michigan apple, and learned that Michigan is known as the Variety State because of its apple production and the many flavors we grow.

Our state is the third largest producer of apples after Washington and New York. Michigan apples are known to have better flavor due to where they are grown with the influence of Lake Michigan, sunshine and rain making a big difference. Our apples have better sugar and acid content. As a chef, finding a product unique to the area where you work is exciting.

Apple pie is such an autumn dish. To me it brings up memories of Halloween. Growing up in Scotland I remember bobbing for apples and eating monkey nuts, which you call peanuts, on Halloween. You'd dunk your head in a tub of ice-cold water and grab an apple with your teeth to get a prize. We had to work for our treats. We had to sing a song, tell a poem or a joke before getting

candy. Kids here have it easy. All they have to do is go up to the door and say "trick or treat." With all these great apples, I think Michigan kids should try bobbing.

Now that you're hungry for apples, try this pie recipe. It's easy to make, and has a streusel topping that's unsurpassed. It's very caramely and crusty. I use Macintosh and Jonathan apples for pies and tarts, and Golden Delicious for eating (or bobbing). Use ice water when you make the pie crust. It helps firm up the dough, and makes it easier to roll and gives a nice flaky pastry.



Michigan's Best

Colin Brown

THE TOWNSEND MICHIGAN APPLE PIE

Pastry
2 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
2 sticks (16 ounces) cold unsalted butter
1/3 cup of ice water (or more as needed to form a firm dough)

Combine the flour and salt in a mixing bowl.
Add the cold butter and blend with a fork until it crumbles to the size of a small hazelnut.

Add the ice water a little at a time, just until the mixture comes together.

Remove on to a lightly floured surface and pat flat. Wrap in plastic food wrap and chill in the refrigerator for at least 30-45 minutes.

Roll out to 1/8"-1/4" and line a

lightly buttered 10-inch pie dish.
Apple Filling
6-10 medium sized Michigan Apples (I prefer Macintosh)
1 cup flour
2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

Peel, core and slice apples and toss in dry ingredients. Place in mixing bowl and toss in dry ingredients. Place in pie dish.

Streusel Topping
1/2 cup soft brown sugar
1/4 cup white sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup (4 1/2 ounces) of butter
Pinch of salt
1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 cup all purpose flour

Mix all ingredients until just crumbly, and top pie.
Bake at 325°F degrees for 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Chef Colin Brown is Executive Chef of The Townsend Hotel in Birmingham. He studied culinary arts at the Glasgow College of Food Technology and has won an impressive array of awards, including the Scottish Chef of the Year, was a member of the Scottish Culinary Olympic team, which won seven gold medals, six silver medals and four bronze medals in Frankfurt. Married and the father of four children, Brown and his family reside in Auburn Hills.
Look for his column in Taste on the third Sunday of the month. He welcomes comments and questions from readers.
You can e-mail him at www.chef@townsendhotel.com.

Baked apples are a fall treat

Nothing goes better with a crisp fall day than a crisp fall apple. While apples are available year round, September through November is apple season. What you do with an apple is limited only by your imagination. An apple can be a meal or a snack, a salad or dessert, or part of any number of dishes.

Apples are a good source of vitamins A and C. And, at 80 calories each, they are filling but not fattening. They contain a protective phytochemical, quercetin, which may help reduce the risk of several types of cancer and possibly inflammation as well.

Select apples that are firm, fully developed in color and have a fresh smell. The skin should be smooth, without gouges or bruises. Store fresh apples in a cool, dark place or refrigerated in a plastic bag.

GINGER-STUFFED BAKED APPLES

4 Rome Beauty apples
1/4 cup crumbled gingersnaps (2 cookies)
2 tablespoons golden raisins
1 tablespoon dried currants or raisins
1 tablespoon light brown sugar
1 teaspoon minced crystallized ginger
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground cardamom
4 tablespoons wildflower oil



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Ginger-stuffed baked apples are seasoned with cardamom, cinnamon, and honey. They can be made three to four days in advance.

Preheat the oven to 375°F degrees F.
Peel apples, removing skin from only the top half of each.

Remove the cores from each. Using a spoon or peeler, remove enough flesh from the center of each to make an inch-wide cavity that reaches almost to the bottom. Place hollowed-out apples in an ovenproof dish just large enough to hold them without touching.

In a small bowl, combine gingersnaps, raisins, currants, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, and cardamom. Spoon mixture into the cavity of each apple. Drizzle a tablespoon of honey over each so

it coats the exposed flesh as it drips down. Add cider to the pan.

Bake apples uncovered until they are soft when pierced with a knife but not collapsing, about 50 to 60 minutes. After 30 minutes, add more cider if the pan looks dry. Cool apples to warm and place in individual bowls or dishes. Spoon some of the liquid from the pan over each apple and serve. Alternatively, cool, cover and store them in the refrigerator until ready to serve, up to 3 or 4 days. Bring chilled apples back to room temperature before serving. Makes 4 servings.

Per serving: 271 calories, 1 g. total fat (less than 1 g. saturated fat), 70 g. carbohydrates, 1 g. protein, 6 g. dietary fiber, 32 mg. sodium.

LEWTON

FROM PAGE 61

marshmallows to kabobs and bread on a stick!

Don't forget kitchen mitts. Wrap all ingredients in resealable bags to keep them bug free and dry. It is always a good idea to have a few back up food plans in case of rain or high winds.

FRIENDLY GRILLING FOODS

Mussels and clams are great in the Dutch oven or a cast iron pan with a little wine or beer, water, spices and herbs. The little guys will pop wide open when they're ready.

Seasoned and clean fish in the basket grate pan with handle.

Flank steak, marinated chicken breast or any meat on a skewer are easy crowd pleasers. Don't forget marinades or "mopping" sauces, they will help preserve meat stored in them while adding flavor.

(They also help safe guard texture, moisture and taste if you should happen to overcook.)

Whether your campfire mission is ambitious like lasagna with feta cheese or as simple as a perfect hamburger, plan ahead, bring the proper equipment and I believe you'll

find a new magic in mealtime at your campfire!

PINEAPPLE UPSIDE DOWN CAKE

Makes 1 cake
1 (20 ounces) can pineapple slices
1 cup packed brown sugar
12 maraschino cherries drained and halved
1 package (2 layer size) yellow cake mix
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Lightly grease the sides of your Dutch oven. Drain the pineapple, reserving liquid. Stir together pineapple liquid and brown sugar in Dutch oven. Arrange 6 or 7 pineapple rings atop the liquid, cutting 3 rings in half. Arrange the halves around the edge of the oven, cut side up.

Prepare the cake mix according to package directions, adding cinnamon to the dry mix. Spoon batter over the fruit and syrup.

Place 15 hot coals around the bottom, cover and place 20 hot coals on the lid. Cook for 50 minutes or until it tests done.

BREAD ON A STICK

Yield 8
1 one-pound loaf of frozen (thawed) or fresh made dough. Or choose your favorite flavor - cut into 8 equal pieces
4 tablespoons melted butter
1 teaspoon garlic powder
Wrap bread snugly in a "cork screw" fashion around a good long stout, preferably freshly cut

green sticks or flat metal kabob style stick.

Roast lightly over coals or wood embers as you would marshmallows, rotating the stick frequently, until bread is golden and puffy.

Dip in garlic butter and eat while warm

HOBBO BREAKFAST POT

Yield 6-8 servings
1 dozen whole eggs (or equivalent liquid eggs)
1 cup milk or 1/2 & 1/2
3/4 pound cooked, diced ham. (Or meat of your choice)
6 oz shredded Swiss cheese
6 sliced of Italian bread cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 small onion diced
1 small green pepper diced
1 tomato diced
1 tablespoon butter or oil
Salt & pepper to taste

Heat butter or oil in large cast iron Dutch oven and sauté onions & peppers for 2-3 minutes.

Add eggs, milk, ham, Swiss cheese and tomatoes; mix with whlop or fork until blended.

Stir in bread and season. Cover with lid and place over 8-10 coals. Cover the lid with 6-8 coals and bake approximately 25-35 minutes. Until firm to touch.

Kelli Lewton is the owner of 2 Unique Catering and an instructor in the culinary arts department at Schoolcraft College.