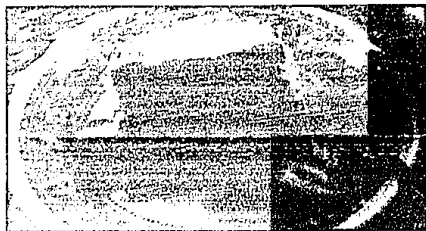


Baked Alaska: A seemingly magical dish



AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR CANCER RESEARCH

Baked Alaska: The meringue and cake insulate the ice cream in this wonderful dessert.

Who can find a better dessert than Baked Alaska? The culinary alchemy in this seemingly magical dish relies on a basic principle — the meringue and cake are both poor conductors of heat. As a result, they insulate the ice cream while the meringue browns in a hot oven. Making Baked Alaska requires just five ingredients, all of them sold at the supermarket. It takes a few, simple steps. Most of them can be done a day or more before the Alaska will be served.

You can use store-bought loaf cake for the slabs that form the base of this dessert. Or, make them from scratch using any favorite recipe, from a tender sponge cake to fudgy brownies.

You can use two pints of ice cream, making up combinations like this pairing of rich chocolate and strawberry. But if you prefer just one ice cream flavor, you can simply cut two slices from a half-gallon brick and shorten the preparation time by a couple of hours.

The soft meringue used to envelop the ice cream is made from pasteurized dried egg whites. Using this powder eliminates both the work of separating eggs and any concern about serving raw eggs. The satiny, marshmallow cloud of meringue it produces is stable and spreads like frosting.

- BAKED ALASKA**
 Fat-free chocolate or plain loaf cake, 13 to 16 ounces
 1 pint low-fat chocolate ice cream, slightly softened (see note)
 1 pint strawberry fat-free ice cream, slightly softened
 1/2 cup lukewarm water
 3 tablespoons dehydrated egg whites
 2/3 cup sugar
 1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar ice cubes
 1 cup strawberries (for garnish)

At least 8 hours before serving the Baked Alaska, cut off the domed top part of the cake and set it aside for another use. Slice the remaining rectangle of cake in half horizontally, making 2 slices, each about 1 inch thick. Place the bottom slice of cake on a heat-proof plate or a cake rack covered with foil.

Spread the chocolate ice cream over the cake, making a thick, even layer about 1 1/2 inches thick. Place the cake and ice cream, uncovered, in the freezer to solidify, 1-2 hours.

Set the second cake layer on top of the chocolate ice cream. Spread the cherry vanilla ice cream over it. Set in the freezer to solidify, 1-2 hours. At this point, you can cover the ice cream and cake with plastic wrap and keep it in the freezer for 1-2 days.

Set the oven rack in the lower third of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F.

For the meringue, carefully clean a large bowl and the blades of a hand-held beater to remove any traces of grease. Dry them with paper towels. Pour the water into the bowl. Stir in the egg white powder and let it sit 3 minutes. It will be lumpy.

Starting on low speed, beat the egg whites until they are frothy.

Add the cream of tartar. Increase the speed of the beater. When the whites are fluffy and opaque, start sprinkling in the sugar, a tablespoon at a time. Beat until the egg whites are glossy and thick enough to make stiff peaks, about 8 minutes.

Spread the meringue over the frozen loaf of cake and ice cream with a spatula, making a thick layer and using a swirling motion to make the meringue look nice.

Fill a large, shallow baking dish with ice cubes. Set it on the oven rack. Place the Baked Alaska on top of the ice. Bake until the meringue is lightly colored, with darker ridges and points, 4-6 minutes, watching it carefully. Cut the Baked Alaska into slices with a sharp knife and serve immediately.

Each of the 8 servings contains 274 calories and 1 gram of fat. (Recipe courtesy of the American Institute for Cancer Research.)

Salad is a quick and easy fix

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
 Confetti Pear and Spinach Salad is easily made, using fresh spinach and canned sliced pears, diced red bell pepper, walnuts and bacon. This recipe makes about 6 servings as a side dish at dinner; it could also be part of a healthful lunch menu, with soup, bread and cheese, if desired.

- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts (toasted if time permits)
- 3 strips bacon, cooked crisp and crumbled
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar-based salad dressing
- 1 teaspoon orange zest (grated rind)

Combine spinach, pears, bell pepper, walnuts and bacon in a salad bowl. Whisk orange zest into dressing and drizzle over salad. Toss before serving. Makes 6 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 187 cal., 5 g pro., 12 g fat, 17 g carbs., 3 g dietary fiber.

Recipe from: California Pear Advisory Board.

CONFETTI PEAR AND SPINACH SALAD

- 10-ounce package washed and ready-to-eat fresh spinach
- 15-ounce can sliced Bartlett pears in light syrup, drained
- 1/2 cup diced red bell pepper

Wine from page D1

Valley mountain parcel was purchased in 1998 and planted in 1998.

Because Bursick and Carano thought futuristically, about six acres of prime Alexander Valley benchland had been dedicated to a vine nursery. There, 16 different clones of cabernet sauvignon on seven different rootstocks were evaluated. Similarly, experimental plantings of merlot, sangiovese, syrah, malbec, petit verdot and cabernet franc were made. "This created a huge library block from which we drew valuable information before we started to plant the mountain parcels," Bursick explained.

An experimental winery within a winery was built at Ferrari-Carano's Dry Creek Valley property. In each vintage between 1989 and 1997, over 200 small experimental lots of red wine were carefully evaluated from library block grapes.

After experimenting for planting decisions, Ferrari-Carano focused attention to labor-intensive vineyard practices and man-

agement of its vineyards. When Bursick coupled this with winemaking techniques suited to mountain fruit intensity and managing tannins for drinkability, Ferrari-Carano's superior red wine image emerged.

With wines, the proof is in the taste. Try these Ferrari-Carano reds on for size — 1996 Merlot, \$27; 1995 Cabernet Sauvignon, \$38; 1996 Zinfandel, \$16, a steal at this price, and 1997 Ferrari-Carano Siena (a luxurious blend of sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon and malbec) \$30.

New wine books

No one other wine writer knows French wines like Clive Coates, author of "The Wines of France" (Wine Appreciation Guild, \$50). Having spent 20 years as a wine buyer for some of Britain's most prestigious wine firms, and passing the master of wine exam on his first try, he "retired" to wine writing. This is his sixth book, and it's written with authority and conviction about every French appellation. A must read for a wine aficionado.

"Wine Spectator's California Wine," by James Laube (Wine Spectator Press, \$40) is the most comprehensive guide available to over 700 California wineries, the wines, vintages and vineyards. Ratings and tasting notes for over 6,000 wines are included in this fully revised second edition. No other reference to the great wines of California is as complete. It's a fabulous reference that's written in an easy-to-read style.

Wine savings

You can save 25 percent off every bottle on the wine list, over 300 labels, at Too Cheez Restaurant, 27155 Sheraton Dr. in Novi, Monday-Thursday, through May 2000. Discount offered with meals only, wines by the glass are excluded. Call (248) 348-8555 for reservations and information.

Look for Focus on Wine on the first and third Sunday of the month in Taste. To leave a voice mail message for the Healds, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

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