

A cake straight from Irish kitchens

A proudly Irish Islesboro matriarch gave me this recipe. Eileen Shea Boardman sent this recipe along years ago, and as I do with practically all the recipes anyone sends me, I tucked it away for a time when I needed an idea or inspiration. I ended up making it to take as my contribution to a big reception held following her memorial service in mid-February, where I met her daughter-in-law, who was probably the original source of it. We'll miss Eileen and remember her with this cake.

I hate to say that the likely reason it is called "Irish" is less because it hails from the Old Sod than because it contains whiskey. The recipe calls for Irish Mist or Irish whiskey, in which we



SANDY OLIVER

TASTE BUDS

soak the golden raisins. Once it is baked, the slight hint of whiskey flavor is left behind while the alcohol all evaporates. Still, it is a very nice version of pound cake.

It used to be, of course, that pound cake had 1 pound each of flour, butter, sugar and eggs. What a wonderful rich, dense, buttery cake that makes. In fact, making historic cakes like pound cake convinced me I actually liked cake, having grown up on fluffy, overly sweet, box mixes, which I didn't think were particularly interesting.

When this comes out of the oven, it has a lovely crusty exterior. It is perfect to eat with a cup of tea or coffee — probably even good with a shot of whiskey.

Send queries or answers to Sandy Oliver, 1061 Main Road, Islesboro 04848. Email sandyoliver47@gmail.com. For recipes, tell us where they came from, list ingredients, specify

Irish Pound Cake

Yields 1 cake

Grated peel of one lemon
1 cup golden raisins
3 tablespoons Irish Mist or whiskey
1 cup butter
1 cup sugar
4 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups flour
½ teaspoon salt
¾ teaspoon baking powder

Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan, flour it and line the bottom with a piece of lightly greased parchment paper.

Put the lemon zest and raisins in a small bowl and drizzle the whiskey over it, tossing to coat.

Cream together the butter and sugar until the mixture is

fluffy.
Add the eggs, beating well after each addition.

Lift the raisins and zest with a slotted spoon and put into a separate bowl. Add the whiskey and vanilla to the egg mixture.

Whisk together the flour, salt and baking powder, and mix the flour into the egg, sugar, butter mixture, stirring only enough to blend.

Toss the raisins with a little bit of flour and fold into the batter.

Bake for 1 hour and 10 minutes. Test for doneness, and bake until golden, slightly cracked along the top and until a tester inserted comes out clean.

number of servings and do not abbreviate measurements. Include name, address and daytime phone number. And make sure to check out Sandy's blog at tastebuds.bangordailynews.com.

Lunchtime meals prepared by chef Richard LeRose at Vittles restaurant in Pittsfield.



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Vittles

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ragon and mustard are new for many. Touches like hot sauce made with a rainbow carrot base are a few octaves above what neighboring pizza joints are laying down.

"I'm flattered that someone would come 40 miles from Bangor to eat here," said LeRose, whose cozy, 49-seater feels like a diner. The 1900s building with high, pressed-tin ceilings is a gathering place for elevated but not fussy fare.

Vittles is not farm to table,

though the waitress, who also owns a farm, brings in seasonal veggies that end up as specials. Everything is made to order. Potatoes from Green Thumb Farms in Fryeburg become hand-cut fries and lightly seasoned potato chips. Inventive specials such as roasted duck breast club with brown butter sage mayo dressed spinach, bacon and tomato turn heads all day.

"We are taking the familiar and putting a twist on it," LeRose said. A pulled pork shepherd's pie is another example of his random twists that keep things lively.

On Friday and Saturday

nights, dinner is served. A new menu is created both nights, featuring rotating specials such as beer-battered Maine haddock and five-spice seared duck breast served with blueberry red wine reduction sauce.

Appetizers such as shrimp Mozambique served in a spicy buffalo garlic and wine butter sauce over focaccia bread, would be right at home in Portland's bustling restaurant scene. But LeRose is not intent on competing for food supremacy in a crowded market.

"I moved here to get out of the hubbub. I'm not interested in cookoffs," LeRose, 37, said. "What I do is not

very different from a good electrician or plumber."

Seeking accolades on blogs, mentions in food glossies, James Beard nods "are not essential to make me tick."

He creates wholesome meals broadened with on-trend ingredients. Glancing over his lunch menu last week, the cook winces. Sriracha is getting 86'd.

"The minute Frito-Lay starts using it," he says with a wry smile, "it's kind of over."

Vittlesofpittsfield.com 107 Main St., Pittsfield. For more information, call 207-487-8181. Open seven days per week. Dinner is served Friday and Saturday until 7:30 p.m.

Pico De Gallo Chicken Skillet

Serves 4

1 pound thin-cut chicken breasts (or 1 pound chicken breasts, pounded thin)
salt and pepper, to taste
1 14.5-ounce can petite diced tomatoes
1 tablespoon finely diced fresh jalapeno
1 clove garlic, minced
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro
1 scallion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon lime juice

Season the chicken breasts

all over with salt and pepper. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the chicken breasts and cook for 3 to 4 minutes per side until browned.

Meanwhile, stir together the tomatoes (with juices), jalapeno, garlic, cilantro, red onion and lime juice. Pour over the chicken breasts. Cover, and cook for 10 to 15 minutes until cooked through.

Serve immediately.



SARAH WALKER CARON | BDN

Caron

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This is one we love.

Pico de gallo is a fresh, uncooked tomato salsa. But it's winter and fresh tomatoes in Maine are, well, out of season. (To be fair, hydroponic tomatoes are available, though.) So I trade fresh

tomatoes for canned petite diced tomatoes for this recipe.

Then the chicken cooks under the sauce a little more, until it's cooked through and tender.

Once it's done, serve it. This is delicious with avocado slices and some flavorful rice. Or shred it to top tostadas. And then enjoy. Good food is worth savoring.

Sarah Walker Caron is the senior features editor for the Bangor Daily News and author of "Grains as Mains: Modern Recipes Using Ancient Grains," available at bookstores everywhere including The Briar Patch and Bull Moose in Bangor. For more delicious recipes, check out Maine Course at mainecourse.bangordailynews.com.

The expansion coincides with expanding sales of the fifth generation ice cream maker into Northern Virginia, Indiana, North Carolina, South Carolina and Ohio.

So when do the ice cream stands open? On March 18, the Bangor and Farmington stands will open at 11 a.m. Auburn, Skowhegan and Waterville will open at noon.

There's free ice cream for fans that evening, too. From 6 to 8 p.m. at each stand, Gifford's will give away a free small (2 scoop) cone to customers. Want to try the newest ice cream stand flavors? A small (2 scoop) cone of new flavors will be \$1.99 through April 3.

Gifford's

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celebrate Acadia National Park's 100th birthday. The other flavor is Chocolate Brownie Crunch, a mix of fudgy brownie chunks dunked in light chocolate ice cream swirled with chocolate-coated cookie crunch. According to a news release, Gifford's has pledged to donate 5 percent of this year's proceeds from its two newest flavors to Friends of Acadia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the park.

Why those flavors to cele-

Week

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tomers, rather than a more limited three-course selection.

Plus, for Queen City restaurateurs, there are other ways to get customers through the door.

"We don't do any advertising because we're firm believers in the New England word of mouth tradition," Peppard said.

And it works.

One-size doesn't fit all

Portland's varied, prolific and high-wattage dining scene attracts a natural built-in audience for such events. During the restaurant week, many Port City participants echoed Turin's statement that it's among the busiest weeks of the year.

"Portland is the restaurant epicenter of Maine," said Britt. "It's a straight numbers situation."

But for other communities, a statewide restaurant week isn't as appealing as a local one.

"I think that no one would argue that Portland is the epicenter of the culinary scene in Maine," Tanya Emery, director of community and economic development for Bangor, said.

Emery pointed out that good food can be found throughout Maine.

"There is a really amazing food scene all across the state," she said.

In Biddeford, a scrappier, community-focused restaurant week kicked off March 13. Participation in Biddeford Restaurant Week is free, which appeals to the city's cluster of small culinary businesses.

"It's not a great climate for taking risks on marketing," said Delilah Poupre, economic director of Heart of Biddeford, the nonprofit that runs the event. If restaurants and cafes had a guaranteed return on investment that would be different.

"It's hard to tell what marketing angle yields what results," she said. "A direct approach in a small town works."

Emery has been a part of a conversation amongst the Bangor community about creating an event dedicated to local cuisine.

"I'm a huge fan of Chop Chop in Saint John," said Emery.

Chop Chop Winter Restaurant Week in Saint John, New Brunswick, is a weeklong event that took place in February. Restaurants offer unique menu options and special pricing, similar to Maine Restaurant Week.

"It's phenomenal and hyper-local," Emery said.

"I would love to see Bangor do something similar to that and learn from our friends in Canada," she said.

Emil Rivera, chef of Sur Lie is thrilled Portland's restaurant scene is so robust, but as a Brunswick resident, he wants to see restaurants outside of Maine's largest city get into the game.

"Brunswick has a mini restaurant scene, and I'd like to see what's going on in my town and in Freeport," Rivera said.

With restaurant week deals at upscale places such as Portland's Timber, locat-

ed on Exchange Street, where a ribeye is priced at \$62, the unattainable becomes attainable. Prix fixe pricing and packed rooms creates a buzz that carries into the spring.

"I can only assume that people see the dining scene in Portland as a fantasy, and this is an excuse to try Portland," said Rivera. "They have an excuse to splurge."

'Good for the brand'

Matt Haskell, owner of Blaze in downtown Bangor, also opted out this year but for a different reason.

"Honestly, I'm so busy," Haskell said. "I'm straight out with all my businesses."

As the owner of Blaze in Bangor, Blaze in Bar Harbor, Finback Alehouse in Bar Harbor and Blaze's new mobile trailer, he simply didn't have the time. Usually a snowbird, Haskell didn't winter in south Florida this year to stay and work on two upcoming projects in Bangor and Bar Harbor.

"I just basically was too busy to do it," he said. "It wasn't because I don't think it's worth doing."

In the past, Maine Restaurant Week generated "exposure" and "was good for the brand," said Haskell, adding that it spurred creativity. Dishes created for Maine Restaurant Week at Blaze in the past, such as scallop tacos — pan seared scallops, kimchi, orange plum salsa, gochujang aioli and fried wonton strips — are now on the everyday menu. Haskell plans on participating again in the future and has been happy with the event outcome in the past.

Though Haskell enjoys participating in Maine Restaurant Week, he suggested that it may be useful for Bangor to take on its own event targeted at restaurants in the area.

"I'd like to see more Bangor restaurants get involved or possibly do our own," said Haskell.

Restaurant week for Bangor?

Britt wants to have better representation in Bangor and other parts of Maine.

"We love Bangor," he said. "We wish more restaurants would participate."

To make that happen, Britt is going to drive up to Bangor, walk into establishments and introduce himself to proprietors.

"After this year's experience it's clear, we don't know each other well enough. There is not enough understanding of what we do to drive customers into restaurants," he said.

To become more inclusive, next year's event will likely include events outside of Cumberland County to "move it across the state."

"We have kicked the idea around of running a Bangor Restaurant Week or a Mid-coast Restaurant Week to focus on individual markets," he said. "But it's so much work to create this one every year, that that idea frankly scares us."

For now, the question on Britt's mind is simple: "What do we need to do to get more restaurants in Bangor involved?"

But the answer remains elusive.

St. Patrick's Day Special

Traditional Irish Boiled Dinner

featuring corned beef, cabbage, potatoes,

carrots and turnip.

\$9.49



Breakfast served all day

