

Fruitcake Hater's Fruitcake



SANDY OLIVER

Oliver

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liqueur dribbled on top, which helps to preserve the cake, seemed a little flexible, too, and I used some homemade lemon brandy instead of the orange liqueur.

The recipe is long, but don't let it seem daunting. Prep all the fruit and nuts.

Assemble the dry ingredients. Deal with the butter, sugar and eggs just as you would for any cake. Half of the dry ingredients are essentially used to dredge the fruit and nuts, but aside from that it all goes together straightforwardly.

Even if you think you have given up on fruitcake, try this one. If you don't like it, then we'll excuse you from future fruitcake.

Send queries or answers to Sandy Oliver, 1061 Main Road, Islesboro 04848. Email sandyloliver47@gmail.com. For recipes, tell us where they came from, list ingredients, specify 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.

Fruitcake Hater's Fruitcake

Yields 4 loaves

Cake

- 3 lbs. dried apricots, sliced
- 1½ lbs. pitted dates, sliced
- 2 lbs. pecan pieces or halves
- 1 lb. golden raisins
- 2 cups (4 sticks) softened butter
- 2¼ cups firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 cup honey
- 10 eggs
- 4 cups sifted flour
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup apricot nectar
- ½ cup light cream
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice

Topping

- 1 cup brandy or cognac
- ¼ cup orange-flavored liqueur
- Preheat the oven to 250 degrees.
- Butter and flour four 9½-by-5-inch loaf pans.
- Assemble the fruits and nuts and put into a large bowl.

In a large bowl, cream together butter, brown

sugar and honey. Add eggs, beating well after each addition.

In another large bowl, sift together flour, spices, salt and baking powder. Beat half this mixture into the sugar mixture. Add the remaining flour mixture to the fruit and nuts.

In a small bowl combine the apricot nectar, cream, lemon juice, add this to the batter and mix. Finally, fold in the dried fruit and nut mix to the batter.

Divide the batter among the loaf pans.

Bake for 2½ to 3 hours or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Transfer the cakes to racks and let them cool in the pans.

Combine the brandy and liqueur and sprinkle each cake with a quarter of the mixture. Then let cakes stand one hour.

Remove cakes from pans and chill them, tightly wrapped in foil, for at least one week.

Opening

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plemented by a design focused on oak and travertine accents.

For Ranni, an admirer of Bangor's rich history and historical buildings, the pizzeria will be yet another tribute to his culture and the traditions native to it. But it also will be part of his dedication to preserving the character in the spaces his eateries inhabit.

"We've delayed [the opening] a little bit because we've tried to find the right design for the place," Ranni said.

Massimo's Cucina Italiana, which opened in 2007, was the first of Ranni's business ventures in Bangor after moving to the state from New Jersey. Before moving, he made breads, pizza and pastries at his bakery Il Forno in Montclair, New Jersey. However, the hustle and bustle became tiresome.

"We decided, you know, that's enough. No more running. No more going crazy. Let's move. And we came up to Maine," Ranni said.

On Nov. 21, the Rannis celebrated the eighth anniversary of opening Massimo's Cucina Italiana. The restaurant and the new pizzeria, which are just down the street from one another, will be open around the same times, and it was important for the Rannis that the two establishments complement rather than compete with each other.

The pizzeria's menu will offer fare that differs from the restaurant's pasta, meat and seafood dishes. Ranni also plans to offer pizza to go. The doors to the kitchen at Massimo's Pizza Bar will be wide open, and patrons can watch as their pizza is prepared. However, they shouldn't expect to see any fancy dough tossing.

"Pizza is not about this," Ranni said, tossing his hands in the air. "That's an American thing."

Rather, they can expect to see Ranni and his employees working the dough into a carefully prepared thin layer to give Bangor residents a taste of Italy.

Tips

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Like a cooking show, have all ingredients in bowls ready to go."

Her signature holiday pie is a tart and sweet cranberry. Made with local berries tucked into an all-butter pastry crust, it's topped with crumbled oats and roasted pistachios.

How does she get a flaky, tender crust?

"Use the best butter you can find with the highest fat content," says Holt, who aims for an 84 percent European-style butter and has gone up to 86 percent. "The best butter you can find makes the best crust. That is just how it is.

She admits, "People swear by their grandmother's crust. Everyone has different ideas about it and if it works keep doing it for sure."

What about Crisco or margarine?

"Don't consider margarine, it's kind of fake. It's like vegetable oil. Some people swear by Crisco. I think it makes a crisp, oily crust. Butter makes a tender, flaky crust that has way more flavor. If you learn to handle your dough correctly all you need is butter."

On handling the dough

"Butter has to be kept very cold. Cut butter into small pieces ahead of time and let it get really, really cold."

Best tool

"A food processor with a sharp blade. If your butter is cold and you grind your butter with dry ingredients the butter starts to look like peas."

Next, gather dough together in a ball and let it sit overnight wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator. Consistency is key.

"It should stick together: a bit like Play-Doh," says Holt. "When you roll pie dough out, butter spreads out in layers, and when it bakes it creates air pockets and you get a tender, flakey crust."

Practice makes perfect

"You don't want to overhydrate. Strike a balance between a little too dry and just wet enough. You have to learn how the dough feels in your hands. Not too wet. You have to get used to it. It should feel like crumbly sand that sticks together in your hands, almost like Play-Doh, but not wet or too sticky." Tip: Make dough the day before. Wrap it tightly and refrigerate.

Why are people intimidated by crust?

"A lot can go wrong. If you are nervous about it, make a large batch and hydrate it differently, separate into different containers to feel what you are doing. Fill up a container with ice and water and a few dashes of vinegar, which adds tang to dough and tenderizes the dough."

How much?

"Unlike a lot of things in this kitchen we don't measure the water for the pie dough. It can depend on the day and how humid it is and the temperature of your hands — all these can have a lot to do with it."



KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

The cranberry pie, topped with pistachios and oats, at Tandem Coffee + Bakery is a new New England classic.

Coffee pairing suggestions?

"A rich and flavorful coffee from South and Central America, or coffees with more bite and acidity from East Africa. A complicated flavor can really balance out the sweetness of a cranberry pie. Coffee and pie together is my dream meal.

That's all I need in my life, a cup of black coffee and a slice of pie."

Tandem Coffee + Bakery, 742 Congress St., Portland.

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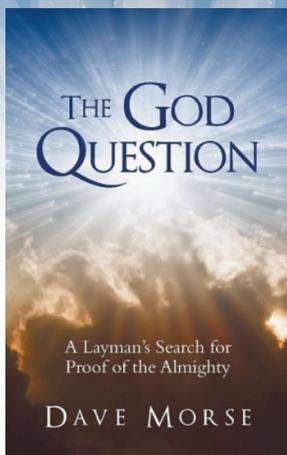
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