Pistachio-Cranberry Biscotti Straws
Double-Ginger Pound Cake with Brown Sugar Mascarpone Whipped Cream
Kahlua Truffle Triangles
Nutty Caramel Thumbprints
Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecakes
SHOPPING LIST

Fresh Produce
2 oranges (for 1 Tbs. of zest and 1 Tbs. of juice)

Eggs & Dairy:
12 large eggs
2 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese
8 oz. mascarpone
1 pint heavy cream
1 quart whole or 2% milk
1 quart buttermilk
7 sticks (1-3/4 lb.) unsalted butter

Other Groceries:
1 can pure solid-pack canned pumpkin
3/4 cup unsalted shelled pistachio nuts
1/2 cup sweetened dried cranberries
1/2 cup crystallized ginger
6 oz. individually wrapped caramels, such as Kraft brand
2 oz. pecan halves (enough for 1/3 cup chopped)
1 lb. bittersweet or semi-sweet chocolate
1 bottle Kahlúa (2 Tbs. needed)

Pantry Staples:
8 cups all-purpose flour
3 cups granulated sugar
2 cups confectioners’ sugar
1 cup light brown sugar
3 Tbs. pure vanilla extract
3-1/2 tsp. baking powder
2-3/4 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. baking soda
1/8 tsp. ground nutmeg
table salt
cooking spray

PAIRING DRINKS WITH HOLIDAY SWEETS

At this party, you can’t go wrong with setting out a selection of coffees and teas for your guests to choose from. If you’d like to serve alcohol too, the key to matching drinks with desserts is to choose liqueurs or wines that are sweeter than the dessert. Try one or more of these ideas:

Coffee liqueurs like Kahlúa always taste good with chocolate or coffee-chocolate desserts. Enjoy the liqueurs in French- or Italian-roast coffee topped with fresh whipped cream, or straightup in a liqueur glass.

Fruit-based liqueurs like the legendary French raspberry liqueur Chambord work well with any dessert that has a fruit element. Serve fruit-based liqueurs chilled without ice in a liqueur glass, or add an ounce to a glass of sparkling wine or nonvintage Champagne.

A sweet fortified wine, such as Pedro Ximenez sherry or Moscatel sherry, is delicious with chocolate or caramel desserts; serve either at room temperature in a small wine glass.

MENU TIMELINE

Up to 6 weeks ahead:
Make and freeze the biscotti.

Up to 1 month ahead:
Make and freeze the cheesecakes.
Bake (but don’t fill) the carmel thumbprint cookies and freeze.
Make and freeze the pan of Kahlúa triangles (but don’t cut into triangles).

Two days ahead:
Make the pound cake but don’t dust with sugar; store at room temperature.
Remove the mini cheesecakes and the Kahlúa triangles from the freezer and thaw, still wrapped, in the refrigerator.

One day ahead:
Make the caramel filling for the thumbprint cookies and fill them; store at room temperature.
Cut the Kahlúa truffles into triangles, arrange on a rimmed sheet pan in a single layer, cover the pan with plastic, and refrigerate.

Remove the biscotti straws from the freezer and thaw, in the container, at room temperature.
Select the serving plates and utensils for the desserts, along with linens, candles, and other table decorations, and set the table.

The morning of the party:
Put the pound cake on a serving plate, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and set on the table.
Arrange the Kahlúa triangles and mini cheesecakes on platters or plates, cover loosely with plastic, and refrigerate.

The morning of the party:
Taste the biscotti straws and, if you like, refresh their flavor by baking them on a cookie sheet at 350°F for 5 minutes; arrange the biscotti in a tall glass or on a platter and set on the table.

Up to 4 hours ahead:
Make sure you’ve left room on the table for all of the desserts; some will stay in the fridge until the last minute.
Arrange the thumbprint cookies on a plate or platter, cover loosely with plastic, and set out on the table.
Make the brown sugar whipped cream, spoon into a serving dish, and refrigerate.

Just before the guests arrive:
Remove the whipped cream, Kahlúa triangles, and cheesecakes from the fridge and put them on the table.

As guests arrive:
Remove plastic wrap from desserts on the table.
Dust the pound cake with sugar.
Light the candles.
Pistachio-Cranberry Biscotti Straws

by Abigail Johnson Dodge

Yields about 2-1/2 dozen biscotti.

ingredients

5-5/8 oz. (1-1/4 cups) all-purpose flour
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. table salt
3/4 cup unsalted shelled pistachio nuts (3-1/2 oz.)
1/2 cup sweetened dried cranberries (2-1/2 oz.)
1 large egg
1 large egg white
1 Tbs. finely grated orange zest (from about 2 oranges)
1 Tbs. fresh orange juice
3/4 tsp. pure vanilla extract

how to make

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Line a large cookie sheet with parchment or a nonstick baking liner.

In the bowl of an electric stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt on low speed until well blended. On low speed (or with a wooden spoon if mixing by hand), briefly mix in the nuts and cranberries.

In a small bowl or a 1-cup glass measure, whisk together the egg, egg white, orange zest, orange juice, and vanilla. With the mixer on low speed, slowly pour in the egg mixture (mix in with the spoon if mixing by hand). Continue mixing (or mixing with a wooden spoon or your hands), until the dough is well blended and forms a sticky, moist dough, 1 to 2 minutes.

Dump the dough onto the lined cookie sheet. Using slightly damp hands, shape the dough into a 7x11-1/2-inch rectangle, wetting your hands as needed. Press and shape the dough as evenly as possible.

Bake until the rectangle is golden brown on top and slightly darker brown around the edges, about 25 minutes. Transfer the cookie sheet to a rack to cool for about 10 minutes or until it can be easily handled.

Transfer the biscotti to a cutting board; use a spatula to loosen it from the parchment if necessary. Using a serrated knife, cut the biscotti crosswise into slices about 1/3 inch thick. (I use a gentle sawing motion to break through the crust. After that, a firm push down on the knife is all that’s needed.) Discard the parchment, return the slices to the cookie sheet, and arrange them with a cut side down. (It’s all right if they touch because they don’t spread.)

Bake until the biscotti are light golden brown and feel dry, about 14 minutes. Transfer the cookie sheet to a rack and cool the biscotti completely; they’ll crisp as they cool.

make ahead tips

The cooled biscotti can be frozen for up to 6 weeks or stored at room temperature for up to 3 weeks, layered between sheets of parchment or waxed paper in an airtight container.
Double-Ginger Pound Cake with Brown Sugar Mascarpone Whipped Cream

by Abigail Johnson Dodge

Serves twelve.

ingredients

For the cake:
1/2 lb. (1 cup.) unsalted butter, at room temperature; plus 1/2 to 1 Tbs., melted, for the pan
12 oz. (2-2/3 cups) all-purpose flour, plus more for the pan
2-1/2 tsp. baking powder
2-1/2 tsp. ground ginger
3/4 tsp. table salt
3/4 tsp. baking soda
3/4 cup granulated sugar
3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
4 large eggs
3/4 cup buttermilk
1/2 cup finely chopped crystallized ginger
1 to 2 tsp. confectioners’ sugar (optional)

For the brown sugar whipped cream:
8 oz. mascarpone
1 cup heavy cream
1/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

how to make

Make the cake:
Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Grease a 10-cup fluted tube pan with the melted butter, using a brush to get into all the nooks and crannies. Lightly flour the pan, tapping out any excess flour.
In a medium bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, ground ginger, salt, and baking soda. Whisk until well blended and set aside.
In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or in a large bowl using a hand-held electric mixer, beat the butter on medium-high speed until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl, add the sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla. Continue beating until very well combined and fluffy, about another 4 minutes. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition, and scraping down the bowl as necessary. Add slightly more than half the flour mixture and stir with a rubber spatula until just blended. Add the buttermilk and stir until just blended. Add the crystallized ginger to the remaining flour mixture and use your fingers to break up the clumps of ginger. Add the flour mixture to the batter and stir gently until just blended. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Bake until a cake tester or toothpick inserted in the center comes out with just a few small, moist crumbs attached, 50 to 55 minutes. Set the pan on a rack and let cool for about 15 minutes. If necessary, run a knife between the cake and the top edge of the pan to loosen the cake. Invert the cake onto a rack, lift off the pan, and allow the cake to cool completely. If using confectioners’ sugar, sift it over the cake just before serving.

Make the whipped cream:
In a medium bowl, combine the mascarpone, heavy cream, brown sugar, and vanilla. Using an electric mixer, beat on low speed until the ingredients are combined, about 1 minute. Increase the speed to medium high and continue beating until the cream is thick and holds firm peaks, 30 to 90 seconds. Be careful not to overwhip or the cream will become grainy. Serve with the cake.

make ahead tips

Bake the cake up to 5 days ahead but don’t dust with sugar. Wrap the cooled cake in plastic wrap and store at room temperature.
Kahlúa Truffle Triangles

by Abigail Johnson Dodge

Yields about 6 dozen 1-1/2- to 2-inch triangles.

ingredients

For the crust:
- 6-3/4 oz. (1-1/2 cups) all-purpose flour
- 3 oz. (3/4 cup) confectioners’ sugar
- 1/4 tsp. table salt
- 6 oz. (12 Tbs.) cold, unsalted butter, cut into 10 pieces, more for the pan
- 1/2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

For the filling:
- 1 lb. semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, broken into squares or very coarsely chopped
- 3/4 cup whole or 2% milk
- 4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces
- 4 large eggs
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 Tbs. Kahlúa

how to make

Make the crust:
Position an oven rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking pan with foil, allowing foil to overhang the long sides of the pan to act as handles for removing the cookie later. Lightly butter the foil.

In a food processor, combine the flour, confectioners’ sugar, and salt. Process the ingredients briefly to combine, about 15 seconds. Scatter the cold butter pieces and the vanilla over the flour mixture and process, using short pulses, until the dough begins to form small clumps, 1 to 1-1/2 minutes. Turn the dough into the prepared pan. Using lightly floured fingertips, press the dough into the pan in a smooth, even layer. Bake until pale golden, especially around the edges, 22 to 25 minutes. Do not overbake or the crust will be hard and crispy. Transfer the pan to a cooling rack and lower the oven temperature to 325°F.

Make the filling:
In a medium bowl, melt the chocolate, milk, and butter together over a pot of barely simmering water or in the microwave. Whisk until smooth and set aside to cool slightly.

In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl, using a hand-held electric mixer, beat the eggs, sugar, and Kahlúa on medium-high speed until foamy and lighter in color, 2 minutes. Reduce the speed to low and gradually add the chocolate mixture. Stop the mixer and scrape down the bowl and beater. Beat on medium speed until well blended, about 30 seconds.

Pour the chocolate batter over the baked crust and spread evenly. Bake until the sides are slightly puffed and a toothpick inserted near the center comes out wet and gooey but not liquid, 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer the pan to a rack. As it cools, the center may sink a bit, leaving the edges slightly (about 1/2 inch) elevated. While the filling is still warm, use your fingertips to gently press the edges down to the level of the center, if necessary.

When completely cool, cover with plastic and refrigerate until very cold, at least 12 hours or up to 2 days. To serve, using the foil as handles, lift the rectangle from the pan and set it on a cutting board. Tipping the rectangle, carefully peel away the foil. Using a hot knife, cut the rectangle lengthwise into 1-1/2-inch strips, wiping the blade clean before each cut. Cut each strip on alternating diagonals to make small triangles. Let sit at room temperature for about 5 minutes before serving.

make ahead tips

You can bake these up to 1 month ahead: Wrap the cooled baking pan in heavy duty plastic wrap and freeze (no need to cut them into triangles first). The baked truffles can also be refrigerated, wrapped in plastic, for up to 2 days.
Nutty Caramel Thumbprint Cookies

by Abigail Johnson Dodge

This cookie recipe uses a great shortcut: melted store-bought caramels as a filling for the thumbprints. Look for individually wrapped caramels in the candy aisle of the supermarket.

Yields about 2 dozen cookies.

ingredients

For the cookies:
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2-1/2 oz. (2/3 cup) confectioners’ sugar
1-1/2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1/2 tsp. table salt
10 oz. (2-1/4 cups) all-purpose flour

For the caramel filling:
22 small caramels (6 oz.), such as Kraft brand
3 Tbs. heavy cream
1-1/2 oz. (1/3 cup) finely chopped pecans, lightly toasted

how to make

Make the cookies:
Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners.

In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held electric mixer, beat the butter, confectioners’ sugar, vanilla, and salt on medium speed until well blended and smooth, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl and beater. Add the flour and mix on low speed until a soft dough forms, about 1 minute.

Using two teaspoon measures, scoop up about two tsp. of dough at a time, and using your palms, roll into smooth balls that are 1 to 1-1/4 inches in diameter. Arrange them about 1-1/2 inches apart on the lined cookie sheets. Using the back of a 1/2 tsp. measure, press down into the middle of each mound to make a well that is almost as deep as the dough ball. (If the edges crack or break open, it’s best to reroll and try again—the finished cookie will look better and hold the caramel without leaking).

Bake one sheet at a time until the tops of the cookies look dry and the edges are golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the cookie sheet for 5 minutes and then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

Make the caramel filling:
In a small saucepan, combine the unwrapped caramels and heavy cream. Set the pan over very low heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the caramels have melted and the mixture is smooth, 4 to 6 minutes. Use the caramel while warm.

Arrange the cooled cookies on a cookie sheet or jelly roll pan. Using a small spoon or spatula, drizzle the warm caramel into each indentation, filling to the rim but not overflowing. Scatter the nuts over the caramel and press lightly into the caramel. Cool completely before storing or serving.

make ahead tips

Baked, unfilled cookies can be frozen for 1 month or stored at room temperature for 5 days. Layer them between parchment or waxed paper in an airtight container. You can fill the cookies up to 3 days ahead. Arrange them on a sheet pan in a single layer and cover tightly with plastic (don’t let it touch the caramel tops). Store at room temperature.

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Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecakes

by Abigail Johnson Dodge

Yields 12 mini cheesecakes.

**ingredients**

- Cooking spray
- 2 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese, at room temperature
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1-1/2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- Pinch table salt
- 2 large eggs
- 1/3 cup pure solid-pack canned pumpkin
- 2-1/4 tsp. all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/8 tsp. ground nutmeg

**how to make**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Line 12 standard muffin tins (approximately 2-3/4 inches in diameter) with foil liners and coat lightly with cooking spray.

In the bowl of an electric stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held electric mixer) beat the cream cheese on medium-high speed until very smooth and fluffy, stopping to scrape down the bowl as necessary, about 4 minutes. Add the sugar, vanilla, and salt, and continue beating until well blended and smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl frequently, about 1 minute; there should be no lumps. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating on medium speed until just blended. (Don’t overbeat once the eggs are added or the cheesecakes will puff and crack during baking.)

Transfer 2/3 cup of the batter to a small bowl. Add the pumpkin, flour, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg to the small bowl and stir with a wooden spoon until well blended.

Divide the plain batter among the muffin cups (about 2 generous Tbs. in each). Then divide the pumpkin batter evenly among the cups (about 1 generous Tbs. in each). Drag the tip of a wooden skewer, toothpick, or paring knife through the two batters in a random, swirly pattern to create a marbled look.

Bake until the centers of the cheesecakes barely jiggle when nudged, 15 to 18 minutes. Set the muffin tins on a rack and let cool completely. Cover and refrigerate until very cold, at least 6 hours or up to 3 days.

**make ahead tips**

The baked cheesecakes can be refrigerated, covered for 3 days or frozen for 1 month. Freeze the cooled cheesecakes in the tins in heavy-duty zip-top plastic bags, or remove them from the tins and arrange in airtight containers.