

Recipes included at this site do not appear in
A Worldwide Vegetarian Journey to Discover the Foods That Nourish America's Immigrant Soul.

December 2023

DO AHEAD HOLIDAY IDEAS:

Cheddar Blue Pot

Cheddar Cheese Breakfast *Strata* with Apples

**Easy Frozen Italian Coffee – Hazelnut – Nutmeg
Cream**

Italian Chocolate Tea Biscuits

Northern Italian Tomato Cream Sauce

**Pureéd Cauliflower, Leek, and *Cannellini* Bean
Soup with Sun-Dried Tomatoes**

Sour Cream Coffeecake with Walnut *Streusel*

How well I remember the pressure of meal preparation around the holidays during those years when our extended family was close by and much larger. Now I cook for the two of us but the “do ahead” recipes that I evolved to save my sanity are still part of my repertoire. Over the years I have often shared “do-ahead” recipes that I have found useful, sincerely hoping that they have been useful to you. Actually, in May 2020 I posted a column “your schedule; how advanced prep and *mise en place* can help” in which we looked at solving the time limitations of our busy lives. [See *recipe archives – May 2020.*] Not everybody is retired; not everybody works at home, but no matter what our circumstances, we have to get nutritious meals on the table. Although you may have adopted some advanced preparation techniques to make every day food preparation easier, at the holidays advanced preparation is vitally useful. The ultimate pre-prep is the ability to prepare do-ahead meal components when you have time, to make soup bases, bake several small cakes, make frostings, bake loaves of bread, make cookie doughs, make ice creams, make a lasagna or other freezable casserole or two or three, cook and mash potatoes and squash. Then, let your freezer be your stalwart assistant.

We all know that the holidays are not just meals. There is cleaning, decorating, shopping, wrapping gifts, laundry, and . . . and . . . and . . . and let’s not forget that some of us continue working during those weeks even if it is escaping to our home offices for a few hours to write, research, read, or grade term papers. Pre-prep and *mis en place* only gets you a few hours. Helpful, yes, but around the demands and chaos of the end-of-year holidays you probably need days of leeway not just hours.

There is another move that can help you be prepared. Instead of buying one or two of the non-perishable food items you use frequently for your pantry shelves or freezer, buy three or four. Right there you have potential, you have available resources from which you can make menu plans without taking time out to go shopping. The rigors of shopping during the Covid-19 pandemic have been a training camp, a laboratory if you will, for this kind of readiness. Planning and setting up food orders a month in advance is the way we have lived with the pandemic isolation.

The holidays always spurred me to try new ideas which, of course, can be counter-productive when time is inevitably a complication. Glorious menus for family gatherings were eventually pared down as the days ticked by. Some might say “you grow too soon old and too late smart,” a truth you realize only when you have fulfilled the proverb.

The recipes I have included this month are perhaps new ideas wrapped in a big red bow of convenience. All can be prepared in advance, hours ahead, days ahead, whenever you have prep time and all can make busy days less harried and any surprise visits a pleasure for the hostess. From appetizer to dessert, from brunch to an evening gathering you can expand your repertoire of “do-ahead” recipes and they may help when you are in your annual survival mode.



CHEDDAR – BLUE POT

TPT - 6 hours and 10 minutes;
6 hours = chilling period

Just before the holidays, before life became frantic, a crock of this cheese spread was made and stored in the refrigerator. We were, therefore, ready for impromptu demands such as drop-in guests, hungry family, famished shoppers, and simple dinners. When that crock was empty, we made another crock for the holidays!

1/4 cup plain yogurt

2 tablespoons coarsely chopped onion

2 ounces *sharp* Cheddar cheese

1/4 cup *finely* crumbled (about 1 ounce) Danish blue cheese

1 1/2 teaspoons Port wine

Set two automatic drip coffeemaker filters into a sieve over a medium-sized bowl or a yogurt filter over a 1-cup measuring cup. Pour the yogurt into the filters and set in the refrigerator. Allow to drain for about 3 hours, or until of the consistency appropriate for your use.

Using the food processor fitted with steel knife, chop onion until *very finely* chopped.*

Fit the food processor with shredding disk. Shred Cheddar cheese.

Refit the food processor with steel knife. Add crumbled blue cheese, drained yogurt, and Port wine. Process until a smooth consistency is achieved.

Pack into a crock or other suitable storage and serving pot. Refrigerate at least 6 hours before serving as a spread for crackers, melba toast, dried French bread slices, or *crudités* such as celery, cucumber, or zucchini.**

Yields about 3/4 cupful
adequate for about 2-4 people
as an appetizer offering



Notes: *If a food processor is unavailable, this may be prepared by hand using a fork to blend ingredients or by using an electric mixer. Chop onion finely and shred Cheddar cheese before combining with remaining ingredients.

**An interesting appetizer can be prepared by spooning this cheese mixture into raw mushroom caps. Serve CHEDDAR-BLUE STUFFED MUSHROOMS at room temperature.

This recipe can be doubled or tripled easily, when necessary.

1/12 SERVING (i. e., per tablespoonful) –
PROTEIN = 2.2 g.; FAT = 2.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 1.2 g.;
CALORIES = 34; CALORIES FROM FAT = 61%

CHEDDAR CHEESE BREAKFAST STRATA WITH APPLES

TPT - 4 hours and 50 minutes;
4 hours = refrigeration period

Apples and Cheddar cheese are perfectly partnered in this very American Heartland bread and cheese pudding, often called a “strata.” The apple pieces are a delightful surprise with your first forkful. This recipe is an excellent choice as a breakfast menu when you have overnight guests since it is best assembled the day before.

3 slices whole wheat bread—thinly sliced
3 teaspoons butter—softened to room temperature

1/2 cup shredded (about 4 ounces) mild Cheddar cheese
1 medium, Golden Delicious apple—peeled, quartered, cored and seeded, and thinly sliced
Ground allspice, to taste
Ground mace, to taste

6 tablespoons fat-free pasteurized eggs
3/4 cup skimmed milk



Choose a **9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan** into which one and a half slices of bread will fit tightly in a single layer. Prepare dish by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating.

Spread each slice of bread with 1 teaspoonful of *softened* butter. Arrange one and a half slices, buttered side up, in prepared baking dish. Sprinkle evenly with *one-half* of shredded cheese. Arrange apple slices over the scattered cheese, covering the whole surface as evenly as possible. Sprinkle ground allspice and mace over apple slices. Top with one of the remaining bread slices, buttered side up, aligning the top slice with the bottom slice. Layer over with remaining cheese.

In a mixing bowl, using a wire whisk, beat pasteurized eggs and milk. Pour egg–milk mixture over bread and cheese layers, being sure to cover all surfaces.

Cover baking dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or preferably overnight.*

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.

Bake uncovered for about 35 minutes, or until custard is set.

Try to serve at once. Otherwise, keep warm on a warming tray for no more than 15 minutes. Cut *strata* “sandwiches” with a spatula when serving.

Yields 4 servings
adequate for 2 people

Notes: *Overnight refrigeration is most convenient if the dish is to be served for breakfast or brunch.

This recipe is easily halved or doubled, when required. Do be sure that the baking dish chosen will contain the bread slices snugly.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 9.9 g.; FAT = 9.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 21.4 g.;
CALORIES = 207; CALORIES FROM FAT = 40%



EASY FROZEN ITALIAN COFFEE – HAZELNUT – NUTMEG CREAM *Semifreddo di Nocciola e Noce Moscato*

TPT - 9 hours and 25 minutes;
1 hour = coffee-nut brittle hardening period;
8 hours = freezing period

We tasted many semifreddos on our trip to Italy. Whenever there was a semifreddo on the dessert list, I tried their version and scribbled journal notes that evening. Also, as we traveled, we found it was unusual to find a semifreddo on the menu which has not been flavored with rum or a liqueur. It seems unnecessary with this well-flavored version, but, if you wish, you may add a tablespoonful of rum or a Frangelico or Kahlua especially if you are serving this as a New Year's Eve dessert.

Granted, the preparation of this semifreddo is rather different from versions which will be encountered in Italy. On comparison, you will find this version quite simple to prepare, nutritionally superior, and richer in taste, but much lower in fat. It does, however, approach the joy of the semifreddo served at Umberto's on the Via Sicilia in Rome, which provided the impetus to experiment.

- 1/4 cup sugar**
- 1 tablespoon water**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons freeze-dried coffee granules**
- 1/4 cup chopped additive-free hazelnuts**
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream**

- 2/3 cup fat-free sweetened condensed milk**
- 1/2 cup fat-free pasteurized eggs (the equivalent of 2 eggs)**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract**
- 3/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg**
- 3/4 teaspoon ground mace**

Prepare a **7 x 3 x 2-inch non-stick-coated loaf pan** by placing it in the freezer until required. Also, lightly butter a cookie sheet and set aside.

In a small, non-stick-coated skillet set over *MEDIUM* heat, combine the sugar, 1 tablespoonful water, and instant coffee granules. Cook until the sugar is melted. Add chopped hazelnuts and vanilla extract. Continue cooking, stirring constantly, until it bubbles and *begins* to caramelize. *Immediately*, pour the mixture on the prepared buttered cookie sheet and allow to cool and harden. When hardened, transfer to a board, using a spatula. Chop the brittle. Set aside to harden and dry—at least for 1 hour.**

Using an electric mixer fitted with *chilled* beaters or by hand, using a *chilled* wire whisk, beat heavy cream in a *chilled* bowl until stiff. Set aside.

In a large bowl, combine sweetened condensed milk, pasteurized eggs, vanilla extract, grated nutmeg, and ground mace. Stir to blend thoroughly. *Whisk-fold* stiffly whipped cream *gently*, but *thoroughly*, into milk–egg mixture. Fold crumbled coffee–nut brittle *gently* into cream mixture.

Pour mixture into chilled loaf pan. Spread evenly. Cover tightly with aluminum foil. Freeze overnight, or until firm—about 8 hours.

Remove entire block of ice cream from pan onto a board and slice.***

Leftovers should be returned to the freezer, tightly covered.

Yields about eight 1/2-cup servings



Notes: *Because raw eggs present the danger of *Salmonella* poisoning, commercially-available pasteurized eggs are recommended for use in preparing this dish.

**It is very convenient to make the coffee–nut brittle the day before.

***For more authenticity you may wish to garnish the dessert plate with a fruit *coulis*, a pool of hazelnut liqueur, or fresh berries. A small pool of chocolate syrup on the side would also be an appreciated garniture.

This recipe may be doubled, when required. Use a 9 x 5 x 3-inch non-stick-coated loaf pan when doubling.

1/8 SERVING (i. e., per 1/2 cupful) –
PROTEIN = 6.8 g.; FAT = 10.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 26.0 g.;
CALORIES = 234; CALORIES FROM FAT = 40%



ITALIAN CHOCOLATE TEA BISCUITS

Biscotti Cioccolato

TPT - 1 hour and 15 minutes

If you find chocolate biscotti in a bakery, most likely they will seem rather one-dimensional to you after you taste this version. The flavor is significantly nuanced by the addition of coffee to my chocolate biscotti. Again, chocolate and coffee merge to please. These are equally pleasant as accompaniments to a continental breakfast menu or as a dessert; or just enjoy a low-fat chocolate treat with a mid-morning coffee.

2/3 cup unbleached white flour
3 tablespoons whole wheat flour
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
2 teaspoons freeze-dried or instant coffee granules
—crushed
1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 cup fat-free pasteurized eggs (the equivalent of 2 eggs)
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon pure almond extract

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Prepare a **9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan** by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating and then *lightly flouring*. Also, prepare a cookie sheet by oiling generously.

Into a mixing bowl, sift white and whole wheat flours, cocoa powder, coffee granules, and baking powder. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, using a wire whisk, beat eggs, sugar, and almond extract together thoroughly.

Using a wooden spoon, gradually stir in sifted dry ingredients until a stiff, smooth batter is achieved. Spread batter in prepared loaf pan and bake in preheated 325-degree F. oven for about 25 minutes, or until a bamboo skewer or toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. (*This will not rise significantly so don't be alarmed when the pan is only about 1/4 full at the end of the baking period.*)

Reduce oven setting to 275 degrees F. and leave oven door open until temperature is, indeed, 275 degrees F.

Meanwhile, remove entire loaf from pan and immediately slice into sixteen 1/2-inch thick slices using a serrated knife. Place slices side-by-side on the prepared cookie sheet and return to oven—now at 275 degrees F. Bake until bottoms of slices are *lightly browned*—about 12 minutes. Using tongs, turn each slice and continue to bake for an additional 10 minutes, or until the remaining side is *lightly browned*.

Remove to wire rack and cool completely. Store in tightly sealed plastic bag.

Yields 16 slices

Notes: These are equally pleasant as accompaniments to a continental breakfast menu or as a dessert.

Although these toasts keep well at room temperature for a considerable period of time, if tightly sealed, they may be frozen for future convenience.

1/16 SERVING (i. e., per slice) –
PROTEIN = 2.0 g.; FAT = 0.3 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 12.4 g.;
CALORIES = 67; CALORIES FROM FAT = 4%



NORTHERN ITALIAN TOMATO AND CREAM SAUCE

Sugo di Pomodoro e Panna

TPT - 32 minutes

Every restaurant and road stop in Italy has its own "sugo." This one is gently seasoned and creamy without being a cream sauce, if you know what I mean! It's a good sauce for cheese manicotti, cannelloni, eggs (hard-cooked, scrambled, poached, etc.), stuffed shells, stuffed zucchini, spinach noodles, mixed vegetables, whole steamed carrots, or any dish which calls for a smooth, rich, yet delicate, sauce.



3/4 cup tomato purée—preferably homemade or commercially-available *passata*

1 1/2 teaspoons butter

1 1/2 tablespoons *finely* chopped carrot

1 1/2 tablespoons *finely* chopped onion

1 1/2 tablespoons *finely* chopped celery

1 tablespoon *finely* chopped fresh parsley

1 teaspoon *finely* chopped fresh basil or 1/4 teaspoon dried basil—crushed

Pinch salt

6 tablespoons light cream or half and half

In a saucepan set over *LOW* heat, combine tomato purée, butter, *finely* chopped carrot, onion, celery, parsley, and basil, and salt. When sauce begins to simmer, cook, stirring frequently, for about 20 minutes. Turn into the work bowl of the food processor filled with steel knife or into the electric blender.

Add cream. Blend or process until very smooth. Set a fine sieve over a clean saucepan. Pour sauce through sieve. Discard debris or reserve for addition to stock pot. Refrigerate until required.*

Place sieved sauce over *LOW* heat. Allow to heat through, *being careful not to allow sauce to boil*. Keep warm until ready to serve. Stir frequently. Turn into heated serving bowl.

Place saucepan with puréed sauce over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat. Bring to the simmer and, stirring frequently, cook until of desired consistency. Reduce heat to *LOW*. Keep warm over *LOW* heat until ready to serve. *Do not allow sauce to boil!* Turn into a heated serving bowl or dress *pasta* to serve.

Yields about 1 cupful

Notes: *Sauce may be prepared to this point and refrigerated for several days before proceeding. Or, it may be frozen for future use. If frozen, defrost completely and reheat over *LOW* heat.

This recipe may be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING (i. e., per 1/4 cupful) –
PROTEIN = 1.3 g.; FAT = 3.6 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 3.3 g.;
CALORIES = 55; CALORIES FROM FAT = 59%



PURÉED CAULIFLOWER, LEEK, AND CANNELLINI BEAN SOUP WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATOES

TPT - 55 minutes

This is a dairy-free soup that has such a creamy texture you will not believe it even if you are the one who made it. Admittedly, I often garnish servings of this rich, garlicky soup with dollops of light sour cream but a dairy garnish is certainly not necessary. It has an earthy, autumn taste and is a favorite for autumn and winter menus. By adding herbed croutons to this smooth purée, you not only add flavor and texture, you complement the leguminous amino acids with those contributed by the amino acids in the wheat product. Make your own herbed croutons or avail yourself of one of the herbed organic crouton products in the bread aisle.

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil**
- 1 very well-rinsed large leek—white and light green portions only—finely chopped**
- 2 garlic cloves—finely chopped**
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme—chopped or 1/2 teaspoon crushed, dried thyme**
- 1 teaspoon fresh sage—chopped or 1/2 teaspoon crushed, dried thyme**
- Pinch ground winter savory***
- 3 cups fresh cauliflower florets**
- 2 cups vegetarian stock of choice**
- 1 cup canned cannellini beans—well-rinsed**
- 3 jarred sun-dried tomato slices in seasoned oil—chopped**
- Salt, to taste**
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- 1 teaspoon extra virgin olive oil**
- 1/2 cup herbed croutons**



In a small kettle set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, heat 1 tablespoonful olive oil. Add *finely* chopped leek. Sauté until leek pieces become soft and translucent, *being careful not to allow the leek to brown.*

Add *very finely* chopped garlic, thyme, sage, and winter savory. Allow to cook, while stirring constantly, for 1 minute.

Add cauliflower, stock, beans, chopped sun-dried tomatoes, salt, and pepper. Allow to come to the simmer. Cover. Cook for 20 minutes, or until cauliflower is very tender. Remove soup from heat and allow to cool for 10-15 minutes.

Using the food processor fitted with steel knife or an electric blender, process soup in small batches until very smooth.**

Turn puréed or defrosted, frozen soup into a clean saucepan set over *LOW* heat. Allow to heat through. Divide between two large, heated soup plates. Pour 1/2 teaspoonful of olive oil into the center of each serving.

Serve at once. Pass croutons.

Yields 4 main course servings



Notes: *Winter savory *Satureja montana*, is a perennial herb. It has a resin taste very unlike that of summer savory, *Satureja hortensis*, which is an annual.

**The cooled, puréed soup can be frozen at this point.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 8.7 g.; FAT = 8.0 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 29.5 g.;
CALORIES = 243; CALORIES FROM FAT = 30%

SOUR CREAM COFFEECAKE WITH WALNUT *STREUSEL*

TPT - 2 hours and 4 minutes;
1 hour = cooling period



This recipe for a small breakfast cake is just the right size for a dessert for a family meal or for a holiday breakfast and tea the next day if your family has also downsized. Since this is a wonderfully moist cake; downsizing, without leftovers to dry out or a substrate for mold development, is very, very practical.

STREUSEL CRUMB TOPPING:

2 tablespoons white sugar
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground mace
1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts

3/4 cup unbleached white flour
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 cup butter—softened to room temperature
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 cup fat-free pasteurized eggs—the equivalent of 1 egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1/2 cup low-fat dairy sour cream

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Prepare a **6-inch springform pan** by coating with lecithin spray coating for baking.

In a small dish, combine white and brown sugars, ground cinnamon and mace and *finely* chopped walnuts. Stir. Set aside until required.

In a small bowl, combine white and whole wheat flours, baking soda, and baking powder. Stir to mix well. Set aside until required.

Using an electric mixer, cream softened butter until light and fluffy. Add sugar and cream until again light and fluffy. Add pasteurized eggs and vanilla extract. Beat until smooth.

Gradually, tablespoonful by tablespoonful, beat in mixed dry ingredients. Add sour cream alternately with the dry ingredients to keep the mixture smooth. Turn into prepared springform pan.

Sprinkle crumb topping ingredients evenly over the top of cake batter. Using a rubber or plastic spatula, plunge the walnut topping down into the batter to a depth of about 1 1/2 inches. Smooth over remaining *streusel* mixture. Bake in preheated 350-degree F. oven for about 40 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean.

Remove to a wire rack and allow to cool completely—about 1 hour. Run a knife around the edge of the coffeecake, release the spring closure, and transfer to a board or serving plate. Wrap leftovers tightly in plastic wrap.

Yields 10 servings

1/10 SERVING – PROTEIN = 4.1 g.; FAT = 14.4 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 34.3 g.;
CALORIES = 287; CALORIES FROM FAT = 45%



*If you enjoyed this sour cream coffeecake with streusel topping,
you might enjoy dropping by next month
when you might have more time for leisurely experimentation.
Replacing a portion of wheat flour with almond flour is beneficial
to the resultant texture of baked goods
and, let's face it, it is another way to incorporate
the goodness of almonds into your diet.
We'll start the New Year with that topic and see where we go.*

Happy New Year,

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

Copyright © 2022