

Recipes from *Holly Blues*  
China Bayles #18  
By Susan Wittig Albert

### **Cass Wilde's Holiday Peppermint Cupcakes**

1/2 cup butter or shortening, room temperature  
1 cup sugar  
1 large egg  
2 large egg whites  
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup whole milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon peppermint extract

Cream butter until light and fluffy. Gradually add sugar and continue to beat until well combined. Add egg and egg whites, beating until blended. Set aside. In a bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, salt. Add half the flour mixture to the creamed mixture; stir until blended. In a measuring cup, mix milk and extracts. Add to the batter; mix until blended. Add remaining flour mixture and mix very well. Divide batter evenly among 12 prepared muffin cups. Bake until tops are just dry to the touch, 22 to 25 minutes. Remove cupcakes to a wire rack and let cool completely. Frost.

#### **Frosting**

6 ounces white chocolate, coarsely chopped  
4 ounces cream cheese, softened  
4 tablespoons butter, softened  
1 teaspoon peppermint extract  
2-2 1/2 cups confectioner's sugar, sifted, divided  
6 peppermint candies, crushed

Place white chocolate in a small glass bowl in the microwave and cook on high for one minute. Alternatively, place in a double boiler and melt over boiling water. Stir until smooth and set aside to cool. In a large mixing bowl, combine cream cheese and butter. Using an electric mixer, beat until thoroughly mixed. Add cooled white chocolate; beat until mixed. Using the mixer's low speed, beat in peppermint extract and 2 cups confectioner's sugar. Using medium speed, beat until fluffy. adding up to 1/2 cup additional confectioner's sugar to make it spreadable. Frost cupcakes, sprinkle with crushed peppermint candies.

### **China's Easy Slow-Cook Sausage-Corn Chowder**

Made the easy way, with canned soup, canned corn, and cooked sausage.

1 pound ready-to-eat smoked sausage, cut in half lengthwise, and into 1/2 inch slices  
3 cups cubed potatoes  
1/2 medium onion  
2 medium carrots, coarsely chopped  
1/4 cup red bell pepper  
1 bay leaf

1 16-ounce can cream-style corn  
1 can mushroom soup  
2 cups chicken broth  
2 cups milk  
1 teaspoon dry thyme  
1 teaspoon savory  
Sour cream  
Snipped fresh chives or fresh parsley

Place sausage, potatoes, onion, carrots, bell pepper, and bay leaf in a slow cooker. Combine corn, soup, and broth, and add to the cooker. Cover and cook on low heat for 6-7 hours. Fifteen minutes before serving, remove bay leaf, stir chowder, and add milk and herbs. Cover and cook on high for 15 minutes. Ladle into bowls and top with dollops of sour cream and sprinkles of snipped chives or parsley.

### Garden Quiche with Tomato, Basil, and Garlic

1 unbaked 9-inch pie shell  
4 large eggs, lightly beaten  
1 1/2 cups sour cream  
1/2 cup evaporated milk  
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, divided  
4 tablespoons minced green onion tops, divided  
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley  
1 teaspoon dried thyme  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper  
3 tablespoons dry breadcrumbs  
1 tablespoon fresh minced basil or 1 teaspoon dried basil leaves, crushed  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 3/4 cups fresh or canned diced tomatoes, drained

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, mix eggs, sour cream, evaporated milk, 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, 2 tablespoons onion, parsley, thyme, salt, and pepper. Pour into pie shell. Combine remaining cheese, breadcrumbs, basil, and garlic in small bowl; sprinkle over sour cream mixture. Top with tomatoes and 2 tablespoons onions. Bake for 40 to 50 minutes or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Cool on wire rack for 5 minutes before serving.

### China's Hot Spiced Holiday Tea

This warm and cheering cranberry- and orange-flavored tea is a natural for the holidays. The recipe makes 12 cups.

12 cups water  
12 whole allspice  
3 small cinnamon sticks  
2 tsp whole cloves  
12 tea bags (an orange-spice tea is nice)  
1 cup brown sugar, packed

1 cup cranberry juice  
1/2 cup orange juice  
1/4 cup lemon juice

Combine allspice, cinnamon, and cloves with the water in a saucepan and bring to a rolling boil. Remove from heat and add tea bags. Cover and steep for 5-8 minutes. Stir and strain. Strain a second time to clarify. (A coffee filter is handy here). Add sugar and stir until dissolved. At serving time, stir in juices, pour into a glass or stainless steel pan and reheat to serving

### Leslie Strahorn's Gingerbread Cookies

6 cups all-purpose flour  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
1 tablespoon ground ginger  
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg  
1 teaspoon ground cloves  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1 cup shortening, melted and cooled slightly  
1 cup molasses  
1 cup packed brown sugar  
1/2 cup water  
1 egg  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

In a large bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, ginger, nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon; set aside. In a medium bowl, mix together the shortening, molasses, brown sugar, water, egg, and vanilla until smooth. Stir in the dry ingredients in two or three additions, mixing very well. Divide dough into 3 parts, flatten to about 1 1/2 inch thickness, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 3 hours.

To shape and bake: Preheat oven to 350°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out 1/4 inch thick. Cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Place cookies 1 inch apart on an ungreased cookie sheet. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Cookies will look dry, but be soft to the touch. Remove from the baking sheet to cool on wire racks. Frost when cool.

### **Rosemary-Mint Soap for Holiday Gifts**

Here's what you'll need for the soap:

plastic candy molds (holiday shapes are nice) or small plastic containers  
cooking spray or petroleum jelly  
2 four-ounce bars of castile (olive-oil) soap  
2 tablespoons water  
1 1/2 teaspoons rosemary oil  
1 1/2 teaspoons mint oil  
2 tablespoons crushed rosemary leaves

Here's how to make the soap:

Spray molds with cooking spray or grease with petroleum jelly. Grate castile soap into an enamel saucepan. Add water and oils and heat slowly, stirring. When the soap has melted and the mixture has the texture of whipped cream, add rosemary leaves. Quickly fill each mold, then rap the mold

sharply on a hard surface to eliminate air bubbles. Allow to harden overnight in the molds. Turn soaps onto a wire rack and air-dry for a few days before wrapping. If any seem rough-edged, wet your hands and smooth the surfaces; dry thoroughly.

- Other fragrant floral possibilities: violet oil and violet petals; lilac oil and lilac florets; orange oil and calendula petals; lemon oil and dried chopped lemon grass and coarsely grated lemon zest; lavender oil and lavender buds with chopped rosemary leaves. Be creative!
- To make a gentle scrubbing soap, add 1 tablespoon chopped dried luffa, or 1/2 cup cornmeal or oatmeal (not flakes). Increase liquid slightly, if necessary.

### Thyme & Seasons Christmas Simmer Gift Potpourri

1 1/2 cup cinnamon sticks, broken into small pieces  
1/2 cup whole cloves  
1/2 cup allspice berries  
1/4 cup whole rosehips  
1/4 cup dried bay leaves, broken  
1/4 cup dried rosemary leaves  
1/4 cup dried orange peel  
1/4 cup dried lemon peel  
1 tablespoon cardamom seeds  
1 tablespoon aniseed  
1 tablespoon ground nutmeg

Mix in a large bowl. Transfer to small lidded jars or plastic bags. Add a label with these instructions:  
*To use: Bring 2 cups of water to a boil in an old 1-quart saucepan. Add 2 tablespoons potpourri and reduce heat. You may also add 2-3 apple slices, if you wish. Simmer, adding water as needed. You may reuse the potpourri, but refrigerate between uses.*



### Two Pomanders for Holiday Gifting

An easy-for-kids-to-make pomander starts with Styrofoam balls, oakmoss, a spice potpourri (made of whole allspice, cinnamon chips, sandalwood slivers, star anise, cloves), cinnamon oil, and white glue. Place the oakmoss on a plate. Cover the ball with glue and roll it in the oakmoss until completely covered. Let dry, then glue pieces of spice potpourri onto the ball, starting with the largest pieces and filling in with the smaller ones. Dust with powdered cloves and dot with a few drops of cinnamon oil. Hang with a ribbon loop.

To make the real thing, you will need a small apple or orange, about a cup of whole cloves, and about 6 tablespoons of spice mixture (2 tablespoons each of cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg) for each fruit. Poke holes in the fruit with a skewer or similar tool, so that when whole cloves are pushed into the holes, the tops are nearly touching. (You might want to try a few to see what distance you should leave between the holes.)

When the fruit is completely covered with cloves, put it into a small plastic bag with 2 tablespoons of the spice mixture and shake gently, being careful not to dislodge any cloves. If there's an excess of spices, leave them in the bag. Put the pomander in the oven with the pilot light on, and dry overnight. For the next three or four days, repeat the spice treatment, returning the pomander to the oven to dry overnight. You will need less spice for subsequent treatments; make more as needed. Hang with ribbon or raffia.