

Recipes from *Hemlock*

China Bayles #29

by Susan Wittig Albert

Cass's Chocolate Chip Cookies (with fresh mint and nuts)

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, cut into 6-8 pieces
1/2 cup fresh mint, firmly packed, roughly chopped
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
2/3 cup semisweet chocolate chips
1/2 cup chopped pecans or walnuts

Melt butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped mint. Remove from heat and let the blend infuse for a half hour. Strain through a fine sieve, pressing the leaves hard. Discard all but a tablespoon of the leaves.

While the butter is cooling, blend flour, baking soda, and salt in a separate bowl. Set aside while you prepare the baking sheets. This recipe makes about 24 cookies, so you'll need two, ungreased or (better) lined with parchment.

Mix the mint-infused butter with sugars and beat until creamy and light. Add egg and vanilla and beat again. Add the flour blend and beat until very well mixed. Stir in chocolate chips and nuts. Chill for an hour, then scoop by spoonfuls onto baking sheets, leaving room for the cookies to spread.

Preheat the oven to 350°. Bake 5-6 minutes, rotate pans and bake another 5-6 minutes, until the edges are golden brown (centers will be slightly underbaked). Cool on baking sheets for 2-3 minutes, then remove to a rack.

Shepherd's Pie

Shepherd's pie is a meat-and-veggie casserole (traditionally, lamb) with a mashed potato topping. This recipe calls for ground beef. Pork, lamb, or chicken—all tasty, too .

Mashed Potato Topping

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1 1/2 lb. potatoes, peeled
4 tbsp. melted butter
1/4 c. milk
1/4 c. sour cream or mayonnaise
Salt, pepper

In a large pot, cover potatoes with water. Bring to a boil and cook until totally soft, 16 to 18 minutes. Drain, return to pot, and mash until smooth. Add melted butter, milk, and sour cream or mayonnaise. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Use a potato masher to mash potatoes until smooth. Add melted butter, milk, and sour cream. Mash together until fully incorporated, then season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Meat-and-Vegetable Filling

1 tbsp. oil
1 large onion, chopped
2 carrots, peeled, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. fresh thyme
1 lb. ground beef (no more than 20% fat)
1 cup frozen peas
1 cup frozen corn
Salt, pepper
2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
2/3 c. low-sodium chicken broth
1 tbsp. freshly chopped parsley or snipped chives, for garnish

Preheat oven to 400°. Heat oil in an ovenproof skillet. Saute onion, carrots, garlic, and thyme for 4-5 minutes. Add ground beef and cook until no longer pink, 5 minutes more. Drain fat. Stir in frozen peas and corn and cook until warmed through, 3 minutes more. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with flour, add broth and stir. Cook for 5 minutes until slightly thickened.

Top meat mixture evenly with mashed potatoes and bake until topping is golden brown, about 20 minutes. Broil if desired. Garnish with parsley or chives.

Chicken and Slicks

This traditional Appalachian Mountain recipe takes a little while to put together, but the extra time is worth it. It's easier to start with chicken thighs.

1 whole 3-pound chicken, or 3 pounds boned thighs
2 medium onions, quartered
4-5 cloves garlic
1-2 bay leaves
1 tsp. whole peppercorns
1 tsp. thyme
1 tsp. salt
Salt, pepper
1/2 cup finely chopped parsley (to be added just before serving)

Place chicken, onions, garlic, bay, peppercorns, thyme, and salt in large saucepan. Add just enough water to cover chicken. Bring to boil, then reduce heat. Simmer until chicken is tender and falling off the bone, about 1 hour.

Slicks

1 cup flour
2 tbsp. butter, softened
1 tbsp. vegetable shortening
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 cup milk

While chicken is simmering, make the dough for slicks (flat dumplings). In medium bowl, blend flour, baking powder, salt with butter, shortening, baking powder, and 1/2 teaspoon salt, mashing with fork until mixture is crumbly. Stir in milk. Let sit about 20 minutes.

Putting it all together

Transfer chicken to a bowl. Strain broth and return to saucepan. Simmer over medium-low heat until reduced to about 6 cups. Add salt and pepper to taste and keep warm. Remove chicken meat from bones if necessary, and shred into bite-size pieces. Set aside while you prepare the slicks.

On floured surface, roll dough into a 10"x 10" square, about 1/4" thick. Cut into squares about 1 1/2"x1 1/2".

Return broth to simmer over medium heat. Add slicks, one at a time. Cover and simmer until dumplings have puffed slightly and are cooked through (about 12 min.), stirring occasionally to ensure that they don't stick to each other. Return chicken to pot to heat. Stir in 1/2 cup chopped parsley and serve in bowls.

Rose's Hoppin' John Soup

Recipes similar to this one appear in American cookbooks beginning in the 1840s. In the South, it is a traditional New Year's dish. But it's enjoyable all year around.

2 cups dried black-eyed peas
1 lb. bacon, cut into bite-size pieces
1 tbsp. oil
1 large onion, chopped
3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. black pepper, ground
1/4 to 1/2 tsp. red pepper flakes
4 cups water, chicken stock, or vegetable broth
2 cups long-grain white rice, uncooked
1 bunch collard greens, washed, stemmed, torn into pieces (or 2-3 cups frozen spinach, thawed)
1 to 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
Salt and black pepper to taste

To prepare black-eyed peas. Pick through dried peas for tiny debris, rinse well, and drain. Place in a large soup pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Remove from heat and let stand for an hour or two. Drain and rinse.

Cook bacon in skillet over medium-high heat for 3 to 4 minutes until partially done; remove from skillet and set aside. Drain most of the bacon fat (save for other uses if you like), leaving enough to coat the bottom of the skillet. Add onions and garlic and sauté until translucent.

Return soaked, drained peas to soup pot. Using the same large soup pot, over medium-high heat, add soaked black-eyed peas, bacon mixture, pepper and pepper flakes, and water or stock. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 1 1/2 to 2 hours or until the peas are tender. (If the soup boils the peas will pop.) Stir in rice and collard greens; cover, and cook 20 to 25 minutes or until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed. If you're using spinach instead of collard greens, add in last 10 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in vinegar and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Stack Cake with Apple Butter

The layers of this old-fashioned stack cake are more like large gingerbread cookies. I use three round cake pans, lightly oiled, to make this dessert. If you have only two, that will work—it'll just take a little longer. You may use your own recipe for the traditional apple butter filling, or purchase a jar from the grocery store. Makes six 9" layers.

Cake

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 1/3 cup molasses
- 1 large egg, slightly beaten
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 1/2 cups flour
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- pinch of nutmeg
- powdered sugar for dusting

Apple Butter Filling

- 4 cups peeled, chopped apples
- 3/4 cups dark brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 6 cups apple cider (not juice)

To make the cakes, preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly oil cake pans

In a medium bowl, beat shortening and sugar until light and creamy. Add buttermilk, molasses, egg and vanilla, beating well.

In a large bowl, combine flour, ginger, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg. Make a well in center of flour mixture. Add shortening mixture, stirring just until combined.

On a lightly floured surface, roll dough into a log and divide into six equal sections. Place one section in each pan, and pat dough out to the edges of the pan. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove from pans and cool on wire racks. Repeat until all sections are baked.

To make the filling: In large saucepan, combine apples, sugar, and spices. Add cider to cover. Bring to a boil and simmer, stirring often, for about 45 minutes. Remove from heat, and let cool slightly. In a blender or food processor, process until slightly chunky—or smoother, if you prefer.

To assemble, place one cake layer on a large plate and spread with about 3/4 cup warm filling. Repeat procedure with remaining layers, leaving top layer bare. Cover and refrigerate cake for a day or two to soften the layers. Before serving, dust the top with confectioners' sugar.