

Cranberry Coconut Trifle

A trifle is an English dessert, with layers of cake, custard and fruit, usually topped with whipped cream. Use your prettiest large glass serving bowl to display this show stopper! Packaged ladyfingers or angel food cake can be substituted for the homemade sponge cake if desired, but the result won't be as delicious! Although there are lots of steps to make this, you can start ahead of time and make the custard and cranberry mixtures up to 2 days ahead.

Coconut Custard:

3 cups low fat milk, divided
1/3 cup cornstarch
3 large eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon coconut extract
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 can (15 oz.) light coconut milk
2/3 cup granulated sugar

Method: Whisk 1/2 cup milk with cornstarch in a small bowl and place near the stove. Then whisk the 3 eggs, 1 teaspoon coconut extract and 1/4 teaspoon salt in another bowl. In a large saucepan, combine the remaining 2 1/2 cups milk, the coconut milk, and the 2/3 cup sugar. Heat over medium high heat until steaming hot, but not boiling. Gradually stir in the cornstarch mixture, whisking constantly. Bring to a full boil over medium heat, cook and whisk constantly until thickened and bubbly. Whisk some of the hot milk mixture into the eggs, whisking constantly, and then return all of the egg/milk mixture back into the saucepan, cook and stir for a few moments until thickened. Strain, if desired, to remove any pieces of egg. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours, or up to 2 days.

Cranberry Filling:

2 bags (12 oz. each) cranberries, picked over and rinsed
1 cup cranberry juice
1 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup honey

Method: Combine all cranberry filling ingredients in a large sauce pan. Cook over medium high heat, stirring often, until most of the cranberries burst open, about 7-10 minutes. Cool to room temperature, can refrigerate for up to 2 days.

Coconut Sponge Cake:

1 ¼ cups cake flour
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
3 large eggs (1/2 to 2/3 cup eggs)
¾ cup granulated sugar
1/3 cup hot water
2 teaspoons coconut extract

Method: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9 x 13” baking pan and set aside. Let eggs come to room temperature. Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. In mixer bowl, beat 3 large eggs on medium high speed until tripled in volume and pale light yellow in color. Eggs should mound on the surface for a few moments when the beaters are lifted. Beat sugar in gradually. Blend in hot water and extract. Quickly and gently fold in the flour mixture. Spread batter evenly in the prepared baking pan. Bake the cake until puffed and lightly browned, about 25 minutes. Cool in pan for 10 minutes, and then turn out onto a rack to cool completely. When cool, cut into 1” cubes. You may not need all of the cake for the dessert – save the rest for shortcake.

To assemble trifle: Spread about 1 cup of the custard in the bottom of the trifle dish. Top with about ¼ to 1/3 of the cake cubes and about 1 cup of the cranberry filling. Repeat layers 2-3 more times. Tip: Depending on the size of your serving bowl, you may not use all of the individual components. If any are left, make individual servings to have later. Make topping.

Topping:

½ cup whipping cream
½ cup non fat vanilla Greek yogurt
2 tablespoons confectioners’ sugar
1 teaspoon coconut extract

3 tablespoons coconut flakes, toasted if desired.

Method: In chilled mixing bowl, beat whipping cream until soft peaks form. Whisk in yogurt, confectioners’ sugar, and 1 teaspoon coconut extract. Spread over the top of the trifle. Garnish with the toasted coconut.

Makes 16 servings, about 1 cup each: Nutrition information per serving: 330 calories, 7 gm fat, 4.5 gm sat. fat, 80 mg. cholesterol, 210 mg. sodium, 62 gm carbs, 2 gm fiber, and 6 gm protein. Recipe adapted from Eating Well magazine.

Peppermint Brownies

These brownies are gluten free! They contain no flour, but if you need to be sure they are totally gluten free, check to be sure your extracts and baking powder are also gluten free. For a more festive look, you can lightly frost them and sprinkle with some chopped peppermint candies. No one will be able to guess the secret ingredient!

1 can (15 oz.) black beans, drained and rinsed
3 large eggs
3 tablespoons canola oil
¾ cup granulated sugar
½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ teaspoon peppermint extract
½ teaspoon baking powder
Pinch of salt
½ cup mini semi-sweet chocolate chips, divided

Method: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Spray an 8 x 8" baking pan with nonstick cooking spray and set aside. Place the black beans and oil in the bowl of a food processor and process until smooth and creamy. Add the eggs, sugar, cocoa, extracts, baking powder and pinch of salt and process until smooth. Add ¼ cup of the chips and pulse to combine. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, smooth the top, and sprinkle with the remaining chocolate chips. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan before slicing into 2" squares. Nutrition information per 2" square, unfrosted: 120 calories, 5 gm fat, 1.5 gm sat. fat, 18 gm carbs, 2 gm fiber, 95 mg sodium, and 3 gm protein. Recipe from the Dry Bean Quarterly, a publication of the Northarvest Bean Growers Association.

Maple Pecan Tart with Dried Cherries

Is there such a thing as a healthier pecan pie? This pie has about 150 calories less per slice than a traditional pecan pie. It features a lighter crust, which is a cinch to make in your food processor. And, it requires no rolling! Other nutrition benefits include the use of more pecans (2 cups total), dried cherries, and the antioxidant benefits of real maple syrup!

Crust:

1 large egg yolk
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 tablespoon water
½ cup pecan pieces
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons flour
¼ teaspoon salt

Method: Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Coat a 9" pie plate or tart pan with cooking spray. Combine egg yolk, melted butter, oil and water in a small bowl and set aside. In food processor, combine pecans and sugar and process until pecans are finely ground. Add flour and salt and process to combine. Drizzle the egg yolk mixture through the feed tube and pulse just until the mixture is combined. Press mixture into the pie plate, pressing firmly across the bottom and up the sides. Bake until dry and just beginning to brown on the edges about 12-14 minutes.

Filling:

2 large eggs
½ cup pure maple syrup
½ cup packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup pecan pieces
1/3 cup chopped dried cherries
1 cup whole pecans for topping

Method: Whisk eggs, maple syrup, brown sugar, butter and salt together in a medium bowl. Remove ¼ cup of the mixture and set aside. Mix in ½ cup pecan pieces and dried cherries. Evenly spread the filling in the baked crust. Combine the ¼ cup reserved maple syrup mixture with the 1 cup whole pecans, and arrange decoratively on top of the filling. Drizzle any remaining maple syrup mixture over the top. Reduce oven heat to 350 degrees, and bake pie for about 25-30 minutes or until it no longer jiggles when it is gently shaken. Cool on a wire rack. Makes 10 servings. Nutrition info. per serving: 353 calories, 22 gm fat, 4 gm sat fat, 65 mg. cholesterol, 36 gm carbs, 2 gm fiber, 136 mg. sodium, and about 5 gm protein. Recipe adapted from Eating Well magazine.