

sweet talk

FOOD AND STYLE'S VIVIANE BAUQUET FARRE OF PIERMONT WHETS YOUR APPETITE WITH FIVE DELICIOUS HOLIDAY DESSERTS.

story and photos by viviane bauquet farre

A photograph of a holiday table setting. In the foreground, a white ceramic cup filled with crême brûlée sits on a red napkin. A silver spoon and fork are placed on the napkin next to the cup. To the left, a lit candle in a silver holder is visible. In the background, a bouquet of pink roses is in a glass vase. The table is covered with a striped placemat.

Giving away homemade cookies, jams, cakes and other heartfelt sweets has always been part of my holiday tradition, but never more so than this past year when the economic downturn forced me – and I’m sure, many of you – to rethink what gift-giving really means. Last December, I did most of my holiday shopping in one place – my kitchen. This year, I plan to do the same. Of course, gifts are not the only reason to whip up homemade desserts around the holidays. There are parties to throw, friends to visit, dinners to host, brunches to savor; in fact, the nice thing about the holiday season is that there’s never a bad time to treat yourself – or someone you love – to dessert. On the following pages, I’ve created a few of my own festive inspirations – a four-layer chocolate cake, pumpkin crême brûlée and a champagne float, to name a few – and paired each one with a particular holiday tradition. Thinking of doing the same? You’ll find the recipes for these delectable delights at Foodandstyle.com, and you’ll find tips on how to prepare and present them for various seasonal occasions right here. Bon appetit!

sienese almond cookies & herb-infused honeys

THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR: HOLIDAY GIFTS

Easy to make and incredibly delicious, this cookie-and-honey combination makes a wonderful holiday gift. The herb-infused honeys are perfect for sweetening teas, cakes or even warm toast. The cookies alone are an addictive crowd-pleaser, and since you make them in batches, you can present them to everyone on your list. Give them away in person, or send them through the mail. They travel well and keep for about two weeks.

SAGE ADVICE To add a festive touch, I packaged these cookies in polka-dotted and silver tissue paper, clear cookie bags, and tied them with red ribbons, all of which you can find at The Container Store (370 Route 17 N., Paramus, NJ; 201-265-9004; containerstore.com). You can infuse honey with fresh herbs from any supermarket, but I recommend buying a high-quality, locally made honey. Try one from the Orchards of Concklin (2 Mountain Road, Pomona; 845-354-0369; theorchardsofconcklin.com).





pumpkin crème brûlée
with ginger & cinnamon

THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR:
A HOLIDAY DINNER PARTY

Crème brûlée is always a hit at my dinner parties, and for that reason, I have many versions of this classic French dessert – one for every season of the year, in fact. During the holidays, I love to make them with freshly baked sugar-pumpkins. The combination of pumpkin, cinnamon and ginger conjure up feelings of warmth; and the smell drifting out of the oven sets a welcoming ambience for guests. In terms of taste, the crunchy-sweet caramel and silky-smooth custard is an irresistible contrast. Simple, elegant and totally scrumptious, this pumpkin crème brûlée is sure to make your holiday dinner party memorable.

PASSING THE TORCH Contrary to popular belief, crème brûlée is easy to make. The custard is simple to prepare – if you can whip egg yolks, sugar and milk, you can make crème brûlée. The trick is to make sure they don't over-bake in the oven.

Incidentally, you can prepare (and bake) the custard two days ahead, but you must caramelize the crust just before serving. A kitchen torch, as opposed to the broiler, makes the job quick and easy, so you can put your focus back where it belongs: on your guests.

raspberry-champagne fizz

THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR: NEW YEAR'S EVE



New Year's Eve is practically synonymous with Champagne. So for this holiday, I created a Champagne-ice cream float. Served in a gorgeous martini glass, it's an elegant display of vanilla ice cream, raspberry coulis (spiked with Chambord liqueur) and Champagne. The best part? You don't have to wait until midnight to enjoy a little bubbly.

TOAST THE HOST Aside from the heavenly taste, the nice thing about this dessert is that you can make dozens of raspberry-Champagne fizzes in just a few minutes – so if you're hosting a large party, you don't have to worry about getting stuck in the kitchen. In terms of Champagne, I recommend the Gruet Domaine St. Vincent Brut

Champenoise (\$12 at Wine For All; 516 Route 303, Orangeburg; 845-680-9463; idrinkwine.com). At \$12 a bottle, it's the perfect sparkler for this dessert – and tasty enough to drink on its own. Pour a few drinks, then exit the kitchen and enjoy them with your guests. What a wonderful way to ring in the new year.

chocolate cake with cognac & bittersweet chocolate curls

THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR: CHRISTMAS DINNER

A holiday feast demands a dazzling dessert —one that tastes as delicious as it looks. So this year, I decided to put my own twist on a traditional chocolate layer cake. A courageous act, considering I find layer cakes and icings a bit intimidating. My goal was a light, moist cake with intense chocolate flavor. My first attempt was disastrous; my second, though improved, still fell short. (The icing was too sweet and the cake too heavy.) Two more attempts finally delivered the cake I had envisioned: a four-layer, dark-chocolate sponge cake, brushed with coffee and

Cognac. Milk-chocolate mousse binds the layers and a white-chocolate mousse gently envelops the whole cake. Bittersweet chocolate curls add yet another layer of chocolaty flavor.

PIECE OF CAKE If I can make this cake, then you can, too. But it requires time to bake and assemble, so plan accordingly. Make the chocolate sponge cake a day ahead and then assemble the cake 4 to 6 hours before serving. One bite will prove it's worth your effort.



THE PERFECT RECIPE FOR: HOLIDAY BRUNCH

There is always a good reason to host a holiday brunch: Maybe family is visiting, or friends are dropping by for the day – or maybe you find it a nice way to kick off the first day of the year. Whatever your reason for hosting, no brunch is complete without dessert. For me, the perfect brunch dessert is not too sweet, rich or chocolaty. After all, you don't want to be overly full for the rest

of the afternoon – or worse, kill your appetite for dinner. So I end my holiday brunches with a chestnut cake. As a child I adored candied chestnuts so much, I often requested them as gifts for my birthday or for Christmas. Now as an adult, I let chestnut flour capture the essence of my favorite childhood treat. Slightly sweet, a little spongy and packed with delicious earthy fla-

vor, this cake is an ideal finish to brunch. Served with warm pan-roasted Bartlett pears and a little chestnut honey syrup, it's even a little addictive.

PREP SCHOOL Prepare this cake a day ahead – the texture will improve with a little rest. Right before serving, pan-roast the pears and make the syrup. It only takes a few minutes and then you can serve.

Vote for Viviane

If you like these desserts, you'll love what Viviane has cooked up for Bon Appetit magazine's online holiday bake-off. See Viviane's entry – and vote for her to win – at Foodandstyle.com.



chestnut cake with pan-roasted pears & chestnut honey syrup