

Gifts from the Kitchen

Candies, cakes, and more to make, wrap, and give. Homemade was never so sweet.

BY JULIA M. USHER



All wrapped up and everywhere to go—
little luxuries for you and yours
(recipes begin on page 78).

EQUIPMENT TIP

Many of the materials needed for these gifts—including cardboard cake rounds, mini springform pans, and paper baking molds—are available by mail from Jane's Cakes and Chocolates (800-262-7630).

HAZELNUT PANFORTE

A prized Christmas sweet from Tuscany, *panforte* means “strong bread”—but it’s more like an almost-flourless fruitcake.

MAKES 1

- 1 cup hazelnuts, toasted, husked, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup pecan halves, toasted, coarsely chopped
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pitted Medjool dates, coarsely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup coarsely chopped candied orange peel
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried tart cherries
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup all purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup stemmed dried Mission figs, coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange peel
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground coriander
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cloves
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cardamom
- Pinch of ground white pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup honey
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons ($\frac{1}{4}$ stick) butter

- 1 9-inch-diameter cardboard cake round

Position rack in center of oven; preheat to 300°F. Butter 9-inch-diameter springform pan. Line bottom and sides with parchment paper; butter paper.

Mix first 16 ingredients in large bowl, tossing to separate fruit pieces. Bring honey, sugar, and butter to boil in small saucepan, stirring frequently. Reduce heat to medium-low. Place candy thermometer in mixture, tilting to submerge bulb, and cook until thermometer registers 242°F to 248°F, stirring occasionally, about 9 minutes. Pour syrup over nut mixture; stir to blend. Immediately transfer mixture to prepared pan; smooth top. Bake until bubbling slightly at edges and top appears dry, about 55 minutes. Cool completely in pan on rack. Cover; let stand overnight at room temperature.

Release pan sides. Remove paper from sides and bottom of panforte. Place panforte on cardboard round. (*Can be made 3 weeks ahead. Store airtight at room temperature.*) ▶

wrap it up

- + Gather tissue paper or parchment paper around cake.
- + Wrap thin strip of pretty paper around the edge of the cake.
- + Wrap ribbon around the whole package, tying in a bow.



GINGERBREAD TRUFFLES

Holiday spices and molasses give these chocolate truffles seasonal charm.

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN

- ¾ cup whipping cream**
- 10 whole allspice**
- 10 whole cloves**
- 1 tablespoon mild-flavored (light) molasses**
- 1½ teaspoons grated peeled fresh ginger**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- Pinch of salt**

- 7 ounces plus 12 ounces bittersweet (not unsweetened) or semisweet chocolate, chopped**
- 7 ounces plus 12 ounces high-quality white chocolate (such as Lindt or Perugina), chopped**
- ½ cup chopped crystallized ginger plus additional for garnish**

Bring first 7 ingredients just to boil in heavy medium saucepan; remove from heat and let steep 1 hour.

Combine 7 ounces bittersweet chocolate and 7 ounces white chocolate in large metal bowl set over saucepan of simmering water; stir until chocolate is melted and smooth. Remove bowl from over water. Strain cream mixture into chocolate; stir to blend. Stir in ½ cup chopped crystallized ginger. Chill filling until firm, at least 3 hours.

Line baking sheet with parchment. Using 1-inch melon baller, scoop filling and roll between palms to form balls. Place on parchment. Chill truffles at least 2 hours.

Line another sheet with parchment. Place 12 ounces bittersweet chocolate in medium metal bowl set over saucepan of simmering water; stir until chocolate is melted and smooth. Remove bowl from over water. Cool until thermometer inserted into chocolate registers 115°F. Quickly submerge 1 truffle in chocolate. Using fork, lift out truffle and tap fork against side of bowl so excess coating drips off. Using knife, slide truffle off

fork and onto prepared sheet. Repeat with remaining truffles. Chill until set.

Line another baking sheet with parchment. Place 12 ounces white chocolate in another medium metal bowl set over saucepan of simmering water; stir until melted and smooth. Remove bowl from over water. Cool until thermometer inserted into chocolate registers 100°F. Hold 1 truffle between thumb and index finger; dip halfway into white chocolate. Place on prepared sheet. Repeat with remaining truffles. If desired, press small pieces of crystallized ginger atop truffles. Chill until firm, about 30 minutes. *(Can be made 1 week ahead. Cover; keep chilled.)* ➤

TEST-KITCHEN TIP

For variety, dip some of the truffles completely in white or dark chocolate, or instead of dipping the truffles in melted chocolate, simply roll them in unsweetened cocoa powder.

wrap it up

- + Drop each truffle into a foil candy cup.
- + Layer with tissue paper in an oval birch Shaker box (from craft stores).
- + Wrap a festive ribbon around the box.



Kitchen Favorites

HOT BUTTERED RUM CHEESECAKES WITH RUM-CARAMEL SAUCE

Three gifts in one: a mini cheesecake, the pan it comes in, and a jar of homemade caramel sauce on the side. Keep in mind that the cakes need to chill overnight.

MAKES TEN 4½-INCH CHEESECAKES

CRUST

- 5½ cups finely ground gingersnap cookies (about 1¾ pounds)
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup (packed) golden brown sugar
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted

FILLING

- ½ cup dark rum
- 4 8-ounce packages cream cheese, room temperature
- 1½ cups sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ⅓ cup whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

TOPPING

- 2½ cups sour cream
- 7 tablespoons sugar
- 1¾ teaspoons vanilla extract
- Rum-Caramel Sauce (see recipe)

FOR CRUST: Blend ground cookies and both sugars in processor. Add butter and process to blend. Divide cookie mixture among ten 4½-inch-diameter springform pans with 1½-inch-high sides (about ½ cup packed per pan). Press crust onto bottoms and up sides of pans.

FOR FILLING: Position racks in top and bottom thirds of oven; preheat to 325°F. Boil rum in small saucepan until reduced to ¼ cup, about 1 minute. Cool.

Using electric mixer, beat cream cheese in large bowl on low speed until smooth. Gradually beat in sugar. Add eggs 1 at a time, beating on low speed just to blend after each addition, occasionally scraping sides of bowl. Beat in spices, then cream, vanilla, and cooled rum just to blend. Divide filling among

wrap it up

- + Place cake in a wrapped gift box.
- + Tie with ribbon and a small, sparkly ornament.
- + Pour the caramel sauce into a clean mustard jar or jam jar.
- + Cover with origami paper, tie with ribbon, and attach a wooden spoon.

prepared crusts (about 1 cup per pan).

Place cheesecakes on 2 rimmed baking sheets. Bake until tops appear set, puffed, and golden at edges but still move slightly in center when shaken, reversing sheets after 20 minutes, about 40 minutes total. Cool 5 minutes.

MEANWHILE, PREPARE TOPPING:

Whisk sour cream, sugar, and vanilla in large bowl. Divide topping among hot cheesecakes, about ¼ cup each, spreading to meet edges of crusts. Bake 10 minutes. Run knife around each cake to loosen crust from pan. Place hot cheesecakes directly in refrigerator. Chill uncovered overnight. (*Can be made 2 days ahead. Cover; keep chilled.*) Serve with Rum-Caramel Sauce.

RUM-CARAMEL SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

- 2 cups sugar
- ⅓ cup water
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup

- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1¼ cups whipping cream
- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons dark rum
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon vanilla extract

Combine first 4 ingredients in heavy medium saucepan. Stir over medium heat until sugar dissolves. Increase heat; boil without stirring until syrup turns deep amber color, occasionally swirling pan and brushing down sides with wet pastry brush, about 10 minutes (time will vary depending on size of pan). Remove from heat. Pour in cream (mixture will bubble vigorously); stir to blend. Mix in butter, then rum, cinnamon, and vanilla. Cool sauce completely. Divide among ten 4-ounce jars. Seal and refrigerate. (*Can be made 2 weeks ahead.*) ■

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