

Travelling through desserts

(My favourite desserts from Europe and Middle East, part I)

by
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The scene is recursive in Hollywood movies: the head of household punishes the rebel son or daughter without dessert.

Of course it would not be a punishment if he had forbid to take the soup or a glass of water. He knows very well that to go against the sweet ending of the meal can break the riot. And we could certainly bet that this is a suffering for the child, but never for a teenager or an unemancipated adult. Childhood is the kingdom of the sweet and adolescence the slow conquest of other tastes. Someone says that the first taste of the baby in the womb is the amniotic fluid and it is sweet. But dessert is more than the favourite part of the meal for kids. The dessert can redeem the suffering of a bad dinner or lunch and sentence with a "not bad" which would otherwise have left a painful memory.

In our Western culture dessert is the fruit, candy or other food that closes any meal, usually always sweet. I mean in our culture because throughout the World this axiom may not be so true. In Chinese cuisine there is no proper dessert recipes but sweet fruit dishes accompanying the meal anytime. In the Middle East there are hardly any pastries where to find cream or chocolate and so whites, pinks and browns of shopwindows are changed by golden brown of baklavas or ma'mul. I remember how odd was for me to see for the first time a pastry in Lebanon ! 'Where are the cakes? I remember I wonder.

In the Mediterranean diet sweet desserts were unknown until very recently, being the natural dessert the fruits. In the West we put sugar and fruits to the yogurt while in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean yogurt is an ingredient in many foods and rarely they take it as a dessert. Tell a greek to serve yogurt with a bag of sugar and he will rise his eyebrows full of skepticism.

The dessert has a bad reputation. It is accused of gaining weight and be harmful to health. Undoubtedly it can be. From time to time to take pastry cream is not the same as doing it every day. We are used to see the things in black or white. Is it normal to refuse the weekly pleasure of a cookie? Should we feel so guilty? Desserts should be reserved for special occasions and family gatherings. Once a week is a normal frequency. The rest of the week we should end meals with fruit.

It is true that cooking desserts is not an easy thing. We can vary the ingredients of a stew or add more or less water in a soup but we have to be careful with the desserts. The amount of each ingredient used must be accurate because of the risk that the dough does not rise or the custard will not set. Pure molecular mathematics.

I like desserts but I feel that I'm not much made for accuracy. I suffer with the doughs that do not rise, or with the recipes look too sweet or few sweet. Sometimes I feel the uncontrollable need to remove a spoonful of sugar when I feel that is too sweet, or to give ten degrees more to the oven if I think, as always wrongly, that the cake does not rise as fast as it should. I admit that I'm useless for cooking desserts. But even in my helplessness I have three basic recommendations to make. The first is to be patient. The second to be faithful to the recipe. The third, and not least, be sure the recipe is "good." The latter is not a hollow statement. In this age of Internet you find many recipes

unreliable. Look at Google the recipe for creme brule and find no less than a dozen which are essentially similar but are different, and much, about the number and diversity of the ingredients. It is true that the success or failure to make a recipe can be conditioned by the skills of the novice, but with recipes for desserts, if you have been followed all instructions and the result has been a failure is most likely that the prescription is defective. I have personally experienced at least fifty percent of disappointment when with other kind of foods I do not reach even five percent.

And here comes this book. All recipes have been made by me and some of them as a result of serious disappointment that little by little I was able to self correct. Probably not all the desserts you would desire are here but the ones are, I know at least they are ok.

Yet there are sophisticated recipes, low in calories, simple and those that even doing everything wrong are always succesful.

I selected the best and easiest dessert recipes from the Middle East and Europe. The choice was random as this book is the first in a series of books devoted to desserts from around the World. Some recipes are traditional while others, even they are known, have no popular support. I mean, not traditional means for me that your grandma or grandpa probably would not know how to cook them.

The weights and measures are based on the American system that differs little from the English one. I hope that you do not have problems in this regard.

Through World desserts you can make a comfortable journey for food cultures of the ancient world.

To follow the example about movies which began this introduction maybe you will remember the film starring Clint Eastwood's "Escape from Alcatraz." Clint played a prisoner's criminal newcomer to the Bay of San Francisco quickly began to make his escape. One veteran prisoner gave him the supplies needed to dig the tunnel and in return, according to the ratio of the request, asked a number of desserts. Of course that never gave his supplies in change of glasses of water or soups. Even he did not ask Clint to join the group of prisoners who try to attain their own freedom. Because maybe freedom is sweet. Because maybe he was still a kid.

To Joana Torres, my mother, summer 2010

INDEX

Basic Pantry	Pag 6
Cookware and utensils	Pag 8
Recipes	
● Crepes (Brittany, France)	Pag 13
● Apple crepes	Pag 15
● Flan (Spain)	Pag 16
● Chocolate's flan	Pag 18
● Apple pie (England)	Pag 19
● Strawberries in english cream (England)	Pag 21
● Pineapple with catalan cream (Catalonia, Spain)	Pag 23
● Phylo dough (Greece)	Pag 25
● Apfelstrudel (Austria)	Pag 27
● Floating island (France)	Pag 29
● Baklava (Middle East)	Pag 31
● Yogurt (Bulgaria)	Pag 35
● Looqemat (Saudi Arabia)	Pag 38
● Tufahija (Bosna and Herzegovina)	Pag 40
● Rosquillas de l'Empordà (Catalonia, Spain)	Pag 42
● Awwamaat (Lebanon)	Pag 45
● Churros (Madrid, Spain)	Pag 47
● Jachnun (Yemen)	Pag 49
● Quince Glace (Turkey)	Pag 52
● Pears biscuit	Pag 54
● Pears in wine (Spain)	Pag 56
● Fruit salad or Macedonia (France)	Pag 58
● Melba peaches (France)	Pag 60
● Banana cake (Canary Islands, Spain)	Pag 63
● Kabak Tatlısı (Turkey)	Pag 64
● Arnadí (Valencia, Spain)	Pag 65
● Mel i Mató (Catalonia, Spain)	Pag 67
● Greixonera ibicenca (Ibiza, Spain)	Pag 69
● Torrijas (Spain)	Pag 71
● Flaó (Ibiza, Spain)	Pag 73
● Rice with milk or rice pudding (Spain)	Pag 75
● Muhallebi (Turkey)	Pag 76
● Menjar blanc (Catalonia, Spain)	Pag 77
● Tavuk Gogusu (Turkey)	Pag 79
● Keskül (Turkey)	Pag 81
● Ma'mul (Middle East)	Pag 82
● Chocolate's mousse (France)	Pag 84
● Cold Tarte Tatin (France)	Pag 86
● Carrot cake (England)	Pag 88
● Syrup cake (Lebanon)	Pag 90
● Halva (Middle East)	Pag 92
● Tiramisu (Italy)	Pag 94
● Fried milk (Andalusia, Spain)	Pag 96
● Panna Cotta (Italy)	Pag 98
● Cake	Pag 100

BASIC PANTRY

Before starting to cook desserts we have a set of basic ingredients and various utensils.

- **Flour:** essential for making cakes, crepes, pastries ... It is important to use a quality flour, suitable for pastry work. Often it is worth buying directly from the bakeries or pastry shops. Buy always baker type. It is not more expensive but is the turning point for a successful or a failure cake. The good flour is slightly yellow and pressing between our fingers is a bit sticky.
- **Eggs:** are essential for creams, custards, pastries ... Currently you can buy pasteurized egg yolks or whites in special containers with less risk of bacteriological contamination.
- **Yeast :** essential for bread or cakes baking. There are two main types: fresh yeast and the chemical or powder yeast. The first is made up of microscopic fungi and produces a slow loosening. The second is a mixture of an acid and bicarbonate to produce an instant loosening. In pastry is usually prefer the fresh because it gives better taste, although is more difficult to work and needs time to be effective. In both types the aim is the same : fill the air dough that contains it.
- **Milk :** part of many recipes and essential for making yogurt, custard etc. You can use whole, semi or skimmed milk and in case of intolerance replace by soja milk.
- **Salt:** required to produce dough, mousse, bread etc. Even sweetest doughs use to require a tiny pinch of salt.
- **Cornflour:** cornstarch or corn flour is an excellent thickener used in the pastry cream, amongst many other recipes.
- **Butter:** saturated fat that is used to give flexibility, taste and texture. It is not interchangeable with margarine.
- **Sugar:** one of the main ingredients of desserts. It can be changed by other sweeteners but carefully. For example honey can make the work of sugar but since it is much more sweet you need only half quantity.
- **Chocolate:** used in hedges or fillers. Always prefer to use tablets at least 70% and melt or grate according your needs.
- **Cream:** liquid in brick containers or pressurized already sweetened.
- **Oil :** for frying use always olive oil extra virgin while for doughs and other purposes sunflower or corn oils are better.
- **Various types of pasta :** puff pastry, phyllo etc. Better to have them frozen cause to make them at home is little 'gratifying'.
- **Fruits in syrup:** to be part of salads or fruit salads if we have no fresh fruit. The cherries in syrup are used as ornaments, cakes and pastries.
- **Fresh fruit :** the cheapest and best desserts ever invented. Also widely used in other desserts we find apples, pears, pineapple, peaches, oranges and strawberries.
- **Nuts:** pine nuts, almonds, macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts etc.
- **Candied fruit:** mainly used in decorating cakes.
- **Natural flavors:** the most common are cinnamon (powder and branch), vanilla and lemon peel, orange blossom water or rose, among many others.
- **Yogurt:** Greek type or normal.
- **Gelatin :** granular compound or in leaves.

- **Jams:** different types, the most used the peach, apricot and berries. Tortel and crepes fillings.
- **Decorations :** chocolate noodles, grated coconut etc.

COOKWARE AND UTENSILS

- **Pastry bag:** with several mouths to spread pastry cream, or to make churros.



- **Electric mixer**



- **Whisk:** metal, bamboo or fiberglass to avoid scratching the pans.



- **Ice-cream maker :** to make ice creams based in milk very easily



- **Dispensing ice cream:** To take "balls" of ice cream.



- **Set of saucepans and stainless steel bowls.**



- **Measures jar for liquids or loose solids.**



- **Electronic scale with bowl-shaped container.**



- **Rolls of aluminum or wood.**



- **Sieves:** heavy gauge, medium and fine.



- **Metal or silicone molds:** for cakes, puddings etc. Silicone molds withstand high temperatures well, and they are flexible and easy to clean.



- **Flour sifter**



- **Grater for lemon peel, orange etc.**



- **Brushes.**



- **Burners for crema catalana.**



- **Nonstick baking sheet**



- RECIPES -

CREPES (Brittany, France)



The crepes are a good support for both starters and desserts and therefore they are very popular at breakfast: we can do a roll of crepe stuffed with feta cheese and finish with a crepe filled with sweet fig jam. Although it is generally made a distinction between recipes of sweet and salty crepes, usually is enough to make a single type 'salty' leaving the point of salt a bit low so that the flavor becomes neutral. The neutral crepes suit well with salty and sweet ingredients while the sweet crepes should not not marry well with the salty stuffing. Crepes are originally from Brittany, a region located at the Northwest of France. However the crepes, under many different names, are very popular in most Europe and America.



INGREDIENTS:

3 cups all-purpose wheat flour
1 cup milk
2 eggs
3 tablespoons butter
1 pinch salt

Mix all ingredients and beat. The resulting dough should have no lumps and have the consistency of the melted chocolate. If it is very dry, add milk and if too much liquid you should rectify with a little flour.

We take a non-sticking skillet and heat at medium fire. With a bit of butter we paint the bottom. When the skillet is hot we take part of the liquid dough using a dipper like the ones used to serve soup. We pound it in the center, stirring with a spatula to cover the entire bottom of the pan. When the edge of the dough starts to darken we turn upside down. If you paint again with butter before to make the second face, would be better. It is possible that the first pancake is just a proof because perhaps we should rectify the elasticity of the dough or the temperature of the plate. If the crepe breaks probably is too dry, while if it has a lot the taste of the flour means we made it too thick.

Salty suggestions:

- Fill with feta cheese and ham York
- Peppers, tuna and boiled egg
- Asparagus with cheese sauce

Sweet suggestions:

- Fill with fig jam
- Cream
- Chocolate and cream

Difficulty : Low
Traditional : Yes

APPLE CREPE



INGREDIENTS:

For the stuffing:

- 1 large apple granny kind (for 2 guests)
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 1 branch of cinnamon
- 1 generous tablespoon of butter

For the crepe (see recipe above)

First let's make the stuffing. In a small skillet heat a tablespoon of butter with a branch of cinnamon. Peel and cut the apple in dices and add to the skillet.

Cover the pan with a lid and simmer till the dices get soft. Be care to only lift the lid to stir quickly the apple. Add the sugar and a bit of water if it does not melt completely.

Now do the crepe as we have just seen in the previous recipe.

We put the pancake on the plate and put in the middle half of the cooked apple. Fold and close. It is important to do it fast because the crepe should be eaten hot. We can cover with a little chocolate syrup or cream and serve immediately.

FLAN (Spanish recipe)



The dessert called in Spain 'flan' is known in other countries as crème caramel. Both names are derived from French. The flan, as it is known in Spain, is a cream solidified by the coagulating action of the eggs. Flan is usually top bathed in liquid caramel. Flan is probably the most consumed milk dessert in Spain together with yogurt. Flan is known in Europe since the times of the Roman Empire, though at the beginning the recipe was obviously quite different. Flan recipe can be found in many countries with slight variations in ingredients and flavors.



INGREDIENTS:

2 cups of milk

One branch of cinnamon

1 scrape lemon peel (or branch of vanilla)

5-6 egg yolks (4 yolks is risky, 5 is ok while 6 is very conservative and you should not fail to coagulate the custard)

7 ounces of sugar

1. Making the caramel

First we are going to make the caramel. From the 7 ounces of sugar take around 2 ounces. Place the sugar in a pan and set it in medium fire with few drops of lemon juice. The lemon juice prevents caramel to cristalize. When the sugar gets liquid with the color of honey quickly pour it at the botton of individual molds or in a large mold if you plan to make a large single flan. The caramel will solidifize, never mind. Later on the caramel will get liquid again. If you do not like the caramel simply skip this step.

2. Making the custard

Boil the milk with the branch of cinnamon and the peel of the lemon. The peel should not have the white part because is bitter. If you do not like lemon flavour use vanilla branch.

Meanwhile beat the egg yolks with the rest of sugar (5 ounces) using a whisk. Remove the cinnamon branch and the lemon from the boiled milk. Pour the milk slowly to the mix of yolks and sugar, stirring all the time. Do not do pour the beaten yolks to the boiled milk : most probably the flan will not get solid. Always pour yolks to the milk, not otherwise. That's specially true if you use few yolks. Now distribute the custard in each of the individual molds (or in the large one).

3. The oven

Preheat the oven at 350 F. Get a baking dish and fill it with water. Be sure that when you place the molds inside the baking dish the water will not reach the custard. Now put the baking dish into the oven with the molds. More or less in 1 hour the flan will be ready. In order to be sure the flan is made just stick a toothpick and if it comes out dry then is made. Allow to cool at room temperature and put in the refrigerator. The time inside the oven can change between 1 hour and 1 hour and 15 minutes, up to your oven. Larger periods of time would mean custard will not get solidified and something was wrong during preparation.

Difficulty: Medium

Traditional : Yes

CHOCOLATE's FLAN



INGREDIENTS:

The same ingredients used to make the traditional flan we've seen before. Instead lemon and cinnamon (that we will not use for this recipe) we will use 1 ounce of black cocoa in tablet (70% or higher).

Chocolate flan is done exactly the same the traditional flan but when we remove the boiled milk from fire then we dissolve very well the ounce of cocoa, proceeding from that point as ever. For the chocolate flan we should not use caramel.

Difficulty: Medium
Traditional : No

APPLE PIE (England)



There are hundreds of recipes for apple pie. The one I submit here is made with a base of puff pastry, custard and a sliced apple surface. Regarding the puff pastry I assume that you buy it already made. Otherwise this recipe could be a headache.



INGREDIENTS:

Mass of frozen puff pastry (1 sheet)
4 apples
Unsalted butter

For the pastry cream:

2 pints of milk
4 / 5 egg yolks
5.3 ounces of sugar
Corn starch
1 branch of cinnamon or vanilla
1 scrape lemon peel

1. Making the custard

The pastry custard is made as the conventional custard but adding starch to make it thicker. If we're going to bake the custard we will always put less sugar compared with the one to be used to fill in cold or to decorate a cake. For example, in this recipe we use 5.3 ounces. If we would use the same custard in cold we should use instead 8.8 ounces.

First we separate one cup of milk and we reserve. We boil the rest of the milk with the branch of cinnamon or vanilla (according to your taste), the peeling of lemon without the white part (that is bitter) and sugar. As we have added sugar from the beginning we will have to stir continuously to prevent sticking to the bottom of the pot as well as for to dissolve it well. When the milk boils remove from the fire.

While we will have separated a cup of milk we will mix it with 3.5 ounces of corn starch and the yolks, beating vigorously so that everything is well dissolved.

We remove the branch of cinnamon and scrape of lemon skin and slowly we add to the bowl of yolks and cornstarch mixture, stirring. Beat vigorously with the whisk to leave no lump and let stand until cool.

2. Making the cake

In a mold that can be baked, preferably metal with the shape of the sheet of puff pastry, grease the bottom with a little butter. Above that we will extend the puff pastry according to manufacturer's instructions. The pasta should go up the sides of the mold to hold the pastry cream. With a spoon cover the breadth of the puff pastry with the cold cream. Peel the apples and remove the core to cut into thin slices with the shape of half a moon. Place in order over the custard and let them to overlap a bit in between. Put some shavings of butter above the apples (with 4 or 5 will be more than enough). Preheat oven to 350 F degrees and with half an hour should be sufficient or until the apple puff pastry and the apples are made at sight.

Difficulty: Medium

Traditional : Yes

STRAWBERRIES IN ENGLISH CREAM (England)



This is a truly exceptional dessert that can be served on special occasions. Your guests will be nicely surprised.



INGREDIENTS:

Strawberries (1.1 pounds approximately four servings)
4 cups semi-skimmed milk
4.4 ounces sugar
4 eggs
1 branch of vanilla

1. To make the english cream

We bring milk to boil with the branch of vanilla and then we reduce to a minimum fire. Remove the vanilla branch. We take the four eggs' yolks and beat with the sugar using the whisk. Add yolks to milk slowly – not viceversa – and put again the mix to the casserole keeping the little fire and stirring non-stop for ten minutes. Check that the milk does not boil at any time.

Remove from fire. Let the cream gets the enviromental temperature. Then cool it in the refrigerator.

2. Prepare the strawberries and make the final presentation

Wash the strawberries and cut along in three or four parts each. We put in a large cup as used for ice cream bathing them with the cold english cream. Since the cream and is very pretty liquid we should provide our guests with a spoon. Therefore the pieces of fruit should be small enough to fit into the spoon.

Difficulty: Low
Traditional : Yes

PINEAPPLE WITH CREMA CATALANA (Catalonia, Spain)



Catalonia is a country located within Spain with a population near 6 millions. The biggest city is Barcelona, that is at the same time the second city of Spain. The inhabitants of Catalonia speak both spanish and their own language called catalan which is a latin language similar to italian, french and spanish. Catalanian gastronomy is very important. "El Bulli", located at the north, near to the border line with France, is considered since years the best restaurant in the World.

Crema catalana is the common name of custard in Spain. Crema catalana is thickened using the coagulating properties of the egg. Typical crema catalana is always served with a top layer of burnt sugar.



INGREDIENTS:

2 pints of milk
4 egg yolks
7 ounces of sugar
cinnamon stick
1 scrape of lemon peel

1 pineapple

1. Making the crema catalana

First we will make the crema catalana. Heat the milk till it boils with the branch of cinnamon and the scrape of lemon skin. Beat yolks with the sugar. Once done, add the hot milk slowly (remove before the cinnamon and lemon). To thicken the crema catalana put it in the oven at 350 ° F about 12 minutes. Anyway do not trust so much the timer of the oven. Simply check from time to time and withdraw the crema when it gets a middle texture between the crème caramel and the custard. Reserve.

2. Preparing the pineapple

Cut along the pineapple to get two parts. Empty each part carefully to separate the flesh from the skin. Cut the flesh in small dices and put again in every half of the pineapple in disorder. Do not re-use the juice the pineapple gave when cutting.

3. The final presentation

Now you should pour the crema catalana – if still hot it will be more easy – over every half of the pineapple. Do not stir, just leave the crema covers the fruit. If some parts of the fruit are not covered just leave it. Now sprinkle couple of tablespoons of sugar over every half of the pineapple. You must burn this sugar using a hot plate or a pre-heated metal spoon. Be careful, all the sugar should melt and give to the surface a toast color.

You can serve cold or with the contrast of warm-cold between the fruit and the custard, both are nice. Usually we provide a bowl to each guest with some extra shovelful of crema to serve at taste.

Difficulty: Medium

Traditional : No

PHYLO DOUGH (Greece)



The phyllo dough is very typical of the Eastern cuisine. In Middle East and Balkans phyllo dough is the standard dough for sweet and salty recipes. It is usually accepted a Greek origin but I suspect that his real home is the sepharad kitchen. Sepharad is the name given by jews to Spain. Large jewish communities existed in Spain since the times of Roman Empire. Sephardies – the jews of Spain – developed an incredible culture, including literature, medicine, philosophy and cooking was not less important. Sephardies suffered from prosecution during all their permanence in Spain until they were expelled in 1492. My theory is that phyllo dough was used extensively in the Middle Ages until it was gradually replaced by the puff pastry dough. Probably it was considered that to cook phyllo dough was cause for suspicion for the Inquisition, since the jews remained in Spain were forced to become christians and those converted were always blamed to continue practicing their religion in private. That was not a minor thing. For example is Spain still is in use the expresion 'to make saturday' in reference to clean the house in deep. If you were cleaning the house in saturday you were clearly showing you were not respecting the Sabath and therefore you were not jewish. In the same manner the ensaimada – a very typical dessert from Mallorca island - joined lard in its realization, an ingredient banned by the law of Moses that was not obviously present in its former jewish recipe. Anyway since I can not find solid proofs for my theory I must accept the greek origin.

To cook phyllo dough is from my point of view to make a great effort to get a poor result. The work required to make layers almost transparent when it is available in specialized shops at reasonable prices is very disproportionate. Anyway, for those 'kitchen heros' here is the recipe for phyllo dough according to the Greek recipe. Phyllo is used like base in many desserts.

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound of all purpose flour
Half a cup of warm water
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Corn starch
Teaspoon of salt

In a large bowl pour flour through a fine sieve. Add the teaspoon of salt. Then add slowly water till make a dough. Place the ball of dough on a smooth surface. Grease hands with a little olive oil and kneaded dough until gets smooth and elastic, adding occasionally a bit of olive oil. This kneading is long and hard. Until you do not have pain in your arms you won't get the proper texture. Now make a big ball, leaving it on a plate covered with a wet cloth. Place the dough in a warm place for at least two hours.

Once two hours have passed divide the ball in another 10 balls, more or less equal size, and roll them over a bit of cornstarch. Leave again half hour and finally knead balls with a rolling pin until we get them thin as paper squares of 17 inches side length, approximately. Phylo should be used immediately or cover with a wet cloth till it can be used. You can also freeze.

As you can see a very arduous job.

I always recommend to buy phylo made. You save a lot of unnecessary work. However if you buy phylo be careful handling it. If you buy frozen layers the first mistake is to thaw the product on the marble of the kitchen. In this case the layers will merge and would become useless, even though they have some film protection in between. You should always thaw frozen phylo in the upper part of the refrigerator, which can take several hours.

Second : do not worry too much because when you extract these foils they get broken. Always happens and is inevitable. Ruptures can be repaired with butter or baking in a way that disguises the break up.

And above all, patience. There is nothing comparable to the phylo dough ... nor can be frustrating that make or use it.

Difficult : High
Traditional : Yes

APFELSTRUDEL (Austria)



Apfelstrudel is certainly my favorite dessert and a usual source of frustration when it comes to preparation. The problem stems from the 'puff pastry' that envelops it and that obviously is not puff pastry (hopefully it would be!). In reality this is the famous and feared phyllo dough that we learnt to prepare in previous recipe. The phyllo dough is difficult to prepare so I recommend to purchase already made, usually frozen, to focus only on the filling and baking. Although in many cookbooks are used some



kind of doughs or even puff pastry is absolutely certain that the original recipe was made with phyllo dough since the Apfelstrudel is a variant of the Eastern baklava. And the baklava is invariably made with filo dough. It is likely that through contacts almost always unfriendly between the Turkish and the Austrian' empires the recipe for baklava slip into austrian' kitchens and the stuffing with nuts was changed by the apple. In any case if you decide to buy phyllo dough the procedure is actually very simple. That would be a sheet of filo filled with apple compote and baked and then dip the strudel with vanilla sauce and eat it warm. So simple, so delicious.

INGREDIENTS :

Phylo dough
1 pound of apples, granny type (a bit acidic)
Half a cup sugar
Half a cup raisins
1 lemon
Half a cup melted butter
Half a cup milk
Cinnamon
Dry bread
Rum (optional)

Peel apples and cut into small dices. In a bowl mix the apple dices with sugar, raisins, grated lemon skin – without the white part cause is bitter - , the juice of the lemon, half teaspoon cinnamon and teaspoon of rum (if you like it). Squeeze the mixture and let stand for half an hour.

Meanwhile we melt a tablespoon of butter in a pan, adding a spoonful of sugar and bread crumbs (you should grate it yourself, and verify that is well-dry). Stir till the bread begins to slightly burnt.

It is supposed you have thawed the phylo dough on the upper part of the refrigerator overnight before (never out at room temperature). Extend the phylo well into a smooth surface on a clean cloth of the same size or larger. Then paint quickly with melted butter and sprinkle the semi-fried bread leaving one inch margin on the edges. The bread is used to absorb moisture from the apples.

Take now the mixture we have made of apples, raisins and so on and put over the breadcrumbs and phylo pasta sheet and without wasting time we take the peaks of the cloth closest to us and got up to begin to roll the dough edge over itself . When the roll picks thickness we can do by hand directly – otherwise the phylo would break -.

At the end of the process we will have a roll of phylo stuffed with apple. Close off the edges and paint the exterior of the roll with melted butter. Place in oven at 375 F degrees for one hour. Then we take half a cup of milk and pour over the roll. We set again to baking at the same temperature for about 10 minutes.

You are ready.

Now we're going to cut it into portions of three or four fingers wide and cover it with vanilla sauce. To make the vanilla sauce I recommend simply to boil a pint of skimmed milk with a branch of vanilla, one tablespoon of sugar and thicken with a tablespoon of cornstarch. Cover with the sauce the Apfelstrudel.

From my point of view is one of the best desserts ever.

Difficulty: Medium-High (if you make phylo), low if you buy it
Traditional : Yes

FLOATING ISLAND (France)



There is a simple way to describe this dessert : an 'island' of meringue that 'floats' over custard 'sea'. The presentation of this dessert is awesome, with the meringue floating like an iceberg. You can find similar desserts in Germany and West Balkans but the recipe I describe is fully french original. In France is very popular and can be found in most restaurants named 'Ile flottant'.



INGREDIENTS:

4 cups of milk
6 eggs
1.1 pounds of sugar
Vanilla essence or vanilla's branch
1 pinch of salt

1. Making the custard

Heat the milk. Beat the yolks with 3.5 ounces of sugar. Then add hot milk and vanilla. Stir for about 10 minutes. Be care not to let milk boil. Remove and allow to cool.

2. Making the 'flan'

Beat now the white of the eggs, that we have separated before, with 7 ounces of sugar and a pinch of salt. Beat until stiff. Prepare a caramel with 7 ounces of sugar and a glass of water. With the caramel still hot bath the inner of the Ramekin Custard Cup. Now place the meringue inside the ramekin, being careful to remove all the air. Place the cup in bain-marie for about 45 minutes (or until the touch is not sticky) at 350 ° F. Remove meringue from its mould. Cool it in the refrigerator.

When both the custard and the creme caramel are cold we start to mount the dessert. Use at least a bowl of soup filled in its $\frac{3}{4}$ with the cream. Then cut a piece of the creme caramel and place in the center. You can garnish with chocolate shavings or sliced almonds.

Difficulty : Medium
Traditional : No

BAKLAVA (Arabic)

The baklava is one of the gastronomic summit of the East and possibly of the World. They can be found in the Balkans, Turkey, Middle East and India, under different names and recipes but essentially the same: filo dough alternating with nuts. Today you can find baklava in any country thanks to the



the presence of emigrants, or simply because they have started to produce locally. Its origin is under discussion. The classical theory locates origin in the arabic kitchen - in fact the name is Arabic - but another theory that takes great strength lately shows Turkey like the origin. The truth is that this is not a complex recipe and therefore it could have emerged in many places simultaneously. From my point of view the source must be linked to the transcendental use of filo dough instead other doughs that were being used for centuries. I suspect that this change occurred in the Jewish cooking, specifically to the Jews living in northern Greece. The phylo dough was adopted by Turkish empire that made baklava popular in Balkans and rest of the Middle East. I might be wrong, but the ingredients and how to make the baklava evokes me a past uniquely Jewish.



*Cooking baklava is easy if you have bought frozen phyllo dough. Otherwise it can become an unimaginable nightmare. I strongly recommend buy phyllo dough and above all **NEVER** replace it in this recipe with puff pastry dough or other kind. Baklava made without phyllo dough is not a real baklava.*

INGREDIENTS:

- 14 ounces of phyllo dough (about 24 sheets)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 7 ounces butter
- 9 ounces of dried fruits (eg pistachios, walnuts etc)
- Cinnamon powder (optional)
- Orange blossom water (optional)

The first thing to do is to clarify the butter. Low heat unsalted butter till melted and let stand for about five minutes, enough to form three layers. The superior layer is foam and you have to remove with a skimmer. The following is the layer that we are interested in preserving

and split by simple decantation. In the fund we will have a whitish substance which is the serum of the milk. Simply reject it.

In the event that we have bought frozen phylo dough we should have thawed it in the upper part of the refrigerator, never out of it to prevent the sheets stick to each other and remain unusable. If you anyway decide to make your own pasta phylo, just let me applaud your courage.

Now we're going to make the stuffing. There are two ways of doing so. The simple one I recommend is to mix some chopped nuts - pistachios and walnuts - with two tablespoons of sugar. The second, more complex, is to prepare a mixture with a tablespoon of orange blossom water, nuts, cinnamon powder and sugar. This mix presents the problem that is not advisable to fill phylo dough with wet stuff. In fact, it is totally undesirable and before using the second version of stuffing you should dry with absorbent paper. There is even a third way of making stuffing simply chopping the nuts, not to use sugar, and provide the sweetness with the syrup you will bath baklava later on. If you will not use syrup in no stage there is no other choice but to incorporate the sugar with the filling. Since I'm going to use syrup I will simply chop pistachios and nuts.

Now we're going to paint with clarified butter the bottom of a tray that can be baked. On that base deposit two sheets of phylo dough and paint it with butter. Then place another two sheets, paint again, and so on until we have a stack of 12 sheets (half of those available). Sprinkled on a uniform nuts to cover the entire surface and back to alternate two sheets of phylo with a coating of clarified butter until we are ready with all the phylo dough available. The top layer must be of course also painted so that it becomes golden when baked. Cut with a very sharp knife blocks of baklava – those will be the individual portions - either shaping in triangles or squares with the size of a mouthful.

Preheat the oven to bake at 420 °F degrees and keep the baklava for 10 minutes. Then we low temperature to 350 °F degrees and finish baking to a crisp and golden.

Let cool and cut away following the cuts we practiced before placing in the oven. Now we have to add the syrup.

INGREDIENTS FOR THE SYRUP:

1 cup sugar
Half a cup of water
1 tablespoon orange blossom water
Juice of half lemon

The orange blossom water can be done so simply by buying flowers of orange blossom and boiling in water, although it is possible to find it in the section of pastry in large shopping centers. If you do not find, use

rose water.

Put the water in a saucepan with the sugar and medium heat until it boils. Let boil for 10 minutes, stirring the foam as it appears. Add lemon juice and leave to simmer for another ten minutes. Orange blossom water is added at the end. It is important to cover the pan because if the water evaporates we will make caramel, not syrup. With this warm syrup we bath the baklava that are obviously completely soaked, ready to serve.

I strongly recommend this recipe, even you just can try in any restaurant or arabic pastry. Baklava is one of the summits of the gastronomies of the World and I am not exaggerating.

Difficulty: High

Traditional : Yes

YOGURT (Bulgaria)



photo : old ad of Danone in Spain

In 1492 Spain expelled the Jews from its territory. A large part of them found shelter in the Ottoman Empire under the protection of Sultan Bayezid II. The Sultan wonder during his whole life how a Kingdom was able to do without the cream of its artisans and merchants. A large part of them settled in the city of Thessaloniki, which was the second city of the ancient Byzantine Empire. The Jews of Spanish were self-called sephardies, from the word Sepharad that means Spain. During centuries the jewish formed the majority of the population of Thessaloniki. There they prospered until the beginning of the twentieth century when dense clouds threatened its prosperity. The Balkan wars, waged by the peoples of the area to get rid of the Ottoman yoke, as well as the tensions inherent in an empire in decline, provoked a deep unease among a population that all looked with hostility and which were, after all, dedicated people to trade involved in wars that were not providing the necessary safety for its work.

The Russian biologist Mechnikov, a Nobel laureate in 1908, outlined the theory that the extreme longevity of Bulgarian peasants was due to the ingestion of yogurt. He was so convinced of the goodness of the product that launched a crusade across Europe to promote it. However the industrialization of the production of yogurt has to be attributed to a sephardi of Thessaloniki called Isaac Carasso. He had traveled to Bulgaria - a few miles away from Thessaloniki - and knew the product. He also was aware of the work of Mechnikov. The industrialization did not take place in the East, but surprisingly in the west, and more specifically in Barcelona, Spain. How did it happen?

During First World War (1914-1918) Turkey aligned itself with Germany in logic opposition to the Balkan countries, newly independent of the Ottoman Empire. It was clear that hostilities were to develop in Thessaloniki, a city desired by all the powers of the area.

Isaac Carasso took his entire family and using a vague protection extended by the King of Spain Alfonso XIII (1886-1941) on the Jews of Spanish's origin he moved to Barcelona. Spain was neutral during the First World War and the Spanish King developed an important humanitarian work among contenders. At the end of the war Isaac Carasso began to manufacture a yogurt to which he named as Danone, in honor of her son Daniel, born in 1904.

At the beginning yogurt was not much popular in Spain. People used to take very different kind of products during breakfast and rarely used milk products for desserts or cooking. However some doctors started to prescribe yogurt to their patients. Therefore the first distribution channel for yogurt were pharmacies.

Yogurt slowly became popular and after some years it could be found in pastry shops, cafes and other retail outlets. Danone opened its first factory in Madrid in 1927 and from that moment on the popularity of yogurt in the World was unstoppable.

The origin of yogurt is controversial. Bulgaria and Turkey are disputing its invention. While the word [yogurt] is turkish and means 'to mix' most probably the current bacteriae used in modern yogurt have bulgarian origin. Probably turkish empire just made popular what it found in Bulgaria. We have seen as well that one russian and one jew were decisive in the modern development of the product.

Yogurt is extremely important in the East Europe and Middle East. Yogurt is mainly used in cooking and a much more less like dessert. However in West countries yogurt is considered a dessert. All the World generally agree that yogurt is extremely healthy food. In this point there is no discussion.



Let's explain now how to make yogurt at home. It's very simple.

INGREDIENTS:

8 cups of milk

1 yoghurt without sugar (in some countries called 'natural' or kumis)

From the yoghurt we only need the bacterium that converts the milk into yogurt. You must buy a simple one, without aroma and sugar, from the expository of refrigerated. If you buy a yoghurt for those exposed on shelves without refrigeration you won't be able to make yoghurt because the bacteriae have been removed artificially. By the way, if you want to make Greek yoghurt you do not need to buy one greek yoghurt. From a greek yoghurt you can only obtain a normal yoghout. At the end of this chapter I will explain how to get such kind of yoghurt.

First preheat the empty oven at 350 °F for about 20 minutes. Then switch off. We will use the oven like 'nest' for the fermentation.

Then boil the milk and let cool till 120 °F. If you do not have thermometer, simply watch the milk is few smokey and introduce your little finger. You will note the milk still very hot but you can keep the finger 'without too much pain'. That's very important cause the bacteriae need this temperature to start fermentation.

We recommend you have small recipients around 1 cup or less. Introduce in each one a tablespoon of the yoghurt you bought. Fill the recipients with the milk. Place the recipients in a box or a tray and wrap with a towel. Put quickly inside the oven and after 6 hours you should have a pre-yoghurt.

When you'll uncover the recipients you will find water and other products of the fermentation. Probably it is also a bit liquid in general. It's normal. You can remove serum – the liquid – if you want. Place now in the refrigerator and let it cool for two hours. The yoghurt will thicken much more and get the aspect we are used to.

Now imagine that you want to make greek yoghurt type. Greek yoghurt is more creamy, similar in consistency to mayonnaise. In the Middle East and East Europe is the usual kind you can find elsewhere. To obtain that creamy consistency you must remove the serum. Place all the yoghurt you got with the procedure just explained into a fine cloth bag and hang it to allow to drain freely overnight – or minimum 6 hours -. Then take the yoghurt and beat hard to get the creamy look. A small trick : add some cream to make it even more soft.

Difficulty: Low

Traditional : Yes

LOOQEMAT (Saudi Arabia)



I have eaten looqemat in Saudi Arabia but really do not know which is the origin of this dessert. If you ask to the Saudis generally they answer looqemat are Lebanese or Turkish origin although it should be noted that for them the whole food is imported, like they do not have any traditional and native recipe (which is not true, of course).

The looqemat is a sweet fritter that uses flour and yogurt. Serve hot or warm – never cold - bathed in the typical syrup that is used in the baklava. They are fairly simple to make but we must respect the times of fermentation so that the result is optimum.



INGREDIENTS:

Half a cup of Greek yogurt
1 cup and a half of all purpose wheat flour
2 teaspoons of fresh yeast
Half teaspoon sugar
Half a glass of warm water
Extra virgin olive oil *
A pinch of salt

** The Saudis seldom use olive oil. They usually use sesame oil, sunflower or other vegetable oils. The vegetable oil has good properties but they are worse behaving with high temperatures like the ones reached in the frying. For this reason I use olive oil. To prevent the delicate flavor is clouded by the olive oil is necessary to set the fritters on absorbent paper to remove excess oil.*

In a bowl, mix the yogurt, the white flour, salt and half the water and mix vigorously. This dough should stand for about 5 or 6 hours in one place at room temperature without much light (cover the bowl with a cotton cloth).

Separately mix the yeast with sugar and the rest of the water and left to ferment (again in dark place at room temperature). When this happens mix the yogurt with the sugar, beat with strength and let stand for three hours.

Now just fill a saucepan or skillet with two or three fingers of olive oil and heat until almost smoke. We will make balls 1 inch diameter and fry in a way that they are covered with bubbling oil (a heavy frying). When golden we remove from oil and put in a gilded paper to absorb excess oil. You should eat warm. If have done looqemat well and the quality of the flour is good the taste will be fine yoghurt. Otherwise it looqemat will have terrible taste to flour. Whatever the outcome, can conceal some imperfections when you bath the looqemat in syrup. For the syrup you will need:

1 cup sugar
Half a cup of water
1 tablespoon orange blossom water
Juice of half lemon

The orange blossom water can be done simply boiling orange blossom in water, although you may acquire it also in specialized shops. The water rose is also good for this recipe.

Put the water in a saucepan with the sugar and medium heat until it boils. Let boil for 10 minutes, stirring the foam as it appears. Add lemon juice and leave to simmer for another ten minutes. At the end you add the orange blossom water. It is important to cover the pan because if the water evaporates the mix will become caramel, not syrup as we want. With this warm syrup bathe the looqemat and if there's some residue of flour taste it disappears.

Difficulty: High
Traditional : Yes

TUFAHIJA (Bosna and Herzegovina)



This is one of the few Bosnian recipes I know but is difficult to know if tufahija is original of Bosna or common in countries of former Republic of Yugoslavia where it can be also found. Bosnia is a complicated puzzle of ethnicities and religions that led to an unfortunate war of the mid nineties, where Sarajevo capital was at the spot light of media world wide. The Tufahija is a dessert made with apples and nuts very easy to cook.



INGREDIENTS:

4 big apples (around 2.2 pounds)
9 ounces of sugar
3.5 ounces of nuts
Butter
Milk cream
Cream

We will seek a deep pan where will fit seamlessly the four apples. Fill the pan with enough water to cover the fruits. Boil the water and dissolve the sugar. Meanwhile peel the apples and remove the heart. Put quickly the apples into the boiling water before they begin to turn brown. Boiling water will make apples soft but not so much cause they could break. Reserve.

With the help of a mortar shredded nuts in a coarse grain. We add to the mortar a couple tablespoons of water from cooking the apples. Fry slightly the nuts in one tablespoon of butter and a stream of milk cream until it is reduced by half. With this mixture fill the apples, using a teaspoon of coffee. Finally crown the apple with a jet of cream to cover the hole. Serve cold or warm.

Difficulty: Low
Traditional : Yes

ROSQUILLAS DE L'EMPORDÀ (doughnuts of L'Empordà, Catalonia, Spain)



The region of L'Empordà is located at the north east of Spain, within Catalanian country. Countryside is lovely and remembers to the Tuscany landscape in Italy. Seaside is also very nice, specially at the north. The area of Empuries, a ancient greek city next to a virgin beach, and the natural park of Cap de Creus are awesome. It is also worthy to visit the Museum of Dali in Figueres, the biggest genius born in this area. Cuisine has a wide variety of dishes. This doughnuts are typical of Easter and were usually eaten on Holy Thursday though nowadays they can be found at any time.



INGREDIENTS:

1.5 pounds of all purpose wheat flour

3.5 ounces grams of sugar

1.8 ounces grams of fresh yeast

5 eggs

1 / 4 cup milk

1 / 4 cup warm water

Lemon

Sweet liquor like anise (french pastis, greek ouzo, lebanese arak, spanish anis or similar). **This is optional.**

Salt

Virgin olive oil

Pour 7 ounces of flour through a sieve in a bowl with the yeast and the quarter-cup of warm water. Kneaded until it is flexible. If you need more water simply wet your fingertips cause the dough must be a bit 'dry'.

Let it stand in one place at room temperature, covered by a cloth until the dough rises twice its original volume.

When that happens - with two hours should be more than enough - add the egg, the milk, grated skin of a lemon – without the white part cause it is bitter - and if you want a small shot of liquor. In addition add a pinch of salt. Knead the dough again. You will realize dough is quite sticky. While kneading we have to incorporate through the sieve the remaining 1.1 pounds of flour. Indeed you have to stop to add flour when the dough is not sticking anymore in your fingers. Sometimes you should need a bit more than 1.1 pounds, be aware. What is more important is to stop adding flour exactly at the time that the dough does not adhere. After this we have to knead more – work hard the dough – and then leave to rest for two hours.

Now we're going to fry the donuts.

We get the dough and do some rounded strips of about 4 inches long. Press to close well the ends or the donut will open when frying. Meanwhile we will have to heat oil in a large pan. Oil must have enough depth to let donut float freely while frying without touch the pan. This is important because we have to fry the maximum number of donuts as possible at the same time cause this dessert is taken always hot or warm. If we use small pan when finishing to fry the last donuts we would have cold the first ones.

As I said before we close the strip to shape the bagel and immediately put them to fry with a good bubbling oil. When they are golden we turn to fry the other side. We remove and leave on a kitchen paper to absorb the excess oil. Sprinkle sugar over – do not use caster sugar, simply the normal one - and they're ready to eat before they get cold.

Difficulty: Medium-High
Traditional : Yes

AWWAMAAT (sometimes Zalabiya, Lebanese donuts)



This recipe is very typical of the entire Middle East, from Istanbul to Saudi Arabia. However the origin of this dessert is lebanese. Specifically is the typical sweet for Christmas in Lebanon (where slightly less of 50% of the population follow the Eastern Christian rite).

Thinking about awwamaat always comes to my mind the image of arabic pastries with huge trays of these donuts bath in golden syrup. Awwamaat are easy to cook if you control the frying, which is sometimes difficult. The most correct recipe is the one that employs laban, but they can also be made with yogurt. When we talk about awwamaat we mean a shape like fritter while zalabiya are much more similar to american donuts. In both cases the ingredients are the same.



INGREDIENTS:

7 cups of Laban or yogur (greek kind)
All purpose wheat flour
1 pinch of salt
Half tablespoon of baking soda
1 cinnamon branch
1 lemon
Half a cup of honey
Virgin olive oil

First pour into a bowl the Laban with a pinch of salt and baking soda. Now we will be add flour to form the dough.

The method that I have to do awwamaat is to add gradually the flour (passed through a fine sieve) stirring non-stop the mixture with the whisk. Stop adding flour when the dough stops to stick from the sides of the bowl. If you want to do zalabiya moisten your hands and get a strip of the dough around 4 inches long and make the donut. If I want to do awwamaat simply knead a ball with the help of the spoon (a small ball a bit less of one inch diameter). Put plenty of oil in a large pan and heat to the point that just starts to smoke slightly. Then fry the zalabiya without touch in between. Zalabiya will sink into the oil immediately but will rise to the surface with an intense bubbling oil (which is a good sign showing everything runs smoothly). You have to fry until they acquire a golden color on both sides (flip once is enough).

They are usually served with a base of syrup. The simplest way to make syrup is to mix the juice of half a lemon, the branch of cinnamon and honey in a pan and bring to boil. Once this happens, switch off fire and remove the cinnamon branch and the liquid is poured on zalabiya or awwamaat. Serve warm or room temperature.

Difficulty: Medium-High
Traditional : Yes

CHURROS (Madrid, Spain)



The origin of the churro is Madrid, capital of Spain, although it is now very popular throughout South America, USA and other countries. In Spain the churros are very typical, being possible to find stable and stalls selling anywhere. Consumed mainly at breakfast, newly purchased and warm or hot, being perfect as a restorative. There's nothing better than dipping churros in a cup of thick chocolate. It's a very simple recipe to make although the job requires a lot of virgin olive oil and a pastry bag. Anyway it is worth. One Sunday morning in Spain that dawns with a dish of churros is really a Sunday.



INGREDIENTS:

2.2 pounds of wheat flour
2 teaspoons salt
2.1 pints bottled water
Virgin olive oil

In a large saucepan, put to boil water with salt and 3 / 4 of a cup with olive oil. When the water starts to boil add the flour, but care, always through a sieve, stirring the water constantly with a wooden spatula. Stirring water while cooking thickens the mixture and will eventually form a ball of dough around the spatula. That ball comes unstuck from the pan easily. At that moment we fill up with the dough the pastry bag (which should have docked a star-shaped mouth) and cast a circulation in the form of a snail inside frying pan with plenty of oil very hot (dough should float). Let fry golden on one side and turn to make the same at the other side. We remove, put on absorbent paper to remove excess oil and cut into pieces. Sprinkled with sugar and eat ALWAYS hot or warm. When churros get cold become like rubber !

Difficulty : Low
Traditional : Yes

JACHNUN (Yemen)



Probably you will find that this recipe belongs to Yemeni cuisine but in reality it is another sample of Jewish cuisine. Jewish cuisine is present directly or has a strong influence in many gastronomies of the World. The cuisines of Spain, Morocco, Greece, Balkans and Middle East are plenty of Jewish dishes. The Jewish diaspora that began almost 2000 years ago led their formats culinary spread throughout the known World and suffered too, thanks to the isolation of the Jewish communities, a particular and unique development. The transfer of the recipes from Jewish communities to their Christians or Muslims neighbours was inevitable because the cuisine knows no barriers. The famous Easter Mona cake, very popular in Catalonia (Spain) and the Marzipan from Toledo (also in Spain) are actually Jewish desserts and even ensaimada from Mallorca is almost certain that was a creation of the Jews from the Balearic Islands. Moreover, due to the terrible plight that has suffered the people of Abraham, over the centuries, some recipes were transformed by the Gentiles (as Jews call non-Jews) that took them as its own to avoid be accused of 'Jews friend'. So we think that the ensaimada was added lard because this animal is banned in the Jewish tradition. Probably before it was made with butter.

Jachnun has a similar story. It was created by Jews living in Yemen and taken by the Arabs who have made it the typical and traditional breakfast of the country. You can eat jachnun in Yemen but also in Israel (in latest case imported by the jews of Yemen that came back to Israel after its creation like modern state in 1948).



INGREDIENTS:

- 1.1 pounds of all-purpose wheat flour
- 3.5 ounces of butter
- 3 teaspoons of sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 cups of warm water

We take all ingredients and mix in a bowl. From the butter will use only 0.8 ounces, reserve the remaining.

We will make the mixture with energy, kneading with our hands until it turns into an elastic dough. When this happens let it stand for half an hour covering with a damp cloth. After this period we will knead again the dough and then divide it into six balls. We re-cover with a damp cloth and let stand one hour. After this we will create the typical form of jachnun. Take the remaining 2.7 ounces of slightly melted butter and extend over a flat surface. Take one of the balls, place over the butter and with the help of a rolling pin we extend as much as we can. Sprink the dough with a little more melted butter and began to fold in one direction making layers of about one inch in width that are overlapping as if they were the bellows of an accordion. At the end of the process you obtain a kind of roll of about 8 inches

long and 1 or 2 inches wide. Now we're going to bake. The baking of the jachnun is slow and differentiator. Indeed is the baking the one that gives character to the recipe.

Preheat the oven at 190 °F. Place the rolls there for at least 8 hours. Usually the jachnun is made by night. Therefore the jachnun is made during sleeping hours to find it baked for breakfast. The result is a dough of brown color that is served at breakfast with boiled eggs and spicy tomatoe sauce.

Difficulty: Medium-Low

Traditional : Yes

QUINCE GLACE (Turkey)



The quince is a fruit with pear appearance but larger. Its flesh is coarse and acid and little attractive to the palate. In fact most of the food guidelines do not consider that quince can be eaten as it is. The origin of quince is Persia but there has hardly been cultivated and Turkey is currently the largest producer in the world. In Turkey the quince can be rarely consumed like table fruit but jam and patisserie is its normal use.

I ate this recipe for the first time in a well-known restaurant on the Istiklal street in Istanbul. While natural quince is heavy and coarse, this dessert, though still has the flavour of the original fruit, surprisingly is soft, light and delicate.



INGREDIENTS:

1.1 pounds of quince
0.6 pounds of sugar
1 stick of cinnamon

First remove the skin of the quinces and their seeds. Do not throw the seeds and skin, but put them to cook in 2 pints of water for an hour at low fire. When this period of time is over, pass by the strainer adding immediately all the sugar and stir until it dissolves.

At the same time we boil the flesh of the fruit in water -user very low quantity of water, just to cover the fruit - for half an hour or so. This short period won't be able to make quince soft, but it will make easier the oven's job. Now put the cooked flesh on a pan that can be baked and bathe with the broth that we have obtained from the skin and seeds. Preheat the oven at 190 F degrees and leave inside until the quince gets glaze (which means soft and soaked in sugar water). This may take some hours (2 at least), so be patience. It is served as dessert with a bit of creamy vanilla ice cream or directly topped with cream (like in Turkey the restaurants do).

Difficulty: Low

Traditional : Yes

PEARS BISCUIT

This recipe is a courtesy of Anabel Molina



The pear is a fruit known since ancient times. Probably it was first cultivated somewhere East Europe or Minor Asia. However currently can be found almost all over the World thanks to its good adaptation to hot and cold climates. Pear has many nutritional properties and provides very few calories.

I do not have an exact origin of this recipe but in view of the origin of the fruit we place it at Eastern Europe.



INGREDIENTS:

- 4 or 6 pears
- 1 cup sugar
- Brandy, cognac or other liquor *
- Mass of cake or pie baked
- Pastry cream
- Sugar glass

* If you want to give a 'easter flavour' to your biscuit use eastern liquors like tuica, slivovitz or rakia.

First we will prepare a light syrup with pears. To do this we mix three glasses of water in a pot – for the time being without putting to the fire - which contains a cup of sugar and a teaspoon of brandy or other liquor. Stir until the sugar has dissolved almost completely. We peel the pears - which must be of white, relatively hard flesh - and cut into four sections parallel to the center. Now we put to low fire the mixture of water and sugar. Stir until all the sugar has been dissolved. At that time we incorporate the sections of the pears and we simmer until the pears are soft and half transparent or the liquid has reduced by one third and gained the consistency of the syrup. Leaving aside to cool. On a mass of cake one finger thick distribute the pastry cream. On top of this layer of cream we put the pear halves in syrup, topped the cake with a thin layer of sugar glass. Serve cold or slightly warm.

Difficulty: Low
Traditional : No

PEARS IN WINE (Spain)



This recipe is typical from the North of Spain. North of Spain is humid, cold and rainy. Its climate is not different to the one of french atlantic coast. Orange or lemon can not be cultivated so apple and pear are the most common fruits there. If you like wine and fruit, this is the most tasty and easy dessert you can prepare.



INGREDIENTS:

4 pears (1 per guest, select hard flesh pears).
1 / 2 cup red wine
1 / 2 cup sugar
1 lemon rind
1 cinnamon stick

Peel pears and place in a small saucepan. We fill the pot with red wine and one lemon rind (remove white part because it is bitter). Put also a cinnamon stick. We set on fire on medium heat to go cook slowly.

Cooking time depends on the hardness of the pear, but ranges from 10 to 20 minutes. After this time we add the sugar, stirring carefully not to break the fruit. Maintain for 15 minutes plus. If the mix is drying up a poud a little more wine.

Serve at room temperature dipped in a little broth.

It should be noted that you have to use quality wine. If we are unable to drink the wine that we use for food there is no doubt that the recipe would not be good.

Difficulty: Easy
Traditional : Yes

FRUIT SALAD (MACEDONIAN SALAD), France



The usual name of this recipe in english countries is 'fruit salad'. However in France, Spain and Italy is more common 'macedonian salad'. Such name was given during XIX century probably in France. At that time the newspapers were full of troublesome stories about Macedonia, a slavian country between Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia that was trying to get rid of the turkish yoke. Macedonia was at that time – and still is – a mixture of many ethnics groups : bulgarians, greeks, serbs, bosnians, albanians, turks... An imaginative french cooker got the idea that each fruit set in a fruit salad could represent one of those ethnicities. Thus while the russian salad got its name because its origin in Russia, the Macedonian salad owes its name to the political situation of the moment.

Currently there is a dispute between Macedonia and the region of the same name located at the North of Greece. Greece does not accept such name for the slavian country because it says refers to a historical country and region within greek country.

Fruit salad is not a popular recipe in Macedonia. However they do not get disturb because the given name to the fruit salad in some countries. And some nationals find the name quite self-explaining of the Macedonian ethnic groups.



INGREDIENTS :

2 kiwis
2 oranges
6 / 8 oranges to squeeze
2 apples
2 peaches
2 bananas
2 pears
1 pineapple
1 yogurt without sugar or liquid yogurt (optional)

The type and quantity of fruits used can change according seasonal availability in the area. Also you can use a mixture of canned fruits – like pineapple – and fresh ones. Fruit should not be in any case too much ripe.

Squeeze the oranges to take the juice. Pour in a large salad bowl. Peel and cut into small blocks the kiwis, pears, apples, pineapple and peaches. We incorporate to the salad bowl.

Peel the two oranges and then slice into portions easy to carry in our mouths. We slice the bananas. Mix well with care and do not add any sugar (fruit has fructose which is the proper and natural sweetener).

If you are not going to eat the salad immediately is advisable to mix the juice with two tablespoons of yogurt to slow oxidation and the consequent lost of vitamins.

Difficulty: Easy

Traditional : Yes

MELBA PEACHES (France)

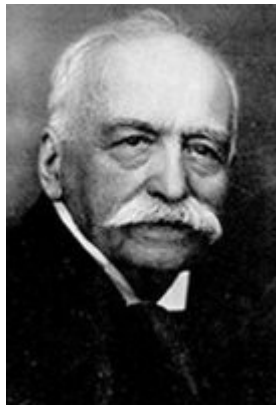


This dessert is more interesting about history than the recipe itself. The chef Auguste Escoffier created it in honor of the Australian opera singer Nellie Melba in the late nineteenth century. At first it was a vanilla ice cream with peaches in syrup and later added a raspberry sauce that has been known since then as the Melba sauce. What is interesting about this? First, the creator. Chef Escoffier was also a great promoter of gastronomy and the Father of the strong association since the nineteenth century between the large hotels and important restaurants that host, so much so that today any renowned Hotel host at least one restaurant worthy of hanging a Michelin star. Escoffier was chef at the Ritz, the Savoy and Carlton, three examples of these hotels with great restaurants. Also this guy wrote several works that all French chefs have read at least once in their life. He is considered one of the fathers of French gastronomy - with all the good and bad that entails -.

Another important aspect of this recipe is that it is one of the first recipes to which was assigned the name of a person to which the cooker admired and honored. This detail, which may seem trivial, was novel in the nineteenth century in which for the first time the concept of gastronomy was seen more than fill the belly and a simple dessert worthy gift, in this case, of an opera star of the magnitude of the Melba. Certainly in that time the fame of the diva dwarfed the gift but it is curious that with the passage of time Mrs Melba has been almost forgotten to the general public to become just a tasty dessert. Finally we have the peach itself. What is behind the peach? Well, actually has a name that does not suit, like the American Indians are named for the confusion of Christopher Columbus.

The first Europeans who knew this fruit did over the Persians. Previously they knew the melon - originating in Central Asia - and saw the peach similar in shape. So they called it "persikon melon", ie the Persian melon. It was clearly not a melon, not even same family, and neither was Persian. The peach originated in China and Persia was a mere transmitter, a bridge between East and Europe. In the same way we now call Arabic numerals to numbers that were in reality from India.

The peach is an excellent high-fiber fruit that can be added to any course or eat alone like dessert. As a curiosity indicate it is not uncommon that there are people allergic to the skin but



Auguste Escoffier



Nellie Melba

not the pulp of the peach. These allergies react to a protein on the surface and people are not able to touch it without getting



sick. Therefore they have to ask someone to peel for them.

It's a bit sad that peach skin, soft as velvet, contain this wicked protein. Because in fact in China, their country of origin, skin texture has resulted from ancient times to call "peach" to the most beautiful women. In China the peach is called "Tao" and a typical name of women in this country is "Spring Peach" and sounds more or less "Chuntao".

INGREDIENTS:

Vanilla ice cream
Raspberries
Peach in syrup

The preparation is individual and in ice cream cup, if possible. We dispose vanilla ice cream at the bottom of the cup and we add a little cold milk and work with the rods to get a softer texture. But it is better if you have soft ice cream. We fill the bottom three fingers thick. Now we add two peach halves in syrup. For the sauce we use a few fresh raspberries in a blender and a very fine sieve to take out the seeds. It is a delicate job but do not despair if remains any seed, it use to happen. The resulting sauce bathes the peaches that, following an unwritten orthodoxy, must be with the back facing the diner. It is quite common to serve the cup with some whole raspberries crowning the whole.

Difficulty: Medium
Traditional : No

BANANA CAKE (Canary Islands)

A very simple and easy dessert, original from Canary Islands (atlantic islands that belong since XV century to Spain) though there is a similar recipe in Venezuela. It is done in ten minutes and the kids love it.



INGREDIENTS:

1 banana per guest
2 tablespoons sugar
2 eggs
2 tablespoons flour
Cinnamon
Virgin olive oil

These measures would serve us to cook about four bananas.

Peel the bananas and remove them longitudinal strands. We put in a pan and pour boiling water over them so they are covered. We keep this bath for about five minutes. Then we take and pour in a bowl with sugar, eggs, flour and half a teaspoon of cinnamon powder and work the dough with a fork, for example, until everything is chopped (no need to get a very fine and homogeneous dough). The resulting dough can make four small cakes or a big pair, keeping in mind that now we have to fry and the smaller will be easier to fry. Fry in plenty of olive oil until they turn golden (just golden, not black !). Let drain to remove extra olive oil. Serve cold or hot, to taste.

Difficulty: Low
Traditional : Yes

Kabak Tatlisi (Turkey)



The Kabak Tatlisi is a traditional dessert that uses pumpkin as the main ingredient. It is very easy to prepare and very tasty.



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 Pumpkin (small size)
- 5 ounces sugar
- 5 ounces of nuts

Remove the pulp of a pumpkin and cut into regular-sized cubes. We put the cubes into a pan and sprinkle with 5 ounces of sugar. Fill with water just to cover. We leave it for 24 hours.

After 24 hours we should put the pan to high heat until it begins to boil. When the water boils we put low the fire till the pumpkin is tender (it should get 1 hour more or less).

Remove from the heat until it takes the room temperature. Grind the walnuts in a mortar and we sprinkle over ... and you're ready to serve.

Difficulty: Low

Traditional : Yes

Arnadí (Valencia, Spain)



The arnadí is a dessert that dates back to the time of Al-Andalus when the Arabs dominated much of the Iberian Peninsula. The etymology of the name is debatable: it may be a term Arab-Andalusian already obsolete or a reference to its origin. In the latter case it would be a modification of the word 'garnatí', ie, from Granada. Nowadays making of Arnadí has been centralized in the area of Valencia and is something like the typical dessert of the village of Xativa. It is usually eaten at Easter but now is done at any time of year because the ingredients are available for several seasons.

You can do Arnadí with pumpkin or a mixture of pumpkin and sweet potato. The truth is that I do not know what was the original ingredient used in Arabic recipe. Neither the pumpkin we know - the typical employed by Halloween - or sweet potatoes were available in Europe until the sixteenth century, so I guess the pulp was used came from another kind of native asian pumpkin that now has dissapeared from spanish gastronomy.

Worth to mention that this dessert is quite unknown even in most of Spain.



INGREDIENTS:

2.2 pounds pumpkin flesh
4 eggs
6 tablespoons orange blossom honey
1.5 ounces of pine nuts
3.5 ounces ground almonds
1.5 ounces of toasted almonds
One teaspoon ground cinnamon
Lemon

With regard to honey, indicate that it is obtained by bees exclusively from orange flowers. It's easy to find in supermarkets of Spain or in countries/ areas where there are oranges like California, Florida, Brazil, Israel etc . If you can not find it, used instead 12 tbsp white sugar or standard honey.

For the flesh of the pumpkin you catch just a whole pumpkin, then chop in very large parts, and put in the oven at 410 F degrees for about an hour (or until pulp is tender). When the pulp is well baked, then empty and pass by the blender. In the ancient recipe there was a further step that was to put the dough in a cloth and leave it hanging to go draining excess water overnight. A faster way is to deposit small balls of pulp in a fine sieve and go tightening with a wooden spoon to release the water. To the resulting pulp is added ground crushed almonds, eggs, honey or sugar, cinnamon and a teaspoon of grated lemon skin and knead until smooth.

The dough is placed in small clay pots giving a cone shape (see photo). Decorate with toasted almonds and pine nuts for baking below 300 F degrees until top is lightly browned.

It is left to cool at room temperature then cooled in the refrigerator, but can be eaten as it is or even hot.

Difficulty: Medium-High
Traditional : Yes

MEL I MATÓ (Catalonia, Spain)



'Mató' is the name in catalan of the cottage cheese. In spanish is called 'requesón' and in italian 'ricotta'. Mató can be made with several kinds of milk but in Catalonia usually is made with cow milk. Mató has a very delicate taste that suits well with salty and sweet ingredients. Mató is the base of the 'Mel i mató' but also can perform well in greek tirópita or in some babka recipes.

Currently you can find 'mató' or cottage cheese in any supermarket. Thus this recipe would be as simple as to poud honey over the bought cheese. However sometimes makes oneself proud to make her/his own cottage cheese and serve to the family the next morning with the breakfast.

To make mató we will use fresh milk with all the fat. The procedure is to 'cut' the milk using any acid, but mainly vinegar or lemon juice. To 'cut' means to separate the solid of the milk from the liquid (serum and water).



INGREDIENTS :

4 cups of cow milk
Apple or wine vinegar

Boil the milk to reduce water and thus increase the concentration of fat, as well as to sterilize . When the milk rises and is about to overwhelm the pot remove from fire. Wait till the milk goes down and place once again in the

fire stirring all the time. Once again the milk will be about to overwhelm, and once again you will remove. Do this around ten times – more or less – until milk will thicken. Withdraw and let cool. Now we're going to cut it. The optimal cut point occurs when the milk acquires a temperature of 158 F degrees. If you have a cooking thermometer better use it. Otherwise put in the finger: if you resist about two or three seconds that would be the ideal temperature. Then pour drops of vinegar, stirring. There will be a time, after some drops, when the milk is automatically cut. Now you have the cheese, still mixed with water and serum. To separate the components use a thin cloth and cover a bowl. Pour the contents of the pot so the water and the serum will fall to the bowl and at the top will remain the cheese. Close the cloth tightening hard to accelerate the elimination of liquids. Now you can mould and put in the refrigerator to get a really tasty cheese. To make the 'mel i mato just pour over the cold cheese one tablespoon of honey and obtain an easy, healthy and very nutritious dessert.

Difficulty: Medium-Low

Traditional : Yes

GREIXONERA IBICENCA (Ibiza, Spain)



Ibiza island is famous for the beaches and the night life. However the island has also a rich culture that also extends to the gastronomy. Greixonera is a very typical dessert that can be made with hard bread. Though its humble origin Greixonera is really tasty.



INGREDIENTS

6 slices of hard bread (french type)
2 eggs
3.5 ounces of sugar
2 cups of milk
Lemon
Sticks of cinnamon

Boil the milk with a cinnamon stick and the peel of the lemon. Once the milk smokes, take away from the fire and poud the sugar stirring all the time. Remove the stick of cinnamon and the lemon. Then put the slices of bread in the milk to soak well and break with a rod or a fork. Do not make a fine dough, make it thick. Add the two eggs and scramble well. The

mixture is placed in the called 'greixonera' that gives name to the recipe. The 'greixonera' is a flat earthenware pot but you can use any kind of one use cake mould. Pre heat the oven at 350 F and keep the cake exactly 30 minutes. The dough will rise but once cold it will go down. It is a normal behaviour since we do not use yeast. It is advisable to put in the fridge and serve cold. Greixonera is really delicious.

Difficulty : Low

Traditional : Yes

TORRIJAS (Spain)



Torrijas arise from the use of stale bread left over from previous days. They are very easy to make and really tasty. In other parts of Europe and USA they use to be called French toast.



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 loaf of stale bread (two or three days at least)
- 4 cups of milk
- 5 tbsp of sugar
- One stick of cinnamon
- Ground cinnamon
- 1 lemon peel
- Extra virgin olive oil

Cut with a sharp knife the loaf of bread into slices about one finger width. Meanwhile boil the milk with the cinnamon stick and lemon peel. When the milk boils, turn off the fire and let stand for some minutes removing the lemon and cinnamon stick. At that time we add the sugar slowly. After each tablespoon (we would need a maximum of 5) we have to taste the mixture to reach the degree of sweetness that we want. This is important because the more sweet is the milk, heavier are the toast. When milk is warm and you have the amount of sugar that

you want, we take the slices of bread and dip it in a bowl or deep dish . The slice should not float. This is important not to crumble once toast is very wet. Once the slices are enough soaked use a spatula to place them in a pan with plenty of oil but not too hot so there should almost no bubbles. When we consider that the bottom is fried we turn taking care not to break the slice. Within two or three minutes should be ready, getting a golden color, never quite dark. We absorb the excess oil using kitchen paper and sprinkle over with sugar and cinnamon powder. In Spain this dessert is usually taken during Easter and some religious celebrations.

Difficulty: Low

Traditional : Yes

Flaó (Ibiza, Spain)



The flaó is a traditional dessert on the island of Ibiza. The flaó is a kind of cheesecake somewhat complicated to do if we stick to the traditional recipe. If we are not very orthodox we can 'build' a quite acceptable flaó.



INGREDIENTS :

14 ounces of wheat flour
14 ounces of fresh cheese (better if comes from goat or sheep)
14 ounces of sugar
4 eggs
Anise seed
Mint leaves
4 eggs
Half a cup of water
Half a cup of virgin olive oil
Half a cup of sweet anise
Butter
Icing sugar

Anise seeds can be purchased at any supermarket in the expository of

spices (sometimes they are called aniseed). We will need very few grains, only a dozen. The same is true about mint : we would need only two or three fine chopped leaves.

First we will prepare a dough. We will mix all ingredients except eggs, cheese, mint and sugar. We will knead a lot to get a thin, elastic dough. We'll take a round cake pan that can go into the oven, one-use aluminum kind, and spreadable butter to make easy to unmold. Place the dough so that it covers the entire bottom of the pan, up the wall and stand a little 'out' from the edge. We cut the excess of dough.

Now let's beat the eggs and sugar. When well blended, add the shredded cheese and mint. The resulting mix should be extend over the other dough that we have placed in the mold. It only remains to put in the oven for 40 minutes at 350 F degrees and serve it once cold with icing sugar on top.

Not exactly the original recipe, but much more easy to make...

Difficulty: Medium
Traditional : Yes

RICE WITH MILK or RICE PUDDING (Spain)



Rice pudding is a traditional Spanish dessert probably brought by Arab conquerors in the eighth century.



INGREDIENTS:

2 cups of whole milk
1.76 ounces of rice
1.76 ounces of sugar
1 lemon rind
1 cinnamon stick
ground cinnamon

Peel the lemon to obtain a strip of skin being careful not to take the white part of it because it is bitter. Therefore, the peeling should be slightly transparent.

Put the cinnamon stick and the rind of lemon in the milk and bring it to the fire, non-stopping stirring until boiling. Reduce the fire to avoid overflow and then add the rice and sugar, stirring constantly to avoid sticking to the bottom. From time to time prove a grain of rice to make sure it is soft. When the rice is done remove from heat and let stand until warm. Then pour the contents into individual containers for direct consumption or large container that will go directly to the refrigerator. When cooled is ready for consumption just adding a little cinnamon at the top.

Difficulty: Low
Traditional : Yes

MUHALLEBI (Turkey)



The Turkish muhallebi is a dessert which bears a certain resemblance to the rice pudding. It is very easy to do and success is guaranteed, cause while using rice flour instead of the grain we do not have problems to make it soft. Origin, like in the case of rice pudding, is Arabic gastronomy.



INGREDIENTS:

4 cups of semi-skimmed milk
8.82 ounces sugar
3.5 ounces of rice flour
1 vanilla bean (optional)

Mix in a nonstick saucepan sugar and rice flour. Slowly incorporate milk stirring constantly to make sure that the rice flour is completely dissolved.

Now we will put the pot on the stove at medium power stirring continuously with a wooden spoon or spatula until the flour and sugar are dissolved, there are no lumps and the mixture has thickened. Where begins to thicken you can add vanilla or cinnamon, but not necessary.

The result is poured into individual containers and placed in the refrigerator to take it very cold.

Difficulty: Low
Traditional : Yes

MENJAR BLANC (Catalonia, Spain)



We have a very ancient recipe which was already known in the Middle Ages and whose origins are probably even older. This recipe is practically across Europe under different names and very few changes in its ingredients. For example, in Catalonia is called 'Menjar blanc', in Germany 'Blamensir', in Spanish 'Manjar Blanco', 'Blancmange' in England, 'Blancmange' in France and so on. As you can deduct in all cases is translated as "white food." A likely origin is Arabic, which would have passed through the Crusaders to Europe. For this the reason Menjar Blanc was found for the first time described at the thirteenth century in Europe - where the Middle East adventures had been done - and that there is same food in Arabic and Turkish countries with very few variations. In ancient times the "white food" was a sweet puree and one of the ingredients was chicken. This reminds us powerfully to the Turkish 'gogsu tavuk' discussed later on. The Menjar Blanc was a tonic recipe and therefore had medicinal uses. With the pass of time drifted to become a Holy Thursday dish within Easter, being then eliminated milk and chicken, forbidden foods at this time. When Church lost its power, the milk recovered its position in many countries but the Menjar Blanc, still consumed in Reus, Tortosa (cities of Catalonia), the strip of Aragon (with catalan language) and the city of Alghero (still speaking ancient catalan) in Sardinia, Italy, still has not milk re-introduced. All these cities and regions where formerly part of the Kingdom of Aragon and catalan was its usual language. The kingdom of Aragon in the fifteenth century possessed also of Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia, Sardinia, Corsica, Naples, Sicily and the Duchy of Athens.



INGREDIENTS :

7 ounces of raw almonds
7 ounces sugar
2.65 ounces cornstarch
Lemon
1 Stick cinnamon
Ground cinnamon
4 cups of water

First we boil the water. When this happens turn off the fire and add a rind of the lemon and a cinnamon stick. We cover the pot and wait 10 minutes for the water to catch the aroma. After the infusion time we strain to remove lemon and cinnamon and add the almonds to the water. Grind. We let the mixture stand about 5-6 hours. With a pressing cloth snuck back forcefully so that the flavor of the beans go into the water. Now proceed to heat the pot slowly and gradually add sugar and the thickener, cornstarch in this case. There should be no lumps, so take your time. Stir until everything is well dissolved and now you can stoke the fire to start up a new boil. Then you take away from fire and let cool to room temperature. Refrigerate in individual molds and serve cold. It is presented in table sprinkled with a little cinnamon.

Difficulty: Medium

Traditional : Yes

TAVUK GOGSU (Turkey)



I often come across recipes that use unexpected products in the context of a dessert. Gogsu Tavuk literally means Chicken breast (tavuk means chicken in Turkish) and despite the name is not a first or second course, is a real dessert. The first time I tried it I got surprise with the taste. The fact is that Tavuk Gogsu tastes like chicken but tastes sweet like a dessert. It looks white, like a rice pudding but more consistent and at first glance one would never guess it contains chicken. So if you want to surprise someone tavuk gogsu is the best to make your guests to guess the 'secret' ingredient.

The tavuk Gogsu is often served at Iftar, the meal is done after sunset during Ramadan, although it can be found in the Turkish restaurant menus throughout the year.



INGREDIENTS :

3.5 ounces of boneless chicken breast
5.3 ounces rice flour
4 cups of milk
8.8 ounces sugar
Ground cinnamon

First we thoroughly clean the chicken breast not only bones and skin, but also any dark vein or blood. It should stay white meat. Now boil until completely cooked. Now we will fraying in very fine strands. It is a job a little patient but the more fine the strands softer will be the dessert.

In a saucepan add the milk with the rice flour. Warm up stirring until thickened. When this occurs we will incorporate, stirring very slowly, the strands of chicken breast. I recommend to incorporate one by one. When incorporated all the chicken cook for about five minutes, again stirring constantly. Now pour the sugar and stir until completely dissolved. Finally retired and let cool in the refrigerator. Serve with cinnamon on top.

Difficulty: Medium-High

Traditional : Yes

KESKÜL (Turkey)



The keskul is a typical dessert from Turkey. Basically keskul is a pudding of almonds and rice very popular in the country between kids. Indeed most people in Turkey buy prepared bags -like in photo above - where you have only to add the milk saving a lot of time.



INGREDIENTS:

3.5 ounces of raw almonds
3 cups of milk
5.3 ounces sugar
1.8 ounces rice flour
Half cup water
pomegranate (optional)
pistachios (optional)
crushed almonds (optional)

In a blender grind the almonds in milk. We put in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Once boiling reduce the heat and add the sugar, the rice flour and half a glass of water. Stir constantly for about 20 minutes and simply leave to cool to room temperature in a container or individual containers that shall be cooled in the refrigerator. Course is served cold garnished with pistachios and almonds optionally crushed, and even pomegranate seeds.

Difficulty: Medium
Traditional : Yes

MAMUL (MA'MUL), Lebanon



Mamul are typical cookies of the Middle East which are made with semolina and butter. As an analogy would be equivalent to the Danish butter cookies. I do not know the origin but they are in almost all Middle East countries being popular as well in Armenia and Israel. In Lebanon, Mamul are dates stuffed while in Turkey nuts are more common. They are fairly easy to make, have low sugar but an awful lot of butter, so they must be consumed with caution.



INGREDIENTS :

7 ounces of butter
18 ounces of semolina
7 ounces of flour for baking
75% cup of milk
7 ounces of nuts
4.4 ounces of sugar
Orange blossom water or anise

Regarding the orange blossom water indicate that it is a flavoring. If you have tasted these cookies in some Arab country and you do not include the orange blossom water in your recipe you will notice something is missing. If this is the first time that you try Mamul, probably without problems you could substitute orange water for a bit of anise. The orange blossom water is readily available in several supermarkets in the area of homemade pastries or making a tea with orange blossom you will find in the herbal.

First we will prepare the dough. Melt on a hot griddle the butter, avoiding bubbles. Then remove from the heat and add the semolina, flour, 1 ounce of sugar and the milk. Mix and pour over the stone from the previously floured kitchen. Knead until elastic and pliable dough.

The filling is very simple. Simply crush the walnuts in the remaining sugar and orange blossom water - or a teaspoon of anise -.

Separate a piece of dough enough to make a sphere half the size of a ping-pong ball, more or less. We open a hole and fill it with a teaspoon of the chopped walnuts and then closing. We put all cookies in a shelf or similar wet with butter and direct to the oven at 370 F degrees for twenty minutes, or until we see that they are made.

Withdrew and sprinkle with icing sugar.

This cookies are usually served in the Middle East with coffee or tea.

Difficulty: Medium-High
Traditional : Yes

CHOCOLATE MOUSSE (France)



The concept of mousse is to make a light cream thanks to the addition of air. The way to add air is almost always with the help of the egg white - though not the only -. The chocolate mousse is a 'classic' of this technic.



INGREDIENTS :

1 tablet of 70% cocoa (about 7 ounces)
4 eggs
3.5 ounces of sugar
Lemon

We separate the whites from the yolks. We beat the sugar with the yolks and set aside. We put the tablet in bain marie and when completely melted remove it to add the yolks and sugar. With the help of a whisk, stir constantly going in the same direction. For sure you have seen this in

several films: the chef who takes the bowl almost under his armpit, and moves the rods frenetically to give volume to the mousse. You must stir until cold. Then we whisk clears until peaks. Use some drops of lemon juice to rise it faster. You can also help with a few drops of vinegar and even a pinch of salt. To determine whether whites are okay you should separate a portion of the mass and then put again: if it sinks or coalesce again is still not ready. When the whites are well mounted that portion which is removed and re-united does not homogenize again. Well, we incorporate the egg whites to the mixture of cocoa and egg yolks, beat them in the same sense that we had followed previously and is now ready. Just pop in the fridge for three hours and ready to eat.

Difficulty: Medium

Traditional : No

COLD TARTE TATIN (tarte tatin false), France



The tarte tatin was created in 1898 thanks to two French sisters' mistake while trying to make a simple apple pie. The conventional apple pies are made from a base of puff pastry that is covered with cream and apples to make the last finishing in the oven. On that occasion it was not. One of the sisters heated too much the mixture of butter and sugar where she tried to caramelize apples and noticed the burnt' smell. Trying to save the cake came up with the idea of covering the mold with puff pastry and turn it. In doing so the cake was quite presentable and only had to take off some apples that had been stuck in the pan (which by the way, is going to happen always with tarte tatin 99% of the cases). The success of the cake was such that they decided to include in the menu of the restaurant.

To make a tart tatin first we need a pan that can go into the fire and then baked in the oven. Then we caramelize apple slices to fit the entire bottom. To caramelize we use butter, sugar and a little lemon juice to prevent crystallization. The water will be given by the same apples. Once apples are ready, we put over puff pastry clutching apples and creating a frame around them. We put the oven medium heat about 45 minutes. Extract from the oven and once warm when we turn. If a piece of apple stuck to the pan simply took off and put on its original site. But we are not going to make a tarte tatin conventional. Let's make a cold cake tatin.



INGREDIENTS:

4 Golden type apples
1 cup water
1 cup sugar
1 stick of cinnamon or vanilla
Lemon juice
Lemon Skin
6 leaves of gelatine (or 9 grams of powdered gelatine)
Puff pastry

We shall first prepare the syrup. In a deep pan we pour two tablespoons of sugar and lemon juice. We simmer until thickened. Then add the remaining sugar and a glass of water. Stir in vanilla or cinnamon stick and lemon rind. Bring to a boil and immediately put down the fire to thicken slightly, mainly for flavoring ingredients. Withdraw then the cinnamon and lemon peel. Peel the apples, cored and make eight wedges each and then incorporate. We leave to simmer until tender, being careful that they must still be whole. Remove from heat and reserve as is, without removing from the pan.

While we were preparing the apples we have done two things. The first is to soften the gelatine leaves in cold water. The second is to take a disposable aluminum base eight inches in diameter, grease it with butter, and place the puff pastry into the shape of this container raising it by the edges. We will have baked at 338 F degrees for half an hour. Reserve.

When the syrup is warm check for excess of water. Check that the level of syrup just cover half of the apples. If it is necessary you need to empty liquid. Now we will pour the rehydrated gelatine leaves. Be careful not to break the apple slices when dissolving gelatine. Now it only remains to dump the apples with its syrup in the puff pastry we baked. We left to take the room temperature and right to the refrigerator. After 3 or 4 hours we will have an excellent apple pie that many would confuse with the real tatin. In this way we can make cakes with gelatin using strawberries, pear, quince...

Difficulty : Low
Traditional : No

CARROT CAKE (England)



The origin of this cake is very uncertain. It is for sure the first carrot cakes appeared during Middle Age in Central Europe. At that time there were few sweeteners and carrot is one of the vegetables that contain more sugar. Besides carrot is a very rich source of vitamins. The first written reference about carrot cake appeared in an English book of XVIII century and since then became very popular in Great Britain and USA.



INGREDIENTS:

2 cups pastry flour
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon *
1 cup sunflower oil **
3 cups grated carrots
2 cups icing sugar
4 eggs
2 teaspoons baking powder (chemical yeast)

* Cinnamon serves for flavor. If you prefer another flavor, you can use vanilla for example.

** The taste of sunflower oil is fairly neutral, but you can use corn oil as well.

Grate carrots to get three cups. You have to beat the oil with the eggs until get a smooth sauce. Now add the sugar, cinnamon, grated carrot, the baking soda and, very important, well-sifted flour. You have to work the dough at least half an hour. You place a pie pan well buttered and dusted with flour to prevent sticking. Pre-heat oven to 356 F degrees. With 45 minutes of baking will be enough. I do not recommend to add more things to the cake, as it is, so simple, it's enough tasty and healthy.

Difficulty : Low

Traditional : Yes

SYRUP CAKE (AL Eish Saraya), Lebanon



This syrup cake is a version of the famous Al Eish Saraya. The Eish Al Saraya is a very popular Arabic candy whose core component is the bread. It can be found throughout the Middle East although it seems more likely that its origin is Lebanon or maybe Egypt.

It can become quite tiresome so if you do not like very, very, very sweet things better do not try it !



INGREDIENTS:

Loaf (12 slices)
2 cups sugar
2 cups water
Juice of 1 lemon
1 vanilla stick
1 cinnamon stick
1 lemon peel
Whipped cream
Pistachios or nuts (optional)

We shall first prepare the syrup. In a deep pan we pour two tablespoons of sugar and lemon juice. We place the pan at low heat until thick. Then add the remaining sugar and two glasses of water. Stir in vanilla, cinnamon stick and peeling of the skin of lemon. We bring to boil and then reduce heat to thicken slightly, mostly to make flavoring ingredients leave their scent.

Toast the bread slices lightly on both sides. We take a container or pan that can go in the oven and arrange a first layer of bread without the crust. Cause the slices are square, fill the gaps with more bread to make it a compact surface. Is the same like to make a puzzle. When the syrup is ready pour it slowly to soak the bread. The bread should absorb all the liquid. No extra liquid should remain. Now assemble the second layer of sliced bread and soak again. We put in the oven 20 minutes at 356 F degrees. After oven time, let it cool and took it to the refrigerator at least 2 hours. To serve remove from the mold or cut a portion. Top with a spoonful of whipped cream with sugar and some pistachios or nuts.

HALVA, Middle East



The halva is of Arabic origin. It derives from a word in that language which means 'sweet'. Can be found almost everywhere in the Middle East and Balkans, even in parts of Russia, Somalia, Pakistan or India.

There are two types of halva: those that are made with sesame paste (tahini) and the ones made with semolina.

The sesame halva is a very dense dessert. Sesame halva is therefore very compact and has a strange crunchy bite texture. The semolina halva has the malleable aspect of a thick paste. In any case, both are always following next rules:

1. First ingredient is cooked then add the syrup. The ingredient is usually a paste (sesame, semolina) with additions of nuts.

2. The proportion of ingredients is 1:2:3:4. Being 1 the content of oil or butter, semolina is 2, 3 is sugar and 4 is water. That is, if we use half a cup of oil, we have to use a cup of semolina, one cup and a half of sugar and 2 cups of water.

I show you the recipe for semolina halva. Halva of semolina is more typical of India. In India is usually made with vegetable oil of sesame or palm, but we will use sunflower oil.



INGREDIENTS :

Half a glass of sunflower oil

0.88 ounces butter

1 cup of semolina

1 cup and a half of sugar

2 cups water

A handful of peeled almonds (or pistachios, or walnuts, or pine nuts etc)

In a saucepan, heat a stream of sunflower oil. We slowly pour the semolina for frying and is browned (be careful not to burn!). Reduce heat and add butter, stirring until melted. Then pour the almonds to make them slightly golden brown. Remove from heat and reserve.

In another pan we will prepare the syrup. Heat the water until boil. Dissolve one cup of sugar and stir well. Then pour the syrup into the semolina toast stirring well so that everything is well mixed. We put the pan into the fire, stirring and add the remaining cup of sugar. When its all well dissolved and homogenous (no lumps) you take the pan from fire and you leave it for 15 minutes. Put then the mixture into a mold and you bring to the refrigerator to cool.

Difficulty : Low

Traditional : Yes

TIRAMISU (Italy)



This Italian dessert was created around the 50s of last century. Its design is simple but there are many alternatives to the traditional recipe. For example, original recipe did not use mascarpone or other type of cheese. The tiramisu is a layer of biscuits – mostly ladyfingers – dipped in coffee and bathed in a simple cream. A liqueur can be added to the coffee – in Italy is typically amaretto – while the cream, beaten eggs and composed of sugar, has lately been added a creamy cheese called mascarpone.



INGREDIENTS:

4 eggs
14 ounces mascarpone cheese (optional)
4.2 ounces of icing sugar
12 ladyfingers (soft type)
1 cup of black coffee
2 tablespoons liqueur (amaretto, brandy...) (optional)

First separate the whites from the yolks. We will work the yolks and for the time being we will reserve the whites. We beat hard the egg yolks mixing them with half the sugar and once dissolved we incorporate the mascarpone cheese (another type of cheese with light flavor is also valid). Now let's beat the egg whites to peaks. For this we put a few drops of lemon juice and beat with wire whisk until we can forcefully turn the pot and the mix do not fall. Then add the remaining sugar and continue beating until mixture has the consistency of a meringue. At this time we can join the two mixtures with great care, as we try not to put down the egg whites. To do this pour the clears over the yolks - not vice versa - and gently turn the rods vertically a few minutes until the mixture, which will stand firm and tall, is homogenized.

Then we make a normal coffee cup as we would take, with its dose of sugar (one tablespoon) and if we want a bit of liquor. We take the ladyfingers and dip each in the coffee draining the excess (be care not to break them !). We place them in a container or pan to make the shape we want (rectangular or round). It is advisable to use a removable base container that we can ring off easily because the resulting cake will not be strong enough to detach. Once we cover the base with the soaked ladyfingers, we cover with the cream and top with chocolate powder sprinkled on the surface. Tiramisu must be left in the refrigerator for at least six hours before consumption.

FRIED MILK (Andalusia, Spain)



A very easy dessert that kids use to love.



INGREDIENTS:

2 cups of whole milk
1 cinnamon stick
Ground cinnamon
1 lemon rind
2.7 ounces cornstarch
3.5 ounces of sugar
icing sugar
1 egg
Wheat flour
Extra virgin olive oil

We put one cup of milk in a saucepan with the cinnamon stick, lemon rind and the 3.5 ounces of sugar. Stir constantly until it boils. Remove from heat and reserve.

In the other cup of milk that we have reserved we will dissolve the cornstarch and mix with the rest of milk of the saucepan. We put back to the fire until it thickens enough, with a consistency greater than mayonnaise, but still liquid.

When this occurs we pour the mixture into a square pan to obtain a thickness of 0.4 inches of milk, approximately. Let cool at room temperature and then bring to the refrigerator. After about four hours - depending on the fridge - we have a solidified dough that can be cut into squares with the size of an individual portion (around 1 inch side length). Bath each portions in wheat flour and dip in beaten egg to fry later in plenty of olive oil (with 1 minute per side will be enough). You put on a paper towel to remove excess oil and sprinkle if desired with cinnamon and icing sugar. Fried Milk can be served hot, cold or at room temperature.

Difficulty : Medium

Traditional : Yes

PANNA COTTA (Italy)



The term "panna cotta" means cooked cream in Italian. Panna Cotta is original from the Piedmont and is a very easy to make and delicious dessert. We need gelatin to make panna cotta. Gelatin is pure protein with almost testimonial presence of water and mineral salts. No fat, no flavor and the human body assimilates it completely - unlike the fiber, for example -. Gelatine is used as thickener, binder and gelling agent. Gelling means that the addition of gelatin in a liquid medium tends to turn that environment in gelatin, which is an intermediate state between liquid and solid. This allows us to enjoy the cream, as in the case of the panna cotta, like it would be a flan. Gelatin is usually obtained from tissue of cattle or pigs but also poultry and fish are used. Gelatin is sold on transparent sheets or granular compounds. In the recipes you can find figures of gelatine given in ounces or leaves. If you have figures in weight but you have gelatin in leaves, then you should know that each leave is about 0.05 ounces, approx. The gelatin can be used only in warm or cold food. If it takes contact with too hot mixture it loses its gelling properties. It also has problems with some fruit acid (especially with pineapple and kiwi). There are other thickeners or gelling agents that complement the action of gelatin of animal origin wherever these do not work well. Currently, the agar-agar, which has its origin in a seaweed, is being used extensively in haute cuisine and it does not suffer with hot.

Before to use leaves of gelatin is necessary to soak them in cold water for at least 5 minutes. This process makes gelatin soft and ready to be used. The granular compound is water soluble instant.

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups of cream for cooking
1 cup of milk
4.4 ounces sugar
6 sheets of gelatin (0.3 ounces of granular gelatine)
Cinnamon (optional)

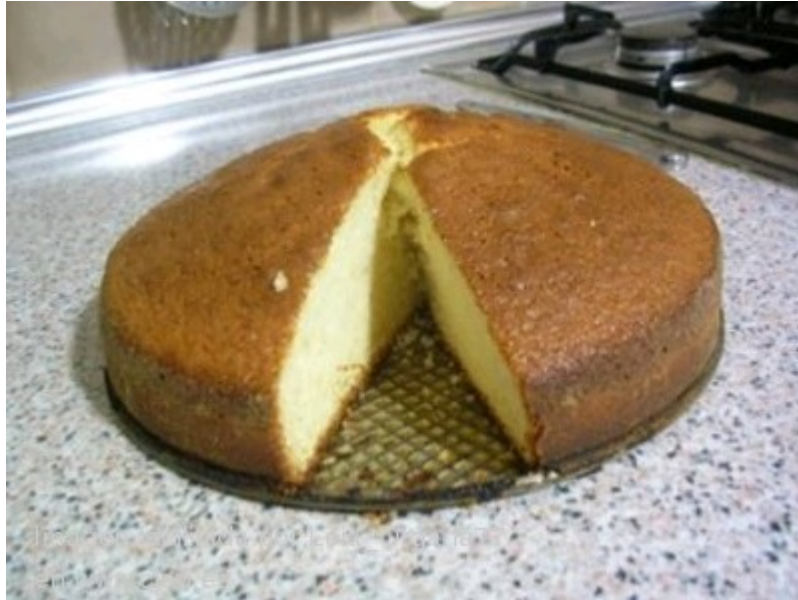
First mix the cream, milk and sugar in a saucepan to boil. If we like the taste of cinnamon we can boil with cinnamon stick. Stirring continuously to prevent the sugar from sticking. Take from fire and reserve.

Meanwhile you have soaked in a bowl gelatin in cold water. When milk and cream is lukewarm, incorporate the gelatin. Stir to dissolve well. Now there are two options: filling individual molds or fill a mold and go cutting portions as we needed. We put the mold or molds in the fridge and the next day they are ready for consumption. In addition, the panna cotta admits many variations such as adding a liqueur in the mix, serve with chocolate sauce or jam, put inside red fruits...

Difficulty : Low

Traditional : No

CAKE (anywhere)



Do you like to cook nice desserts ? So the people around you will expect you will be able to provide the usual cakes for anniversaries and other festivities. They probably will not understand you can make a nice tiramisu but unable to make a simple cake. This recipe never fails. It is extremely easy to prepare and thanks to the oil and yogurt gets a juicy and tender cake that can be eaten alone or decorated with cream, jam, chocolate....

INGREDIENTS:

A sugar-free yogurt (a small pot of 4.4 ounces)
7 ounces of baker flour
7 ounces sugar
Half a cup sunflower or corn oil
3 eggs
Half a bag baking powder (chemical yeast) *

* check the label to know the advised qty of yeast per quantity of flour according to the manufacturer.

We mix all the ingredients, including eggs, and pass by the blender. Dough should be liquid and without lumps. Pour into a mold of 8 inches diameter. You can use aluminum single-use mold grease up with a little butter or silicone molds. Pre heat the oven at 338 F degrees and bake during 30-40 minutes. To check if the dough is well cooked, stick a toothpick in the center and when extracted it should be completely dry. Anyway, when golden brown at the top is for sure cake is okay.

Another project of Media Hora Para Cocina (<http://mediahoradecocina.blogspot.com>)