

## CHERRY DESSERTS

I got some wonderful cherries on the way back from Stockton the other day. And so I thought of making that traditional French cherry dessert, cherry *clafoutis*. A *clafoutis* is a type of fruit dessert in which fruit is mixed in with a sort of sweetened pancake batter or a thickened custard and then baked. I like them both, but this one is the custard type.

You'll need about a 1 ½ cups of ripe pitted cherries, which is about ¾ of a pound of fresh cherries. Stem, rinse, and pit the cherries, eating any extras. The French leave them unpitted, but I don't want either of us to break a tooth. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. You'll also need ¼ cup of sugar, 2 eggs, 1 tablespoon of cornstarch, 1 ½ cups milk, 1 ½ teaspoons of pure vanilla extract, and a teaspoon of confectioners' or powdered sugar.

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Mix the ¼ cup of sugar and the tablespoon of cornstarch together in a bowl. Add the 1 ½ teaspoons of vanilla extract and the two eggs and mix well with a wire whisk for 30 to 40 seconds. Add the milk and mix well until completely incorporated into the egg mixture. Then put the cherries in the bottom of a 4-6 cup gratin dish or shallow baking dish. You can either halve the cherries first or leave them whole.

Pour the egg and milk mixture over the cherries and put the gratin dish on a cookie sheet. Bake the gratin in your 350 degree oven for about 40 minutes, until just set. Take it out and let it cool to room temperature. When cool, sprinkle the teaspoon of powdered sugar over the *clafoutis* and serve at room temperature.

If you prefer, you can use 1 ½ cups of cleaned and hulled fresh strawberries instead. Just quarter the strawberries before putting them in the bottom of the gratin dish. Other berries also work very well, as do stone fruits like cut up peaches, nectarines and apricots.

Or if you have some leftover white bread, you can do a cherry-bread pudding. You'll need about a pound of ripe cherries, 3 slices of white bread, 1 cup of milk, ½ cup of sliced almonds, ½ cup of cherry jam, 4 teaspoons of sugar, 1 teaspoon of unsalted butter, ½ teaspoon of powdered sugar, and a cup of sour cream or cherry or vanilla yogurt.

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Pit the pound of cherries. Toast the three slices of white bread and crumble the toast into a medium-size bowl. Toast the ½ cup of sliced almonds in a dry frying pan over low heat, shaking often, until the almonds just turn a light beige. Don't let them get too dark or they'll get bitter. Add the toasted almonds to the crumbled toasted bread, reserving two tablespoons of the almonds for a topping. Pour in the cup of milk and mix well. Add the pitted cherries and the ½ cup of cherry jam and mix well.

In a small bowl, mix the saved two tablespoons of the toasted almonds with two of the teaspoons of sugar. Grease a six cup gratin dish or baking dish with your teaspoon of unsalted butter and sprinkle the greased dish with the remaining two teaspoons of sugar. Then pour the cherry mixture into the dish and top with the almond-sugar mixture. Bake in at 350 degrees for 35-40 minutes. Let it cool to lukewarm, sprinkle with the ½ teaspoon of powdered sugar, and serve, garnished with the sour cream or yogurt.

Or put some pitted cherries in a small bowl for each diner, top with a dollop of cherry yogurt, and serve garnished with a sprig of mint accompanied by some crispy cookies.

If you have a good, sweet sauterne dessert wine, or any good white dessert wine, peel 2 Ruby Red grapefruits with a sharp knife, removing all the skin and the white pith. Then cutting between the membranes, remove the flesh in wedgelike pieces. Place the grapefruit pieces in a bowl and squeeze any remaining juice from the membranes over the grapefruit. Peel 3 ripe kiwi fruit and cut them into

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½-inch pieces along with the grapefruit. Pour half a cup of a white sweet dessert wine over the fruit, along with two tablespoons of Grand Marnier or other orange liqueur. Mix carefully and let it sit for an hour or so before serving. Spoon the fruit into four glass goblets or dessert dishes, and top with some whole fresh ripe cherries.

So don't miss out on the wonderful cherries available this time of year. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.