

## CAPIROTADA

Last week I gave you a recipe for a French apple dessert. This week we travel south of the border, for a wonderful Mexican apple and bread pudding called capirotada. Unlike traditional American-style bread puddings, it uses neither milk nor eggs. It's easy to make and your family will love it.

You'll need half a loaf of sweet French bread or baguette with the crust, 8 ounces (one stick) of unsalted butter, melted, 1 pound brown sugar, either light or dark, 1 ½ cups of water, 1 ½ teaspoons of ground cinnamon, 1 cup of chopped walnuts, 8 ounces solid cream cheese, chilled and cut into lots of small pieces, say ½ to 1 inch, and 2 large Granny Smith or other tart firm apples, peeled, cored and chopped.

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9 by 13 inch baking dish. Cut the bread into 1 inch cubes, (more or less.) Put the bread cubes into a large bowl, mix the bread with the melted stick of unsalted butter and spread the buttered cubes onto a baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for about 10 to 15 minutes, until the cubes are lightly toasted. Be careful not to burn them—carbon pudding isn't very tasty.

While the bread is toasting, mix one pound of brown sugar with the 1 ½ cups of water in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Add the 1 ½ teaspoons of cinnamon, stir well to blend and take off the heat. You've now made the sugar syrup for your pudding.

When the bread cubes are toasted, take them out of the oven and turn the oven up to 400 degrees. In a very large mixing bowl, mix together the cup of chopped walnuts, the two chopped apples, and the 8 ounces of cream cheese, cut into small pieces. You want to cut up the cream cheese into lots of small pieces so it melts well throughout the pudding. That's why the cream cheese is much easier to work with if you have chilled it first. Just leave it in the refrigerator until you are ready to cut it up.

Add the bread cubes to the apple, walnut and cheese mixture and mix them well. Finally, stir in your brown sugar syrup and mix that well. Scoop all of this into your buttered baking dish and bake at 400 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring it from time to time. Don't stir for the last 5 minutes, so that the top becomes a little crusty. This serves eight people, more or less.

The Mexicans top this dessert with crema, a type of clotted cream which you can make by stirring a tablespoon of buttermilk into a cup of heavy cream and leaving it overnight in the refrigerator. Nowadays you can often find crema in the supermarket. Or you can top it with crème fraiche, (which is more or less the same thing), sour cream, slightly sweetened whipped cream, or even custard-style vanilla yogurt.

Or microwave some vanilla ice cream until soft but not completely melted. This makes a wonderful sort of custard sauce over the pudding. The hot pudding/cold sauce makes a fun contrast. Leftovers can easily be heated in the microwave, and are delicious with a little plain heavy cream poured over them. Look for this recipe on our website, [www.htradio.net](http://www.htradio.net). Simply click on the link to the Hometown Kitchen.

I love apples any time of year, but they seem especially delicious in the fall. One of my favorite desserts is simply slices of apple served with some good cheese. You can either spread some soft cheese, like a brie or camembert, on slices of apple, or serve some slices of firmer cheese alongside. It's a wonderful combination. I particularly like smoked gouda, a hearty cheddar, or some Stilton along with my slices of apple.

And don't forget to get over to Apple Hill in El Dorado County. It's a wonderful autumn drive, and the sights and tastes are delicious. Nowadays the crowds have gotten so large that it pays to get there by 10 am. I always get some cider—one of the farms sells cider made from different varieties of apples. Cider is not only good to drink, it's also a delicious liquid in sauces for meat or poultry. My mother also used to make a cider jelly that was absolutely wonderful. And when I was in college, we used to use fresh cider as a mixer for bourbon. Delicious! This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.