GOURMET RECIPES

Life Is Too Uncertain... Eat Dessert First!

Sometimes we just simply have to indulge with dessert... It's a small, intense and immensely satisfying gratification, and most times well deserved. So you know where we stand on the subject, and we had a yummy time collecting some favourites. Forget the really rotten week... start here:

*The Splenda World of Sweetness* is a super collection of recipes for homemade desserts and drinks from those folks who give us the little yellow packets of sweetener we find on the restaurant table. Hey, it's just great in food as well as your iced tea, and each recipe also has the nutritional information and exchanges for those who must have such facts. We happily dived snout first into this book!

*The Vodka Cookbook* from Smirnoff is such fun and, best, has terrific recipes! All the history and information you ever need about vodka is in here, plus nice photographs! You know what happens when you tell someone there's vodka in their dinner? Their eyes widen; the lips curl into a smile. An ordinary meal becomes an extraordinary event, and if the soufflé flops... just pour everyone a shot!

*Infused: 100+ Recipes for Infused Liqueurs and Cocktails* is such fun... Now you can make your faves at home at a fraction of the cost, and a fresher taste to boot! Author Susan Elia MacNeal gives us the secrets, and the recipes for making today's must-have ingredients for today's hot hot cocktails! And... the holidays are coming up fast, better get brewing today!
The Maple Syrup Book is everything you wanted to know about the world's favourite topping! Seems real maple syrup is as rare as saffron, and as highly prized as the best pinot noir grapes! North America's Northeast sugar maple groves thrive only under specific climatic conditions and produce sap for just a few fleeting days each year... and we love the results! Could you imagine anything else topping a hot stack of pancakes? Of course not... and there's more, much much more in this delightful book!

Tony's wine recommendation:
Too sweet for wine of any kind!

On today's menu:

- Pecan Pie
- Red Squares
  - Lemon Peel Vodka
- Maple Caramel Corn
- Peach Liqueur
  - Sugar Syrup

Have your cake and eat it too? And why not add a slice of...

Pecan Pie

Oh, this is our most favourite dessert in the whole world... rich, sweet and utterly sinful, unless of course it's a reduced-sugar version made with Splenda!

Serves 1 (so don't tell anyone!), or 6 if you must confess

- One 9-inch frozen pie shell
- 3 large eggs
- ¾ cup firmly packed Splenda® Brown Sugar Blend
- ¾ cup light corn syrup
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
• 1 tsp vanilla extract
• 1½ cups pecan halves

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350°F. To discourage over-browning, cover the top edges of the pie shell with strips of aluminum foil. Place the pie shell on a baking sheet.
2. Whisk the eggs in a medium bowl until blended. Whisk in the Splenda Brown Sugar Blend, corn syrup, melted butter, and vanilla. Stir in the pecans. Pour into the pastry shell.
3. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove the foil strips. Continue baking until a knife inserted near the center of the pie comes out clean, about 25 minutes more.
4. Transfer the pie to a wire rack and let stand until warm or cooled completely. Cut into wedges and serve.

Exchanges per serving: 4 fats

Red Squares

Oh, come on... we saw you at those fraternity parties... we were all there! Remember those sinful little Red Squares? Didn't remember too much afterwards, though... Recreate the insane fun this fall with this too-delicious version from The Vodka Cookbook. It sure ain't your granny's red Jell-O, and, sweetheart, think twice if he offers seconds!

Serves 4

• 1 cup strawberry gelatin
• 1 cup Lemon Peel Vodka (recipe below)
• Fresh mint to decorate
• Powdered sugar, for dusting (optional)

1. Mix the gelatin in a medium bowl with 2 cups boiling water, or as per the instructions on the packet, until the gelatin has
2. Stir in half the Lemon Peel Vodka and pour into a 5×8-inch pan. Refrigerate until firm, about 4 hours.
3. Dip the bottom of the pan and a small knife into warm water for about 15 seconds. Use the knife to cut the gelatin into 1-inch squares. Serve in chilled martini glasses garnished with mint. Dust with powdered sugar, if desired.
4. Call a taxi...

**Lemon Peel Vodka**

- 4 lemons
- 3 cups vodka

1. Wash the lemons. Using a zester or vegetable peeler, peel the skin to create narrow ribbons. Scrape away any remaining pith.
2. Put the peel into a large jar and add the vodka. Store in a dark, dry place for about 2 weeks, shaking the jar occasionally.
3. Strain through cheesecloth, discard the peel and store in a bottle ready for use.

**Maple Caramel Corn**

WARNING: This obscenely delicious recipe has been brought to you by your National Dental Association, and we guarantee you cannot stop eating it. From *The Maple Syrup Book*. Remember to floss tonight...

- 10 heaping cups (2.5 L) plain popped popcorn
- 1 cup (250 mL) pecan halves
- 1 cup (250 mL) whole almonds
- 1 cup (½ lb or 250 mL) butter
- ½ cup (125 mL) maple syrup
- 2/3 cup (160 mL) brown sugar
- 2/3 cup (160 mL) white sugar
- 1 tsp (5 mL) vanilla
Roast nuts in the oven. Combine popcorn and nuts in a large roasting pan, making sure the nuts are evenly distributed.

In a medium-size saucepan, blend the butter, sugars and maple syrup over medium-high heat, stirring until completely melted. Insert a candy thermometer. Do not stir mixture after this point. Cook the caramel mixture until it reaches 280°F (140°C). Remove the caramel from the heat, add vanilla and baking soda and stir rapidly making sure the soda is well blended. Immediately pour the caramel over the popcorn.

With a large wooden spoon or spatula, quickly stir the caramel and popcorn until the corn is completely covered. Don't let the caramel touch your hands; it is very hot!

Transfer the popcorn onto two baking sheets. Gingerly pat it down until it is flat on the baking sheets.

To quickly cool the candy, place the baking sheets in the refrigerator. When cool, the candy should easily break into bit-sized pieces. Store your candy in an airtight container.

Peach Liqueur

Ah, those fresh peaches are in, and if you're like us, you bought a few too many. We froze ours and found this yummy recipe to use them up, a lovely liqueur that will liven up a cold winter night... or your life, if you need it! From Infused, 100+ Recipes for Infused Liqueurs and Cocktails.

- 750 mL bottle of brandy, vodka, rum, tequila or Cognac
- 12 peaches
- ¼ to 1 cup Sugar Syrup, optional (recipe below)

Decant the spirits into a clean 2 quart (2 L) glass container with a tight-
filing lid. Soak the original bottle to remove the label. Let dry.

Cut the peaches in half and thinly slice. Add the peaches and their pits to the spirits. Allow the spirits to infuse away from direct sunlight and intense heat for 1 month. Shake the container a few times each week.

When you're satisfied with the intensity of flavour, strain the liqueur through a metal sieve into a bowl. Discard the solids. Add the sugar syrup to taste, if desired.

Using a funnel, pour the liqueur into the original bottle (or another container). Label with the name of the liqueur and the date. Age the liqueur for 1 month away from light and heat.

Sugar Syrup

- 1 cup water
- 2 cups granulated sugar

Put the water in a small saucepan. Add the sugar. Bring the water to a boil while stirring. Reduce the heat and continue to stir until the sugar dissolves. Cool to room temperature. Select a clean container that will hold at least 1½ cups. Using a funnel, pour the sugar syrup into the container, seal, and store in the refrigerator for up to 6 months.

Variation: Use your favourite honey in place of the sugar syrup. Add 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise, the zest of ½ lemon, or 6 whole cloves with the peaches.

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Beisch.

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Happily enjoyed by Helen Hatton and Ron Morris.