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Thinking Outside the (Cake) Box

Seven creative recipes for desserts this winter.

by JENNY ADAMS

Most people have a favorite hand-me-down cookie recipe. Maybe your pecan pie is unstoppable at Thanksgiving. Or, perhaps, you're legendary for baking up perfect red velvet cupcakes. Even if your best dessert comes from a Betty Crocker box, this season can be a reason to pull out the flour, take the vanilla extract off the top shelf and get truly creative with that last course. Dessert is a time to sit back and really enjoy time with friends and family around a table or a fireplace. Since professional chefs feel the same way, several around the country were kind enough to share some of their more unusual desserts. We were not disappointed: From Austin, Texas, we got a crazy lowdown on creating cheddar cheese ice cream sandwiches. In Washington D.C., one chef is throwing bitter endive into his final course. This winter, "thinking out of the box" earns a whole different, delicious meaning.

Cheddar Cheese Ice Cream Sandwiches

Courtesy of Chef Paul Qui of qui,
Austin, Texas

With his first restaurant, qui, Chef Paul Qui is wowing guests daily with inventive dishes and desserts. While at initial glance, you might not immediately associate cheddar cheese and dessert, the combination of rich cream and the kick of salty cheese comes together in great harmony. Qui admits that you can simply fold some nice cheddar cheese into a quality vanilla ice cream to make this recipe much simpler, but where's the adventure in that?

INGREDIENTS

1 quart heavy cream
¾ cup sugar
9 egg yolks
2 cups grated cheddar cheese (Qui uses Cabot Clothbound Cheddar, but you can substitute with another aged white cheddar)
Waffle cone discs (store-bought, or make your own in a waffle maker)
Peanut butter sauce
Cajeta (a caramel-like syrup that can be found in any food store specializing in Mexican cuisine)
Greek yogurt, plain
Honey
Finely grated cheddar cheese

INGREDIENTS: Peanut Butter Sauce

1 cup peanut butter
1 cup warm water
2 tbsp. honey



METHOD: Ice Cream

In saucepot, combine heavy cream and half of the sugar. Bring to a simmer. Allow to cool slightly (approximately 150°F). While the cream is cooling, gently whisk the remaining sugar with the egg yolks until the mixture turns a light pale. Temper the egg yolk mixture with a little bit of the cream and then add the egg yolks to the saucepot with the remaining cream. Place the saucepot back over a medium heat and use a spatula to stir continuously until the mixture thickens to coat the back of the spatula, around 365°F. When it reaches this point, slowly add the grated cheese a little at a time, whisking until all of the cheese is completely melted. Immediately chill the mixture over an ice bath until it cools completely. Refrigerate for 12 hours. Whisk the mixture again and pass through a fine kitchen strainer. Follow your ice cream maker's instruction to churn and freeze.

METHOD: Peanut Butter Sauce

Use a whisk or a blender to mix all ingredients into a spreadable sauce consistency.

METHOD: Assembly

Temper the ice cream mixture until it is soft enough to spread but does not melt. Meanwhile, lay out four waffle cone discs. Coat each disc with Cajeta and peanut butter sauce. Place one disc on top of the other (layering them will add to the crispy texture), then add a scoop of ice cream onto the waffle cone base. Top with the remaining two waffle cone discs. Top sandwich with Greek yogurt, honey and cheddar cheese shavings.

Yields 10-12. ▷

Endive Clafoutis with Sweet Orange Sauce

Courtesy of Chef Bart Vandaele at Belga Café, Washington, D.C.

INGREDIENTS: Endive Clafoutis

1 cup milk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 vanilla bean, sliced and seeds removed
4 egg yolks
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup bleached flour
1 stick butter, melted
1 lb. endive, chopped
2 large sheets puff pastry

INGREDIENTS: Sweet Orange Sauce

3 oranges
1 cup orange juice
2/3 cup sugar
4 tsp. sugar, for caramelizing
10 tsp. orange zest
2 tsp. five spice powder
1/2 tsp. saffron
3 pieces star anise
5 pieces cardamom
1 cinnamon stick
3 cloves
2 limes, juiced
4 tsp. grapefruit puree

INGREDIENTS: Other

High-quality coffee ice cream

Often, when people think of desserts in America, the images that come to mind are of pie, cake and decadent chocolate cookies. However, highly trained chefs will tell you that desserts can also be as lovely palate cleansers, devised to bring a bright harmony to the end of a long or heavy winter meal. At Belga Café, Chef Vandaele's choice of sharp, bitter endive marries with the sugary sweetness of puffy pastry and vanilla to create a fresh experience and lasting impression in a last course.

METHOD: Pastry

In a large bowl, mix together milk, vanilla extract, vanilla bean seeds, egg yolks, sugar, flour and melted butter. Chop the endives. Lay out puff pastry sheets; using 10cm stainless-steel cooking rings, cut out circles. Inside the cooking ring place the puff pastry on bottom, add chopped endive and top with mixture. Place in oven at 350°F for 15 minutes.

METHOD: Sweet Orange Sauce

Peel the oranges and save skin for zest. Slice the oranges into circles. Add into a pan on low heat and caramelize with 4 teaspoons of sugar. In a saucepan, mix together orange juice, sugar, spices, orange zest, lime juice and grapefruit puree. Cook and reduce over medium-low heat. It's ready when it reaches the consistency of caramel, in approximately 15 minutes.

TO PLATE

Place the pastry in the center of the plate. Spoon the sauce on the plate to fully surround the pastry. Add one scoop of coffee ice cream on the side.

Serves 4.





Blue Cheese Brioche Bread Pudding

Courtesy of
American Seasons,
Nantucket, Massachusetts

“Blue cheese is not usually the first thing one reaches for in a dessert, but it adds a wonderful complexity and bite to the richness of bread pudding,” says Pastry Chef Natasha Misanko. “For American Seasons’ recipe, we use the Original Blue from family-owned Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company in California. Its medium-flavor profile and creamy texture with just a touch of salt elevate this dessert as a tangy winter indulgence.”

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup egg yolks
- 1 fresh loaf of brioche,
cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 quart half-and-half
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup organic sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Nantucket Native honey
(or similar artisanal brand honey)
- 1 cup crumbled Point Reyes
(or similar creamy blue cheese)
- 1 cup high-quality dark chocolate,
chopped
- High-quality vanilla ice cream

METHOD

Place egg yolks in a large bowl and set aside. Place brioche cubes in single-serving baking dishes. In a pot, bring half-and-half, salt, sugar and honey to a boil. Once half-and-half mixture is boiling, pour slowly over egg yolks, whisking constantly until both yolks and liquid are combined fully. Sprinkle blue cheese over brioche, then sprinkle chocolate over blue cheese, making sure to spread fairly evenly. Place the single-serve dishes on a baking dish or sheet pan, and pour custard mixture over brioche until dishes are almost full. Allow to sit for 10 minutes until liquid is absorbed. If the brioche is still dry, add more custard and repeat until brioche has absorbed enough liquid to be moist but not wet. Pour hot water in the sheet pan until the liquid reaches half-way up to the outside of the single-serve baking dishes. Place the sheet pan and dishes in a pre-heated 375°F oven and bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the top of the pudding can be pressed without any raw liquid rising to the top. The brioche tops should be golden brown.

Allow to cool slightly and drizzle with fresh honey. Serve warm with high-quality vanilla ice cream.

Black Cardamom Beignets

Courtesy of Francis Ang,
Fifth Floor Restaurant,
San Francisco, California

INGREDIENTS: Beignets

2 ¼ tsp. dry active yeast (1 pack)
6 oz. lukewarm water
2 oz. sugar
18 oz. all-purpose flour
4 oz. evaporated milk
1 tbsp. salt
2 tbsp. butter
1 large egg

INGREDIENTS: Pastry Cream

8 oz. milk
1 whole black cardamom (smashed)
2 oz. sugar
½ oz. cornstarch
⅛ tsp. salt
1 egg
1 oz. butter

INGREDIENTS: Peach Marmalade

1 lb. ripe peaches (cut into small,
diced pieces)
1 lb. sugar

Combining a classic New Orleans dessert with a spice most commonly found in Vietnamese dishes, Francis Ang, pastry chef at Fifth Floor Restaurant in San Francisco, California, has created a brand new spin on this lovely dessert staple. "I like using black cardamom on dishes when I want a little smokiness," he says. "It has a very distinct aroma that you cannot get from other spices. It works well with peaches or pears that have been poached."



METHOD: Beignets

In a bowl, combine yeast, water and sugar; let sit for 5 minutes. In another larger bowl, add the rest of the ingredients. Pour in yeast mixture and stir until it forms a ball. Knead, adding just enough flour so as not to stick. Put the dough in a bowl that has been brushed with soft butter. Cover it and let it rest in a warm area until it has doubled. Once it has doubled, place on a floured surface and roll with a rolling pin until ½-inch thick. Cut with 1-inch cookie cutters. Fry at 335°F, either in a fryer or deep skillet. Fry each for 3 minutes then flip over. Fry another 3 minutes.

METHOD: Pastry Cream

Heat the milk and black cardamom in a pot and let it steep for 10 minutes. In a separate bowl, whisk together sugar, cornstarch, salt and egg. Slowly drizzle the hot milk into the egg mixture while simultaneously whisking. Put the mixture back in the pot and cook on low, whisking vigorously and letting it boil for one minute. Pass through a fine mesh strainer. Whisk in butter and let cool.

METHOD: Peach Marmalade

Cook the peaches and sugar together in a heavy-bottom pot on low heat and stir every few minutes until it reduces to a thick consistency.

TO PLATE

Roll fried beignets in a mixture of sugar with a few pinches of ground coffee. Pipe the pastry cream into the beignet. Spoon the marmalade on a plate, then place the beignet on top.

Vegan Fudgesicles

Courtesy of Chef Matthew Kenney of M.A.K.E.,
Santa Monica, California

INGREDIENTS

1 cup cashews
½ cup young coconut meat
½ cup agave nectar
1 cup almond milk or other nut milk
½ cup cacao powder
2 tbsp. vanilla extract
½ cup coconut oil, melted
Pinch salt
Chocolate Shell (optional)

INGREDIENTS: Chocolate Shell

1 cup coconut oil
½ cup cacao powder
½ cup agave nectar
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla extract

Chef Matthew Kenney is a legend in the raw food revolution, with restaurants in California, Florida and England. This particular recipe can be found in a cookbook, entitled *Everyday Raw Desserts*. "One of my greatest rewards as a chef is found when preparing healthy dishes that satisfy even the most jaded gourmand," he says. "The best way to accomplish this is through updated, lighter interpretations of comfortable foods that one may not normally associate with the term 'health.' You can't find a better example of that than a fudgesicle."

METHOD

Blend all ingredients for popsicles in a blender (he uses a Vitamix) until smooth and pour into popsicle molds. Freeze overnight. Run hot water over the outside of the popsicle molds to remove easily.

METHOD: Chocolate Shell

After popsicles are made, blend all ingredients for chocolate shell in a blender until smooth. Dip frozen popsicles into room-temperature chocolate shell mixture. The icy fudgesicles will cause the chocolate to harden immediately on the outside.

Yields 10-12. ▷



Beet, Goat Cheese & Pistachio Ice Cream

Courtesy of Sam Mason
& OddFellows Ice Cream,
Brooklyn, New York

OddFellows is a collaboration by culinary icon Sam Mason and husband-and-wife team Mohan and Holiday Kumar. Stop in the next time you find yourself in Brooklyn. Or whip up this recipe for one of their hottest seasonal scoops. While beets probably aren't the first produce you reach for to make homemade ice cream, the juice of fresh beets adds a unique kick of tart sweetness against creamy goat cheese, rich honey and pistachios. The result is deliciously upbeat. Pun intended.

INGREDIENTS

10 oz. beet juice
24 oz. milk
6 oz. heavy cream
3 ½ oz. dried milk powder
1 ¼ oz. corn syrup
8 oz. sugar
7 oz. egg yolks

METHOD: Ice Cream

Heat the beet juice with milk, cream, dried milk powder and corn syrup. Whisk egg yolks and sugar together in a separate bowl. When the beet juice mixture is simmering, whisk eggs and sugar mixture in slowly. Chill and strain. Freeze as instructed in an ice cream machine.

INGREDIENTS: Goat Cheese, Honey and Pistachios

6 oz. goat cheese
3 oz. honey
6 oz. pistachios

METHOD: Goat Cheese, Honey and Pistachios

Combine room-temperature goat cheese, honey and pistachios in a bowl. Marry well and chill.

METHOD: Assembly

Fold goat cheese, honey and pistachio mixture into the beet ice cream. Freeze until firm. Serve on waffle cones or in a bowl.

Yields a half-gallon of ice cream.



The Welcome Back Cocktail

Courtesy of
Angostura Rum

Fernet Branca is a wonderful Italian digestif. Intense and capable of being served all on its own, it adds an herbal complexity to cold coffee. This cocktail, with a small dose of rum and the festive topping of mint and whipped cream, is a very refreshing way to close a big meal.

INGREDIENTS

1 oz. Angostura 7 Year Gold Rum
1 ½ oz. Fair Cafe coffee (room temperature)
¼ oz. Fernet Branca
Glassware: Coupe glass
Garnish: Mint sprig

METHOD

Add rum, coffee and Fernet into mixing glass. Add ice and stir until chilled. Strain into chilled coupe and garnish with one mint sprig.

Serves 1. ♦