

Caramelized Pear Upside-Down Gingerbread Cake

Sugar is usually caramelized in one of two ways: It is sprinkled in a heavy pan and cooked over low heat until it dissolves, then the heat is increased to medium, or it is dissolved in a little water over medium-high heat, forming a thick syrup. In both cases it is heated until it turns a rich brown. In this recipe, however, the sugar is mixed with butter for flavor. Rather than letting the sugar cook undisturbed to prevent crystallization, the butter-sugar mixture is stirred occasionally until it becomes light brown.

In an 8-inch square, heavy aluminum cake pan placed over medium heat, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter. Add the granulated sugar and cook, stirring occasionally, until the sugar melts and turns light brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Arrange the pear slices in the pan in 4 overlapping rows. Set aside.

Preheat an oven to 350°F.

Over a sheet of waxed paper, sift together the flour, baking soda, ground ginger, cardamom, cinnamon and salt. Stir in the fresh ginger. Set aside.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the flat beater, beat the remaining 6 Tbs. ($\frac{3}{4}$ stick) butter on medium speed until creamy. Add the brown sugar and beat until the mixture is pale and fluffy. Slowly drizzle in the egg, beating each addition until incorporated before continuing. Beat in the molasses.

Reduce the speed to medium-low and add the flour mixture in 3 additions, alternating with the milk and beginning and ending with the flour. Beat just until combined. Pour the batter on top of the pears and spread it evenly to the edge of the pan. Bake until the top of the cake is puffed, 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer the pan to a wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes.

Run a table knife around the edge of the pan and shake it to make sure the cake is not sticking. (If it is, set the pan over low heat and heat for 1 to 2 minutes, gently shaking it until the cake is free.) Place a serving plate upside down on the pan. Wearing oven mitts, invert the plate and pan together. Lift off the pan. Dislodge any pear slices that stick to the pan and arrange them on top of the cake. Serve at room temperature. Serves 9.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Cake*, by Fran Gage (Simon & Schuster, 2003).

Ingredients for Caramelized Pear Upside-Down Gingerbread Cake

8 Tbs. (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar

2 firm but ripe, large pears, such as Comice or Anjou, peeled, cored and cut lengthwise into $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch slices

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda

2 tsp. ground ginger

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cardamom

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt

1 Tbs. peeled and finely chopped fresh ginger

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar

1 egg, at room temperature, lightly beaten

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup light molasses

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk, at room temperature

Ingredients for Buttermilk-Brined Turkey

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups turkey brine

1 quart water

4 quarts buttermilk

1 fresh turkey, 16 to 18 lb., neck, heart and gizzard removed (reserved, if desired)

4 Tbs. ($\frac{1}{2}$ stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

Essential Holiday Tools

There are a few essential tools that will make your holiday an easy, relaxed occasion.

- Roasting pan
- Thermometer
- Bulb baster
- Gravy separator
- Carving board and carving set
- Chopper and/or slicer
- Ricer

And of course, great friends!

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Technique Class: All-Star Holiday

“Whether it’s your first time preparing a holiday meal or your twentieth, I hope these recipes make your feast enjoyable.”

— Chuck Williams

Buttermilk-Brined Turkey

Soaking the turkey in a saltwater brine produces tender, juicy meat. In this recipe our brine mixture also includes buttermilk, which adds flavor to the turkey and helps keep the meat moist.

In a small saucepan over high heat, combine the turkey brine and water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring often, until the brine dissolves, 5 to 10 minutes. Let the brine mixture cool to room temperature. In a large pot, stir together the brine mixture and buttermilk.

Rinse the turkey inside and out with cold water and place in a large brining bag. Carefully pour the buttermilk brine mixture into the bag. Seal the bag, pressing out the air, and place in a large stockpot or other container large enough to hold the turkey. Refrigerate for 24 to 36 hours, turning occasionally.

Remove the turkey from the brine; discard the brine. Rinse the turkey inside and out with cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Trim off and discard the excess fat. Place the turkey, breast side up, on a rack in a large roasting pan. Rub the skin evenly with the butter. Truss the turkey as desired using kitchen twine. Let the turkey stand at room temperature for 1 hour.

Position a rack in the lower third of an oven and preheat to 400°F.

Roast the turkey for 30 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 325°F. Continue roasting, basting every 30 minutes with the pan juices. If the breast begins to cook too quickly, tent it loosely with aluminum foil. After about 2 hours of total roasting time, begin testing for doneness by inserting an instant-read thermometer into the thickest part of the breast and thigh, away from the bone. The breast should register 165°F and the thigh, 175°F. Total roasting time should be 3 to 4 hours.

Transfer the turkey to a carving board, cover loosely with foil and let rest for 20 to 30 minutes before carving. Serves 12 to 14.

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Ingredients for Ham

Ingredients for Ginger Peach-Glazed Ham

5 cinnamon sticks, each about 6 inches long

1 precooked smoked ham, about 15 lb.

2 cups dry white wine

For the glaze:

1 jar (15 oz.) peach preserves

1 Tbs. minced pickled ginger

1½ tsp. ground dry ginger

1 tsp. dry mustard

4 Tbs. firmly packed light brown sugar

1 head chicory (curly endive), separated into leaves

Ginger Peach-Glazed Ham

The ham tastes great hot and even better served at room temperature, when the cinnamon flavor is more pronounced. For the best flavor, look for peach preserves made with just fruit and sugar and no artificial ingredients.

Preheat an oven to 325°F.

Break the cinnamon sticks into 1½- to 2-inch pieces. Using a sharp knife, cut 8 or 9 horizontal slits, each ⅛ to ¼ inch deep and running at an angle in the upper, more fatty side of the ham. Slip the cinnamon-stick pieces into the slits, poking them into the meat.

Set the ham, cinnamon side up, on a rack in a large roasting pan. Pour the wine into the bottom of the pan and tent the ham with aluminum foil, sealing the edges securely. Bake for 2 hours.

Meanwhile, in a small saucepan over medium heat, combine the peach preserves, pickled ginger, dry ginger and mustard. Stir well and heat until the preserves melt, forming a glaze.

After 2 hours, remove the ham from the oven and poke any loose cinnamon sticks back into the meat. Increase the oven temperature to 350°F. Stir about 2 Tbs. of the pan juices into the glaze to thin slightly. Then spoon about three-fourths of the glaze over the top of the ham. Sprinkle 2 Tbs. of the brown sugar on top of the peach glaze, then pat it with the back of a spoon so that it clings to the meat.

Return the ham to the oven and continue baking for 1 hour more, then baste with the pan juices and spoon the remaining glaze over the top. Pat with the remaining 2 Tbs. brown sugar. Continue to bake until the glaze is browned and bubbly and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the ham registers 140°F, about 30 minutes more. Remove from the oven, tent loosely with foil and let rest for 25 minutes before carving.

Transfer the ham to a large platter and garnish with the chicory. Beginning at the large end of the ham, carve across the grain into thin slices and arrange them around the platter. Serve hot or at room temperature. Serves 20 to 24.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Lifestyles Series, *Brunch Entertaining*, by Janeen Sarlin (Time-Life Books, 1999).

Cheesy Potato Gratin

Enriched with two kinds of cheeses, this gratin is easy to prepare, as it does not call for layering the potatoes in a baking dish. Instead, chunks of potatoes are simmered on the stovetop in a fry pan, along with the ingredients for the sauce. Then the gratin is baked in the same pan in the oven until golden brown and bubbling.

Preheat an oven to 375°F.

In a 10-inch ovenproof nonstick fry pan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the shallot and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Slowly stir in the stock and cream. Add the Gruyère and thyme and stir until the cheese has melted, about 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper. Add the potatoes and stir to coat them well. Cover the pan and cook over medium heat for 15 minutes.

Remove the lid and sprinkle the Parmigiano-Reggiano on top. Transfer the pan to the oven and bake, uncovered, until the top is golden brown and bubbling at the edges, 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving. Serves 6 to 8.

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Smoky Bacon-Biscuit Dressing

In this savory dressing, homemade cream biscuits stand in for the traditional bread, while crispy bacon adds delicious smoky flavor. Use our Williams-Sonoma biscuit mix to make delicious cream biscuits for this recipe.

Position a rack in the lower third of an oven and preheat to 350°F.

Spread the biscuits out on a baking sheet. Toast in the oven until lightly browned, 25 to 30 minutes. Set aside. Increase the oven temperature to 375°F.

In a deep sauté pan over medium-high heat, cook the bacon until crisp, 7 to 9 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain.

Pour off all but 3 Tbs. of the fat from the pan. Set the pan over medium heat and add the onions. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are soft and lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Add the celery, mushrooms, parsley, sage and thyme and cook until the celery is soft, about 5 minutes. Transfer the onion mixture to a large bowl. Add the bacon to the bowl and season with salt and pepper. Add the biscuits and stock and stir to combine.

Transfer the dressing to a baking dish and cover with aluminum foil. Bake for 30 minutes, then remove the foil and bake until the dressing is lightly browned, about 20 minutes more. Serves 10.

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Ingredients for Cheesy Potato Gratin

1 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 shallot, finely chopped

2 Tbs. all-purpose flour

½ cup chicken stock

½ cup heavy cream

1 cup grated Gruyère cheese

1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

3 lb. Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1½-inch chunks

½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Ingredients for Smoky Bacon-Biscuit Dressing

Twelve 4-inch cream biscuits, cut into 1½-inch cubes

1 lb. sliced smoky bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces

2 yellow onions, diced

5 celery stalks, diced

8 oz. white button mushrooms, brushed clean and sliced

¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

2 Tbs. chopped fresh sage

2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

5 cups chicken stock