TastefullyJOY

Fall Desserts & Beverages

Cozy seasonal recipes for sweet treats and comforting sips



TastefullyJOY — Fall Desserts & Beverages — Cozy seasonal recipes and comforting sips

A little planning.
More kitchen joy.

Thirty recipes for seasonal baking, small celebrations and a comforting drink. Inside, the food and the practical details come together: clear ingredients, complete methods, useful pauses and a few notes about what to look for along the way.

I want a recipe to make sense on an ordinary kitchen counter. Read the full method before starting, set out the ingredients in order and give cooling or chilling the time it needs. A dessert for sharing does not have to mean doing every stage in one busy hour.

From almond-coconut thumbprint cookies and apple-ginger hand pies to espresso chocolate and warm cider, there is something here for a small treat or a table of friends. Choose a recipe that fits the time and ingredients you have.

Each recipe brings together a finished-dish photograph, a four-stage visual guide, a complete ingredient list, the full method and useful kitchen notes. Read the steps in order and keep the ingredients close as you cook.

With care, Joy
TastefullyJOY

Something sweet.
Something to sip.

01	Almond Joy Cookies	7
02	A Festive Fall Pumpkin Bundt Cake	11
03	Pumpkin Roll with Cream Cheese Filling	15
04	Chocolate Lava Cakes with a Peanut Butter Heart	19
05	Cranberry Orange Icebox Cookies	23
06	Pumpkin Cookies with a Chocolate-Hazelnut Center	27
07	Glazed Maple Leaf Cookies	31
08	Ube Crinkle Cookies	35
09	Witch Finger Cookies with Pistachios and Jam	39
10	Hocus Pocus Binx Black Cat Cookies	43
11	Homemade Bread Bowls for Soup	47
12	Soft Pretzels with a Jalapeño-Cheddar Crown	51
13	Jack Skellington Oreo Pops	55
14	Ghostly Pumpkin Pudding	59
15	Homemade Salted Caramel Sauce	63

Something sweet.
Something to sip.

16	Peanut Butter Ice Cream Pie	67
17	Strawberry Tiramisu Cups with Mascarpone and Yogurt	71
18	Zesty Lemon Bars with Buttery Shortbread	75
19	Pumpkin Cream Cheese Doughnuts	79
20	Classic Tiramisu with Espresso and Mascarpone	83
21	Cookies and Cream Brownies with Oreo Frosting	87
22	Cinnamon Apple Pie with Pretzel Crust	91
23	Apple-Ginger Hand Pies with Cornstarch Pastry	95
24	Cranberry Linzer Tart with Walnut Crust	99
25	Bicerin with Espresso, Chocolate and Cream	103
26	Dalgona Coffee: Whipped Instant Coffee	107
27	Pineapple-Basil Smoothie	111
28	Brazilian Lemonade with Lime and Condensed Milk	115
29	Nonalcoholic Smoky Citrus Punch with Tea	119
30	Hot Bourbon Apple Cider with Warming Spices	123

Make the pauses part of the plan.

Measure before mixing

Use the exact ingredient list for the recipe you are making. Weight measures are useful for flour and crumbs, while the liquid measures in this book use US customary cups. A metric cup is a different volume.

Read for texture, too

An oven timer is a guide. Look for the stated signs of doneness and use a thermometer where the method calls for one. A thick cake, a filled cookie and a hot drink should not be judged by the same visual cue.

Cool means cool

Warm filling can soften pastry; warm cake can melt a topping. Give each stated cooling or chilling stage its own place in the schedule. Some stages can overlap, but they cannot all be removed.

Scale thoughtfully

TastefullyJOY’s Planner can scale ingredient quantities. Pan depth, cooking time and heat transfer still need separate consideration. Doubling a batter does not mean doubling the baking time.

Plan the next occasion

For more recipes and free kitchen tools, visit tastefullyjoy.com. Choose your portions, make a grocery list and leave time to enjoy what you have made.

Choose with care.
Cook with attention.

Ingredients and allergies

Read package labels and account for allergies and individual needs. These recipes include common allergens such as wheat, dairy, eggs, nuts and sesame. A substitution can change both suitability and cooking behavior.

A cold place for dairy desserts

Keep perishable ingredients refrigerated and return dairy-based desserts to the refrigerator promptly after serving. Follow the storage guidance in the individual recipe and avoid leaving a celebration dessert out for the whole afternoon.

An adults-only option stays optional

Some drinks include bourbon, brandy or rum. Keep alcohol additions separate when serving a mixed group, and follow the recipe’s nonalcoholic option where one is offered.

Fry with care

Use a deep, stable pot with plenty of space above the oil and keep a thermometer nearby. Work in small batches, allow the oil to return to temperature and keep hot pastries in a single layer on a rack.

Keep in touch

For recipes and kitchen questions, email joyleealexander@gmail.com. Tell me which dish you are cooking, what is on your table and what you would like to make next.

01 Almond Joy Cookies

Almond-coated thumbprint cookies with coconut filling, a whole almond and a fine milk-chocolate drizzle.



MAKES About 20 cookies

TIME 30 min prep + at least 20 min chilling + 15–20 min baking + cooling

Almond Joy Cookies

ALMOND COOKIE DOUGH

- 1 cup (227 g) unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup (100 g) granulated sugar
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 2 cups (240 g) all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup finely chopped roasted almonds, for coating

COCONUT FILLING

- 1 cup (60 g) unsweetened coconut flakes
- ¼ cup sweetened condensed milk
- 1 large egg white
- 1 pinch kosher salt

FINISH

- 20 whole almonds
- 1 cup (170 g) milk chocolate, melted



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Almond Joy Cookies

01. Mix the dough
Beat softened butter and sugar for about 1 minute until creamy. Beat in egg yolks and almond extract. Whisk flour and salt separately, then mix into the butter on low speed just until a soft dough forms. Do not overmix.

02. Shape and chill
Divide into about 20 equal portions, roughly 1 ounce each. Roll into balls, coat in the finely chopped roasted almonds and place on a parchment-lined tray. Press a deep thumbprint with a thumb or the narrow base of a small glass, keeping a sturdy border. Freeze the shaped cookies for at least 20 minutes.

03. Fill the centers
Heat the oven to 325°F (163°C). Stir coconut flakes, condensed milk, egg white and salt until evenly moistened. Spoon a small mound into each chilled thumbprint and gently press one whole almond on top.

04. Bake and cool
Space the cookies 1–2 inches apart. Bake for 15–20 minutes, until the edges are lightly golden and the coconut filling is set. Allow the cookies to cool completely on the tray, about 30 minutes, before decorating.

05. Drizzle the chocolate
Melt chocolate gently in short microwave intervals, stirring between intervals, or over barely simmering water. Put it in a small piping bag or a zip-top bag with a tiny corner cut off. Drizzle thin lines over the cooled cookies and let the chocolate set before serving or packaging.

Almond Joy Cookies

A note from Joy

Keep the shaped dough cold, leave enough dough around each indentation and avoid overfilling. Cool the cookies completely before drizzling so the chocolate lines stay distinct. Dark or semisweet chocolate can replace milk chocolate for a less sweet finish.

Build a sturdy thumbprint
Leave a generous rim around the coconut center. A small glass can make a rounded indentation, and any small cracks can be smoothed gently before filling. Finely chopped almonds adhere more evenly than large chunks.

Keep the dough cold
Butter-rich dough softens as it is handled. Freeze the shaped cookies for at least 20 minutes; if the mixture becomes sticky while shaping, pause and chill it before continuing.

Cool before finishing
The baked cookies need time to firm before they are moved or decorated. Chocolate drizzled over a warm surface will spread instead of holding a fine line. Allow the chocolate to set before layering cookies in a box.

Make a small gift box
Separate layers with parchment to protect the chocolate. Let children help with shaping, coating and decorating cooled cookies, while an adult handles the oven and hot trays.

02 A Festive Fall Pumpkin Bundt Cake

Two spiced pumpkin Bundt cakes become one cheerful Halloween centerpiece, with orange frosting, a green cone stem and an optional candy-filled surprise.



MAKES 20–24 servings

TIME 20 min prep + 80–100 min baking + cooling and 15 min chilling

A Festive Fall Pumpkin Bundt Cake

PUMPKIN CAKES

- Cooking spray, for the pan
- 2 (15.25-oz.) boxes white or yellow cake mix, divided
- 2 (3.4-oz.) boxes instant vanilla or pumpkin pudding mix, divided
- 8 large eggs, divided
- 2 cups pumpkin puree, divided
- 2/3 cup vegetable oil, divided
- 1/2 cup sour cream, divided
- 3 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice, divided
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract, divided
- 1 cup water, divided (1/2 cup per cake)

FROSTING AND DECORATION

- 2 1/2 cups plus 3 tablespoons store-bought vanilla or cream cheese frosting, divided (from two 16-oz. containers)
- Orange and green food coloring
- 1 cake ice cream cone
- Green and orange sprinkles, optional
- Halloween candy, optional
- 2–3 (12-inch) food-safe cake dowels or straws, optional



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

A Festive Fall Pumpkin Bundt Cake

01. Mix the first cake
Heat the oven to 350°F. Generously grease a 12-cup Bundt pan. On low speed, beat together 1 box cake mix, 1 box pudding mix, 4 eggs, 1 cup pumpkin puree, 1/3 cup oil, 1/4 cup sour cream, 1 1/2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice, 1 teaspoon vanilla and 1/2 cup water. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl and mix again to incorporate everything.

02. Fill the pan
Transfer the batter to the prepared Bundt pan and smooth the top with a rubber spatula.

03. Bake and cool
Bake for 40–50 minutes, until a tester inserted into the center comes out clean. Let the cake cool in the pan for 15 minutes, then invert onto a wire rack and cool completely.

04. Bake the second cake
Wipe out and grease the pan again. Repeat the mixing and baking process with the remaining box of cake mix, box of pudding mix, 4 eggs, 1 cup pumpkin puree, 1/3 cup oil, 1/4 cup sour cream, 1 1/2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice, 1 teaspoon vanilla and 1/2 cup water. Cool completely.

05. Color the frosting
Put 1 3/4 cups frosting in a heatproof 2-cup measuring cup. Stir in orange food coloring until you reach the shade you want.

06. Stack the pumpkin
With a large serrated knife, level the rounded bottoms of the cooled cakes. Place one cake on a platter with its smooth side facing up. Spread 3/4 cup of the orange frosting over it, then stack the second cake so the edges align. Add food-safe dowels or straws if needed, trimming them to fit. Chill for 15 minutes.

07. Make the green stem
Mix the reserved 3 tablespoons frosting with green food coloring. Spread over the ice cream cone and add green sprinkles, if using.

08. Add the orange drips
Microwave the remaining orange frosting in 3-second bursts, stirring between each, until just pourable, about 10 seconds total. Slowly pour around the cake in a circular motion for a drip effect. Add orange sprinkles, if using.

09. Finish and serve
Fill the center holes with Halloween candy, if desired. Set the green-frosted cone upside down on top as the stem. Remove any dowels or straws before slicing and serving.

A Festive Fall Pumpkin Bundt Cake

A note from Joy

Chill the assembled cake before adding the cone so the frosting has time to set and the colors stay crisp. Keep the orange frosting only just warm enough to pour; short microwave bursts give you more control over the drips. I'd keep the green stem until the final decorating step. Check for every support straw or dowel before serving, and follow the frosting label's storage directions.

A pumpkin shape built from two cakes
The pumpkin in this dessert comes from both the batter and the shape. Two Bundt cakes meet in the middle, orange frosting runs over their ridges, and a green-frosted ice cream cone becomes the stem. I like the playful logic of it. Familiar baking ingredients create a centerpiece with a clear seasonal idea, and the decoration doesn't demand tiny piping details or a collection of specialty tools to explain what it is.

This is also a generously sized project, with twenty to twenty-four servings. Before you begin, choose the platter, make room for cooling and consider when the cake will be sliced. Two cakes need two full rounds of baking if you use the single pan in the recipe, followed by complete cooling before stacking. The eighty to one hundred minutes of baking describes those rounds together. Allow a separate stretch for complete cooling so both cakes are ready to frost and stack securely.

Keep the two batches clearly divided
The ingredient list supplies both cakes, but the method mixes them one at a time. Setting out two groups makes that division easier to follow: one box of cake mix, one box of instant pudding mix and the appropriate share of eggs, pumpkin, oil, sour cream, spice, vanilla and water for each. It is a simple way to avoid putting the full two cups of pumpkin into the first bowl while the second cake is still waiting.

White or yellow cake mix is the intended base, with instant vanilla or pumpkin pudding mix as the companion. These are used as the dry mixes in this recipe, not prepared separately according to their boxes. The eggs, water and other additions are already supplied in the cake's method. Following both the box additions and the recipe additions would change the batter substantially. Read through the measured batch before mixing so the convenience ingredients stay convenient rather than creating two competing sets of directions.

03 Pumpkin Roll with Cream Cheese Filling

A softly spiced pumpkin sponge rolled around a smooth cream-cheese filling for neat, make-ahead slices.



MAKES 10–12 slices

TIME 25 min prep + 18 min baking + cooling and chilling

Pumpkin Roll with Cream Cheese Filling

PUMPKIN CAKE

- 3/4 cup (94g) all-purpose flour (spooned & leveled)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 and 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon store-bought or homemade pumpkin pie spice
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2/3 cup (150g) canned pumpkin puree
- 1/2 cup (100g) packed light or dark brown sugar
- 1/2 cup (100g) granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

FOR ROLLING

- for rolling: 3/4 cup (90g) confectioners' sugar

CREAM CHEESE FILLING

- 6 ounces (170g) full-fat brick cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 1/4 cup (4 Tbsp; 56g) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 1 and 1/2 cups (180g) confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Pumpkin Roll with Cream Cheese Filling

01. Prepare the pan and towel
Heat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 10-by-15-inch baking pan, line with parchment and grease the parchment. Lay a thin clean kitchen towel on the counter and cover it evenly with the 3/4 cup confectioners' sugar used for rolling.

02. Mix the batter
Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, pumpkin pie spice and salt. In another bowl whisk eggs, pumpkin, both sugars and vanilla. Combine wet and dry mixtures just until smooth.

03. Bake
Spread the batter evenly into the prepared pan, including the corners. Bake 17–18 minutes, until the surface springs back lightly when touched.

04. Roll while warm
Immediately invert the cake onto the sugared towel and carefully peel away the parchment. Starting at a short end, gently roll up the warm cake with the towel inside. Let cool completely in its rolled shape, about 2 hours.

05. Make the filling
Beat the cream cheese until smooth, then beat in the softened butter. Add the filling's confectioners' sugar and vanilla and beat until creamy.

06. Fill and chill
Gently unroll the cooled cake, leaving its inner curl relaxed rather than forcing it flat. Spread the filling with a 1/2-inch border. Roll up again without the towel. Cover and refrigerate at least 20 minutes before slicing; keep leftovers refrigerated.

Pumpkin Roll with Cream Cheese Filling

A note from Joy

Have the sugared towel ready before the cake leaves the oven. The first roll happens while the cake is warm; waiting until it is cold makes cracking more likely.

A rolled cake is mostly a sequence

A pumpkin roll looks elaborate because of its spiral, but its success depends more on doing a few tasks in the right order than on complicated decoration. Prepare the pan, sugar the towel, mix and bake the thin cake, then roll it while warm. The cream-cheese filling comes later, after the rolled sponge has cooled. Reading the whole method before starting keeps the hot-cake stage calm. This is a useful make-ahead dessert because the final chill improves slicing, and the spiral supplies its own visual detail without frosting the outside or buying extra decorations.

Use the correct pan and pumpkin

The 10-by-15-inch pan controls the sponge's thickness. A larger pan can produce a cake that is too thin and dry, while a smaller one leaves a thicker sheet that may not bend in the same way. Choose plain pumpkin puree for this sponge; the recipe supplies its sugar and spices separately from the pumpkin. Measure the flour lightly, using the weight when possible, and do not pack it into the cup. A rolled sponge needs flexibility; extra flour and an overbaked thin layer both make bending more difficult. Set the measured ingredients out before mixing so the batter does not wait while the pan is being prepared.

Build a dependable release layer

Greasing the pan helps hold the parchment in place, and greasing the parchment helps the cake release cleanly after baking. Fit the paper into the corners so the batter can spread evenly without folding into thick ridges. A thin, clean kitchen towel should be ready with an even dusting of confectioners' sugar before the pan goes into the oven. Avoid a thick, textured towel that can imprint heavily or be awkward to roll. The sugar limits sticking during the first roll, so distribute it over the area the cake will touch rather than leaving most of it in a mound in the center.

Mix just enough for a uniform batter

Whisk the dry ingredients together so the leaveners and spices are distributed before they meet the pumpkin mixture. In the second bowl, combine eggs, puree, sugars and vanilla until no isolated streaks remain. Once wet and dry meet, stop when the batter is smooth and the flour is incorporated. A thin sponge does not benefit from prolonged vigorous stirring after that point. Spread it to an even depth all the way to the corners. Thick edges and a thin center bake at different speeds, making one part dry before another is ready. A small offset spatula helps, but a regular spatula works with a little care.

04 Chocolate Lava Cakes with a Peanut Butter Heart

Bake dark chocolate lava cakes with peanut butter centers. Prepare the ramekins and watch for set edges with a soft middle before serving.



MAKES 4 cakes

TIME 15 min prep + 12–13 min baking

Chocolate Lava Cakes with a Peanut Butter Heart

CHOCOLATE BATTER

- 6 ounces (170g) high quality semi-sweet chocolate, such as Ghirardelli or Lindt
- 1/2 cup (8 Tbsp; 113g) unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup (31g) all-purpose flour (spooned & leveled)
- 1/2 cup (60g) confectioners' sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 2 large egg yolks
- 10g 70% dark chocolate, chopped (in addition to the 170g semi-sweet chocolate)

FILLING AND SERVING

- 8 teaspoons (42g) creamy peanut butter (about 2 teaspoons per cake)
- optional for serving: ice cream, melted peanut butter and/or chocolate syrup for drizzling



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

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Chocolate Lava Cakes with a Peanut Butter Heart

01. Prepare ramekins
Grease four 6-ounce ramekins with nonstick spray, then dust the interiors with cocoa. Coat the corners too so the warm cakes can release.

02. Preheat
Heat the oven to 425°F (218°C).

03. Melt chocolate and butter
Put butter, the 170g semi-sweet chocolate and the additional 10g 70% dark chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl. Heat in 10-second bursts, stirring each time, until the mixture is smooth. Set aside.

04. Mix the batter
Mix flour, powdered sugar and salt in one small bowl, and whisk eggs and yolks in another. Add both to the melted chocolate and stir gently with a spatula. Use a whisk briefly for any stubborn lumps; the finished batter will be fairly thick.

05. Add peanut butter
Divide the batter between the ramekins. Add peanut butter to each and press it slightly below the surface with a spoon; it does not need to disappear completely.

06. Bake, unmold and serve
Set the ramekins on a tray and begin checking after 12 minutes. Use the edges and center to decide whether more baking time is needed; the added chocolate and your ramekins may affect the timing. Look for firm edges while the tops remain a little soft. Rest 1 minute. Using oven mitts, place a plate over each ramekin and carefully turn over to release the cake. Serve straight away, with optional ice cream, melted peanut butter or chocolate syrup.

Chocolate Lava Cakes with a Peanut Butter Heart

A note from Joy

There's plenty of practical cooking in my day, but I still like leaving room for a little chocolate. Have the ramekins and plates ready before mixing so the last few minutes feel calm. If refrigerating the prepared batter, allow for a different baking time and check the set edges carefully. These cakes are loveliest served warm, with their soft centers still inside.

Small cakes with a warm center
A lava cake is a dessert with a short path from oven to plate. The outside needs enough structure to hold its shape, while the center stays soft enough to open under a spoon. Peanut butter gives that middle another flavor and a thicker, creamy pocket. I like the straightforward pairing of chocolate and peanut butter here; it doesn't need several sauces to make the warm cake feel complete.

The recipe makes four individual cakes, which keeps portion planning simple. The active work is brief, but arranging the serving plates and clearing a landing place before you mix are worthwhile. Once the ramekins leave the oven, there isn't a long cooling period in which to find a missing oven mitt or decide which plates to use. A little preparation makes the final minute much calmer.

Buy chocolate for melting, not just sweetness
The larger portion of semi-sweet chocolate forms the body of the batter, with the additional small amount of seventy-percent chocolate deepening the flavor. Keep both amounts in mind when weighing. Add the extra dark chocolate alongside the full semi-sweet quantity to give this version its intended depth. Chop all the chocolate into small, manageable pieces so it melts evenly with the butter.

Choose chocolate you enjoy eating, and consider how the rest of the package will be used before buying several varieties. A small remainder can belong in another planned dessert without becoming an excuse to add more chocolate to these cakes. This batter has relatively little flour, so the chocolate and butter do much of the work. Changing their quantities casually changes more than the strength of the chocolate flavor.

Understand the eggs, sugar, and flour
Whole eggs and additional yolks help create the rich texture and give the outside its structure as it bakes. Keep the separation tidy so shell fragments don't reach the batter. The flour is a modest measure, and spooning and leveling it matters: a densely scooped quarter cup can introduce more flour than intended. Confectioners' sugar mixes readily into this thick batter and belongs with the dry ingredients before combining.

05 Cranberry Orange Icebox Cookies

Buttery slice-and-bake cookies with dried cranberries, fresh orange zest and a simple orange glaze.



MAKES 24 cookies

TIME About 25 min prep + 3 hr chilling + 15 min baking, plus cooling

Cranberry Orange Icebox Cookies

COOKIE DOUGH

- 3/4 cup (12 Tbsp; 170g) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 2/3 cup (133g) granulated sugar, plus more for rolling
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 cups + 2 Tablespoons (265g) all-purpose flour (spooned & leveled)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 Tablespoons (30ml) orange juice
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 3/4 cup (100g) very finely chopped dried cranberries ()
- Coarse sugar, optional, for rolling

ORANGE GLAZE

- 1 cup (120g) confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 Tablespoons (30ml) orange juice
- optional: more orange zest



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

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Cranberry Orange Icebox Cookies

01. Mix the dough
Beat the softened butter and granulated sugar until creamy, about 3 minutes. Beat in the egg and vanilla, scraping the bowl. Mix in flour and salt on low speed, then add 2 tablespoons orange juice, orange zest and finely chopped cranberries just until evenly combined.

02. Shape and chill
Divide the dough in half and shape each piece into a 7–8-inch log about 2 1/2 inches wide. Wrap tightly and refrigerate at least 3 hours or up to 5 days.

03. Slice
Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets. Roll the chilled logs in coarse sugar if using, then cut each log into 12 equal slices. Arrange about 2 inches apart.

04. Bake
Bake 13–15 minutes, until the edges are lightly golden. Let the cookies rest on the sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer to a rack and cool completely.

05. Glaze
Whisk confectioners’ sugar with the remaining 2 tablespoons orange juice. Drizzle over cold cookies and add optional zest. Let the glaze set for 30–60 minutes before stacking.

Cranberry Orange Icebox Cookies

A note from Joy

Finely chop the dried cranberries before they enter the dough. Smaller pieces make chilled logs easier to slice cleanly without dragging large fruit pieces through the edges.

A dough log makes the baking day easier
Icebox cookies separate mixing from baking in a useful way. The dough is shaped into logs, chilled until firm and sliced when the oven is ready. That makes these cranberry-orange cookies convenient for a planned treat without a long decorating session. The orange comes through zest, juice and a thin glaze, while dried cranberries bring little chewy pieces to the buttery base. Set aside the full chilling time at the start. The recipe becomes much less demanding when that rest is treated as part of the plan rather than an optional delay before baking.

Use zest for aroma and juice for moisture
Orange zest carries fragrant oils, while the measured juice adds liquid and acidity. Wash and dry the orange, then grate the colored surface lightly, stopping before you reach the bitter white pith. Zest before juicing, because a whole firm orange is easier to hold against a grater. Keep the dough's juice separate from the glaze's juice: each uses two tablespoons, and accidentally pouring the entire amount into the dough changes its consistency. A fresh orange can cover both tasks with little waste. Save any extra juice for another use so the dough keeps its measured balance of liquid.

Chop the fruit for a cleaner edge
Dried cranberries need to be chopped quite finely so they distribute through the dough and do not interfere with slicing. A large sticky piece can pull through a cold log and leave a ragged gap at the cut edge. Use a sharp knife and take a moment to separate pieces that cling together. The cranberries contribute sweetness as well as chew, so there is no need to add another dried fruit simply for color. Check that the fruit is pliable rather than very hard and dried out. A consistent small chop helps each cookie carry the same balance of citrus, butter and cranberry.

Cream the butter without turning it oily
Softened butter should give under light pressure but still hold its shape. If it is partially melted, the dough can be harder to handle and the cookies may spread more than intended. Beat it with the sugar until evenly creamy, then add the egg and vanilla and scrape the bowl. The flour goes in on low speed to avoid overworking the dough and coating the kitchen in a flour cloud. Stop when the dry streaks disappear and the fruit is evenly distributed. A thick, slightly tacky dough is expected before chilling; adding extra flour immediately can make the finished cookies dry.

06 Pumpkin Cookies with a Chocolate-Hazelnut Center

Soft cinnamon-pumpkin cookies wrapped around a chocolate-hazelnut center, with a light sugar coating.



MAKES 12–14 cookies

TIME 30 min active + at least 1 hr filling freezing + 45 min dough chilling + 14 min baking

Pumpkin Cookies with a Chocolate-Hazelnut Center

INGREDIENTS

- 14 tbsp. Nutella
- 1/2 c. pumpkin puree
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 c. packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 3/4 c. granulated sugar, divided
- 1 large egg yolk, room temperature
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- 3/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. baking soda
- 1 1/2 c. all-purpose flour



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Pumpkin Cookies with a Chocolate-Hazelnut Center

01. Freeze the filling
Place 14 tablespoon-sized portions of chocolate-hazelnut spread on a parchment-lined tray and freeze at least 1 hour, until firm enough to handle.

02. Dry the pumpkin
Spread 1/2 cup pumpkin puree on a plate and blot repeatedly with paper towels to remove excess moisture. Re-measure: about 1/3 cup should remain.

03. Mix the dough
Beat the softened butter, brown sugar, salt and 1/4 cup granulated sugar until creamy. Mix in yolk, vanilla, cinnamon and the blotted pumpkin. Mix in baking powder and baking soda, then fold in flour just until no dry streaks remain. Cover and freeze about 45 minutes, until firm.

04. Fill and shape
Heat the oven to 350°F and line two baking sheets. Place the remaining 1/2 cup sugar in a bowl. Flatten 1 tablespoon dough, add one frozen filling portion, cover with another flattened tablespoon of dough, and pinch the seam closed. Roll into a ball and coat with sugar. Keep unused filling frozen while working.

05. Bake and cool
Arrange about 2 inches apart. Bake about 14 minutes, rotating sheets halfway through, until puffed and the edges are set. Let rest briefly on the sheets, then transfer to a rack to cool. The centers are very hot immediately after baking.

Pumpkin Cookies with a Chocolate-Hazelnut Center

A note from Joy

Keep the filling portions frozen until the moment they are enclosed. Blotting the pumpkin and sealing the dough edges are both important for holding the soft center inside.

A filled cookie needs a little advance work
Begin with the chocolate-hazelnut filling so it has time to freeze while you make the pumpkin dough. Portion it onto a lined tray and give it time to become firm. The cookie dough has its own short freezer rest after mixing, and those two waiting periods can overlap partly. Having both the filling and dough properly chilled keeps shaping manageable and helps you seal each center neatly. A defined batch of twelve to fourteen large cookies also makes it easier to decide how many are needed before opening more ingredients.

Plain pumpkin, measured twice
Pumpkin puree brings moisture as well as flavor. In this dough, some of that water is blotted away so the cookies remain tender without turning into little cakes. Begin with the listed half-cup, spread it on a plate and press with paper towels until the amount is reduced to about one-third cup. Re-measuring matters more than counting a fixed number of towels, since pumpkin brands differ. Use plain puree rather than sweetened pie filling. The concentrated pumpkin still contributes its character, while the dough has a better chance of staying strong enough to hold the filling.

Make small frozen centers
Use a tablespoon measure to portion the chocolate-hazelnut spread as evenly as practical. Flattening each scoop slightly makes it easier to cover with two small dough rounds later. The portions need to be firm enough to lift cleanly from the parchment; a sticky, bending center will smear over the seam as you work. Keep most of the tray in the freezer and remove only a few portions at a time if the room is warm. A large frozen center may seem generous, but it leaves less dough around the edges and increases the chance that filling will leak onto the baking sheet.

Cream the base, then stop at the flour
The softened butter, brown sugar and a quarter-cup of granulated sugar are beaten until creamy before the yolk and pumpkin enter. Scrape the bowl so the dense pumpkin is distributed rather than sitting in a streak beneath the butter. Add the leaveners evenly and fold the flour only until the dry patches disappear. The remaining granulated sugar is for the outside, not an extra addition to the dough. Keep that bowl separate from the start. The yolk enriches the dough without adding the extra liquid of a whole egg, so do not casually substitute an entire egg and expect the same texture.

07 Glazed Maple Leaf Cookies

Buttery walnut cookies, cut into autumn leaves and finished with a soft brown-sugar maple glaze.



MAKES 48 cookies

TIME 20 min prep + 1 hr chilling + 12 min per batch

Glazed Maple Leaf Cookies

WALNUT COOKIES

- 3 c. (360 g.) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 c. raw walnuts
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 c. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 c. (200 g.) granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tbsp. whole milk
- 1 tsp. pure maple syrup

MAPLE GLAZE

- 3/4 c. (160 g.) light brown sugar
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1/2 tsp. maple extract or pure vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp. pure maple syrup
- 1 1/2 c. (175 g.) confectioners' sugar
- Pinch of kosher salt
- Pinch of ground nutmeg
- 3 tbsp. whole milk
- Crushed raw walnuts and maple sugar, for serving (optional)



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Glazed Maple Leaf Cookies

01. Make the dry mixture
Pulse the flour and walnuts in a food processor until the nuts are finely ground. Add baking powder, cinnamon and salt; pulse briefly to distribute.

02. Mix and chill
Beat the softened butter and granulated sugar until pale and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Beat in the egg, 1 tablespoon milk and 1 teaspoon maple syrup. Mix in the dry ingredients on low just until combined. Wrap and chill at least 1 hour, or up to 2 days.

03. Shape
Roll chilled dough on a lightly floured surface to 1/8 inch thick. Cut leaf shapes and arrange on parchment-lined trays. Reroll scraps gently. Freeze the shaped cookies 10 minutes.

04. Bake
Heat the oven to 350°F. Bake 10–12 minutes, rotating the trays halfway through, until the edges are lightly golden. Cool completely on a rack.

05. Prepare the glaze
Over low heat, stir the brown sugar and 6 tablespoons butter until melted and smooth, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to a heatproof bowl; cool slightly. Whisk in extract and 1/2 teaspoon maple syrup, then confectioners' sugar, a pinch each of salt and nutmeg, and 3 tablespoons milk.

06. Dip and finish
Dip one side of each cool cookie into the glaze and let excess drip away. Add optional crushed walnuts or maple sugar while wet. Let the glaze set before packing.

Glazed Maple Leaf Cookies

A note from Joy

Keep the unrolled dough chilled while working with a small portion. Thin leaf tips brown before the center, so start checking the smallest shapes first.

A little autumn, thoughtfully planned
A leaf-shaped cookie can make a simple plate feel seasonal without a cupboard full of decorating supplies. Here the walnut dough and warm brown-sugar glaze do most of the work; the cutter provides the finishing detail. The buttery walnut dough, gentle spice and brown-sugar glaze give each cookie a nutty flavor with maple in the background. I would plan these as a baking project with a pause in the middle: mix the dough when you have a few minutes, let the refrigerator do its part, and save rolling and glazing for a calmer stretch. Serve a small portion alongside a warm drink, where the cookie's walnut and maple flavors can be enjoyed at an easy pace.

Why the walnuts go in with the flour
Walnuts contain oil, so processing them alone for too long can turn them past finely chopped and toward a paste. Pulsing them together with flour helps separate the pieces and makes a fine, even mixture easier to achieve. Pulse briefly and stop to inspect the mixture, keeping an eye on how finely the nuts are chopped. The nuts should be small enough that the cutter does not drag large pieces through the dough. This is also a good place to use a bag of walnut pieces, which is often less expensive than perfect halves and works just as well once ground. Smell the nuts first; stale or bitter walnuts will not become fresh again in the oven or under glaze.

A soft butter stage, followed by a cold dough stage
The butter should yield to a fingertip but still hold its shape before mixing. That allows it to blend with sugar without leaving hard lumps or making the dough greasy. Once the egg and dry mixture are incorporated, the goal changes: chilling firms the fat so the dough rolls cleanly. Do not try to fix a warm, sticky dough with repeated handfuls of flour. Wrap it, flatten it into a manageable slab and give it time in the refrigerator. If the edges crack when rolling, let the slab sit briefly until pliable. Soft enough to bend and cool enough to lift is a more useful target than forcing dough straight from either extreme.

Rolling an even sheet protects the delicate tips
An even 1/8-inch thickness matters more than a perfectly shaped first roll. A thick center can stay soft while thin leaf points become dark, so check the sheet from the side before cutting. Lightly flour the pin and work surface, then lift and rotate the dough between passes so it does not quietly stick underneath. Collect scraps gently and chill them again if they become soft; repeated kneading makes later cookies tougher. You do not need a special cutter to enjoy the flavor. A simple round cutter produces the same dough and glaze with fewer fragile edges, though the yield will vary with its size.

08 Ube Crinkle Cookies

Soft purple ube cookies with a snowy crinkle coating, made with ube halaya and a little concentrated ube extract.



MAKES 20 cookies

TIME 20 min prep + 1 hr chilling + 11 min per batch

Ube Crinkle Cookies

INGREDIENTS

- 1 3/4 c. (210 g.) all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 large egg, room temperature
- 1/2 c. (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted, cooled
- 1/4 c. (55 g.) light brown sugar, packed
- 1 1/2 c. (300 g.) granulated sugar, divided
- 1/2 c. (150 g.) ube halaya
- 3 tsp. ube extract, such as McCormick
- 1 c. (115 g.) confectioners' sugar



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Ube Crinkle Cookies

01. Combine dry ingredients
Whisk flour, baking powder and salt in a bowl.

02. Mix the ube base
Whisk the egg, cooled melted butter, brown sugar and 1/2 cup granulated sugar. Stir in ube halaya and ube extract until evenly purple.

03. Finish and chill the dough
Fold the dry ingredients into the ube mixture just until no flour remains. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour, or up to 1 day.

04. Portion and coat
Heat the oven to 350°F and line trays with parchment. Divide the dough into about 20 portions, roughly 2 tablespoons each. Roll each ball first in the remaining 1 cup granulated sugar, then generously in confectioners' sugar. Leave about 2 inches between cookies.

05. Bake
Bake in batches for 9–11 minutes, until the edges are set and the centers remain slightly soft. Do not wait for the centers to become firm in the oven.

06. Cool
Leave the cookies on the tray for 10 minutes before moving to a rack. Cool completely before packing.

Ube Crinkle Cookies

A note from Joy

Keep the second tray of dough cold while the first bakes. Coat each batch just before it goes into the oven so the sugar stays distinct.

Purple, soft and worth a little planning
Ube crinkles bring a lovely contrast to the cookie plate: a soft purple center under a pale coating that opens into little cracks as the dough spreads. Ube is a purple yam used in many Filipino sweets, and this version combines prepared ube halaya with extract for both flavor and color. I like the practical rhythm of a dough that can be mixed ahead and baked when needed. Build the full one-hour chill into your plan before you start shaping the cookies. It gives the melted butter time to firm up so shaping feels manageable, and it lets you divide a sweet baking project into two short sessions.

Ube halaya and extract are different ingredients
Halaya is a sweetened cooked yam preparation, usually sold in a jar or tub. The extract is a concentrated flavoring, often with added color, and a few teaspoons cannot replace the body supplied by the halaya. Check the consistency as well as sweetness across brands: this dough needs smooth, spoonable halaya with the body of cooked yam. Read the ingredient label if dairy or other allergens matter to your household. Taro, purple sweet potato and ube are different foods, even when products share a similar color. Use the listed ube ingredients for this batch to keep its intended moisture and flavor; taro and purple sweet potato would need their own adjustments.

Melted butter needs time to cool
Hot butter can warm the egg and make an already soft dough harder to handle. Melt it first, then let it cool until fluid but no longer hot before whisking it into the egg and sugars. The brown sugar brings moisture while the measured granulated sugar in the dough supports the cookie structure. Remember that only half a cup of the granulated sugar belongs in the wet mixture; the rest is for rolling. Setting those amounts out separately at the start prevents a very easy mistake. Once the dry ingredients are added, stop as soon as they disappear rather than beating the mixture into a stretchy paste.

Cold dough makes portioning less messy
The dough will be shiny and softer than a traditional cutout cookie dough before chilling. Cover it and allow at least an hour in the refrigerator instead of trying to correct its texture with extra flour. Use a scoop or two spoons to divide it while still cool, then roll briefly between your palms. If a batch becomes sticky as you work, return it to the refrigerator for a short pause. Similar-sized portions spread and bake more evenly, which is especially helpful with a colored dough where browning is less obvious. A roughly two-tablespoon scoop gives the intended generous, soft-centered style.

09 Witch Finger Cookies with Pistachios and Jam

Buttery pistachio cookies shaped into playful green fingers, with sliced-almond nails and a little red jam.



MAKES about 50 cookies

TIME 35 min prep + 1 hr chilling/freezing + 9 min per batch

Witch Finger Cookies with Pistachios and Jam

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/4 c. (145 g.) confectioners' sugar
- 1 c. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp. almond extract
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- 5 to 6 drops green food coloring
- 2 3/4 c. (330 g.) all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 c. finely chopped pistachios (about 70 g.), plus more for decorating
- 3/4 c. sliced almonds (about 85 g.)
- 1/2 c. (135 g.) cherry, strawberry, or raspberry jam



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Witch Finger Cookies with Pistachios and Jam

01. Mix the butter base
Beat confectioners' sugar and softened butter until pale, about 2 minutes. Beat in the egg, then almond extract, vanilla and green coloring.

02. Make and chill dough
Whisk flour and salt separately, then mix into the butter base on low just until combined. Fold in chopped pistachios. Cover and chill at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 days.

03. Shape the fingers
Line baking sheets with parchment. Work with one quarter of the dough at a time, keeping the rest cold. Roll tablespoon-size portions into fingers about 3 inches long and slightly thinner than a little finger. Press an almond slice onto one end. Pinch two knuckles, score fine lines with a knife and add a few pistachio pieces if desired.

04. Freeze and bake
Freeze shaped cookies 30 minutes. Heat the oven to 375°F. Bake in batches for 7–9 minutes, turning trays as needed, until the edges are firm and tops look dry. Cool slightly before decorating.

05. Add jam
Lift each almond gently, add a tiny dab of jam and replace the almond. Add a little jam to the opposite end if desired. Cool completely before serving.

Witch Finger Cookies with Pistachios and Jam

A note from Joy

Shape the dough slightly slimmer than the finished finger you want. Cold dough and the freezer rest help keep the knuckle details from spreading away.

A playful shape with a real cookie underneath
Witch fingers are a decorating project built around a buttery nut cookie, so the flavor deserves as much attention as the shape. Pistachios bring texture and a gentle nuttiness, almond extract adds aroma, and a small amount of red jam gives a bright contrast at the ends. Even a gentle green tint gives the cookies a playful Halloween look on the plate. I would serve a modest tray alongside fresh fruit or a savory snack, giving everyone a little variety at the table. The cookie itself is rich enough that a few carefully shaped pieces feel festive.

Start with butter that is soft, not melted
The mixing stage works best when the butter yields easily but still holds its shape. Confectioners' sugar blends into that butter to make a fine-textured base; a melted, oily mixture will be much harder to shape. Beat until the color lightens, then add the egg and flavorings. Once the flour goes in, use low speed and stop when the dry streaks disappear. Finely chop the pistachios so a large nut piece does not split a thin finger during rolling. If the bowl feels warm after mixing, the planned refrigerator rest will bring the dough back to a more workable texture.

Cold portions make a large batch manageable
Working with one quarter of the dough at a time keeps the rest firm while you shape the first tray. Roll a small portion gently between your palms and aim slightly thinner than the finished finger you want, because the cookies will spread a little. A consistent tablespoon-size portion helps the batch bake evenly. If a shaped piece sticks to your hands or looks shiny, give it a short chill instead of kneading in extra flour. Extra flour can make the cookies dry and can cover the green color. The refrigerator and freezer are doing useful work here, even though neither step feels like active cooking.

Make the details readable rather than complicated
Two small pinches are enough to suggest knuckles, and a few shallow knife lines create the folded-skin effect. Deep cuts can weaken the dough and turn into cracks in the oven. Press an almond slice into the nail end firmly enough to leave a seat, but do not push it all the way through. A few pistachio pieces can become little bumps without needing a separate decorating ingredient. The fingers do not have to match exactly; a slightly irregular shape suits the theme. Keep them similar in thickness, however, so the thin ones do not overbake while a thicker center remains soft. A light touch also keeps the almond nail from cutting through the dough before baking.

10 Hocus Pocus Binx Black Cat Cookies

Dark cocoa cat-face cookies with almond eyes, candy details and simple piped whiskers for a playful Halloween bake.



MAKES 24 cookies

TIME 35 min prep + 30 min chilling + 10 min per batch

Hocus Pocus Binx Black Cat Cookies

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 c. (180 g.) all-purpose flour
- 1/4 c. (20 g.) black cocoa powder
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 3/4 c. (150 g.) granulated sugar
- 1/2 c. (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 c. (105 g.) packed light brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- Sanding sugar, for rolling
- 48 sliced raw almonds
- 1/4 c. semisweet chocolate chips
- 48 mini green M&M's
- 24 mini brown M&M's



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Hocus Pocus Binx Black Cat Cookies

01. Make the dough
Whisk flour, black cocoa, baking soda and salt. Beat the butter with granulated and brown sugars until creamy, then mix in egg and vanilla. Add the dry mixture and mix only until combined. Cover and chill at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 days.

02. Shape the faces
Heat oven to 350°F and line trays with parchment. Scoop 24 portions of about 1 1/2 tablespoons, reserving a little dough for ears. Roll in sanding sugar, arrange 2 inches apart and flatten into 2-inch circles.

03. Add ears and almond eyes
Form two tiny balls of reserved dough for each face, roll in sanding sugar and press onto the top edge. Pinch the tips into ears. Press two almond slices into each face, narrow points facing inward.

04. Bake and cool
Bake for 8–10 minutes until the edges are set. Rest on the tray 5 minutes, then transfer gently to a rack and cool completely.

05. Decorate
Melt chocolate in short microwave bursts, stirring until smooth. Pipe a dot on each almond and attach a green candy. Use another dot to attach a brown candy nose, then pipe whiskers. Allow the chocolate to set before serving.

Hocus Pocus Binx Black Cat Cookies

A note from Joy

Keep a little dough aside before portioning the faces. Attach the ears so they overlap the face slightly; a tiny point of contact can snap after baking.

A black cat built from everyday baking shapes
These cookies use circles, tiny dough balls and almond slices rather than an elaborate decorating kit. The black cocoa makes the faces dark enough for green candy eyes to stand out, while a little melted chocolate holds the details in place. I would approach them as a relaxed baking project: make the dough ahead, then set out a small decorating station when the cookies are cool. A tray does not need twenty-four identical expressions to look charming. Keeping the shapes simple leaves more attention for the cookie texture, which should be tender in the middle with edges firm enough to support the ears.

Black cocoa gives color as well as flavor
Black cocoa is more intensely alkalized than standard natural cocoa and gives the dough its dark appearance. A different cocoa can still make a chocolate cookie, but it may look browner and behave differently in this formula. Use the measured amount rather than adding extra for an even darker color, which would increase the dry ingredients and can make the cookies crumbly. Whisk the cocoa with flour, baking soda and salt so there are no dark dry pockets in the dough. Cocoa stored in a damp cupboard can form lumps; break those up before mixing instead of relying on the butter mixture to dissolve them.

Two sugars help build the cookie base
Granulated sugar and brown sugar have different textures and moisture levels, and both belong in the dough. Beat them with soft butter just until the mixture looks creamy, stopping while it still holds its shape. Add the egg and vanilla before the dry ingredients so the wet mixture is even. Once flour is in the bowl, stop mixing when it is incorporated. The thirty-minute chill makes the dough easier to roll and helps the faces hold their shape. If the dough has chilled overnight, let it soften just enough to scoop and shape comfortably.

Reserve the ears before dividing the batch
It is easy to scoop all the dough into faces and discover there is nothing left for ears. Set a little aside first, then portion the larger rounds as evenly as possible. Roll each face in sanding sugar and flatten it to the intended diameter on the lined tray. The small ear balls need to overlap the top edge slightly so they bake into the face instead of touching at one fragile point. Pinch the tips gently into triangles. Leave space between the finished shapes, remembering that the ears make them wider than a plain round cookie and can meet a neighboring face as the dough spreads.

11 Homemade Bread Bowls for Soup

Bake homemade yeast bread bowls with firm crusts and soft centers. Follow the rising and shaping steps, then cool and hollow them for soup.



MAKES 6 large bread bowls

TIME 30 min active prep + 1 hr 50 min rising + 30 min baking

Homemade Bread Bowls for Soup

BREAD DOUGH

- 2 packets active dry yeast (4 and 1/2 teaspoons)
- 2 and 1/4 cups (540ml) warm water (110°F – 115°F)
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 Tablespoons (30ml) olive oil
- 6 cups (780g) bread flour (spooned & leveled), plus more for hands and surface

EGG WASH

- egg wash: 1 large egg beaten with 1 Tablespoon water or milk



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Homemade Bread Bowls for Soup

01. Activate the yeast
Whisk the warm water and yeast in a large bowl, using the mixer bowl if you have a dough hook. Cover with a towel and wait about 5 minutes for a foamy surface.

02. Mix the dough
On low speed, mix in sugar, salt, olive oil, 4 cups bread flour and any optional seasonings. Mix for 1 minute, then incorporate the remaining 2 cups flour.

03. Knead until elastic
Knead with the dough hook or by hand on a lightly floured surface for 5–6 minutes. Add flour only a teaspoon at a time if the dough sticks badly. Aim for soft, slightly tacky dough that slowly springs back when pressed. Stretch a small piece: if it becomes thin enough to transmit light without tearing, it is ready; otherwise knead a little longer.

04. Let rise
Shape a ball, place in a greased large bowl and turn to coat. Cover and let rise somewhere warm until doubled, about 90 minutes. On a cold day, an oven heated to 150°F (66°C) and then switched OFF can provide warmth: leave the door slightly open initially and close after about 30 minutes. Never leave the heating on with the dough inside.

05. Release the gas
Press the risen dough down to release trapped gas. Turn it onto a lightly floured counter and press out any remaining large air pockets.

06. Divide and shape
Cut the dough into 6 equal portions with a scraper or sharp knife. Shape each portion into a smooth, large ball.

07. Rest on trays
Line 2 large trays with parchment or silicone mats, placing 3 balls on each. Cover loosely and rest 20 minutes while the oven heats.

08. Brush and score
Heat the oven to 400°F (204°C). Brush the balls with egg wash and cut an X in the top of each with a sharp knife.

09. Bake
Bake about 30 minutes, until golden. Check a bowl's center with a thermometer; 195°F (90°C) is the doneness target.

10. Cool and hollow
Let the bread cool until comfortable to handle; cooler bread is easier to cut. Remove a round lid from each bowl, scoop out the soft center and add soup. Keep the scooped bread for dipping.

11. Store unfilled bowls
Store covered, unfilled bowls for a couple of days at room temperature or up to 1 week refrigerated. Freeze baked bowls up to 3 months; thaw overnight in the refrigerator and bring to room temperature before serving.

Homemade Bread Bowls for Soup

A note from Joy

Cooking for my family makes me notice the useful little leftovers, too. Save the bread you scoop from these bowls instead of letting it disappear in the kitchen rush. Toast it with garlic and herbs for a crunchy soup topping, or keep some plain for dipping. I like the thought of the bowl and its center both becoming part of the meal, with very little wasted.

Bread that gets to be part of dinner
A bread bowl is more than a serving dish. The crust holds the soup for a little while, the soft bread inside becomes something to dip, and the lid gives you another piece to tear. I like planning all of those parts as food from the beginning. Hollowing the loaf should create room for dinner, not a pile of bread that gets forgotten while the soup takes the attention.

This batch makes six large bowls, so check the meal plan before starting. You might need all six for one table, or you might leave several unfilled for another day. The dough itself is straightforward, with bread flour, water, yeast, a little sugar, salt, and olive oil. Its shape and a properly baked center are what help it do the more unusual job of holding something warm and spoonable.

Bread flour has a useful job here
Bread flour supports a dough that can stretch and keep a rounded form. Measure it by the recipe's weight or spoon and level the cups, keeping the extra flour for the counter separate from the measured amount. A dense scoop can make the dough drier before kneading even begins. Starting with the intended amount is more useful than trying to soften a stiff dough after it has absorbed far too much flour.

Olive oil gives the dough a little richness, while sugar accompanies the yeast without making this a sweet bread. Salt belongs in the dough for flavor; it isn't something to leave out because soup will be added later. The egg wash is a separate finishing mixture, so keep that egg and its small amount of water or milk apart from the ingredients being measured into the mixing bowl.

Check the yeast before committing the flour
The warm water should be in the range specified for the active dry yeast, and a thermometer removes the guesswork from what feels warm to different hands. Let the mixture stand for its brief activation period and look for a foamy surface. This small checkpoint comes before the flour because it is easier to notice a yeast problem in a bowl of water than in a large, heavy dough.

12 Soft Pretzels with a Jalapeño-Cheddar Crown

Shape soft pretzels with a jalapeño-cheddar topping for a chewy, savory bake. Includes dough cues, a brief baking soda bath and cheese timing.



MAKES 12 pretzels

TIME 35 min prep (includes 10 min dough rest) + 18–22 min baking

Soft Pretzels with a Jalapeño-Cheddar Crown

PRETZEL DOUGH

- 2 and 1/4 teaspoons (7g) instant yeast (1 standard packet)
- 1 and 1/2 cups (360ml) warm water (lukewarm around 100°F / 38°C)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 Tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 Tablespoon (14g) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled
- 3 and 3/4—4 cups (469–500g) all-purpose flour (spooned & leveled), plus more for hands and work surface

BAKING SODA BATH

- 1/2 cup (120g) baking soda
- 9 cups (2.13L) water

CHEESE AND PEPPER TOPPING

- 1/4 cup (4 Tbsp; 56g) unsalted butter, melted
- 4-5 jalapeños, sliced
- coarse sea salt, for sprinkling
- 1.5-2 cups (188-250g) shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/16 teaspoon finely ground black pepper (one tiny pinch for the whole topping)



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Soft Pretzels with a Jalapeño-Cheddar Crown

01. Mix yeast and water
Whisk yeast into warm water in a large bowl or mixer bowl. Cover and leave for 1 minute.

02. Mix the dough
Mix in salt, garlic powder, sugar and melted butter. Add 3 cups flour in 1-cup (125 g) portions, using a spoon, spatula or dough hook. Mix in another ¾ cup for about 1 minute. If needed, add a further ¼–½ cup to bring the sticky dough together.

03. Knead
Knead by hand on a floured counter or with the dough hook for 5 minutes. If it sticks, add flour in teaspoon portions rather than large handfuls. The dough should stay soft and slightly tacky, springing back slowly when pressed. A small piece should stretch thin enough to let light through without tearing; knead longer if it breaks immediately.

04. Rest
Shape a ball and cover with a clean towel for a 10-minute rest. Alternatively, cover tightly and refrigerate up to 1 day. You can prepare the baking-soda bath during this rest.

05. Prepare the oven and trays
Heat the oven to 400°F (204°C). Prepare 2 trays with silicone baking mats or greased parchment so the dipped dough releases cleanly.

06. Shape pretzels
Divide the dough into portions of about ⅓ cup (75 g). Roll each into a 20–22-inch rope. Make a U, cross and twist the ends together, then fold them down onto the curve and press to secure the pretzel shape.

07. Heat the soda bath
Bring the baking soda and 9 cups water to a boil in a roomy pot.

08. Boil briefly and top
Lower 1–2 pretzels into the bath for just 20–30 seconds; a longer dip can leave an unpleasant flavor. Lift with a slotted spatula, drain and place on the prepared tray. Brush with melted butter, gently press on jalapeño slices and sprinkle coarse salt. Repeat. Boiled, unbaked pretzels can be covered and refrigerated up to 24 hours.

09. Bake and add cheese
Bake 10 minutes. Mix the 1/16 teaspoon black pepper into the shredded cheddar for the whole batch, then sprinkle each pretzel with 2–3 tablespoons of the cheese. Bake another 8–12 minutes, until the bread is golden and the cheese has melted.

10. Serve warm
Let the pretzels settle briefly on the tray, then serve while warm.

11. Store and reheat
Keep leftovers covered for up to 1 day at room temperature or 1 week refrigerated. For a softer bite, microwave briefly or warm in a 350°F (177°C) oven for about 5 minutes.

Soft Pretzels with a Jalapeño-Cheddar Crown

A note from Joy

My children don't want the same amount of heat, so I like leaving some room to choose with the toppings. Keep jalapeños easy to see and make a milder portion if needed. Smoked cheddar or a pinch of smoked paprika in the finishing butter gives the pretzels another savory direction. That little flexibility is useful at our family table and at a work potluck, too.

A soft pretzel with a savory crown
These pretzels put the strongest flavors on the surface: jalapeño slices, sharp cheddar, a little coarse salt, and a tiny pinch of black pepper shared across the batch. Underneath is soft yeast dough with garlic powder mixed in. I like that arrangement because the bread remains recognizable while each bite gets some browned cheese and pepper. The topping doesn't need to be hidden inside the dough to feel generous.

The batch makes twelve pretzels, so plan the trays and the serving portions before mixing. The dough has a short rest before shaping, followed by a brief soda bath and baking in stages. None of those jobs is difficult on its own, but setting them in order keeps the counter from becoming crowded just when you need room to lift a wet pretzel from the pot.

Choose sharp cheese and decide the pepper balance
Sharp cheddar brings enough flavor that the measured topping can do its job without making a thick blanket. Shred it into pieces that scatter evenly and melt over the pretzel, keeping the topping easy to distribute. The listed range gives some flexibility, but begin by dividing what you have across the batch. There is no need for one tray to receive most of the cheese simply because it reaches the oven first.

Jalapeños vary in heat, so their appearance won't tell you exactly how bold a bite will be. Slice them evenly and distribute them with some space between pieces. If you prefer a gentler topping, removing seeds and the pale interior before slicing can be a useful choice, although the peppers can still be hot. Wash your hands and utensils after handling them, and keep those hands away from your eyes.

Give the yeast a comfortable start
The water for this instant-yeast dough is lukewarm, around the temperature in the method, rather than very hot. Whisk in the yeast and give it the brief covered pause before adding the other ingredients. Melted butter should have cooled slightly so it joins the dough comfortably. Keep the separate, larger portion of butter for brushing apart from the small amount that belongs in the dough.

13 Jack Skellington Oreo Pops

Chocolate-coated sandwich cookies become cheerful skeleton-face pops with a few simple black icing details.



MAKES 12 cookie pops

TIME About 20 min prep + 10 min chilling

Jack Skellington Oreo Pops

COOKIE POPS

- 2 cups white chocolate chips
- 2 teaspoons coconut oil
- 12 Halloween Oreo sandwich cookies
- Black icing, for decorating



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Jack Skellington Oreo Pops

01. Melt the coating
Put the white chocolate chips and coconut oil in a microwave-safe bowl. Heat in 20-second bursts, stirring well after each, until just smooth.

02. Add the sticks
Carefully slide one of the 12 food-safe lollipop sticks into each cookie's cream layer. If a cookie separates, use a little melted coating to secure it and let that join set.

03. Coat and set
Hold each cookie over the bowl and spoon coating over both sides, letting excess drip away. Place on a parchment-lined tray and refrigerate 5–10 minutes, until firm.

04. Decorate
Draw the eyes, nose and stitched smile with black icing, using a toothpick for fine detail. Let the decoration set. Tie optional black ribbon below each cookie and remove it before eating.

Jack Skellington Oreo Pops

A note from Joy

Spoon the coating over the cookie instead of pushing the whole pop through a deep bowl. Less pressure on the stick helps keep the cookie layers together.

A familiar cookie with a festive finish
These pops begin with whole sandwich cookies, making them a simple assembly project with no cake to crumble or frosting mixture to roll. The sandwich cookie remains intact under a white coating, which gives each face a clean round shape. That keeps the shopping list small and makes the number of servings easy to plan. Count twelve cookies and twelve sticks before melting anything, then line a tray with parchment. A simple black-and-white design is enough to communicate the character; the dessert does not need a collection of extra candies or a complicated display to feel festive.

Choose a cookie that can hold a stick
The cream layer is where the lollipop stick sits, so insert it slowly and keep the cookie flat as you work. Pressing hard through a thin filling can crack the wafers or force the cookie apart. If the layers separate, a small dab of melted coating can help join them again, followed by a brief rest until secure. Choose food-safe sticks intended for treats, with a smooth shape suited to holding a sandwich cookie safely. The seasonal cookie version is optional for appearance inside the coating, but changing to a much smaller or softer cookie affects how well the stick can support it.

White chocolate prefers gentle heat
White chocolate chips can look almost unchanged even when warm enough to melt with stirring. Heat in short bursts, then stir thoroughly before deciding that another burst is necessary. A bowl with very hot spots can scorch the coating while other chips still appear solid. Coconut oil loosens the mixture, but it does not protect white chocolate from excessive heat or water. Keep the bowl and spoon dry. Stop once the coating is smooth and fluid enough to spoon, and give it a moment to lose its fiercest heat before it touches the cookie filling.

Spoon rather than force a dip
A cookie pop is wider and more fragile at its center than it first appears. Pulling it through a thick coating can loosen the stick or split the wafers. Hold the cookie above the bowl and spoon the mixture across each side, turning gently to cover the edges. Let the excess fall back into the bowl rather than building a heavy shell. A thin, even layer sets more neatly and is easier to bite. Place the coated cookies on parchment without crowding them, and keep the sticks pointing in consistent directions so the tray is easy to move into the refrigerator.

14 Ghostly Pumpkin Pudding

Gently spiced pumpkin custard sets into small chilled cups beneath soft meringue ghosts and tiny candy eyes.



MAKES 12 small servings

TIME About 35 min prep and cooking + 4–8 hr chilling

Ghostly Pumpkin Pudding

PUMPKIN PUDDING

- 1 packet (1/4 ounce / 7 g) unflavored gelatin
- 1 tablespoon cold water
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup sugar
- 6 large egg yolks; reserve 2 whites for topping
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon fine salt
- 1 can (15 ounces) plain pumpkin puree

GHOST TOPPING

- 2 large egg whites
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
- Pinch of fine salt
- Small edible candies, for eyes



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Ghostly Pumpkin Pudding

01. Bloom the gelatin
Sprinkle one standard 1/4-ounce (7 g) packet unflavored gelatin over 1 tablespoon cold water in a large bowl. Let it soften while you cook the custard.

02. Cook the pumpkin custard
Set a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of gently simmering water without touching the water. Whisk together the milk, 1 cup sugar, yolks, cinnamon and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Stir constantly until lightly thickened and at least 160°F. Remove from the heat and whisk into the softened gelatin until dissolved, then whisk in the pumpkin until smooth.

03. Chill the pudding
Divide among 12 small cups, leaving space for the topping. Cover and refrigerate 4–8 hours, until set.

04. Heat the meringue
In a clean heatproof mixing bowl, combine the 2 egg whites, 1/3 cup sugar, cream of tartar and pinch of salt. Whisk over gently simmering water until the sugar dissolves and the mixture reaches 160°F throughout. Use a thermometer rather than touch to judge readiness.

05. Whip and decorate
Remove from the heat and whip at medium-high speed to stiff peaks. Spoon or pipe onto the cold pudding in ghost shapes. Add small edible candy eyes and keep refrigerated until serving.

Ghostly Pumpkin Pudding

A note from Joy

Cook the egg-white topping to 160°F before whipping, and put it onto fully chilled pudding. A clean, grease-free bowl helps the whites form a light, defined ghost shape.

A chilled dessert with two textures
The pumpkin base is smooth and softly set, while the ghost topping is airy enough to make a little peak. That contrast is the central idea; the decoration can stay simple. Divide the pudding into small cups so the rich custard feels like a manageable dessert portion and the topping has a clear place to sit. Most of the recipe's elapsed time belongs to the refrigerator. Make the base first, let it become completely cold, and return to the topping later. Planning those two stages avoids a warm pudding that melts or swallows the little meringue ghosts.

Choose plain pumpkin and unflavored gelatin
Use plain canned pumpkin puree, not pumpkin pie filling, because the sugar and spice are measured separately here. The recipe uses a standard quarter-ounce packet of unflavored gelatin. Check the weight on your package, as packet sizes vary internationally. Sweetened dessert gelatin would alter both flavor and sweetness. Sprinkle the powder over the cold water and let it absorb the moisture before mixing it into hot custard. Dry clumps are harder to dissolve once they are surrounded by a thick pumpkin mixture, so this quiet first step prevents a noticeable texture problem later.

Gentle heat gives a smoother custard
A bowl over simmering water cooks the milk-and-yolk mixture more gradually than direct high heat. The bottom of the bowl should sit above the water, and the water should not splash into the custard. Stir continuously, reaching the bottom and sides where thickening starts. The mixture should begin to coat the spoon lightly, but temperature is also important: bring the egg mixture to at least 160°F rather than judging only by appearance. A hard boil or abandoned bowl can leave cooked egg bits. If a few small lumps form, strain the custard before it joins the gelatin.

Dissolve first, then add pumpkin
Pouring the warm custard over the softened gelatin gives the powder enough heat and liquid to disperse. Whisk until no little granules remain before adding the pumpkin. Pumpkin thickens the mixture and makes lumps harder to see, which is why the order is useful. Scrape the bowl thoroughly so the last portion is as evenly set as the first. Divide the mixture while it is still fluid rather than waiting for it to thicken on the counter. Leave some headroom in every cup: the ghost topping needs a stable place to sit, and an overfilled cup is awkward to cover and move.

15 Homemade Salted Caramel Sauce

A smooth four-ingredient caramel sauce with butter, cream and a clear salty finish for small drizzles over desserts.



MAKES About 1 cup (290 g)

TIME 5 min prep + 15 min cooking, plus cooling

Homemade Salted Caramel Sauce

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup (200 g) granulated sugar
- 6 tablespoons (85 g) unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into pieces
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) heavy cream, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon salt



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Homemade Salted Caramel Sauce

01. Set up before heating
Measure the sugar, cubed room-temperature butter, room-temperature cream and salt. Use a medium heavy stainless-steel saucepan with high sides and a heatproof spatula.

02. Melt the sugar
Cook the sugar over medium heat, stirring and scraping the edges as it clumps and melts. Continue until the sugar is fully liquid and amber, reducing the heat if it darkens too quickly.

03. Add the butter
Lower the heat and carefully stir in the butter. The mixture will foam. Stir until combined; if it separates, remove from the heat and whisk carefully until smooth before continuing.

04. Add the cream
Slowly pour in the cream while stirring, keeping hands clear of the rising steam. Once incorporated, bring to a controlled boil over medium heat for 1 minute.

05. Salt and cool
Remove from the heat and stir in the salt. Let the caramel cool and thicken before tasting or using. Transfer to a heatproof storage container once safe to handle. Refrigerate covered and reheat only the amount needed gently.

Homemade Salted Caramel Sauce

A note from Joy

Measure the butter and cream before melting the sugar. Once the caramel reaches amber, having both within reach matters more than trying to work faster.

Four ingredients with a focused method
Salted caramel uses a short shopping list, but the sugar stage deserves your full attention. This is a dry caramel: granulated sugar melts in the pan without an initial addition of water. The butter and cream turn that melted sugar into a pourable sauce, and salt balances its sweetness. There is no need to multitask at the stove. Measure everything first, choose a clear work area and keep a heatproof surface ready for the saucepan. The recipe becomes more approachable when the preparation is deliberate and the hot stage is treated as one continuous task.

The pan makes the color easier to read
A heavy stainless-steel saucepan spreads heat more evenly and lets you see the sugar's color against a pale interior. A dark-coated pan can make it difficult to distinguish amber from the beginning of burning. High sides are important because the butter and cream make the caramel rise and bubble. Use a pan large enough for that expansion even though the final amount is only about a cup. A heat-safe silicone spatula or wooden spoon should reach the edges. Avoid tools that cannot tolerate hot sugar, and keep the handle positioned where it will not be bumped as you stir.

Clumps are part of the first stage
Dry sugar often changes from loose crystals to damp-looking clumps before it becomes a smooth liquid. Those clumps do not automatically mean the batch has failed. Continue stirring across the base and edges, allowing unmelted sugar to meet the warm liquid. Manage the heat so the melted areas do not turn very dark while a large patch of crystals remains. If the pan has a strong hot spot, move it slightly or lower the heat. The goal is evenly melted amber sugar. Patience here is more useful than increasing the heat to force the last few crystals to disappear.

Amber is a flavor decision
As sugar cooks, its color deepens and the flavor moves from simple sweetness toward a more toasted bitterness. Watch continuously once the mixture is fully liquid, because that change can accelerate quickly. You want a clear amber color and a caramel aroma, not blackened spots or an acrid smell. Remove the pan from the heat if the color is advancing too fast. Cream will lighten the appearance later, so do not judge the sugar stage by the color of the finished sauce in a photograph. A burnt base cannot be repaired by adding more butter, sugar or cream after the fact.

16 Peanut Butter Ice Cream Pie

A no-bake cookie crust filled with peanut butter ice cream and whipped cream, finished with peanut butter ribbons and a little candy crunch.



MAKES 12 slices

TIME 25 min prep + at least 6 hr freezing

Peanut Butter Ice Cream Pie

INGREDIENTS

- 22 regular Oreo cookies (not Double-Stuf)
- 5 Tablespoons (71g) unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup (240ml) cold heavy cream or heavy whipping cream
- 1 quart peanut butter ice cream, softened
- 1/4 cup (62g) melted creamy peanut butter, plus more for garnish if desired
- 1/3 cup (67g) Reese's Pieces, crushed, plus more for garnish if desired
- optional: whipped cream for topping



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Peanut Butter Ice Cream Pie

01. Press the crust
Crush the cookies, filling included, into fine crumbs. Stir with melted butter and press firmly into the bottom and up the sides of an ungreased 9-inch springform pan at least 2 1/2 inches deep.

02. Whip the cream
Beat cold cream until it holds stiff peaks. Stop before it becomes grainy.

03. Fold the filling
Allow the peanut butter ice cream to soften just until scoopable, not melted. Fold it into the whipped cream in several additions until evenly combined.

04. Layer and freeze
Spread half the filling in the crust and drizzle with half the melted peanut butter. Repeat with remaining filling and peanut butter. Scatter the crushed candy over the top. Cover and freeze at least 6 hours, preferably overnight.

05. Slice and serve
Let the frozen pie stand about 5 minutes before slicing. Add optional whipped cream or extra peanut butter if desired. Use a sharp knife warmed in hot water and wiped dry between cuts. Return leftovers promptly to the freezer and use within 5 days for best quality.

Peanut Butter Ice Cream Pie

A note from Joy

Soften the ice cream only enough to fold; a liquid mixture loses air and takes longer to firm. Clear a level freezer space before assembling the pie.

A freezer dessert that lets you work ahead
A no-bake pie is useful when the oven is busy or the kitchen already feels warm. Here a chocolate sandwich-cookie crust surrounds a filling of peanut butter ice cream folded with whipped cream. The result is rich and cold, with enough structure to cut into small slices after a proper freezer rest. I would plan it the day before serving rather than expect a quick last-minute dessert. Most of the work happens in one short session, but six hours of freezing is part of the recipe. That pause is what turns a soft bowl of filling into a pie that can leave the pan neatly.

The cookie filling stays in the crumbs
Regular chocolate sandwich cookies give the crust its intended balance of crumb and fat; the extra filling in double-filled cookies changes that balance. Crush the cookies with their cream centers included. Aim for fine, even crumbs that will press together firmly and support the sides of the crust. Mix in melted butter thoroughly, checking the bottom of the bowl for dry pockets. A food processor is convenient, but a sealed food bag and rolling pin can do the crushing if you take time to break down the pieces evenly. Less equipment can be just as practical when the texture target is clear.

A deep pan gives the filling somewhere to go
The specified springform pan needs enough height for the whipped filling, not just the shallow depth of a standard pie plate. Press the crust across the base and up the sides with steady medium pressure. A flat-bottomed measuring cup helps make it even, but avoid packing so hard that the frozen crust becomes difficult to cut. Check the curve where the base meets the side; this is where loose crumbs often hide. Put the pan on a tray if it is easier to carry. Clear a flat freezer shelf before filling it so you are not trying to rearrange frozen packages with a soft pie in your hands.

Whipped cream and softened ice cream need different care
The cream should be cold so it whips into a stable foam. Stop whipping as soon as the peaks stand up and the cream still looks smooth. The ice cream, meanwhile, needs a brief softening so it can blend without forcing out all that air. It should be scoopable and thick, never a puddle. Fold it into the cream in stages with broad turns of a spatula, scraping the bottom of the bowl. Those gentle folds help preserve the air you whipped into the cream. If a hot room makes the mixture runny, give it a short pause in the freezer to firm up before continuing gently.

17 Strawberry Tiramisu Cups with Mascarpone and Yogurt

Layer strawberry tiramisu cups with mascarpone-yogurt cream and orange-dipped ladyfingers. Chill this no-bake dessert before serving.



MAKES 6 glasses

TIME 45 min prep + at least 1 hr chilling

Strawberry Tiramisu Cups with Mascarpone and Yogurt

THE BERRIES

- 1 lb strawberries, sliced
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 2 tsp orange zest
- 1 tbsp torn mint leaves

THE CREAM

- 8 oz mascarpone, room temperature
- 1–2 tbsp sugar
- 1 cup plain full-fat Greek yogurt

THE DIP + LAYERS

- ½ cup fresh orange juice
- ¼ cup elderflower liqueur
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp water
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 12 ladyfinger cookies
- Mint or toasted coconut, optional garnish



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Strawberry Tiramisu Cups with Mascarpone and Yogurt

01. Make strawberries glossy
Toss sliced strawberries with 1 tablespoon sugar and orange zest; let sit until they release a little juice.

02. Whip the cloud
Beat mascarpone with 1–2 tablespoons sugar until smooth. Gently fold in the Greek yogurt.

03. Mix the quick dip
Whisk orange juice, elderflower liqueur, honey, water and vanilla together.

04. Layer in glasses
Spoon cream into six glasses. Dip each ladyfinger briefly in the orange mixture, break it up and layer with strawberries. Repeat until the glasses are full.

05. Chill + finish
Refrigerate at least 1 hour so the cream sets a little. Add a fresh berry, mint or toasted coconut before serving.

Strawberry Tiramisu Cups with Mascarpone and Yogurt

A note from Joy

Little glasses leave room for smaller servings, which I like with my family's different appetites. For an alcohol-free version, use extra orange juice or a little elderflower syrup instead of the liqueur, and reduce honey to taste. Dip the ladyfingers briefly. They will soften as the glasses chill, and a light dip helps the fruit and cream keep their lovely layers.

A glass with room for fruit and cream
These strawberry cups borrow the layered idea of tiramisu and take it in a bright, fruit-forward direction. Mascarpone meets tangy Greek yogurt, ladyfingers get a brief orange dip, and strawberries bring their color and juice between the creamy layers. There is no coffee in this version and no raw egg added to the cream. I like calling it Italian-inspired and letting the actual ingredients explain the dessert.

Individual glasses make the layers easy to see and the portions easy to share. They also turn assembly into a manageable job: a spoonful here, a broken ladyfinger there, then a chilled rest that does useful work while you move on to dinner. The cups should feel generous and fresh, with enough contrast that the fruit remains more than decoration on top.

Choose berries for flavor before size
Strawberries that smell like strawberries and feel firm enough to slice are a better starting point than the largest berries in the display. Remove any damaged fruit, wash the sound berries and dry them before trimming and slicing. Extra wash water would join the juice released by the sugar and make the layers wetter than intended. Similar slices distribute more comfortably through the glasses, but they do not need to be identical.

Reserve a little of the best-looking fruit from your package if you want the optional fresh finish. The recipe uses a full pound, so it is a good place to plan around a package you can use well. Save any berries left after filling the glasses for breakfast or another snack, where they can be enjoyed fresh.

Let a little juice become part of the dessert
Sugar and orange zest turn the sliced strawberries glossy as they sit. The fruit begins releasing a little juice, carrying its flavor into the space between the layers. This is different from cooking the berries into a sauce, and they should keep recognizable pieces and a fresh character. Give the mixture a gentle turn so the sugar is distributed rather than gathering at the bottom of the bowl.

18 Zesty Lemon Bars with Buttery Shortbread

Tart lemon filling over a buttery shortbread base, with fresh zest for aroma and a make-ahead chill for neat slices.



MAKES 24 bars

TIME 30 min prep + 50 min baking + cooling and 3 hr chilling

Zesty Lemon Bars with Buttery Shortbread

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup butter, softened – I prefer unsalted
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 2 cups all-purpose flour, spooned and leveled
- 1/4 cup rice flour, or 1/4 cup additional all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest (optional)
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon zest, chopped fine
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 6 large eggs at room temperature
- 1 cup fresh lemon juice (4-6 lemons depending on size)



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Zesty Lemon Bars with Buttery Shortbread

01. Make the crust
Combine softened butter, 1/3 cup sugar, 2 cups all-purpose flour, rice flour, salt and optional teaspoon of zest just until the dough comes together. If not using rice flour, replace it with the same 1/4 cup all-purpose flour.

02. Press and chill
Line a 9-by-13-inch glass or ceramic pan with parchment overhang. Press the dough evenly over the bottom with a slight raised edge. Prick with a fork and chill for 20 minutes. Heat oven to 325°F.

03. Bake the crust
Bake the cold crust for 25–30 minutes, until golden at the edges. Let it cool on a rack 10–20 minutes while preparing filling.

04. Mix the filling
Rub 2 tablespoons zest into 1 1/2 cups sugar. Whisk in 4 tablespoons flour. In another bowl, gently whisk the eggs, then mix in lemon juice and the sugar mixture without beating in lots of air.

05. Bake the filling
Pour onto the still-warm crust and bake 18–20 minutes, checking frequently near the end. The filling should be set at the edges with a slight center wobble, not liquid waves; egg filling should reach 160°F.

06. Cool, chill and slice
Cool on a rack for about 1 hour, then refrigerate at least 2–3 hours until cold and firm. Loosen the edges and lift carefully with the parchment, supporting the base. Cut into 24 bars with a sharp knife wiped clean between cuts. Add optional powdered sugar just before serving.

Zesty Lemon Bars with Buttery Shortbread

A note from Joy

Rub zest into the sugar before mixing the filling. The crust should still be warm when filled, and the finished bars need a full chill before clean slicing.

A bright dessert that earns its cooling time
Lemon bars look simple on the plate, but they rely on two very different textures working together: a firm buttery base and a smooth, gently set filling. The fresh lemon flavor is enough of a finish that elaborate decoration is unnecessary. I would plan the bars several hours ahead or the day before serving, because a warm pan cannot give the same clean slices as a fully chilled one. A small square delivers plenty of sweetness and acidity, making it a useful dessert after a richer meal. The preparation is manageable when the crust, filling and cooling stages are treated as separate, unhurried tasks.

Measure the flour without packing the cup
Too much flour can make the shortbread base dry and hard to press evenly. Spoon flour into the measuring cup and level it, or use an accurate weight where provided. The rice flour option gives a slightly different crispness, but if it is not already in the pantry, the same measured amount of all-purpose flour is the listed practical alternative. Keep the crust flour separate from the smaller amount used in the lemon filling so nothing ends up in the wrong bowl. Softened butter should be pliable, not melted, allowing the mixture to come together without leaving a greasy layer at the bottom of the pan.

An even crust makes every bar easier to cut
Line the pan with parchment that extends above two sides, giving you handles for lifting later. Press the dough across the bottom in a uniform layer, paying attention to corners where it can become too thick. A flat-bottomed cup helps smooth the surface without working the dough repeatedly. A small raised edge gives the filling a little border, while fork pricks reduce large bubbles as the crust bakes. Chill the prepared pan while the oven heats. Use that chilling time to clear the counter and measure the filling, so the eggs and juice will be ready when the crust finishes its first bake.

Bake the base before adding the lemon
The crust needs its own baking stage so it can support the wet filling. Look for light gold across the surface and slightly darker edges, rather than leaving it completely pale. Glass and ceramic pans hold heat differently from thin metal ones, so use the visual cues along with the time range. Let the crust cool only briefly before filling; it should remain warm. A long pause can allow the base to shrink from the pan sides. The idea is not to rush a hot pan dangerously, but to have the filling measured and ready during the crust bake so the stages meet comfortably.

19 Pumpkin Cream Cheese Doughnuts

Make pumpkin cream cheese doughnuts with soft yeast dough, cinnamon sugar and a cool pumpkin filling. Includes rising, frying and filling steps.



MAKES 12 small pastries

TIME 35 min prep + 20 min frying + 1½–2 hr rising

Pumpkin Cream Cheese Doughnuts

DOUGH

- 2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 ¼ tsp active dry yeast
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup warm whole milk
- 1 large egg
- 3 tbsp unsalted butter, softened
- ½ tsp vanilla extract

PUMPKIN CREAM FILLING

- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- ⅓ cup pumpkin puree
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp pumpkin pie spice
- Pinch of salt

CINNAMON SUGAR

- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1½ tsp ground cinnamon

FRYING AND DECORATING

- Vegetable or canola oil, for frying
- Plain, uncoated food-safe cotton cooking twine suitable for frying, optional for shaping
- Cinnamon-stick pieces, optional decorative stems; remove before eating



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Pumpkin Cream Cheese Doughnuts

01. Mix the dough
Warm milk to 105–110°F. Stir in yeast and a pinch of the measured sugar; wait 5–10 minutes for foam. Mix flour, remaining sugar and salt. Add milk mixture, egg and vanilla; knead, then work in softened butter. Knead 8–10 minutes until smooth and slightly tacky, adding only a little flour if needed.

02. First rise
Cover in a lightly greased bowl and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 60–90 minutes. Make the filling by beating cream cheese, pumpkin puree, powdered sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, pumpkin pie spice and salt until smooth. Refrigerate until needed.

03. Shape and proof
Divide dough into 12 equal pieces and shape into smooth balls. For pumpkin ridges, loosely loop plain, food-safe, uncoated cotton cooking twine around each ball; leave room for expansion. Cover and proof 20–30 minutes until puffy. Plain round doughnuts are an easier option.

04. Fry in batches
Heat 2–3 inches of oil in a heavy pot to 350°F; keep the pot no more than half full. Fry a few pastries at a time, about 2–3 minutes per side, adjusting for size, until evenly golden. Check a first pastry: the center must be fully cooked, with no wet dough. If browning too fast, lower heat slightly and extend cooking. Drain on a rack.

05. Coat and fill
Carefully cut off and remove every piece of twine. Mix coating sugar and cinnamon; roll warm pastries in it. Let cool, then make a small opening and pipe pumpkin cream into each pastry. Use cinnamon-stick pieces as decorative stems and remove them before eating. Keep filled pastries refrigerated and serve the same day for best texture.

Pumpkin Cream Cheese Doughnuts

A note from Joy

I'm just as happy making these as plain rounds. The important contrast is soft dough around a cool pumpkin center. Keep the filling chilled, check the first fried doughnut inside, and let the batch cool before piping. The pumpkin ridges are a finishing choice; they don't need to decide whether you make the recipe.

Pumpkin lives inside these doughnuts
The pumpkin flavor in these small pastries comes from the cream filling, not the yeast dough. That distinction makes the first bite interesting: cinnamon sugar on the outside, soft dough underneath and a spiced pumpkin-cream-cheese center. I like that each part has a separate job. The dough doesn't need to carry every fall flavor, and the filling doesn't need to be so sweet that the cream cheese disappears.

This is a hands-on project with two rises and a frying stage, so give it a little space in the day. The listed preparation and frying times sit alongside the rising time rather than replacing it. Twelve small pastries are enough to make portioning useful without requiring a bakery-size operation. Read the shaping and decorating choices before starting, too. Round doughnuts are a complete option here; the twine is optional if you want the pumpkin ridges as well as the pumpkin filling.

Let the yeast show you it is ready
Active dry yeast begins in milk warmed to 105–110°F, with a pinch taken from the measured sugar. The five- to ten-minute wait for foam is a chance to confirm that the mixture is active before you add the rest of the dough ingredients. Use a thermometer for the milk instead of guessing from steam or how warm the saucepan feels. Liquid that is much too hot is a poor starting point for the rise you are depending on.

Measure the sugar before taking out that pinch, so the total amount remains the recipe's amount. If there is no sign of activity, check the yeast and milk temperature before adding the mixture to the flour. An active yeast mixture is what gives this dough the rise it needs before frying. Checking that small bowl first helps you protect the flour, egg and butter from going into a dough that may fail to rise.

A soft dough needs patient kneading
The dough brings flour, sugar and salt together with the milk mixture, egg and vanilla before the softened butter is worked in. Adding the butter at that point lets it become part of a developing dough instead of leaving obvious greasy patches. The eight to ten minutes of kneading is real work, whether done carefully by hand or with suitable equipment. You are looking for a smooth dough that feels slightly tacky, rather than a dry ball that never clings at all.

20 Classic Tiramisu with Espresso and Mascarpone

Layer espresso-dipped ladyfingers with mascarpone cream for classic tiramisu. Follow the pasteurized-egg method and allow time to chill.



MAKES 12 servings

TIME 45 min prep + 10–12 hr chilling

Classic Tiramisu with Espresso and Mascarpone

COFFEE AND LADYFINGERS

- 1 cup (240ml) very strongly prepared espresso, warm or room temperature
- 5 Tablespoons (75ml) Grand Marnier (optional)
- 40–45 ladyfingers

MASCARPONE CREAM

- 16 ounces (about 2 cups; 450g) mascarpone, cold
- 2 Tablespoons (30ml) dark rum
- 4 large pasteurized eggs, separated
- 1/2 cup (100g) granulated sugar, divided
- 2 cups (480ml) heavy cream or heavy whipping cream
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

FINISH

- unsweetened natural or Dutch-process cocoa powder



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Classic Tiramisu with Espresso and Mascarpone

01. Prepare the dish
Set out a 9 × 13-inch dish that holds at least 12–14 cups. This dessert needs space for two biscuit layers and two cream layers, so check the capacity before you start.

02. Dip the first biscuit layer
Stir espresso and Grand Marnier in a shallow dish. Give each ladyfinger a fast dip on both sides, then arrange half of them across the base. Trim a few to fill gaps. Keep the remaining biscuits and coffee mixture for the second layer; soaking the biscuits longer will make the dessert soggy.

03. Combine mascarpone and rum
Briefly mix the cold mascarpone and rum on medium speed with a paddle or whisk attachment. Stop as soon as they come together, and set the bowl aside. Mascarpone needs a gentle hand here.

04. Whisk yolks over gentle heat
Set a heatproof bowl over gently simmering water, keeping its base above the water, or use a double boiler. Whisk the yolks with ¼ cup (50 g) sugar for about 5 minutes, until pale and foamy. Remove from the heat and immediately mix into the mascarpone on medium speed.

05. Whip and fold cream
Whip the cream and vanilla on medium-high for about 3 minutes. Stop when the peaks hold their shape but the tips still bend; firm, dry cream is harder to fold. Fold the cream into the mascarpone with slow, broad strokes.

06. Whip and fold pasteurized whites
Using a clean bowl and whisk attachment, beat the pasteurized egg whites and salt on medium-high for about 1 minute. Once foamy, increase to high and gradually add the remaining ¼ cup (50 g) sugar. Beat about 4–5 minutes to firm peaks, stopping before the whites look dry. Gently fold into the cream mixture.

07. Spread the first cream layer
Spoon half the cream over the first biscuit layer and ease it into an even layer with an offset spatula. Keep the biscuits in place as you spread.

08. Complete the layers and begin chilling
Briefly dip the remaining ladyfingers in the reserved coffee mixture and arrange them over the cream. Press lightly to settle the layer, then spread the rest of the cream over it. Refrigerate uncovered for 2–3 hours; the generous filling should fit the dish selected in step 1.

09. Dust with cocoa and chill overnight
Once the cream has chilled, sift a generous covering of cocoa over the surface. Wipe the dish rim, cover with wrap or foil, and refrigerate another 8–9 hours, or up to 1 day. Leave this chilling time in your plans—it helps the layers hold together.

10. Slice and serve
Cut the chilled dessert with a sharp knife, wiping the blade between portions. Slide a small serving spatula under each slice to lift it out neatly.

11. Store leftovers
Cover the remaining tiramisu and refrigerate for up to 3 days. Return it to the refrigerator promptly after serving.

Classic Tiramisu with Espresso and Mascarpone

A note from Joy

An overnight dessert appeals to me because the refrigerator can do its work while I'm busy with the family. Give this tiramisu its full two-stage chill before slicing; a rushed middle won't hold neatly. Fresh berries are a lovely side for a shared meal. Small slices let people choose how much they want, which suits a table with different appetites like ours.

Let the refrigerator have its time

Tiramisu looks like a soft, simple dessert, but its structure comes from a series of small decisions. The coffee dip is brief, the mascarpone is mixed gently, and the cream and whites are folded without knocking out all the air. Then the refrigerator gets a long, uninterrupted turn. I like a dessert that can be finished well before serving. Give its full resting time a place in the plan so the layers have time to settle in the refrigerator.

This version makes twelve servings in a generously sized dish. Espresso stays noticeable through the rich cream, while unsweetened cocoa gives the top a different kind of bitterness. The goal isn't a wet coffee cake under a thick blanket of filling; it is softened biscuit layers that support a light, creamy mixture. Small slices can be satisfying, and people can choose more. A few berries alongside are a simple option from the kitchen note, without making another dessert part of the day's work.

Check the dish before opening the cream

A 9-by-13-inch footprint alone doesn't tell you everything about capacity. The dish needs to hold at least twelve to fourteen cups for two biscuit layers and two generous cream layers. Check the capacity before starting so there will be room for both biscuit layers and all of the cream. A dish with adequate depth also makes it easier to cover the dessert after the first chilling stage without pressing the cover directly into the cream.

Clear a level place in the refrigerator while the dish is still empty. Carrying a filled pan around a crowded shelf is a poor time to rearrange jars. Have enough room above it for the initial uncovered chill and later covering. A stable, level surface helps the layers remain even while they settle. This preparation takes only a little attention, but it affects the finished dessert more than decorative serving plates or an especially elaborate cocoa pattern.

21 Cookies and Cream Brownies with Oreo Frosting

Layer brownies with Oreo buttercream and a chocolate topping. Includes cooling and assembly steps to keep each cookies-and-cream layer distinct.



MAKES 24 brownies

TIME 30 min prep + 30–35 min baking + cooling and 30 min chilling

Cookies and Cream Brownies with Oreo Frosting

BROWNIE BASE

- 9×13-inch pan brownies batter (or boxed brownie batter)
- 24 Oreo cookies

OREO BUTTERCREAM

- 3/4 cup (12 Tbsp; 170g) unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 3 cups (360g) confectioners’ sugar
- 2 Tablespoons milk
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 6 whole Oreos, chopped (about 3/4 cup, or 70g)
- pinch of salt

CHOCOLATE TOPPING

- 1/2 cup (8 Tbsp; 113g) unsalted butter
- 1 heaping cup (around 200g) semi-sweet chocolate chips



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Cookies and Cream Brownies with Oreo Frosting

01. Prepare the pan
Heat the oven to 350°F (177°C). Line a 9 × 13-inch pan with parchment, leaving enough overhang to lift the cooled slab out.

02. Add batter and whole cookies
Make brownie batter suited to a 9 × 13-inch pan, following its recipe or package. Spread in the pan and press 24 Oreos across the top in 6 rows of 4. Leave batter beneath the cookies.

03. Bake the brownies
Begin checking at 30 minutes. Test the brownie portion in the center with a toothpick: wet batter needs more baking, while a few moist crumbs indicate it is ready. If necessary, check again every 2 minutes; the chosen batter determines the final timing.

04. Cool completely
Cool completely in the pan on a rack. Lift out using the parchment handles, keeping the slab whole. Set it, still on the parchment, on a tray that fits in the refrigerator so you can move it without breaking it.

05. Make and spread Oreo buttercream
Beat butter on medium with a paddle attachment for about 2 minutes. Add powdered sugar, milk and vanilla; mix on low 30 seconds, then high for 2 minutes. Fold in chopped Oreos by hand. Taste the frosting and add a small pinch of salt if needed, up to about ⅛ teaspoon. Spread over the cold brownies and chill uncovered at least 30 minutes, or up to 1 day.

06. Make chocolate topping
Melt the chocolate chips and cut-up butter together in a saucepan over low heat, stirring until smooth. Alternatively, microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring between each.

07. Finish and chill
Spread the melted chocolate evenly over the chilled frosting. Let the topping set for a few hours at room temperature or about 1 hour in the refrigerator before cutting. Give the layers time to firm up for cleaner squares.

08. Store
Cover any remaining brownies and refrigerate for 3–4 days.

Cookies and Cream Brownies with Oreo Frosting

A note from Joy

When my husband shares food with coworkers, I think about tidy portions as well as a generous pan. Wait until these layers are set before slicing, and wipe the knife between cuts. Double-Stuf Oreos are an option for an extra-creamy cookie bite. Small squares leave room for people to taste something sweet without needing to commit to a large dessert serving.

Three layers, three different jobs
These brownies have a chewy chocolate base, a cookie-filled buttercream, and a smooth chocolate cap. The whole Oreos pressed into the batter give another layer of cookies-and-cream flavor before the frosting goes on. I like thinking of the dessert as a slab that needs support and cooling at each stage. That makes the work feel much simpler than trying to decorate twenty-four individual pieces from the beginning.

The hands-on time is only one part of the plan. Cooling, chilling the buttercream, and letting the chocolate set are what make the layers distinct and the slices easier to handle. Allow time for each layer to cool or set before the next goes on, so the brownie and frosting are ready for assembly well before serving. Patience here has a practical result: the layers stay where you put them.

Choose a brownie base that fits the pan
The recipe allows homemade or boxed brownie batter, but it needs to be suited to a nine-by-thirteen-inch pan. A smaller recipe stretched across that area won't give the same support beneath the cookies and frosting. A larger amount changes the baking depth and time. Read your chosen batter's instructions before beginning and keep its preparation separate from the frosting and chocolate topping ingredients.

This flexibility can be useful for grocery planning. If you already have a reliable batter recipe and its ingredients, there is no need to buy a mix solely for this dessert. If you use a mix, include whatever it requires in your plan. The finished brownie will take some of its texture from that base, so avoid promising an identical chew from every possible batter. The topping layers are consistent; the foundation is your chosen recipe.

Set up a path from pan to refrigerator
Line the pan with parchment and leave enough overhang to lift the cooled slab. Flatten the paper into the corners as well as you can so the batter spreads evenly instead of collecting beside a large fold. Find a tray that will hold the lifted brownie and fit in the refrigerator. Checking that space while the pan is empty is much easier than rearranging shelves with a fragile slab in your hands.

22 Cinnamon Apple Pie with Pretzel Crust

Bake apple pie in a chewy yeast pretzel crust with a salted finish. Prepare the apple filling ahead and leave time for the dough to rise.



MAKES 10–12 servings

TIME 1 hr active + 1½ hr rising + 30 min second rise + 30 min baking + 2 hr cooling

Cinnamon Apple Pie with Pretzel Crust

PRETZEL CRUST

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed, room temperature, plus more for greasing
- 1 (1/4-ounce) package active dry yeast (about 2 1/4 teaspoons)
- 3 tablespoons (packed) dark brown sugar
- 3 1/4 cups (or more) unbleached bread flour
- 1/2 cup cold pilsner-style beer
- 2 teaspoons fine sea salt
- 2 tablespoons baking soda (optional; see step 4)

APPLE FILLING

- 9 large Honeycrisp, Braeburn, and/or Golden Delicious apples (about 4 1/2 pounds)
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

FINISH

- Unsalted butter (for pan)
- 1 large egg yolk
- Pretzel or coarse sea salt



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Cinnamon Apple Pie with Pretzel Crust

01. Activate yeast
Butter a large bowl. In a mixer bowl, combine ½ cup warm water (100–115°F), yeast and brown sugar. Let stand 5–7 minutes until foamy.

02. Mix and knead
Stir in bread flour, beer, sea salt and 2 tablespoons softened butter. Mix with a dough hook on medium-low until a ball forms, about 2 minutes, then knead 5–7 minutes until elastic. Add flour 1 tablespoon at a time if sticky, or warm water 1 teaspoon at a time if dry. Alternatively, knead by hand.

03. First rise
Place in the buttered bowl, cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 1½ hours.

04. Prepare optional baked baking soda
For the optional pretzel treatment, heat oven to 275°F. Spread baking soda on a foil-lined small tray and bake for 65 minutes. Let cool. Handle carefully and avoid eye or prolonged skin contact.

05. Make the optional solution
In a small stainless-steel pot (not aluminum, copper or nonstick), combine the baked baking soda and 1 cup water. Bring to a simmer, stirring to dissolve; cool.

06. Cook and cool apples
Peel, core and cut apples into 1/4-inch wedges. Combine with sugar, all-purpose flour, lemon juice, 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon, nutmeg, kosher salt and 1/4 cup water in a large pot. Cook over medium heat, stirring, for 15–20 minutes until softened with a little bite. Reduce to medium-low and simmer another 10 minutes until very tender. Cool to room temperature.

07. Divide dough and prepare the pan
Heat oven to 450°F and butter a 10-inch cast-iron skillet. Punch down dough and divide into equal halves by weight. Return one half to the covered bowl while shaping the other.

08. Shape the base
Roll one half to a 13-inch circle and fit into the skillet, extending slightly over the edge. Gently stretch any shrinking sections to an even rim. Cover and let rise until about 50% larger, 20–30 minutes.

09. Shape the top and rim
Divide the second half into three pieces, keeping unused pieces covered. Roll one into a 36-inch rope and form an approximately 11-inch pretzel: make a U, cross and twist the ends twice, then fold them down onto the curve. Place on a parchment-lined tray. Roll each remaining piece to a 30-inch rope and twist together for the rim. Cover and let rise about 50%, 20–30 minutes.

10. Partially bake the base
Prick the skillet dough with a fork. Brush with the optional soda solution. Beat egg yolk with 1 tablespoon water and brush over the base. Shield only the outer rim with foil. Bake 12–15 minutes until light golden and dry; cool at least 5 minutes.

11. Fill and finish shaping
Brush the outer rim with egg wash and attach the twisted rope. Add cooled apples. Place the pretzel shape over the filling, gently stretching its ends to meet the rim. Brush exposed rim and pretzel with optional soda solution, then egg wash. Sprinkle with pretzel salt.

Cinnamon Apple Pie with Pretzel Crust

12. Bake and cool completely Bake 12–15 minutes until the pretzel top is golden and firm. If the underside needs longer, cover the top loosely with foil and continue, checking every 2 minutes. Cool completely for at least 2 hours before slicing.

13. Make-ahead options Make ahead: refrigerate dough up to 1 day, then bring to room temperature and let rise until doubled, about 1½ hours. Refrigerate apple filling up to 2 days and bring to room temperature before baking. Keep optional soda solution in a covered container at room temperature up to 3 days.

A note from Joy

This is the sort of baking idea I want to give its own time, away from the school-lunch rush. Include the rising and full cooling time in your plan before deciding when dessert will be ready. A little vanilla ice cream gives the salty crust and spiced apples a creamy contrast. I like a modest slice that leaves the unusual pretzel-and-apple combination in the spotlight.

Apple pie with a chewy edge
This pie brings together cinnamon apples and a yeast-raised pretzel crust, so it asks for a different plan than a flaky pastry pie. The edge has chew, the shaped top has a salty finish, and the apples are cooked before they go into the skillet. I like the way those parts stay distinct. A little salt against fruit makes the sweetness more interesting without requiring a second sauce or a complicated topping.

Give this project a generous window in the day. The dough rises, the apples cool, the base gets its own brief bake, and the assembled pie cools completely before slicing. Some work can overlap, but the waits still matter. I prefer deciding on those pauses at the beginning instead of discovering that a beautiful golden top has finished while the filling is still too warm to hold a slice.

Choose apples for the full filling
Honeycrisp, Braeburn, and Golden Delicious are the listed choices, alone or together. A mixture can give a broader apple flavor, but one suitable variety is enough if that makes more sense at the store. Buy for the stated weight as well as the approximate count; nine small apples aren't the same quantity as nine large ones. Set aside the full stated amount of apples before you begin so the pie has the generous filling this recipe is built around.

Peel, core, and cut the apples into even quarter-inch wedges. Consistent size helps the slices soften together instead of leaving a few firm chunks among pieces already breaking down. Trim only what needs removing, and set up a bowl or clear space for the prepared wedges before starting. When a recipe uses several pounds of fruit, an orderly cutting station makes the work easier than stopping after every apple to find somewhere to put it.

23 Apple-Ginger Hand Pies with Cornstarch Pastry

Eight triangular hand pies with fresh apple, chewy dried apple and ginger inside a butter-and-cornstarch pastry made with 1 tablespoon of neutral oil.



MAKES 8 individual pies

TIME 35 min prep + 45 min chilling + about 45 min cooking

Apple-Ginger Hand Pies with Cornstarch Pastry

CORNSTARCH PASTRY

- 2 cups (240 g) all-purpose flour, plus a little for rolling
- ¼ cup (28 g) cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon (12 g) granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon fine salt
- 4 tablespoons (56 g) cold unsalted butter, diced
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) neutral vegetable oil, for the dough
- 6 tablespoons (90 ml) ice-cold water, plus up to 1 tablespoon (15 ml) if needed

APPLE-GINGER FILLING

- 300 g peeled, cored apples, cut into small ¼-inch cubes (about 2 medium apples)
- 60 g unsweetened dried apples, finely chopped
- ½ cup (120 ml) unsweetened apple cider (not vinegar)
- ¼ cup (60 ml) water, plus 1 tablespoon more only if needed
- 2 tablespoons (25 g) packed light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 small pinch fine salt

FRYING AND FINISHING

- Neutral vegetable oil, enough for a 2-inch depth in a deep, heavy pot
- 1 tablespoon powdered sugar, optional, for dusting
- Equipment: frying thermometer, rolling pin, fork and wire rack



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Apple-Ginger Hand Pies with Cornstarch Pastry

01. Cook the two-apple filling
Combine the fresh apples, dried apples, cider, ¼ cup water, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger and pinch of salt in a saucepan. Cover and simmer gently for 5 minutes, then uncover and cook about 10–15 minutes more, stirring and lightly mashing, until the dried fruit is soft and the filling holds a spoon mark without free liquid. Add 1 tablespoon water only if the pan dries before the fruit softens. Stir in lemon juice and cool completely in a shallow dish.

02. Make the cornstarch dough
Whisk the flour, cornstarch, granulated sugar, baking powder and fine salt together. Rub in the cold butter until the mixture has coarse crumbs. Add the 1 tablespoon oil and 6 tablespoons cold water. Fold gently until the dough holds together; add up to 1 tablespoon more water only if dry crumbs will not join. Do not knead until smooth. Flatten into a square, wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

03. Portion and roll
Divide the dough into 8 equal pieces and keep them covered. On a lightly floured surface, roll each into a roughly 5½-inch (14 cm) square, about 2 mm thick. Keep unused portions cold. Let a piece rest briefly if it springs back rather than forcing it thinner.

04. Fill, fold and chill
Put about 35 g cooled filling (roughly 2 level tablespoons) on one half of each square, leaving a ½-inch clean border. Lightly dampen the border, fold diagonally into a triangle and press out trapped air. Crimp firmly with a fork without piercing the pie. Refrigerate the shaped pies for 15 minutes. Refrigerate any extra filling separately.

05. Fry a first pie, then small batches
Heat a 2-inch depth of oil to 350°F (175°C), keeping the pot less than half full. Start with one pie. Fry for about 5–7 minutes, turning carefully, until evenly golden. Drain, let it cool enough to handle, then cut it open to check that the inner pastry has no damp, floury layer. Adjust time if needed. Fry the remaining pies 1–2 at a time, returning the oil to 350°F between batches.

06. Drain and serve
Drain in a single layer on a wire rack over a tray. Let the pies stand for at least 10 minutes; the apple filling stays hot. Add powdered sugar, if using, just before serving.

07. Prepare ahead or store
The wrapped dough and cooled filling can be refrigerated separately for 1 day before assembly. Refrigerate leftover cooked pies within 2 hours and use within 2 days. Reheat on a rack in a 350°F oven until hot through; start checking after 8 minutes. Do not expect stored pastry to match freshly fried pastry.

Apple-Ginger Hand Pies with Cornstarch Pastry

A note from Joy

Fresh apple provides small pieces of fruit; dried apple absorbs some of the cooking liquid. Keep the filling thick and completely cool before sealing. The tablespoon of oil is measured into the pastry, separately from the frying oil. Check the first pie for a fully cooked center before frying the rest.

A small apple pie, with a different dough
A hand pie makes room for a little sweetness without turning dessert into a whole event. This version puts fresh apple, finely chopped dried apple and a little ginger inside eight triangular pastries. The fresh fruit leaves small pieces in the center; the dried apple gives the filling more body. Outside, the pastry combines wheat flour, cornstarch, butter and one measured tablespoon of neutral oil. The intention is a thin shell around an apple filling that stays where it belongs.

What the cornstarch and oil are doing
The dry mixture contains 240 grams of all-purpose flour and 28 grams of cornstarch. Cornstarch contributes starch without adding wheat gluten, so the blend has a different structure from an all-wheat dough. It blends with wheat flour in the pastry. It is not cornmeal, and the yellow flour used for cornbread is not an equivalent substitute. Keep the wheat flour in the recipe; the cornstarch alone cannot provide the same structure.

Butter and liquid oil also behave differently. Cold butter can stay in small pieces while you bring the dough together; oil distributes through it more readily. This version uses 56 grams of butter and 15 milliliters of neutral oil, with no shortening or egg. Measure the oil separately from the oil used for frying. Adding several more spoonfuls would change how the dough rolls and seals. More oil does not automatically mean a crisper finished pie.

Step 1: Cook a filling that can sit still
Peel and core the fresh apples before weighing the 300 grams needed for the filling. Cut them into small, similar cubes and chop the dried apples more finely. The two forms of fruit serve different purposes: fresh apple supplies tender pieces, while dried apple takes up cooking liquid and adds a concentrated apple flavor. A firm baking apple is a useful starting point. Avoid substituting an equal weight of all dried or all fresh fruit, because that would change the moisture balance.

Begin with the lid on for five minutes to help the fruit soften without losing all the liquid at once. Uncover the pan for the rest of cooking, stir across the bottom and mash only enough to bind the pieces. The filling should hold a spoon mark and show no puddle of cider around the fruit. Ginger and cinnamon should support the apple, not become a heavy coating of spice. Add the lemon juice at the end, then cool the mixture fully in a shallow dish before rolling and filling.

24 Cranberry Linzer Tart with Walnut Crust

Bake a cranberry Linzer tart with walnut pastry, a spiced fruit filling and a lattice top. Cool the filling and chill the dough before assembly.



MAKES 10 servings

TIME 45 min prep + at least 1 hr chilling + 45–55 min baking + cooling

Cranberry Linzer Tart with Walnut Crust

CRANBERRY FILLING

- 1 lb. fresh (or frozen) cranberries
- 1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
- 1 Tbsp. finely grated peeled ginger
- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- Pinch of kosher salt
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest

WALNUT CRUST AND EGG WASH

- 1 1/2 cups walnuts
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 tsp. finely grated lemon zest
- 1 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp. baking powder
- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 14 Tbsp. chilled unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 2 large eggs

FINISH AND EQUIPMENT

- Powdered sugar (for serving)
- A 10"-diameter fluted tart pan with removable bottom



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Cranberry Linzer Tart with Walnut Crust

01. Cook and chill filling
Bring cranberries, sugar, ginger, butter and salt to a boil over medium-high, stirring often. Cook 10–12 minutes until the berries burst and the mixture reduces to about 1¾ cups. A spoon drawn across the pan should briefly expose the bottom. Stir in lemon zest off the heat and chill at least 1 hour, until cold.

02. Toast walnuts
Heat the oven to 350°F with a middle rack. Toast walnuts on a rimmed tray for 10–12 minutes, turning once, until golden. Let cool.

03. Make and chill pastry
Pulse walnuts, sugar, lemon zest, cinnamon, salt, cloves, nutmeg, baking powder and 2 cups flour in a processor until finely ground. Pulse in butter until the largest pieces are pea-sized, then add 1 egg and process in longer pulses until the dough gathers. Wrap half as a ½-inch-thick disk. Press the other half evenly over the tart-pan base and sides with floured hands. Chill both at least 1 hour, or up to 3 days.

04. Fill and form lattice
Spread the cold filling in the crust. Roll the other dough half on lightly floured parchment to ⅛ inch thick, dusting as needed. Cut 8 strips and arrange in a crosshatch over the filling. Handle gently rather than repeatedly moving the delicate strips. Trim the overhang, press the ends into the rim and chill 15–20 minutes.

05. Brush and bake
Beat the remaining egg and brush the exposed pastry. Bake 45–55 minutes until the pastry is golden and the filling bubbles. Let the tart cool.

06. Finish
Remove the pan ring and dust with powdered sugar just before serving.

07. Make-ahead filling
For advance preparation, cover the filling in a nonreactive container and refrigerate up to 3 days.

08. Make-ahead tart
The baked tart can be wrapped tightly and kept at room temperature for up to 1 day before serving.

Cranberry Linzer Tart with Walnut Crust

A note from Joy

The 5:30 a.m. lunch-box routine makes me appreciate a dessert whose work can be spread out. The cranberry filling can be made up to three days ahead and refrigerated; the tart can be baked a day ahead. Let it cool fully before wrapping. That's a useful plan for a gathering, leaving the last day with fewer baking jobs and more room for the family's everyday meals.

A tart with a bright center
Cranberries make a lovely argument for giving a dessert a little sharpness. Their vivid filling sits against a walnut pastry flavored with cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and lemon zest, so each slice has more going on than sweetness alone. The lattice leaves the fruit visible and gives the tart a special look without requiring decorative piping or a second dessert component.

I like a bake whose beauty comes from its actual ingredients. A calm plan makes this project comfortable, especially when you leave room for its cooling and chilling stages. The fruit must cool, the pastry must chill, and the finished tart needs time to settle. Spread those waiting stages across your day, and the active work becomes much easier to fit around ordinary meals and everything else happening in the kitchen.

Buy for the tart and the rest of the week
Fresh or frozen cranberries work within this recipe, which makes the filling practical beyond the short season when fresh bags are easiest to find. Check fresh berries for softness or damage before cooking and sort out any that are spoiled, so the filling begins with sound fruit. Walnuts are a major part of the crust, so they should smell pleasantly nutty.

A stale or bitter walnut will not improve after it is ground into pastry. The lemon supplies zest to both filling and crust; zest it before finding another use for the juice. Ginger brings a warm, lively note to the cranberries, and the remaining root can have a place in another meal. There is no need to collect extra garnishes. The baked lattice and a last dusting of powdered sugar are already a complete finish.

Cook the filling to a texture, too
The cranberries burst as they heat with sugar, ginger and butter, turning from separate berries into a concentrated fruit mixture. Stir often enough to move the fruit across the pan and keep the thickening parts from sticking. The recipe gives a cooking window, a reduced volume and a helpful visual cue: a spoon drawn through the mixture should briefly expose the bottom.

25 Bicerin with Espresso, Chocolate and Cream

A warming Italian-style drink with concentrated chocolate, espresso and a softly aerated layer of cold cream.



MAKES 2 drinks

TIME About 15 min active + 15 min equipment chilling

Bicerin with Espresso, Chocolate and Cream

CHOCOLATE AND COFFEE

- 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- About 2/3 cup water
- Sugar, to taste
- Ground espresso for 2 long shots, about 1/3 cup brewed espresso each

CREAM

- 2/3 cup cold heavy cream



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Bicerin with Espresso, Chocolate and Cream

01. Prepare the glasses and cream container
Chill a clean jar or metal shaker for at least 15 minutes. Warm two heat-safe serving glasses with hot water, then empty and dry them before assembling.

02. Make the chocolate
Whisk 1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa with about 2/3 cup water in a small saucepan. Simmer gently, stirring, about 10 minutes until smooth and lightly thickened. Add sugar to taste and remove from the heat.

03. Aerate the cream
Pour the cold cream into the chilled container and shake or whisk until thickened but still pourable. Stop before it becomes stiff or grainy.

04. Layer and serve
Brew 2 long espresso shots, about 1/3 cup each. Divide the espresso and chocolate between the glasses, then slowly spoon the cream over the back of a spoon so it sits on top. Serve immediately.

Bicerin with Espresso, Chocolate and Cream

A note from Joy

Keep the cream cold and stop while it is softly thickened and pourable. It should form a gentle top layer rather than a stiff mound of whipped cream.

Three layers, a small moment to pause
Bicerin is associated with Turin and combines coffee, chocolate and cream in a small glass. This home version uses the same appealing contrast without requiring a cafe setup. Warm espresso and chocolate sit beneath a cool, softly thickened cream layer, so both temperature and texture matter. Its richness suits a small dessert glass, with enough room to enjoy the coffee, chocolate and cream together. Prepare the glasses and cream first, then brew the espresso near the end. That simple order keeps the warm layers ready for pouring when the cool cream is waiting.

Make the chocolate choice clear
The basic version here uses unsweetened cocoa powder, with sugar added to taste. Cocoa, shaved dark chocolate and sweetened hot-chocolate mix are not interchangeable by volume without changing richness and sweetness. Using one defined base makes the instructions easier to follow and the result easier to adjust next time. Whisk the cocoa with a small amount of the water first if it wants to float in dry patches, then add the rest. The mixture should become smooth before it simmers. Taste after the cocoa has cooked, since raw cocoa powder can seem harsher and chalkier than the finished chocolate layer.

Concentrated chocolate rather than a full mug of cocoa
The chocolate portion needs enough body to remain distinct from the coffee, but it should still pour. A gentle simmer evaporates some water and allows the cocoa to hydrate. Stir along the bottom and corners of the small saucepan so a concentrated patch does not catch. If it thickens too far, loosen it with a small splash of hot water, keeping the measured cream for the topping. Sweeten gradually and remember that the finished drink includes cream, which softens bitterness. A pourable consistency lets that deep chocolate flavor mingle with the coffee as you drink.

Coffee strength is part of the balance
Espresso contributes the bitterness and aroma that keep the chocolate and cream from feeling one-dimensional. Brew it shortly before assembly so it is warm and fragrant. The recipe describes long shots of roughly one-third cup each, but home machines and moka pots do not all produce the same concentration. If using strong brewed coffee, expect a lighter coffee presence and a less defined layer rather than claiming an identical drink. Avoid adding a very large volume of weak coffee; it dilutes the chocolate and leaves less room for the cream, changing both the proportions and the small-glass experience.

26 Dalgona Coffee: Whipped Instant Coffee

Whip instant coffee, sugar and hot water into glossy dalgona coffee foam. Spoon it over milk and ice for a creamy two-layer coffee drink.



MAKES 2 small drinks

TIME 5 min prep · no cooking

Dalgona Coffee: Whipped Instant Coffee

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tbsp instant coffee
- 2 Tbsp white granulated sugar
- 2 Tbsp water (hot)
- 1 cup milk (½ cup per glass) (low fat, regular, almond, soy, goat's milk)



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Dalgona Coffee: Whipped Instant Coffee

01. Dissolve the coffee mixture
Combine instant coffee, sugar and hot water in equal proportions in a large mixing bowl.

02. Whisk by hand
For hand whisking, first stir until the coffee and sugar dissolve. Whisk briskly until the foam holds firm peaks. It may take several minutes depending on your pace; use the texture rather than a fixed whisk count to judge readiness.

03. Use a roomy bowl
A roomy bowl and rounded whisk make it easier to incorporate air. Tilt the bowl slightly as you whisk; a fork or spoon is much less efficient.

04. Mixer alternative
For the mixer method, start on low to dissolve the coffee and sugar, then increase speed until glossy, firm peaks form. Begin checking around 1½ minutes, allowing for differences between mixers, and stop when the foam holds.

05. Optional candy garnish
For an optional crunchy garnish, prepare Korean dalgona candy using a separate candy recipe and break it into small pieces.

06. Prepare the milk
Divide 1 cup cold milk between 2 small glasses, using ½ cup per glass. Add ice if desired.

07. Top and enjoy
Spoon the whipped coffee over the milk. Add optional candy pieces, cocoa or cinnamon. Stir together for a latte-like drink, or sip through the foam and milk.

Dalgona Coffee: Whipped Instant Coffee

A note from Joy

My mornings start with school lunches and my husband's lunch, so I like a small coffee moment that feels a little different. A pinch of cocoa or cinnamon on the foam gives this glass a lovely finish. Add more milk if the topping tastes too strong, and stir before drinking. The pretty layers are fun, but a creamy, balanced sip matters more than keeping them perfect.

A small coffee break, thoughtfully made

The first thing you notice is the contrast: pale milk underneath, a thick sweep of coffee foam above it, and a spoon waiting to bring them together. Dalgona coffee makes a few ordinary cupboard ingredients feel quite different. I like how a little attention to texture makes these familiar ingredients feel like a treat. It can be a small treat without becoming another complicated kitchen project.

My mornings begin with school lunches and my husband's lunch, so a coffee moment fits around the practical work of feeding people. That doesn't mean every morning needs a beautifully layered drink. This is an option for a moment when whisking a little foam sounds enjoyable. The recipe makes two small drinks, which is worth knowing before you reach for the biggest glasses in the cupboard.

The topping is concentrated coffee, not a bowl of lightly flavored whipped cream. Its strong taste makes more sense once it meets the milk. You can admire the layers, then stir them without worrying that you've spoiled the presentation. A comfortable, balanced sip matters more to me than keeping a photograph-perfect stripe between the two layers.

Where the Korean inspiration belongs

The name connects the drink to dalgona, the Korean sugar candy whose caramel color and airy appearance the foam recalls. The whipped coffee topping and the candy are different preparations. The coffee foam is made without cooking sugar. Add a piece of the candy on top if you enjoy that finish, or serve the drink simply with its whipped topping.

Growing up in Seoul and now making a home in America gives me an interest in the way familiar flavors appear in different forms. Here, that cultural connection can stay simple: understand the name, enjoy the texture, and make the drink in a way that suits your kitchen. There is no need to turn one glass into a claim about how every Korean household drinks coffee.

If you choose the optional candy garnish, use a separate candy recipe and treat it as another task. The written coffee method does not provide the measurements or cooking instructions for candy. For a quieter version, leave it off entirely. The milk and whipped coffee already provide the main contrast, and skipping an extra garnish can be the most practical choice.

27 Pineapple-Basil Smoothie

Blend ripe pineapple, fresh basil and plain yogurt or kefir into a creamy smoothie with pistachios and chia.



MAKES 1 generous serving

TIME 10 min prep and blending

Pineapple-Basil Smoothie

SMOOTHIE

- ¼ cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves
- 6 oz ripe pineapple, peeled, cored and chopped (about ¼ pineapple)
- ¾ cup plain kefir or plain yogurt
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 heaped tbsp shelled pistachios
- ½ tsp chia seeds
- 2–3 ice cubes



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Pineapple-Basil Smoothie

01. Prep the fresh ingredients
Wash the basil and pat it dry. Remove the pineapple skin, eyes and firm core, then measure the fruit.

02. Fill the blender
Add the kefir or yogurt, pineapple, basil, honey, pistachios, chia and ice. Put the liquid in first to help the blades turn.

03. Blend until smooth
Blend on high for about 1 minute, pausing to scrape down the sides if needed. Check that the nuts and basil are finely blended.

04. Taste and serve
Taste before adding any extra sweetness. Pour into a chilled glass and enjoy promptly. Stir if the smoothie separates as it stands.

Pineapple-Basil Smoothie

A note from Joy

I like getting the glass and ingredients ready before I switch on the blender. Morning already has enough moving parts! Start with ripe pineapple and plain yogurt, then taste before changing the honey. If you prefer a looser drink, add a small splash of cold water. Basil is delicate, so keep the leaves fresh and blend the smoothie just before serving.

Basil can belong in a sweet glass

Fresh basil changes the direction of a pineapple smoothie in a small but noticeable way. Instead of tasting only sweet and creamy, the drink gets a green, fragrant note that makes the fruit feel more distinct. Plain kefir or yogurt provides a tangy base, pistachios give it a little substance, and a few ice cubes chill the mixture. I like a short ingredient list where each item has something specific to contribute, and this one gives familiar ingredients a different setting.

The recipe makes one generous serving and takes about ten minutes once the fruit is ready to cut. That single-serving size is useful for turning a portion of pineapple into a drink just for you. Enjoy it for the simple combination of sweet fruit, fresh herbs and a cool dairy base. Careful blending brings those few ingredients together and lets you adjust the texture with small changes as you go.

Measure pineapple after trimming

The six ounces of pineapple refers to peeled, cored and chopped fruit. A quarter of a pineapple is an approximation, since whole fruits vary considerably in size. Weighing the prepared pieces keeps the balance with the three-quarter cup of kefir or yogurt more consistent. If you measure before trimming away the skin and core, the actual fruit in the blender may be quite different from the amount the recipe expects.

Remove the skin, eyes and firm core with the fruit steady on the cutting board. Small, reasonably even pieces move through the blender more readily than a few long wedges. Ripe pineapple brings sweetness and juice, while firmer, less ripe fruit can leave the drink sharper and harder to smooth. Taste a small prepared piece so you know the fruit you are working with. That simple check is more informative than judging the final drink against a memory of a sweeter pineapple from another shopping trip.

Treat basil as a main flavor

A quarter cup of tightly packed fresh leaves is enough to be noticed. Measure the leaves rather than a loose handful of leafy stems, and wash and pat them dry as the recipe directs. Excess washing water is not part of the liquid measure. Tender leaves blend more easily than coarse stems, and removing unsuitable pieces before blending is easier than wondering afterward why the drink has stubborn green fibers.

28 Brazilian Lemonade with Lime and Condensed Milk

Make creamy Brazilian lemonade with fresh limes and condensed milk. Pulse briefly, strain and serve over ice while the lime flavor is fresh.



MAKES 6 servings

TIME 10 min prep · no cooking

Brazilian Lemonade with Lime and Condensed Milk

INGREDIENTS

- 4 limes, scrubbed and washed, plus wedges or wheels for serving
- ⅓ cup granulated sugar
- 7 ounces sweetened condensed milk (or, for a dairy-free version, use 7 ounces sweetened condensed coconut milk)
- 4 cups cold water
- 4 cups ice, plus more for serving



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Brazilian Lemonade with Lime and Condensed Milk

01. Prepare the limes
Trim away both ends of the washed limes and cut each lime into quarters.

02. Pulse briefly
Add limes, sugar, condensed milk, water and ice to a blender, working in batches if needed. Pulse only 5–8 times to draw out the lime flavor without grinding the rind fine. Visible rind pieces are fine; prolonged blending can make the drink bitter.

03. Strain
Pour through a fine sieve into a pitcher. Press gently with a spoon to recover the liquid, then discard the rind and pulp.

04. Serve immediately
Pour into tall glasses over ice, add lime wedges and serve straight away.

Brazilian Lemonade with Lime and Condensed Milk

A note from Joy

Sweetness is one more thing my family doesn't agree on, so I like a recipe with room to adjust. Taste this drink before adding extra sugar, and blend it near serving time. Sweetened condensed coconut milk is an option for a dairy-free version. If you try it, check the label and taste again, since its sweetness can differ from the dairy version in the recipe.

Lime flavor with a creamy finish
Limonada brings together things that don't initially look like one drink: whole cut limes, sweetened condensed milk, cold water and plenty of ice. A few brief pulses release the citrus flavor, and straining leaves a pale, creamy drink with a bright edge. The lime is meant to be noticeable through the sweetness. I like the contrast of something rich enough to feel like a small treat and sharp enough to refresh the mouth alongside a meal.

Despite the familiar English word lemonade in the title, the fruit in this recipe is lime. Start there rather than buying lemons and expecting the same result. This is a home-kitchen version to make shortly before pouring, not a pitcher to prepare in the morning and forget about until dinner. The short method is part of its appeal, but that timing matters. Set out the glasses, sieve and pitcher first so the finished drink doesn't wait while the rest of the table comes together.

Choose limes for flavor and handling
Look for limes that feel firm and have sound skins, without mold or damaged areas. Since the rind briefly goes into the blender, wash and scrub the fruit as directed before cutting. Use clean hands, a clean board and a clean knife. Trimming both ends removes the hard little caps and gives you a better view of the fruit before quartering. The quarters should fit comfortably among the other ingredients rather than balancing whole fruit above the blender blade.

Limes differ in size, juice and intensity, so four pieces of fruit aren't a guarantee that every pitcher will taste identical. That is a reason to choose good fruit and pay attention, not a reason to turn the recipe into an unmeasured citrus experiment. The whole-lime method gets aromatic flavor from the peel as well as juice. A bottle of lime juice may be useful for another task, but it doesn't replace that process simply because its label names the same fruit.

29 Nonalcoholic Smoky Citrus Punch with Tea

Prepare a nonalcoholic citrus punch with smoky Lapsang souchong tea, orange and lemon. Chill the base ahead, then add bubbles before serving.



MAKES 18–20 small drinks

TIME 25 min active + 8–12 hr cold brewing + 1 hr chilling

Nonalcoholic Smoky Citrus Punch with Tea

CITRUS AND TEA BASE

- 2 lemons, plus more for juicing as needed
- 2 oranges
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 4 bags Lapsang souchong tea (or use 4 teaspoons loose-leaf)

BUBBLES AND SERVING

- 1 cup/8 ounces soda water
- 1 cup/8 ounces tonic water
- Lemon and orange slices, for serving
- Ice ring or block, for serving



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Nonalcoholic Smoky Citrus Punch with Tea

01. Infuse the citrus sugar
The day before serving, peel the lemons and oranges and reserve the fruit. Place peels and sugar in a bowl or large jar. Press with a muddler or rolling-pin end for about 2 minutes, until the peels begin looking translucent. Leave at room temperature at least 2 hours or overnight.

02. Cold-brew the tea
Combine 3 tea bags or 3 teaspoons loose tea with 3 cups water in a pitcher. Cover and refrigerate 8–12 hours. Remove the bags, or strain loose tea through cheesecloth in a fine sieve. The covered cold brew keeps refrigerated up to 5 days.

03. Make and chill the syrup
Boil 1 cup water, add the remaining tea bag or teaspoon tea, and steep 4–5 minutes. Remove or strain the tea, then pour it over the citrus sugar and stir to dissolve. Strain, pressing the peels to recover the syrup. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour before mixing.

04. Mix and add bubbles
Juice the reserved fruit to make about 1 cup, adding another lemon if needed. Place the prepared ice wheel in a punch bowl. Add juice, chilled citrus-tea syrup and cold-brew tea. Gently stir in soda and tonic water just before serving, then ladle into glasses with lemon and orange slices.

Nonalcoholic Smoky Citrus Punch with Tea

A note from Joy

My husband's work potlucks make me appreciate a drink people can share without needing alcohol. Prepare the tea and citrus ahead, but save the soda and tonic for serving so the bubbles stay lively. Mandarins or blood oranges give it a seasonal change. Taste before adding more lemon; citrus varies, and the glass should feel bright without becoming too sharp.

A punch with more than sweetness

Smoky tea gives this citrus punch a character you won't get from juice and bubbles alone. Lemon and orange appear in two forms: their peels perfume the sugar, while their juice brightens the finished bowl. Tonic adds a little bitterness, soda keeps that edge from taking over, and a large piece of ice cools the mixture. I like a drink with distinct parts that still leaves room for the food beside it.

This is a nonalcoholic punch, but that description doesn't mean it is free of caffeine; the Lapsang souchong is tea. It is worth being clear about the ingredients when offering it to a mixed group. The recipe makes eighteen to twenty small drinks, with modest punch glasses giving you the intended portions. A small first pour lets people discover the smoky flavor and choose whether they want more.

Start with tomorrow's serving time

The active work is fairly short, but several parts need a long rest or a chill. Working backward from serving is more useful than reading only the twenty-five minutes of active preparation. The cold-brew tea needs eight to twelve hours in the refrigerator. Citrus peel and sugar need at least two hours, and the hot tea syrup must chill for at least an hour. Those waits can overlap, but none disappears because the final mixing step is quick.

The day before serving is a sensible place to begin. Set the cold brew in the refrigerator, prepare the citrus sugar, and make sure there is room for a pitcher and an ice ring or block. Keep the lemons and oranges after peeling because their juice still has a job. A small labeled container prevents them from becoming anonymous bare fruit at the back of the refrigerator. The drink is a good example of planning that reduces pressure without requiring a full day of constant kitchen work.

Let the tea stay recognizable

Lapsang souchong brings the smoke, so choose that tea rather than assuming any dark tea will give a similar result. Four bags or the stated loose-leaf amount are divided between two preparations. Three go into the cold brew, and one makes the hot infusion for the syrup. Separate them at the start. It is easy to drop all four into the pitcher and only later realize there isn't a portion left for the boiling water.

30 Hot Bourbon Apple Cider with Warming Spices

Warm apple cider with cinnamon, cardamom and orange, then add bourbon to individual mugs. Keep plain spiced cider available for an alcohol-free option.



MAKES 12–24 drinks

TIME 10 min prep + 20 min simmering

Hot Bourbon Apple Cider with Warming Spices

SPICED CIDER BASE

- ½ gallon of apple cider
- 5 cinnamon sticks (or 3-4 teaspoons ground cinnamon)
- 10 crushed cardamom pods (or 2 teaspoons cardamom)
- 10 whole cloves (½-1 teaspoon ground cloves)
- 2 bay leaves
- One orange: zest and juice
- 1-2 cups of water

SERVING

- 24-ounce bottle of Bourbon
- Garnishes: dried orange slices, star anise or cinnamon sticks



FOUR-STAGE VISUAL GUIDE

A quick look at the cooking stages. Keep the full ingredient list and method nearby as you prepare each recipe.

Hot Bourbon Apple Cider with Warming Spices

01. Simmer the cider and spices
Combine cider, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, bay leaves, a wide strip of orange peel and 1 cup water in a Dutch oven. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a gentle medium-low simmer for at least 20 minutes to infuse the spices.

02. Adjust the citrus
Stir in the juice of half the orange. Taste and adjust the citrus or spice balance to your preference.

03. Add bourbon to individual mugs
For each serving, add 1–2 ounces bourbon to a mug and ladle the hot spiced cider over it.

04. Garnish
Finish each mug with a dried orange slice.

Hot Bourbon Apple Cider with Warming Spices

A note from Joy

My kitchen is feeding children as well as grown-ups, so I like this drink's separate cider base. Keep the bourbon clearly separate and add it only to the adult mugs. A cinnamon stick or star anise makes a pretty garnish and adds aroma. It's a small finishing job for a relaxed moment, rather than one more complicated recipe in the middle of the lunch-box routine.

One welcoming pot, individual choices
A pot of warm apple cider can make the drink part of a gathering feel simple. Cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, bay and orange give the apple a fragrant frame, while bourbon waits until the mugs are poured. I like that separation because it gives people a clear choice without requiring a second whole recipe. The base remains plain spiced cider for anyone who wants an alcohol-free drink, and the adult version is made individually.

The important flavor decision is to keep the apple recognizable. Spices can become very assertive if they are left to simmer without attention, and more is not always more inviting. A gentle pot, a little tasting and a sensible serving plan give this drink its character without turning a relaxed moment into an elaborate kitchen project.

Buy cider you enjoy before it is spiced
The cider is the largest part of the drink, so choose one whose apple flavor you like on its own. Some are very sweet, others are sharper, and the recipe's water and citrus give you room to find a balance. Check the label for any existing spice flavor before adding a full collection of your own. For a shared family drink, pasteurized cider is a practical choice; store it according to its label and keep opened containers refrigerated.

The bourbon does not need to be an expensive bottle selected only for this recipe. Choose one you enjoy and keep it as a separate serving ingredient. A drink made for several people should fit the gathering's budget as well as its flavor. The spices and citrus already bring plenty of aroma without an elaborate garnish collection.

Whole spices are easier to manage
Whole cinnamon sticks, crushed cardamom pods and cloves give you pieces that can be removed or strained after they have flavored the liquid. The listed ground alternatives are useful when that is what the pantry holds, but they behave differently in the mug. Ground spice stays suspended or settles, and a fine strainer may not remove it all.