

Questa Del Rio News

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"With Love, Pecans and Chocolate"

By Food Editor Elizabeth Brunazzi

Pecans are in my bloodline. My father's Italian grandfather immigrated to the US on a ship from Genoa, Italy, the start of an itinerary that would take him through Ellis Island to Philadelphia, and onward to St. Louis, Ouachita Valley, Arkansas, and finally, Texarkana, Texas, where he finally settled. Shortly after he planted his flag there, he planted a pecan tree behind his home. The pecan tree grew large and tall, and produced small, dark native pecans year after year as the 20th century progressed; they were the best I have ever tasted, collected year after year by my grandmother and aunt.

My mother's French-Irish family hails from Shreveport, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. I am glad to share the following ideas, updated from my store of best family recipes and memories as gifts for the New Year, Mardi Gras, and Valentine's Day, 2022. Let the good cooking roll!

Mama Bessie's Best Pecan Pie

1/4 C melted butter, or plant butter substitute
2 well beaten eggs
1/2 C sugar, organic raw cane sugar, or your favorite sweetener
1 C dark Karo syrup
Dash of salt and cinnamon
1/4 C melted butter, or plant butter substitute
3/4 C pecan halves or quarters:
 small, dark native pecans preferred
1-1/4 t vanilla

Brown butter in saucepan until golden brown. Watch that it does not burn! In a separate bowl add ingredients in the order listed, and stir. Blend in browned butter last. Pour into an unbaked pie shell. A thin, handmade pie crust is recommended, or as close to a commercial version as is available. (A thick pastry dough used for fruit pies is not suitable for this recipe.) Bake at 425 degrees for 10 minutes, then lower to 325 degrees for 40 minutes.

Auntie Maurice's Best

"Texas" Pecan Brownies

1/2 C butter, or plant butter substitute
1 C sugar (can be reduced to 3/4 C organic raw cane sugar, or your favorite sweetener)
2 eggs
1/2 C sifted flour, your choice of flour
1/4 t salt
1/3 C chopped pecans
2 squares melted chocolate, your favorite
1/2 to 1 t vanilla
Dash of cinnamon and powdered ginger
Optional: 1/2 C chopped dried cherries or cranberries

Oil an 8-inch square pan. Work butter until creamy and add sugar gradually until smooth. Add eggs, beating gently, one at a time. Sift flour. Salt, and add dashes of cinnamon and ginger to taste. Beat all again. Mix in the chocolate, nuts, vanilla, and, if desired, chopped fruit. Pour into the oiled pan. Bake at 350 degrees 25-30 minutes. Do not overbake! Cool in pan and cut into squares. These are moist and keep well covered in the fridge, or frozen.

Creole Pralines *

2 C organic raw cane sugar
1 C brown sugar
1 stick butter or plant butter substitute
1 C milk
2 T dark Karo syrup
4 C pecan halves

Method:

Put all ingredients except pecans in a 3-qt saucepan, bring to a boil, and cook for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add pecans and cook mixture until the liquid forms a soft ball when a teaspoon of it is dropped into cold water. Stir well and drop by spoonfuls on waxed paper. Cool. Serve fresh to guests or in tins as gifts. Keeps well in a covered container in the fridge for use over several weeks.

* If you want to make a special, homemade confection for offering to guests or as gifts instead of buying commercial candies, I highly recommend these pralines, presented in your favorite wrappings. For those of you who want a "lighter" version, I cannot offer any help. Enjoy!

Pecans!

By Deborah Archuleta-Moreno

The holiday season has come and gone, and after reflections and new year's resolutions, we roll into February, the month of love, chocolate, and pecans. Yes, pecans—that tasty meaty nut that jumpy squirrels like to gather. Currently, the pecan harvesting has begun in Roswell, now that the pecans have shed their tough outer shells at the beginning of fall. New Mexico is one of the leading states in the US that produces this most delicious nut, followed by Texas, Georgia, and Oklahoma, and even into Mexico. It made me wonder, where did the pecan tree come from?

It turns out that the pecan tree is one of the only major nut trees that grows naturally in North America, and is the most valuable North American nut variety. Native to the Mississippi River Valley, eventually the pecan would be brought through Texas, northern Mexico, and into New Mexico by the early settlers. The name "pecan" is a Native American word meaning "all nuts requiring a stone to crack," originally from the Algonquin tribe.

There are accounts from the Spanish Expeditions of "great groves of very tall pecan trees." The French wrote that the nut was more delicate and flavorful than the almond. Presidents including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were noted to have planted pecan trees.

For Native Americans, the pecan nut was a food staple during winter months. The nut was easy to shell, and it could be stored in leather sacks and earthen pits, or strung on leather cords.

The pecan nut has many health benefits and is a great source of energy. With much protein, healthy fats, and fiber, they have calcium, magnesium, and potassium. They are great to eat as a snack or made into pecan pies.

Here is an easy recipe to make the nut into a delicious, sweet snack for anytime!

Candied Pecans

1 C sugar
1 t ground cinnamon
1 t salt
1 egg white
1 T water

Preheat oven to 250 degrees F.

Combine sugar, cinnamon, and salt in a bowl.

Whisk the egg whites and water in a separate bowl until frothy.

Stir in pecans and egg white mixture until pecans are evenly coated.

Place coated pecans on a baking tray.

Bake in preheated oven for one hour, stirring every 15 minutes, until pecans are browned. ENJOY!

Sweet Potato Pecan Bread

From Elizabeth Brunazzi

1 C organic raw cane sugar (substitute 1/2 C sugar and 1/2 C maple syrup or pureed applesauce, to taste)
1/2 C vegetable oil
2 eggs
1-3/4 C all-purpose flour, organic, unbleached
1 t baking soda
1/4 t salt
1/2 t cinnamon
1/4 t nutmeg
1/4 t ginger
1/3 C water
1 C cooked, mashed sweet potatoes, blond or garnet
1/2 C pecan halves or quarters. I prefer using pieces instead of ground or chopped, especially if the pecans are the small, dark native type.

Combine sugar/sweeteners and oil. Add eggs and beat. Combine flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger. Stir flour mixture into egg mixture alternately with water. Stir in sweet potatoes and nut pieces. Pour batter into a greased 9" x 5" inch loaf pan, or two smaller loaf pans. Bake at 350 degrees (175 C) for about one hour. Test center with a toothpick. This bread freezes very well. Serve au naturel, or top with whipped flavored yogurt, or whipped cream garnished with finely minced fresh ginger.



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