

HOLIDAY BAKING





TRADITIONS AND RECIPES FROM COOKS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

BY AMANDA FLATTEN

Baking and the holidays go hand in hand. The delightful smells of pies, cakes and cookies fill the air as memories of holidays past fill our minds. In many families, baking at Christmas is a tradition passed down through the generations. The spirit of passing on special family recipes is shared in *The Taste of Home Baking Book*, in stores this holiday season.

Taste of Home magazine, one of the largest subscription-based food magazines, is known for its exchange of recipes and tips from at-home cooks. The company has many cooking contests a year in which people send in recipes. “We get in the neighborhood of 90,000 recipes a year,” says Catherine Cassidy, editor of *Taste of Home*. Last year’s release of *The Taste of Home Cookbook* was so successful, this year the editors compiled a companion volume, the *Baking Book*.

“Our customers love to bake,” says Cassidy, who recently shared baking recipes from the book on “Good Day Dallas.”

“The editor of the book, Janet Briggs, went through our recipe database, which has more than 40,000 recipes, and looked for the best chocolate cake, the best apple pie, the best cheesecake,” Cassidy says.

“Most of the recipes are from readers,” says Cassidy, adding that many readers are from the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

The *Baking Book* features more than 700 recipes in a five-ring binder. The book is broken into various sections such as Baking Basics, Cookies, Bars & Brownies, Cakes, Pies & Tarts, Quick Breads, Holiday Baking and more. The beginning of each section includes “Secrets for Success” with helpful tips and

tricks. “If you’ve never baked before, you can pick up this book and bake a cake from scratch. It has great recipes and basic instructions,” Cassidy says. “Even if you are an accomplished baker, you are still going to find tremendous recipes in this book.”

Even Cassidy says she learned some great tips from the new book. When making the Fudge-Topped Brownies (see Page 40), or any brownies for that matter, she says it’s best not to cut the brownies when they are warm. It’s better to put them in the freezer to cool them down because they will cut cleanly and won’t fall apart.

When making the Cranberry Almond Muffins (see Page 41), the secret is to not beat the batter too much. “If you over mix the batter, it takes away from the tenderness of the muffins,” she says.

The holiday season is a perfect time to get the kids involved in baking. “There are so many recipes that you can bake with kids,” she says. “It’s fun for the kids and they will be proud of what they make.”

Cassidy, who has two girls — ages 13 and 16 — says making mini breads for her daughters’ teachers has become a holiday tradition. “As soon as the calendar turns over to December, my girls ask when we are going to bake the breads,” she says. “This year, I plan to use the *Baking Book* because there are so many great bread recipes. There is a Triple-Chocolate Quick Bread that is to die for.”

Whether you enjoy baking cakes, breads, scones or cheesecakes, the *Baking Book* offers a little bit of everything to make this holiday season even more special.

All recipes from *The Taste of Home Baking Book*, 2007, \$29.95 (free subscription to *Taste of Home* magazine included with purchase), www.tasteofhome.com.

Fudge-Topped Brownies

Prep: 25 min. Bake: 25 min.
Yield: 10 dozen

- 1 cup butter
- 4 squares (1 ounce each) unsweetened chocolate
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

TOPPING:

- 4 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 package (12 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 package (11 1/2 ounces) milk chocolate chips
- 1 jar (7 ounces) marshmallow creme
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups chopped walnuts

In a heavy saucepan or microwave, melt butter and chocolate; stir until smooth. Remove from the heat; blend in sugar and vanilla. Add eggs; mix well. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt; add to chocolate mixture. Stir in walnuts. Pour into a greased 13-inch by 9-inch by 2-inch baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes or until top springs back when lightly touched.

Cool on a wire rack while preparing topping. Combine the sugar, milk and butter in a large heavy saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Stir in the chocolate chips, marshmallow creme and vanilla until smooth. Add walnuts. Spread over warm brownies. Freeze for 3 hours or until firm. Cut into 1-inch squares. Store in the refrigerator.



Heavenly White Chocolate Cake

Prep: 20 min. Bake: 25 min., plus cooling
Yield: 14 to 16 servings

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 squares (1 ounce each) white baking chocolate, melted and cooled
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons clear vanilla extract
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans, toasted

FROSTING:

- 2 packages (one 8 ounces, one 3 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup butter, softened
- 4 squares (1 ounce each) white baking chocolate, melted and cooled
- 1 1/2 teaspoons clear vanilla extract
- 6 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
- White chocolate curls

Line three greased 9-inch round baking pans with waxed paper and grease the paper; set aside. In a large mixing bowl, cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add chocolate; mix well. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Beat in vanilla. Combine flour and baking soda; add to creamed mixture alternately with buttermilk and water. Fold in pecans. Pour batter into prepared pans.

Bake at 350 degrees for 23 to 27 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks; discard waxed paper.

For frosting, in a large mixing bowl, beat cream cheese and butter until smooth. Add chocolate and vanilla; mix well. Gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until light and fluffy. Spread frosting between layers and over top and sides of cake. Garnish with chocolate curls. Store in the refrigerator.

Blueberry Swirl Cheesecake

Prep: 15 min. Bake: 35 min., plus chilling

Yield: 8 servings

2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, softened	2 eggs, lightly beaten
1/2 cup sugar	1 graham cracker crust (9 inches)
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract	1 can (21 ounces) blueberry pie filling, divided

In a large mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese, sugar and vanilla until smooth. Add eggs, beating just until combined. Pour into crust. Drop 1/2 cup of pie filling by heaping teaspoonfuls onto the cream cheese mixture; cut through with a knife to swirl the pie filling.

Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes or until center is almost set. Cool on a wire rack for 1 hour. Refrigerate for 2 hours. Top with remaining pie filling. Refrigerate leftovers.



Cranberry Almond Muffins

Prep: 20 min. Bake: 20 min.

Yield: 8 muffins

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 eggs
1/2 cup sour cream
1/4 cup butter, melted
1/4 teaspoon almond extract
3/4 cup sliced almonds, divided
1/2 cup whole-berry cranberry sauce

In a bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. In another bowl, whisk the eggs, sour cream, butter and extract; stir into dry ingredients just until moistened. Fold in 1/2 cup almonds.

Fill greased or paper-lined muffin cups half full; drop 1 tablespoon cranberry sauce into the center of each muffin. Cover with enough batter to fill cups three-fourths full; sprinkle with remaining almonds.

Bake at 375 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted 1 inch from the edge comes out clean. Cool for 5 minutes before removing from pan to a wire rack. Serve warm.