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GET RICH
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These German desserts are worth a splurge

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When the diet-be-doggoned inner child roars, these are the kinds of desserts she wants . . .

Towers of puff pastry and candy-colored fruit, topped with fanciful curls of whipped cream and bright-red, stem-waving cherries.

Pillowy souffles, layered in deep chocolate ganache, dusted with powdered sugar and topped with strawberries.

A lemony roll of cake, draped in billows of whipped cream and sugared lemon slices.

And a chocolate-frosted layered cake decorated with even more whipped cream, chopped chocolate and lacy chocolate figures.

Annemarie Greipel admits that her eyepopping dessert table at the Gasthaus Restaurant in Louisville is ``not for slimmers."

Her desserts, however, generally warrant making an exception to any dietary rules her customers may be following.

``Everyone who comes in here wants one," Greipel said.

In the age of fat-free potato chips, she makes 30 of these desserts a week to keep up with demand at the small, German family restaurant on Brownsboro Road.

``And people want to know why we're not open for lunch," she said.

A self-taught baker, Greipel says her desserts are influenced by her native German heritage. Of course, it's also obvious they have a flair all her own.

“I hate recipes,” she said.

Despite living in a country where “everyone bakes” and spending much of her childhood with an English stepfather who owned a bakery, she couldn't make even a simple cake when she and her husband, Michael Greipel, opened the Gasthaus nine years ago.

“Then I got into it,” she said, “and here we are.”

The couple visited relatives in Louisville during the late 1980s. While here, they noticed two things: a lack of authentic German restaurants and a large number of residents with a German-American heritage.

“We thought we could fill a need,” she said.

And so they returned to Louisville in 1993 and set up Gasthaus.

Determined not to rely on mass-produced, frozen desserts for her restaurant, Greipel developed a few basic recipes that she adapts, changing fruit fillings, liqueurs and decorations to make something new almost every time.

“You use your imagination,” she said. “Anyone could do what I do.”

Well, at least, anyone who has the time.

In Germany, where after-dinner desserts are uncommon, these and even fancier cakes, strudels and tortes are enjoyed in the afternoon “when your friends pop in,” according to Greipel. Bakery windows are filled with “wonderful cakes - each one different from the next.”

A quick flip through her cookbooks reveals a very different world from the American culture of five-minute meals in six easy steps. Nearly every page shows a delicately layered, impossibly decorated cake (called torten) or pastry dessert. There are even nearly unrecognizable, much more difficult versions of American favorites, such as carrot cake. After a while, the visual display is almost numbing.

“I'm always surprised by people's reactions,” Greipel said. “To me, it's nothing.”

She was nice enough to share two of her dessert recipes, the fallen chocolate soufflé and her basic torten layer cake. These have been adapted for a home kitchen and Americanized a bit to use ingredients available here (Greipel imports many of her ingredients from Europe).

Greipel prefers to bake everything at 340 degrees. If your oven does not have a digital display, feel free to use 350 degrees.

A waist is a terrible thing

·o mind with these desserts

Gasthaus fallen

chocolate souffle

This velvety souffle appears a bit complicated but is actually nothing more than a series of simple steps - including melting chocolate, beating egg whites and folding batter.

Greipel recommends doubling the recipe to make two souffles at a time, saying that one can be sliced and frozen for ``midnight snacks."

10 ounces (about 1 3/4 cups chips) high-quality bittersweet chocolate (Greipel prefers Belgian)

13 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 1/3 cups confectioners' sugar

4 eggs, separated

3/4 cup flour

Line a 9-inch round springform pan with parchment paper. Grease edges. Preheat oven to 340 degrees (if you do not have a digital display on your oven, approximate or just use 350 degrees).

Melt chocolate in the top half of a double boiler over hot (not boiling) water. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly, but not enough to reharden, as you continue with the recipe.

Meanwhile, beat butter until it is soft and fluffy. Slowly add sugar beat until mixture is almost white, about 3 minutes.

Beat in egg yolks, one by one, to butter mixture, scraping bowl after each addition. Add flour when completely mixed, stir in chocolate. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, using clean beaters, beat egg whites on low speed until they are foamy. Increase speed to medium until soft billows form in the egg whites. Increase speed to high and beat until stiff peaks form when you lift the beaters, and the eggs slip just a little in the bowl (a lot of slip indicates underbeaten eggs no slip indicates egg whites that might have been beaten too dry).

Spoon egg whites atop chocolate mixture. By hand, fold in egg whites very gently with a rubber spatula.

(To fold: Hold spatula like a knife. ``Cut" straight down the center of mixture, scraping the bottom of the bowl. Pull the spatula along the bottom of the bowl, then lift batter from the bottom up and over egg whites give bowl a quarter-turn and repeat. Batter will lighten as you work, becoming somewhat foamy, not soupy.)

Gently spoon batter into prepared pan. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for approximately 45 minutes. Souffle will still appear soft - with a shiny top - when it's done, but the middle will not jiggle when the pan is shaken. Souffle will fall quite a bit as it cools, giving the top a humped look.

When cool, cover thickly with ganache (recipe follows). Serve with ice cream and whipped cream.

Serves 12 (the pieces are very rich, so cut them small).

Ganache

1 cup heavy whipping cream

2 cups chopped high-quality bittersweet chocolate, or use chips

Heat cream in the top half of a double boiler or in a heavy-bottomed saucepan set over very low heat. Stir in chocolate. Continue to stir and heat until chocolate melts and mixture is smooth. Pour over cake while chocolate is still warm, smoothing it toward the edges to make a shiny glaze ganache will harden as it cools.

Makes approximately 2 1/2 cups.

You may not need all the ganache for one souffle. Leftovers are good reheated and poured over ice cream or served with other desserts.

Torten layered cake

Experienced bakers will be surprised by the ingredients in this cake - there's no butter or milk.

The simple recipe is nothing more than equal amounts of cornstarch and self-rising flour folded into wellbeaten eggs, flavoring and sugar.

When baked, the cake has a spongy texture that easily soaks up the liqueur without becoming too mushy. Fruit and liqueur combinations should depend on your imagination, but to help you start things out, here are a few suggestions: cherries with brandy peaches with amaretto blueberries with white creme de cacao and chocolate ganache with Irish Cream.

Cake:

4 eggs

1 1/2 cups sugar

2 tablespoons lemon juice

3/4 cup self-rising flour

3/4 cup cornstarch

3 tablespoons Dutch baking cocoa (optional, for chocolate cake)

Filling:

2 15-ounce cans fruit of your choice, drained with liquid reserved

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1/4 cup sugar

Approximately 1/2 cup liqueur of your choice (appropriate varieties include Irish Cream, fruit-flavored liqueurs, brandy or rum)

1/4 cup to 1/3 cup apricot preserves (or flavor of your choice)

Topping:

3 cups heavy whipping cream

3 tablespoons powdered sugar

Maraschino cherries, with stems

Make the cake: Preheat oven to 340 degrees (if you do not have a digital display on your oven, approximate or just use 350 degrees). Lightly grease a 9-inch springform pan. Line the bottom with parchment paper that has been cut to fit, and grease again.

Beat eggs until they are foamy. Slowly add 1 1/2 cups sugar beat until sugar is thoroughly combined and mixture is pale yellow. Pour in lemon juice, but don't mix.

Sift flour and cornstarch (and cocoa, if using) over eggs gently fold into egg mixture, incorporating lemon juice as you do. Spoon into springform pan and bake 35 minutes, or until slightly brown and puffy - test with a toothpick all the way through to make sure cake is baked the toothpick should have a few crumbs attached. The finished layer will be approximately 1 1/2 inches high.

Remove from pan and cool on wire rack. (Cake may be wrapped well and frozen at this point.)

When cool, divide into 3 1/2-inchthick layers, cutting horizontally and removing the top layer first.

Make the filling: Place 1 cup reserved liquid from fruit in a saucepan with cornstarch and 1/4 cup sugar. Stir to combine evenly and make sure all the lumps are out of the cornstarch. Bring to a boil and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Make the topping: Beat together heavy whipping cream and powdered sugar. Set aside.

Assemble the dessert: Place bottom cake layer on a plate. Sprinkle with liqueur or liquor of your choice. Using a pastry bag and a large star tip, pipe a puffy, wavy line of whipped cream around the top edge of the cake layer. (If you want to be fancy, pipe shells or stars.) In the center of this circle of whipped cream, spread a few spoonfuls of fruit and a few spoonfuls of fruit glaze, being careful not to melt the whipped cream. Add a puff of whipped cream in the center, to help support the cake.

Place second layer on top of the first. Spread with apricot preserves. Pipe another line, or decoration, around the edge of the cake layer. Fill the center with a puff of whipped cream.

Top with third cake layer. Sprinkle more liqueur onto layer. Pipe another whipped cream edge around the top. Spoon remaining fruit and glaze (you may not need to use all the glaze) into the middle. Decorate with cherries.

Optional step: Frost sides of cake with whipped cream.

Variation: Make a chocolate torten: Place bottom layer on a plate. Sprinkle with liqueur of your choice. Spread with chocolate ganache (see recipe above). Using a pastry bag and large star tip, pipe a thick, wavy line of whipped cream, or a series of shells or stars, around the layer's edge. Pipe a puff of whipped cream in the middle.

Place second layer atop first. Spread with apricot preserves. Pipe whipped cream edge around layer. Pipe a puff of whipped cream in the middle.

Top with third layer. Sprinkle with liqueur. Cover with ganache (if you wish, frost entire cake with ganache). Pipe decorative puffs of whipped cream around top. Sprinkle with chopped chocolate. Top with maraschino cherries.

Variation: Make a combined cake: Spread bottom and top layers with both chocolate ganache (recipe above) and fruit cherries are a good choice for this cake.

Serves 12.

PHOTOS BY JOHN SOMMERS II, SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Annemarie Greipel's creations at the Gasthaus Restaurant recently included a lemon roll, far right, and an Irish whiskey layered torten, second from left in front.

Greipel makes 30 desserts a week, like this puff pastry layered with cherries.

BY JOHN SOMMERS II, SPECIAL TO THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Annemarie Greipel makes 30 desserts a week for her Gasthaus Restaurant on Brownsboro Road. Greipel, a self-taught baker, says her German-inspired desserts aren't "for slimmers."

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