

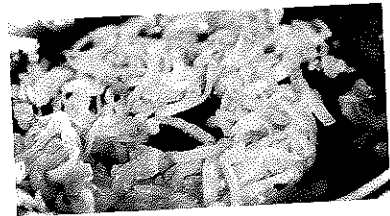
BREAKFAST BREAD PUDDING



Makes 8 to 10 servings

Make this breakfast casserole the night before and store it, unbaked, in the fridge. Then just pop it in the oven when you get out of bed the next morning. Hearty and divine!

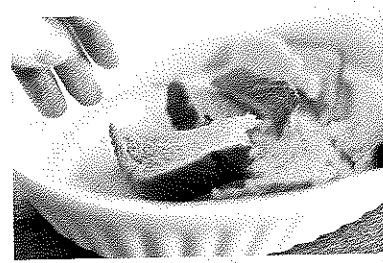
- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 pound breakfast sausage
- 8 slices Texas toast (or other thick-sliced bread), lightly toasted and set aside to dry for a few hours
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese
- 8 eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup half-and-half
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Dash of cayenne pepper (optional)



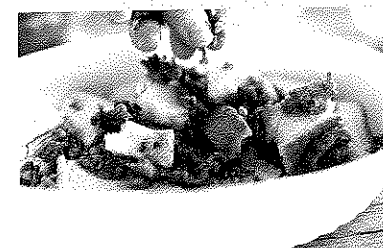
1. In a large skillet over medium heat, sauté the onion in 2 tablespoons of the butter until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Remove to a plate.



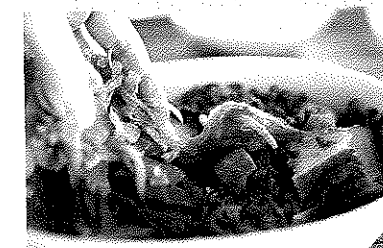
2. Brown and crumble the breakfast sausage in the same skillet. Set aside.



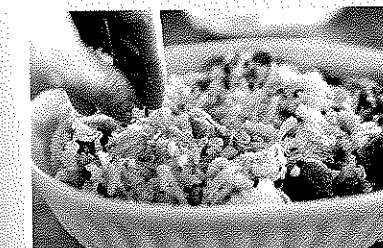
3. Use the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter to grease a 2-quart baking dish. Tear the Texas toast into chunks and lay half of them in the dish.



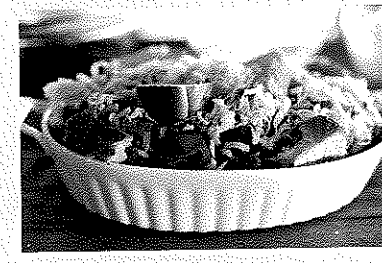
4. Add half the crumbled sausage . . .



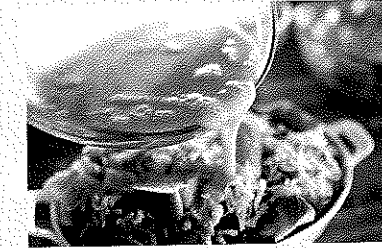
5. Half the onions . . .



6. Half the red pepper, and half the cheese.



7. Repeat the layers, ending with the cheese and arranging a few chunks of the crust so they stick out of the top.

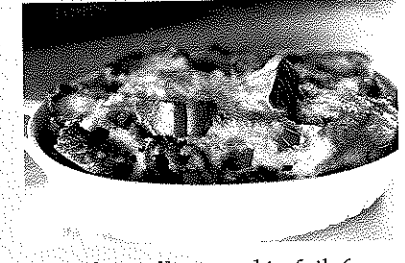


8. Lightly beat together the eggs and half-and-half. Stir in salt and pepper to taste and a bit of cayenne, if you want a little heat. Pour the egg mixture over the top.

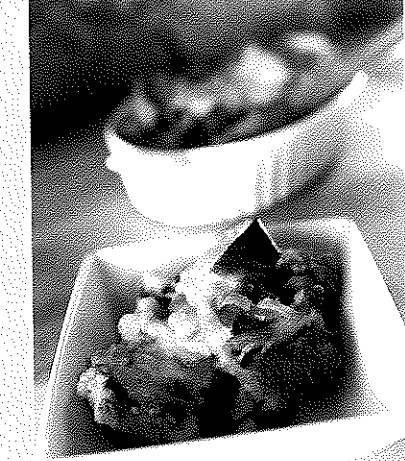


9. Cover the dish with aluminum foil and place it in the fridge for several hours or overnight.

10. Preheat the oven to 350°F.



11. Bake, still covered in foil, for 20 minutes, then remove the foil and bake for 10 to 15 minutes more, or until the top is golden brown.



12. Dish it up and serve immediately.

Variations

- Substitute crumbled bacon or diced ham for the sausage.
- Use crusty French bread or ciabatta bread instead of Texas toast.
- Substitute Cheddar or Swiss for the Monterey Jack.

COWGIRL QUICHE



Makes one 10-inch quiche, to serve about 8

My cowgirl version of quiche is a little more girly . . . and every bit as delicious.

16 ounces white mushrooms,
washed and sliced

2 leeks

2 tablespoons butter

8 eggs

1½ cups heavy cream

2 cups grated Swiss cheese

Salt and black pepper to taste

8 thin slices prosciutto (or any
good ham)

1 recipe Pam's Piecrust (page 37),
enough for a deep pie dish or tart
pan



1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.



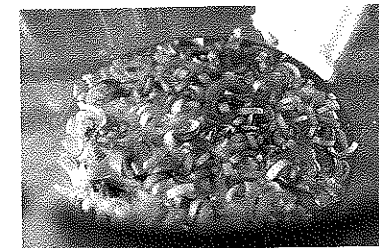
2. Place the mushrooms on a large
baking sheet. Roast in the oven for
15 to 20 minutes, or until golden
brown. Remove from the oven and
set aside.



3. Meanwhile, lop off the tops and
bottoms of the leeks and cut them
in half lengthwise.



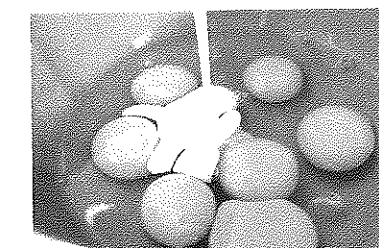
4. Slice each half thinly . . .



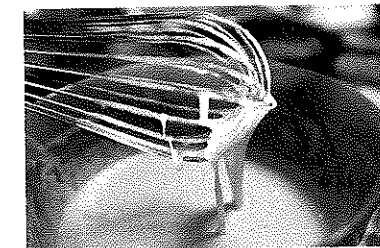
5. And soak the leeks in cold water
for about 10 minutes to remove
any grit or dirt.



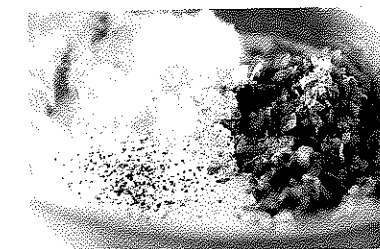
6. In a large skillet over medium
heat, sauté the leeks in the butter
until golden brown and beginning
to caramelize, 8 to 10 minutes. Set
aside.



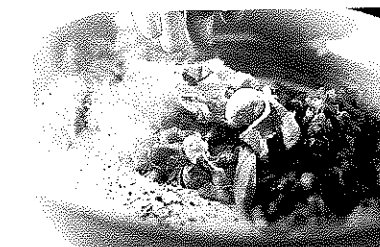
7. For the quiche base, add the
eggs and cream to a medium bowl.



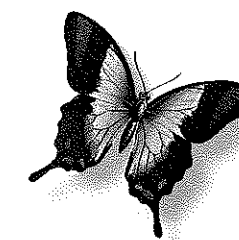
8. Whisk them to combine.



9. Stir in the leeks, mushrooms,
grated cheese, salt and pepper . . .



10. And prosciutto.



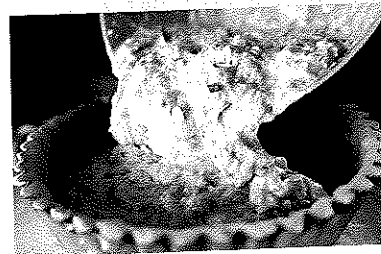
Confession: for the longest time I
thought "heifer" and "Hereford" were
the same thing. I'm not proud of this.



11. The mixture should be very thick!



13. Remove it from the oven and allow it to sit for at least 10 minutes before serving.



12. Pour it into the pie shell, then cover it loosely with a sheet of aluminum foil to prevent it from getting too brown on top. Bake for 45 minutes, then remove the foil and bake for an additional 10 minutes.



14. If you're using one of these funky pans, carefully lift the quiche out of the pan. Ta-dal (That looks like my foot, but I promise it isn't.)



15. Place it on a cutting board and slice wedges with a serrated knife.

Delicious for breakfast, even better for lunch with a salad and a bunch of juicy grapes.

Variation

Stir 2 tablespoons Pesto (page 137) into the quiche mixture before baking.

Gathering cattle on a warm summer morning. It's the stuff that dreams—and laundry rooms—were made of.

PAM'S PIECRUST

Makes one 9-inch, 2-crust pie

My good friend and fellow homeschooling mother Pam Regentin has a wedding cake business in Oregon called Fleur Cakes, but she's just as well known for her pies. Pam visited the ranch to teach a pie workshop once, and everyone fell madly in love with her crust.

Butter was to blame.

2½ cups all-purpose or pastry flour

1 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon sugar

1 cup (2 sticks) cold butter, cut into chunks

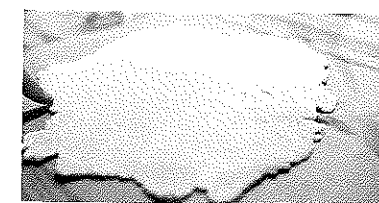
¼ cup cold water



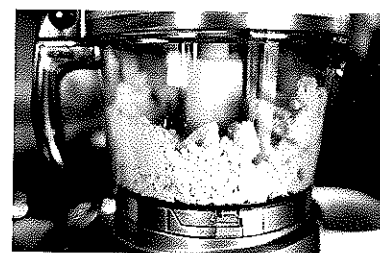
1. Lightly mix 2 cups of the flour, the salt, and the sugar in a mixing bowl or in the bowl of a food processor.



3. Do not overmix this flour. It should coat the clumps.



5. Have ready 2 sheets of parchment paper that are each at least 12 inches square. Place 1 disc of dough between them. (If the dough is sticky for any reason, don't worry. Just sprinkle some flour on the parchment to get started. You shouldn't have to add much for it to stop sticking.) Starting at the center, roll the pin out to the edge. Turn the dough and parchment as necessary and continue rolling, always from the center to the outer edge. After a couple of rolls, lift the parchment paper away from the dough to loosen and replace the parchment. Flip the whole thing and loosen the other paper sheet. Continue rolling until the dough is large enough for your pie pan.



2. Cut the butter into the flour using a pastry cutter or by pulsing the food processor. The mixture should look like large crumbs and begin to cling together in clumps. Add the remaining ½ cup flour and mix lightly or pulse the processor 2 or 3 times.



4. Sprinkle the cold water over the dough and with your hands or a wooden spoon, mix it in until the dough holds together, then shape the dough into 2 discs. At this point, you may wrap the dough in plastic wrap for storage; it will keep up to a week in the fridge or up to 6 months in the freezer.

Use with Cowboy Quiche (page 32), and Cowgirl Quiche (page 34).

BASIC CHICKEN SALAD



Makes 8 servings

Chicken salad is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna git. This is chicken salad the way I like it! And my way is the best way. In my own mind. As far as I'm concerned. According to me.

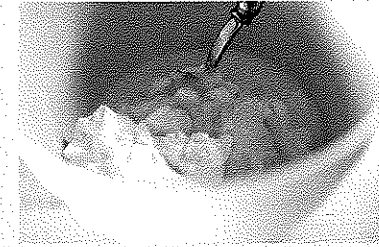
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup plain yogurt or sour cream
- ½ cup half-and-half
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Kosher salt to taste

- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 cups shredded or diced cooked chicken
- 2 or 3 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 green onions, sliced (white and light green parts only)
- 2 to 3 cups red and green grapes, halved

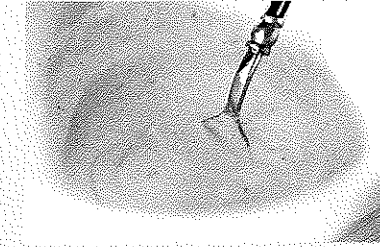
½ cup slivered almonds, lightly toasted in a small skillet until golden brown

A small handful of fresh dill, minced

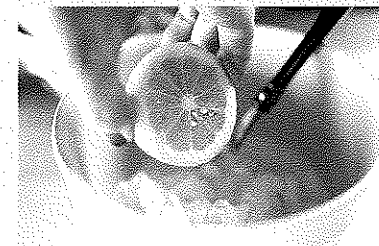
Sandwich bread, croissants, store-bought crepes, lettuce, or radicchio, for serving



1. First, stir together the mayonnaise, yogurt, and half-and-half. This is the base of the chicken salad dressing, and you can change it up by adding whatever spices or ingredients you like.



5. Stir this together and set it aside for a second. Okay, fine—37 seconds.



2. Add the lemon juice . . .



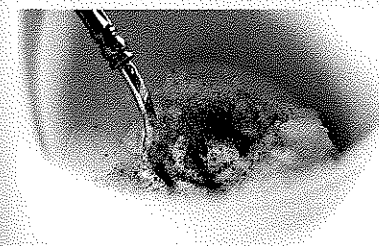
6. Throw the chicken, celery, green onions, and grapes into a bowl.



3. Sugar . . .



7. Pour three-quarters of the dressing over the top.



4. And some salt and pepper.



8. Toss it together, then toss in the slivered almonds . . .



9. And the fresh dill. Fresh dill makes chicken salad dreamy!



10. Give it a final toss and a final taste, adjusting whatever seasonings you think it needs and adding more dressing if it needs more moisture.

11. Wrap it inside a crepe or croissant, or between two slices of toasted bread, or serve it alone on a big leaf of lettuce or radicchio.

Cutie patootie!



CURRIED CHICKEN PASTA SALAD



Makes 8 to 10 servings

Use the Basic Chicken Salad recipe to create this gorgeous, colorful, and exceedingly flavorful curry pasta version, which you can serve by itself or wrapped in a crepe or flatbread. So, so wonderfully good.

1 recipe Basic Chicken Salad (page 50)

2 tablespoons brown sugar
3 tablespoons curry powder,
more or less to taste

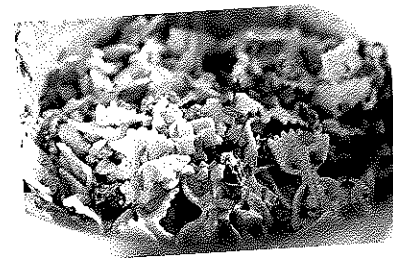
6 ounces bow tie pasta, cooked
and drained
¾ cup regular or golden raisins



1. Mix up the Basic Chicken Salad dressing, substituting the brown sugar for the regular sugar. Stir in the curry powder.



2. In a large bowl, combine the chicken salad ingredients and the pasta, substituting the raisins for the grapes. Pour on the curry dressing . . .



3. And toss it around to combine.
Perfect chicken salad with a scrumptious curry kick! To die for.



SPICY GRILLED VEGETABLE PANINI

Makes 4 sandwiches

I love panini. I don't know what magical thing happens when you smash a loaded sandwich between two sides of a panini press, but I do know I like it.

This panini is so darn good, you'll seriously want to cry. When I make it, I always tell myself I'm only going to be able to eat half . . . and I wind up wolfing down the whole darn thing.

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons
balsamic vinegar

Salt and black pepper to taste

1 yellow squash, cut into thick
diagonal slices

1 zucchini, cut into thick
diagonal slices

1 red bell pepper, seeded
and cut into large chunks

1 yellow bell pepper, seeded
and cut into large chunks

2 cups sliced button mushrooms

5 tablespoons butter

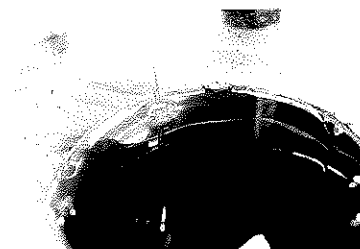
2 roma tomatoes, sliced

¼ cup mayonnaise

¼ cup hot pepper jelly
(the spicier, the better!)

12 to 16 slices pepper jack cheese

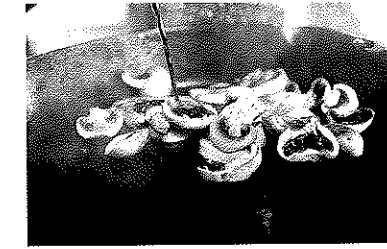
8 thick slices crusty French bread



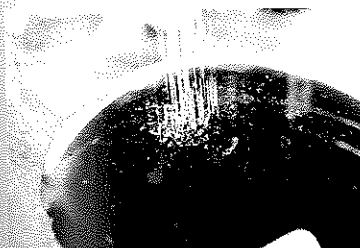
1. Make a marinade for the vegetables by combining the olive oil and ¼ cup of the balsamic vinegar in a large bowl.



3. Throw the squash, zucchini, and peppers into the bowl . . .



5. In a small skillet over medium-high heat, sauté the mushrooms in 1 tablespoon of the butter and the remaining 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar until golden brown, about 5 minutes.



2. Add salt and pepper to taste and mix together.



4. And toss them together to coat. Set aside.



6. Remove the mushrooms to a plate and set aside.

BRIE-STUFFED MUSHROOMS



Makes about 16 to 18 mushrooms

You'll love these elegant (but very simple) stuffed mushrooms. They're beautiful and decadent and divine, and are the perfect little bite to serve before a dinner party. Guests will kiss you and demand to be invited back next time.

(Whether or not you invite them back is entirely up to you and outside the scope of my involvement. I just wanted to mention it.)



12 ounces white button mushrooms, washed
½ stick butter
¼ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley

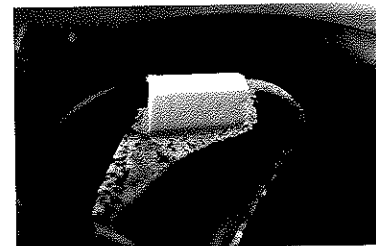
4 garlic cloves, minced
4 or 5 green onions, sliced (up to the middle of the dark green part)

Splash of white wine (optional)
One 8-ounce wedge Brie cheese, cut into bite-size chunks

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.



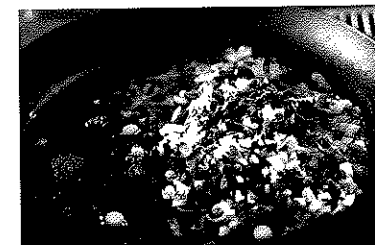
2. Remove the stems from the mushrooms.



3. Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat.



4. When the butter is melted and the skillet is hot, throw in the mushroom caps and toss them around for a minute.



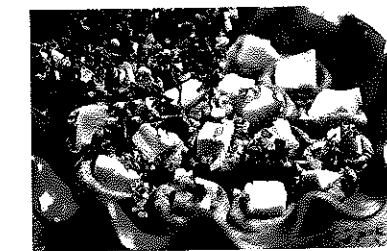
5. Remove the mushrooms from the skillet and set them aside. Throw in the parsley, garlic, and green onions. Add the wine if you're using it. Stir and cook for 1 to 2 minutes to release all the flavors, then remove from the heat.



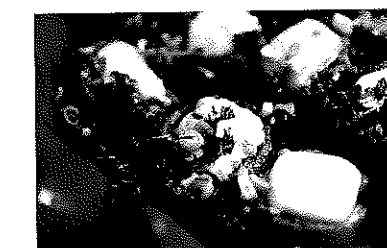
6. Place the mushroom caps in a baking dish.



7. Place a chunk of Brie inside of each cap . . .



8. Then pour the parsley mixture all over the top.



9. Bake the mushrooms for 15 minutes, or until the cheese is melted. Serve them straight out of the oven or at room temperature a little bit later.

These are perfect little pop-in-your-mouth delights. You'll love them.

Variations

- Use a combination of herbs (parsley, basil, sage) on the mushrooms.
- Use chunks of fresh mozzarella instead of Brie.
- Place a few stuffed mushrooms in between 2 slices of crusty French bread: stuffed mushroom sandwich!

CAPRESE SALAD



Makes 8 to 12 servings

If something better than Caprese Salad exists on Earth, I haven't yet found what it is. In fact, I challenge anyone to show me something better than Caprese Salad! Go ahead. I'll wait.

See? You couldn't do it. I tried to tell you to save you the effort!

I love Caprese Salad. I love it in the morning and I love it in the night. I love it as a main-dish salad for lunch, and I love it as a side dish for dinner. I love it as a midnight snack, and I love it as a midafternoon snack, and I love it as a mid-late-early-dinner snack.

Have I mentioned I love Caprese Salad? Oh, good. I thought I'd forgotten.

This is a good one. The thick, glossy balsamic reduction makes for a gorgeous presentation and rich flavor. Try it sometime soon!

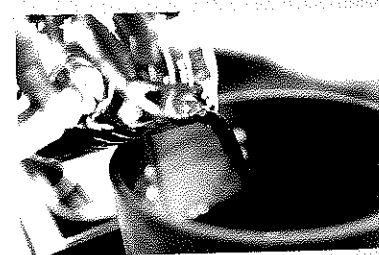
2 cups balsamic vinegar
3 ripe tomatoes

12 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, thickly sliced
Fresh basil leaves

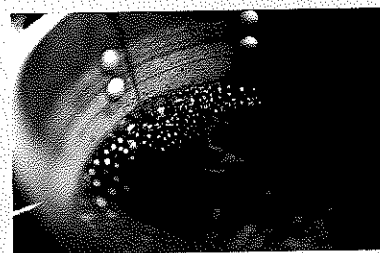
Olive oil, for drizzling
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper



1. Measure the balsamic vinegar . . .



2. And pour it into a saucepan.



3. Bring it to a gentle boil over low heat.



4. Cook it for about 15 minutes, or until the balsamic has reduced to a nice, thick (but still pourable) glaze. Oh, and one other thing: Your house will stink. But it's a good kind of stink. It's a vinegar kind of stink.

I'll stop talking now. Just allow the reduction to cool to room temperature before you serve it.



5. When you're ready to assemble the salad, cut the tomatoes into thick slices.



6. Arrange them on a platter, alternating them with the mozzarella slices.



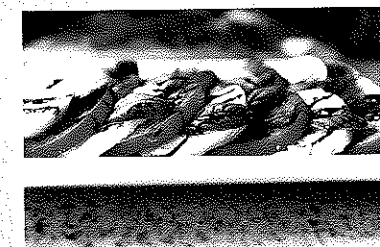
7. Tuck whole basil leaves in between the tomato and cheese slices.



8. Drizzle olive oil in a thin stream over the top.



9. Then drizzle on the gorgeous, almost-black balsamic reduction.



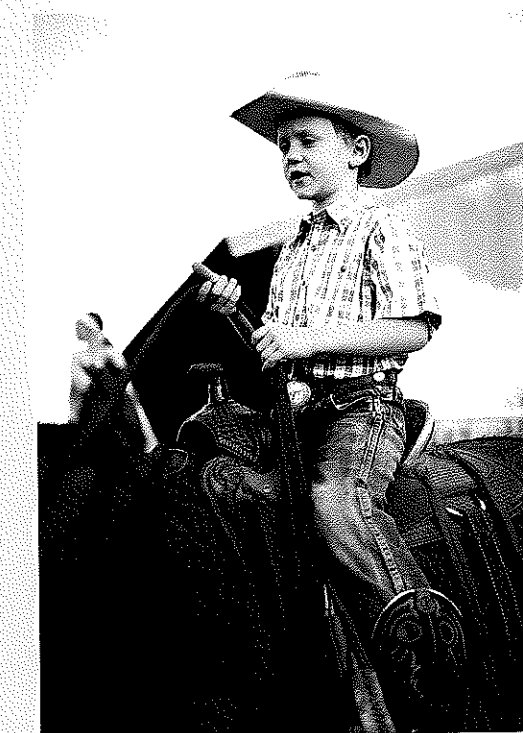
10. Finally, sprinkle salt and pepper on top.

You need this in your life. Make it today, my friends.

Variations

- Use different varieties of heirloom tomatoes for a beautiful presentation.
- Substitute peach slices for the tomatoes for a sweeter salad.
- Use leftovers to make a Caprese sandwich. Spread Pesto (page 137) on the bread and add chopped Greek olives to send it over the top.

When I first saw my husband on a horse, I remember thinking there was no more beautiful sight in the world. Then I saw my baby on a horse, and it was all over.



WHISKEY-MUSTARD MEATBALLS



Makes about thirty 1-inch meatballs

These pop-in-your-mouth meatballs are perfect for any party, from the Super Bowl all the way to New Year's Eve. I can never eat just one. Or two. Or three.

Or four.
I'll stop now.

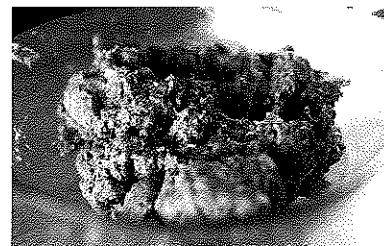
1 pound ground beef
1 pound ground pork
1½ cup panko bread crumbs
1 egg

Salt and black pepper to taste
½ cup spicy mustard
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 cup whiskey

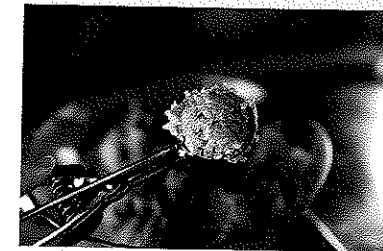
3 cups beef broth
3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 cup heavy cream



1. In a bowl, combine the beef, pork, bread crumbs, egg, salt and pepper, and ¼ cup of the spicy mustard.



2. With your hands (or a large spoon), mix the ingredients until they're well combined.



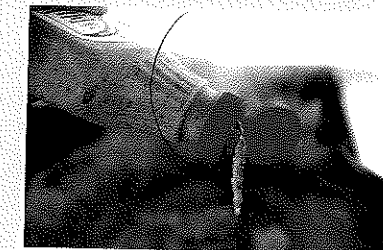
3. Use a cookie scoop or teaspoon to form balls, using your hands to shape if necessary. Place the meatballs on a cookie sheet and freeze for 10 to 15 minutes, just to firm them up.



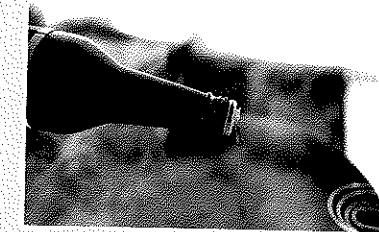
4. Heat the canola oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the meatballs in 3 batches, turning them to cook all over, 5 to 7 minutes to a batch. Remove the meatballs to a plate as they're done.



5. When all the meatballs are on the plate, pour the whiskey and beef broth into the skillet. Allow the mixture to bubble up and reduce for 3 to 5 minutes, or until slightly thicker.



6. Then stir in the remaining ¼ cup spicy mustard . . .



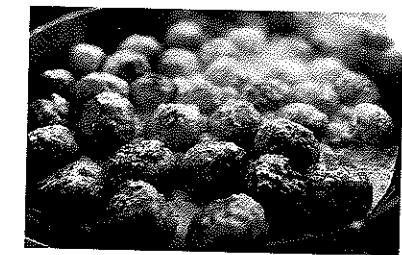
7. And the Worcestershire sauce. Stir and cook for another couple of minutes.



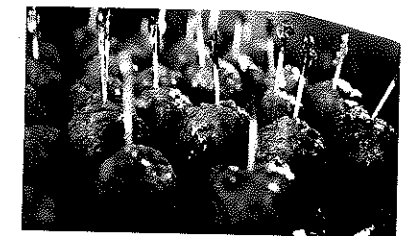
8. Finally, pour in the heavy cream and stir it to combine.



9. Add the browned meatballs back into the sauce.



10. Simmer for 5 to 7 minutes, or until the meatballs are cooked through.



11. Turn the skillet into a makeshift chafing dish and stick toothpicks into each meatball. Serve immediately.

Savory, spicy, and scrumptious!

Variations

- Serve over buttered egg noodles for a main-course dish.
- Place in the middle of split dinner rolls to make Meatball Sliders (page 103).



The eyes are the window to a doggie's soul.

CHERRY LIMEADE

Makes 12 to 16 servings

Cherry limeade is a summer staple where I live. It's got the nice tartness of lime and the sugary wonderfulness of bright red maraschino cherries (my youngest child's favorite part!).

I don't want to lead anyone astray, but splashing in a little vodka turns this innocent summer refreshment into a . . . well, a not-so-innocent summer refreshment. But you didn't hear that from me.

1 cup freshly squeezed lime juice
1 cup sugar

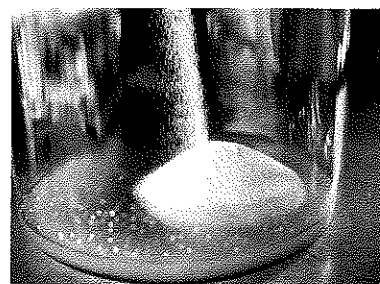
One 2-liter bottle lemon-lime soda
One 5-ounce jar maraschino cherries, with juice

Thin lime slices, for garnish

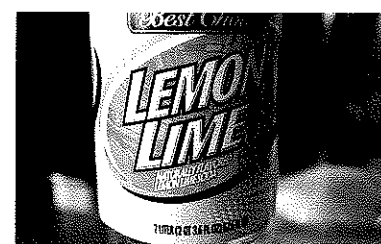
1. Begin by chilling all the ingredients thoroughly before using. Everything needs to be very cold.



2. When the ingredients are cold, add the lime juice to a pitcher or vat.



3. Add the sugar.



4. Then grab the lemon-lime soda . . .



5. And pour it right in.



6. After that, dump in a whole jar of maraschino cherries—juice and all! If you prefer the cherry limeade to be more on the light pink side, drain the cherries before adding them (and discard the juice).

7. Finally, add plenty of lime slices on top. Serve the limeade in a big, tall glass filled with ice, piling in plenty of cherries and lime slices. They're part of the treat, too!

Variations

- Make a cherry limeade float by placing two scoops of vanilla ice cream in a large glass and pouring the limeade over the top.
- Spike with vodka or rum for an adult version. But only if you're an adult. Thank you for your cooperation.



FANCY MAC AND CHEESE

Makes 12 servings

This is one of those recipes that can definitely be described as ridiculous, where *ridiculous* means so decadent, delicious, and divine that it almost renders the person eating it speechless. A little goes a long way with this one. Invite lots of guests . . . preferably guests you really, really like!

16 ounces white button or cremini mushrooms, quartered
Olive oil, for drizzling
Kosher salt and black pepper to taste
8 slices thick-cut bacon
2 yellow onions, peeled, halved, and thinly sliced

5 tablespoons butter, plus more for buttering the pan
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
½ cup grated Gruyère cheese
½ cup grated fontina cheese
4 ounces goat cheese (chèvre)
1½ pounds macaroni

¼ cup all-purpose flour
2 cups whole milk
½ cup half-and-half
2 eggs, beaten
4 ounces crumbled Gorgonzola or other blue cheese



1. Preheat the oven to 425°F.



2. Drizzle the mushrooms with olive oil, then sprinkle them with salt and pepper.



3. Roast them in the oven until deep golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Set aside. Try not to eat them before the macaroni's done.



4. Next, fry thick slices of bacon until chewy but not yet crisp.



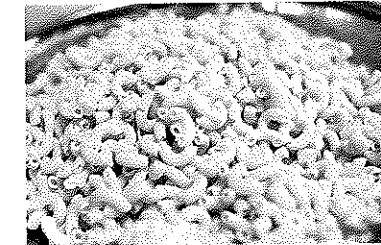
5. Chop up the bacon into bite-size bits. Set aside. Try not to eat them before the macaroni's done.



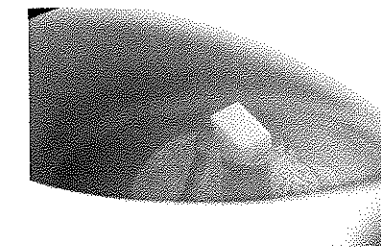
6. In a large skillet over medium-low heat, sauté the onions in 1 tablespoon butter, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 15 minutes. Set aside. Try not to . . . oh, never mind.



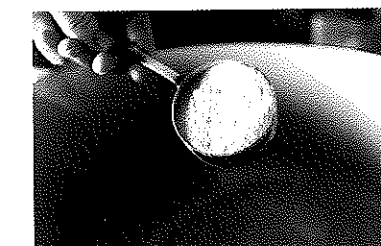
7. Grate the Parmesan, Gruyère, and fontina cheeses. Unwrap the goat cheese.



8. Cook the macaroni until just undercooked. Set aside.

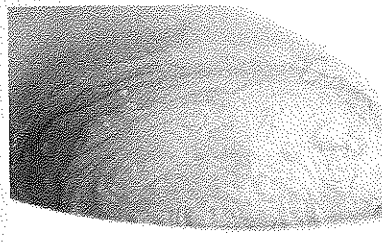


9. To make the sauce, melt the remaining 4 tablespoons butter in a large pot over medium heat.



10. Sprinkle in the flour, whisking to combine.

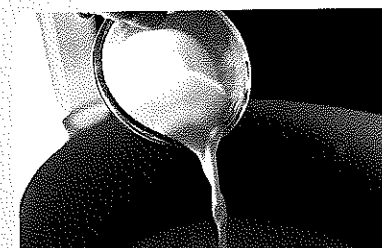




11. Let the roux cook for a minute or so, whisking constantly.



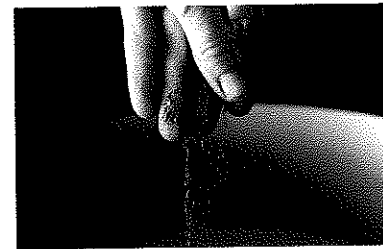
12. Then pour in the milk, whisking constantly. Cook the white sauce for 3 to 5 minutes, or until thick and bubbly.



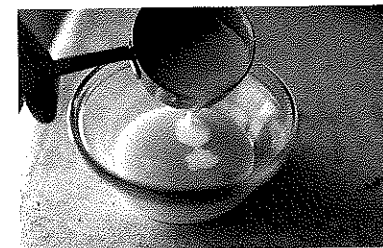
13. Next, add the half-and-half . . .



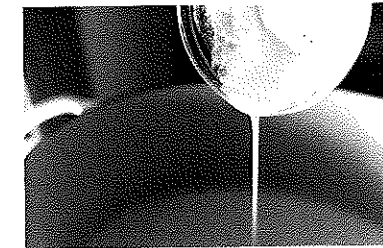
14. 1 teaspoon salt . . .
(Freaky pink alien claw alert!)



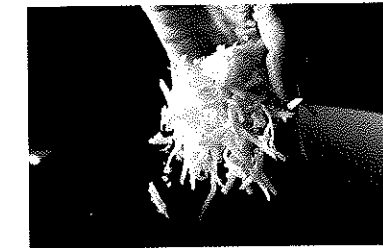
15. And ½ teaspoon pepper.



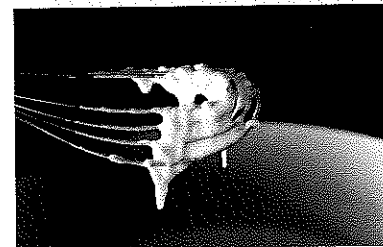
16. Spoon some of the hot sauce into the beaten eggs to temper them, stirring with a fork to incorporate the mixture without cooking the eggs.



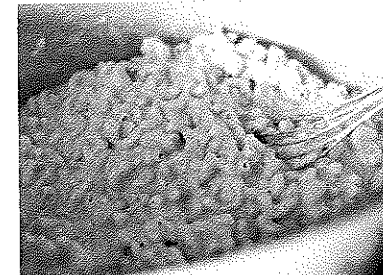
17. Pour the tempered eggs into the white sauce, stirring constantly as you add them.



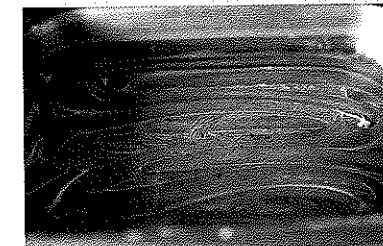
18. Add the Parmesan, Gruyère, fontina, and goat cheeses.



19. Stir until the cheeses melt.



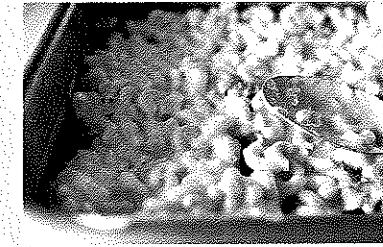
20. Add the cooked macaroni and stir to coat. Splash in a little milk or hot water if needed for thinning.



21. Preheat the oven to 350°F and butter a 9 x 13-inch baking pan.



22. Lay on half the onions . . .



23. Half the macaroni . . .



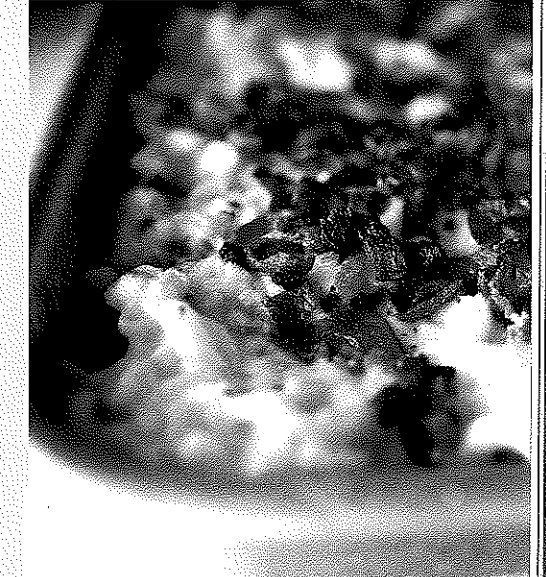
25. Half the Gorgonzola . . .



24. Half the mushrooms . . .



26. And half the bacon.

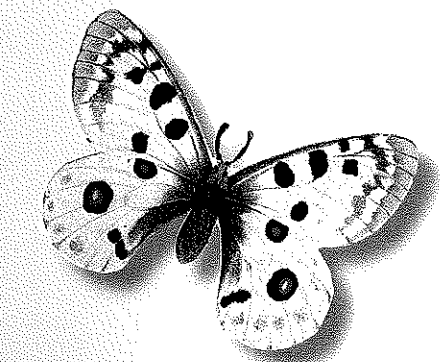


27. Repeat the layers, ending with the bacon. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until bubbly and hot.

This is the stuff that dreams—and love handles—are made of.

Variations

- Substitute diced ham or pancetta for the bacon.
- Use different cheeses to your liking.
- Serve with steak or chicken as a side dish, or with a green salad as a main dish.



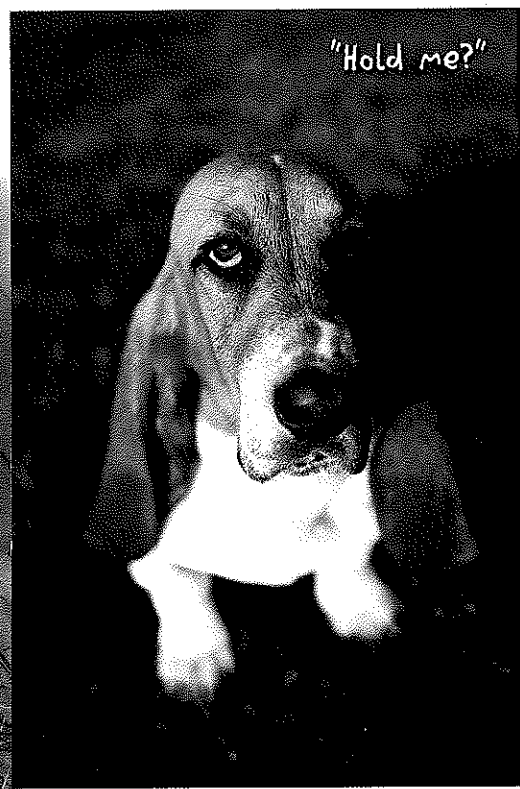
TWICE-BAKED NEW POTATOES



Makes 8 servings

These are a yummy, diminutive version of good ol' twice-baked potatoes, and maybe a tiny bit fancier. But only a tiny bit.

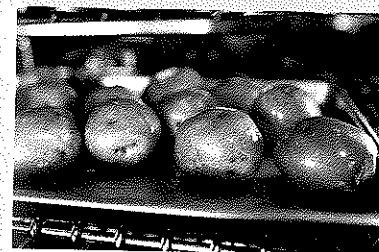
- 12 new potatoes, scrubbed clean
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1½ cups grated Monterey Jack cheese
- 1 tablespoon minced chives
- 1 garlic clove, finely minced
- Salt and black pepper to taste



1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.



2. Drizzle the potatoes with the olive oil and toss them to coat.



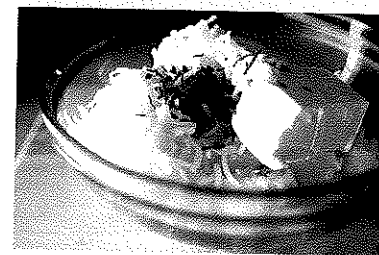
3. Roast the potatoes for 20 to 25 minutes, or until they are tender and the skin is slightly crisp.



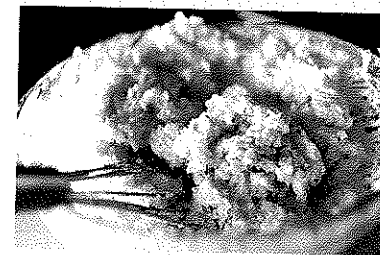
4. Halve the potatoes. Use a spoon or small scoop to remove the insides, leaving a small margin of potato intact.



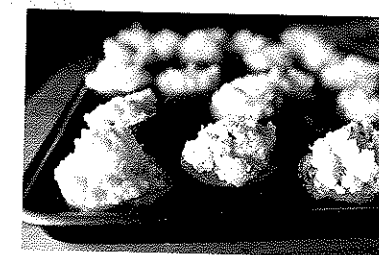
5. To the scooped-out potatoes, add the cream cheese, sour cream . . .



6. Monterey Jack, chives, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste.



7. Mash until the potato mixture is totally smooth. Give it a taste and add more salt if needed.



8. Scoop the mixture into the potato shells. At this point, you can cover and refrigerate them until dinnertime.



9. Bake the potatoes for 20 to 25 minutes, or until golden brown on top. Serve with steaks, chicken, or just a nice green salad and a glass of wine.

Enjoy!

Variation

Add a little goat cheese to the potato mixture for extra creaminess.

Hint: You can make these up to 3 days ahead of time and store, unbaked, in the fridge.



STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE CAKE

Makes one 10-inch cake

I made this cake a few years ago on a whim . . . and what a delightful whim it turned out to be. It's a spin on strawberry shortcake, but the cake is, well, cake—not the biscuit-like disc in the classic strawberry shortcake recipe. I added cream cheese frosting instead of whipped cream, just for kicks, and it turned out to be just what the whole mess of deliciousness needed.

This is one of my father-in-law's three favorite desserts. He likes to eat it for breakfast.

I do too, now that I think about it!

CAKE

½ cup (1 stick) plus 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

1½ cups plus 3 tablespoons granulated sugar

3 large eggs

½ cup sour cream, at room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1½ cups all-purpose flour

3 tablespoons cornstarch

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking soda

STRAWBERRIES

1 pound strawberries, hulled and halved

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

One 8-ounce package cream cheese, at room temperature

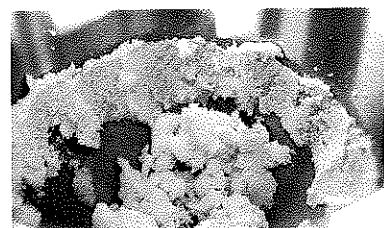
1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter

1½ pounds powdered sugar, sifted

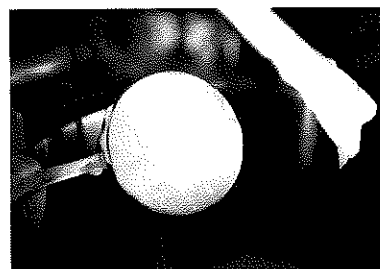
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon salt

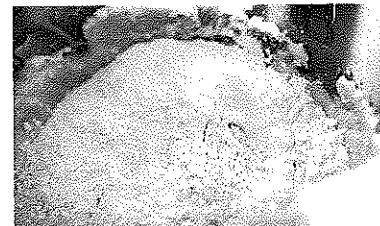
1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Grease and flour a 9-inch round cake pan that's at least 2 inches deep (or you can split the batter between 2 pans if they're not deep enough).



2. To make the cake batter, beat together the butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.



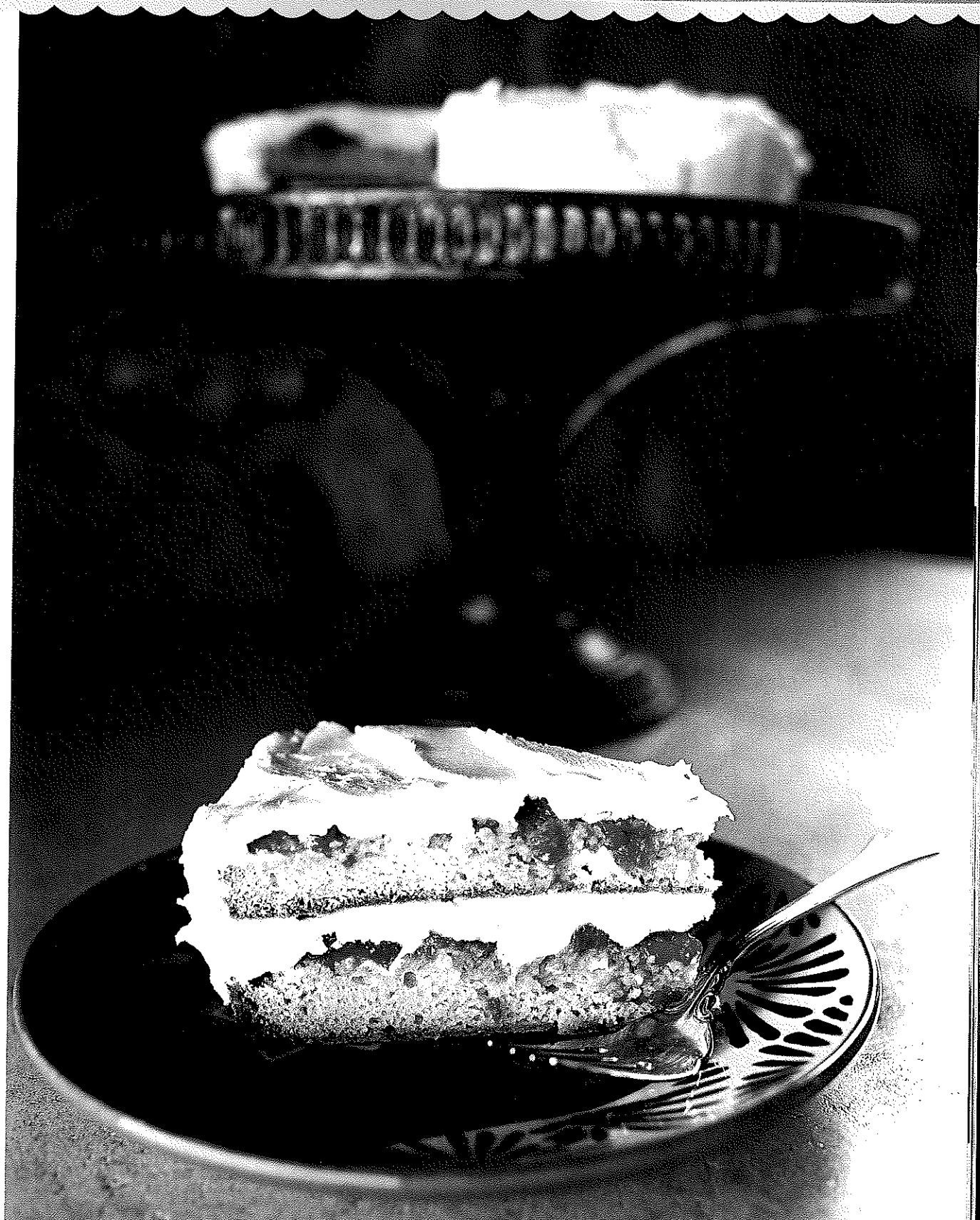
3. Add the sour cream and vanilla, then mix until just combined.

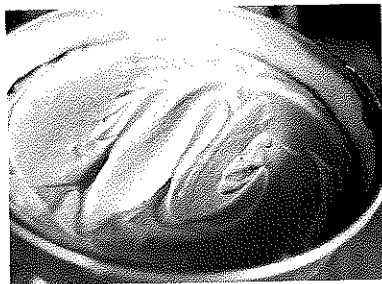


4. Sift together the flour, cornstarch, salt, and baking soda and add it to the bowl.

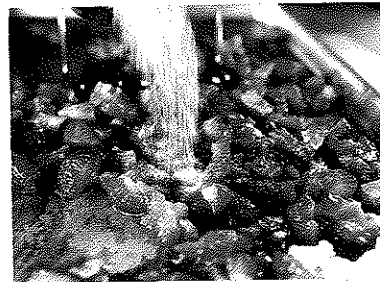


5. Mix it together until just combined.





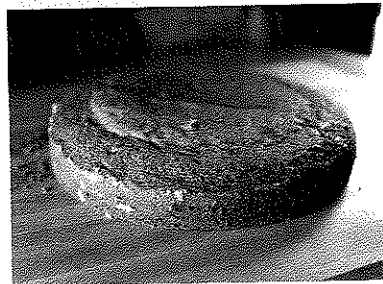
6. Spread it in the pan or pans and bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until the cake is no longer jiggly like my bottom.



9. Sprinkle the strawberries with the sugar. Toss them around and allow them to sit for a little while.



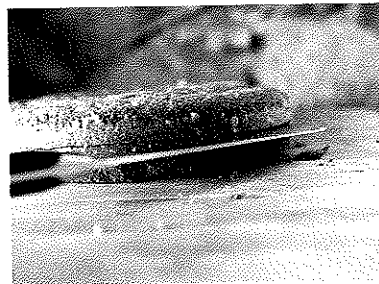
12. Mix until very light and fluffy. Warning: You'll feel like eating this bowl of icing before you even get it on the cake.



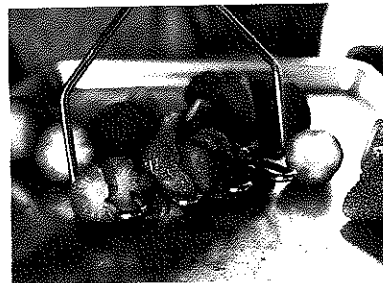
7. Carefully remove the cake from the pan and allow it to cool completely.



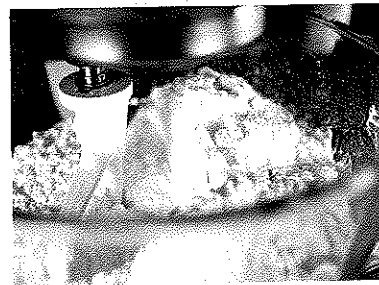
10. They'll give off this beautiful liquid after several minutes. Try not to drink it with a straw.



13. To assemble the cake, use a sharp knife to cut it in half through the middle. It's easier if you go all around the perimeter of the cake, slicing only halfway through the circle the whole way.



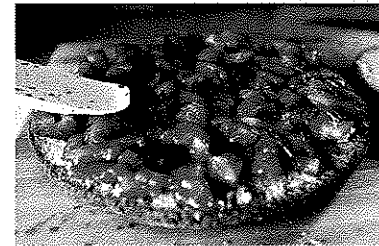
8. Next, mash the strawberries with a potato masher or a fork (reserve a few for garnish if you like).



11. To make the frosting, combine the cream cheese, butter, powdered sugar, vanilla, and salt in a mixing bowl.



14. Lay the two halves cut side up.



15. And cover both halves with an equal amount of strawberries. Then—this is an important step!—place the cake halves in the freezer for 15 to 20 minutes. This'll firm up the surface of the strawberries just a bit so that it's easier to spread on the icing.



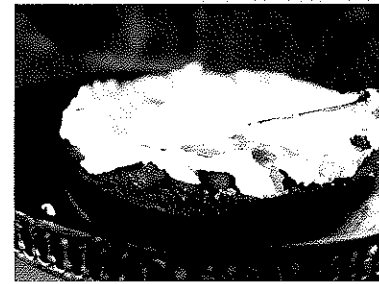
18. Carefully ice the outside of the cake with the remaining icing.



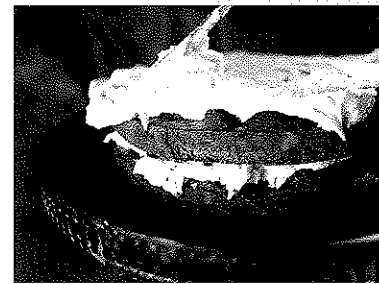
19. Lovely! You can certainly decorate the top of the cake with strawberry slices, too.

But I'm hungry and want to eat, so I'll skip that part.

Store leftovers in the fridge. The cake can be made up to 24 hours in advance.



16. Remove the cakes from the freezer and place one layer on a cake stand or platter. Cover with a little less than a third of the icing.



17. Place the second layer on top, then spread the top with icing.

