

QUINOA SALAD WITH CURRANTS & PECANS

I say quinoa salad is the new pasta salad! Just like pasta, it goes with just about any toppings and is delicious when tossed with a simple, light dressing—but it's also a great high-protein starch that doesn't land with a *thud* in your belly. This sweet-savory mix with red onions, currants, and pecans plus fresh Persian cucumbers and olive oil-lemon juice dressing is perfect as a side, or you could serve it on a bed of greens or with a cup of soup and call it lunch. It's perfect for packing up to go because it holds really nicely in the fridge, even overnight.

Serves 2 or 3

1 pound tricolor quinoa, cooked according to the package directions

½ small red onion, diced

½ cup dried currants

½ cup pecans, toasted (see Note, page 38)

½ cup diced Persian cucumber

¼ cup fresh lemon juice (from about 2 lemons)

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup crumbled feta cheese

1 tablespoon coarsely chopped fresh parsley

In a medium bowl, combine the cooked quinoa, onion, currants, pecans, and cucumber. Put the lemon juice in a separate small bowl and slowly whisk in the olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Drizzle the dressing over the quinoa salad and toss to evenly coat. Top with the feta and parsley and serve.



SOUTHERN CALI SALAD WITH FARRO

This salad is all about Southern California—it's fresh, it's light, and it's got just the right healthy-to-delicious ratio. There's hearty, chewy farro plus tons of texture from jicama, Marcona almonds, grapes, and raisins. The whole lot gets heaped onto a big bed of greens—any kind will do—dotted with tangy goat cheese and drizzled with thyme vinaigrette. This is a great salad to make the day after you've cooked up a big batch of grains as a new spin on your leftovers, or toss in some roast chicken or anything else that came off the grill.

Serves 2

3 cups shredded Tuscan kale leaves,
romaine lettuce, or arugula,
washed and dried

½ cup cooked farro, rice,
quinoa, or wheat berries

½ cup thinly sliced jicama

12 red or green grapes,
thinly sliced

¼ cup golden raisins

¼ cup Marcona almonds

¼ cup balsamic vinegar

¾ teaspoon kosher salt,
plus more to taste

½ teaspoon dried thyme

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black
pepper, plus more to taste

¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled

In a large bowl, toss together the kale, farro, jicama, grapes, raisins, and almonds. In a separate medium bowl, whisk together the vinegar, salt, thyme, and pepper. Slowly stream in the olive oil as you whisk. Drizzle the dressing over the salad and toss to coat. Top with the goat cheese and season with salt and pepper.



RUSTIC TURKEY PANINI WITH BRIE, APPLES & WATERCRESS

Give me a slice of Brie and a slice of apple, and I'll be one happy lady. It's a classic pairing that hits that sweet-salty note I'm such a big fan of—plus, I love how the soft Brie melts against the crisp apple in your mouth. This sandwich takes that cheese-board vibe to the next level with peppery watercress, smoked turkey, and a gloss of rich walnut oil.

Serves 2

- 2 tablespoons walnut oil
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- 4 (½-inch-thick) slices whole wheat country bread
- 2 ounces Brie cheese, thinly sliced
- 4 ounces thinly sliced smoked turkey
- 1 Granny Smith apple or pear, cored and thinly sliced
- 1 small bunch fresh watercress, tough stems removed
- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- Freshly ground black pepper

Preheat a panini press, griddle, or large skillet.

In a small bowl, mix together the walnut oil and thyme. Liberally brush one side of each slice of bread with the oil mixture. Turn 2 of the slices oiled-side down. Top each of these two slices with one-quarter of the Brie, half the turkey, half the apple slices, and a few sprigs of watercress. Drizzle with lemon juice and the remaining thyme oil. Sprinkle with a few cracks of pepper and put the remaining Brie on top.

Place the other 2 bread slices on top, oiled-sides up, and carefully transfer one sandwich to the panini press, griddle, or skillet. If you aren't using a panini press, place a heavy pan on top of the sandwich. Cook the sandwich until the bread is golden and toasted, the apple and turkey are heated through, and the cheese has melted, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Repeat with the second sandwich.

Cut each sandwich in half and serve immediately.

FRESH MOZZARELLA, PROSCIUTTO & FIG BAGUETTE

Baguette sandwiches are the Swiss Army knife of lunch—portable, handy, and great in infinite combinations. While you can't go wrong with any stack of your favorite ingredients on fresh, crusty bread, I love this pairing of mild mozzarella, salty prosciutto, and sweet fig jam. Parcel these up in parchment and twine, rustle up a bottle of rosé, and you have yourself a picnic!

Serves 4

- 1 French baguette, halved lengthwise
- ¾ cup Fig Jam (page 11) or store-bought jam
- 10 slices prosciutto
- 2 (8-ounce) balls fresh mozzarella, sliced into ¼-inch-thick rounds

Spread the baguette halves generously with the jam. Arrange the prosciutto slices and mozzarella rounds on one half, and top with the other half. Cut the sandwich crosswise into 4 pieces.



LUNCHING AND MIDDAY MUNCHING

When done, a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the chicken should reach 165°F. Transfer the chicken to the paper towel-lined baking sheet and season immediately with salt.

If serving warm, let the chicken cool slightly before serving with the Pickle & Potato Salad. If packing it up to go, let it cool completely first or the steam will make the chicken soggy.

Note: Lately I've been obsessed with a small-batch brand of hot sauce called The Kitchen Garden, which you can find on Etsy.

PICKLE & POTATO SALAD

I love pickles! I can't get enough of their salty, briny acidity, which is why I also include a little of their juice in this potato salad. It helps this salad feel lighter and brighter, while the eggs keep things creamy and rich.

Serves 6

1½ pounds tricolored small potatoes

1½ teaspoons kosher salt,
plus more for the potatoes

½ cup mayonnaise

¼ cup chopped sweet pickles

3 tablespoons pickle juice
(from the jar)

1 tablespoon yellow mustard

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black
pepper, plus more to taste

5 hard-boiled eggs,
peeled and chopped

½ medium red onion, thinly sliced

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley,
for garnish

Paprika, for garnish

Place the potatoes in a large pot and add enough cold water to cover them by 1 inch and a generous pinch of salt. Bring the water to a boil over medium-high heat and cook until the potatoes are fork-tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Drain the potatoes and let them rest until they're cool enough to handle. Cut each one in half.

In a small bowl, mix together the mayonnaise, sweet pickles, pickle juice, mustard, salt, and pepper.

In a separate large bowl, combine the halved potatoes, eggs, and red onion and toss with the dressing. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and garnish with the parsley and paprika.



THAI-STYLE SHRIMP & COCONUT SOUP

I'd eaten versions of this dish whenever we went out for Thai food in California, but when I finally had it in Thailand, *that* was the real "aha" moment. I couldn't believe how aromatic the broth was—loaded with lemongrass, cilantro, Thai lime leaves (sometimes referred to as kaffir lime leaves), and galangal, a slightly sweeter version of ginger (though ginger is a perfect substitute). It's rich and luscious thanks to coconut milk, but not at all heavy. And the whole thing was spiked with savory fish sauce and spicy Thai chili paste. Once I got home, I immediately got to work re-creating it because I knew I'd always need a way to satisfy that craving. You may need to track down some of these ingredients (lemongrass, lime leaves, galangal) at an Asian market or specialty spice shop, or even online, but I promise it's worth it!

Serves 4

- 1½ quarts chicken broth
- ½ stalk lemongrass, tender bottom portion smashed with the back of a knife and sliced into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 (1½-inch) piece fresh galangal or ginger, peeled and thinly sliced crosswise
- 8 fresh Thai lime leaves, torn and lightly bruised
- 6 ounces unsweetened full-fat coconut milk
- 6 ounces button mushrooms (about 2 cups), quartered
- 1 small red bell pepper, diced
- 3 tablespoons red Thai chili paste (I like nam prik pao)
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 or 2 dried Thai chiles or 1 fresh Anaheim chile, seeded and thinly sliced
- 1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 4 teaspoons fresh lime juice (from about 1 lime)
- 1 teaspoon palm or light brown sugar
- ¼ cup lightly packed fresh cilantro leaves
- Chili oil

In a stockpot, bring the chicken broth to a gentle boil over medium heat. Add the lemongrass, galangal, and lime leaves and reduce the heat to low so the liquid is barely simmering. Cook until the broth is well infused with aromatic flavor, 20 to 25 minutes. Add the coconut milk, mushrooms, bell pepper, chili paste, fish sauce, and dried chiles and simmer, stirring, until the vegetables are tender, about another 5 minutes. Add the shrimp. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp are bright pink and cooked through, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat.

Season the soup to your liking with the lime juice, sugar, and fish sauce. Stir in the cilantro leaves.

Serve with the chili oil if you want to make the soup spicier—be sure to add it a few drops at a time!



HOLT'S FAVORITE BAKED MAC 'N' CHEESE

One of the first times I was visiting one of my best friends down in South Carolina, we went to a barbecue spot and were served an enormous slice of macaroni and cheese. Up until then, I'd only seen the kind that got mixed up in a pot, so the idea of a casserole-style version that was super gooey in the middle, slightly crispy along the edges, and topped with bubbling, browned cheese seemed almost too good to be true. So now I make a version with traditional cheddar, plus ricotta to keep things super creamy, a pinch of mustard powder to get that classic mac 'n' cheese yellow, and butternut squash for a little sweetness and even creamier body—and some vitamins, too, but no need to tell anyone that.

Serves 4 to 6

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, plus more for greasing

1¼ cups cubed peeled butternut squash

½ pound cavatappi pasta

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

2 cups whole milk

2¼ teaspoons mustard powder

1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta water

¼ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

3½ cups coarsely grated mild cheddar cheese (about 10 ounces)

½ cup Homemade Ricotta (page 276) or store-bought

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Grease a 2-quart baking dish with butter.

Insert a steamer basket into a large steamer pot. Add 2 inches of water and bring to a boil. Put the squash in the steamer, cover, and cook until very, very soft, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a food processor and process until smooth. Set aside ½ cup of the squash; freeze the rest for another use.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the cavatappi and cook until firm to the bite, about 8 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Melt the butter in a large, wide pot over medium-low heat. Sprinkle the flour over the butter and whisk, making a roux. Cook, whisking continuously, until the roux is light golden, about 5 minutes. Pour in the milk, whisking continuously. Increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a low boil, about 4 minutes. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until the sauce thickens and coats the back of a spoon, about 3 minutes. Add the mustard powder, salt, and pepper and stir. Add 3 cups of the cheddar in three or four batches, whisking to make sure the cheese is fully melted before adding the next. Stir in the ricotta and reserved ½ cup pureed squash. When the mixture is fully blended, remove from the heat.

Add the cavatappi to the sauce and stir to coat. Transfer the mixture to the baking dish and scatter ½ cup cheddar evenly over the top. Place on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the cheese is browned and bubbly. Let cool for 15 minutes before serving.



NOT-YOUR-MAMA'S TURKEY MEAT LOAF AND SOUR CREAM MASHED POTATOES

Not to knock my mom's meat loaf—a fixture on our weeknight dinner table—but I wanted to take this usually heavy meal to a lighter place. I use turkey instead of beef and/or pork and add oats instead of bread crumbs as a binder. Plus, it gets a kick of hot sauce, so while this meat loaf might be healthier, it definitely doesn't skimp on flavor.

Serves 4

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
2 pounds ground turkey
1½ cups old-fashioned oats
2 large eggs
¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
½ cup ketchup,
plus more for topping
1½ teaspoons tomato paste
Hot sauce
2 teaspoons kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
Sour Cream Mashed Potatoes
(recipe follows), for serving

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

In a small skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until tender and fragrant, about 6 minutes. Let cool.

In a large bowl, combine the ground turkey, oats, eggs, Worcestershire, ketchup, and tomato paste. Season with a dash or two of the hot sauce (depending on how hot you like things), the salt, and a few cracks of pepper (again, to your liking). Add the cooled onion and combine the ingredients with your (clean) hands.

Transfer the meat loaf mixture to an 8-by-4-inch loaf pan. Press it down until the meat is flat and level. Top with as much ketchup as you like.

Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, until a meat thermometer registers 165°F. Let cool for 5 minutes.

Slice and serve with Sour Cream Mashed Potatoes.

(Continued)



BRAISED TRI TIP WITH HONEY-ROASTED CARROTS & PARSNIPS

As my mother would say, this is a meal that sticks to your ribs. Tri tip is a cheaper, tougher cut, but it magically transforms as it braises low and slow in a broth that gets flavored with my secret ingredient: French onion soup mix. (Yep, you heard me right!) The deep, meaty flavor of the beef complements the sweetly caramelized root vegetables.

Serves 6 to 8

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 whole tri tip roast
(about 3 pounds)
Kosher salt and freshly ground
black pepper
2 yellow onions, thinly sliced
1 (1-ounce) packet
French onion soup mix
2 sprigs fresh thyme
2 bay leaves
Honey-Roasted Carrots & Parsnips
(recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat the vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Season the roast with salt and pepper. Place the roast in the pot, fat-side down. Cook until browned, 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate. Drain off all but 2 tablespoons of the fat from the pot. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until they soften and start to brown, about 8 minutes. Stir in the soup mix, thyme, bay leaves, and 2 cups water. Return the meat to the pot with any juices that have collected on the plate and bring to a simmer.

Cover the pot with a lid and place it in the oven. Bake for 2½ to 3 hours, until the meat is fork-tender but not falling apart. Let the meat rest for 15 minutes. Skim off any excess fat from the braising liquid and discard the thyme sprigs and bay leaves.

Cut the tri tip into 1-inch-thick slices. Spoon the hot braising liquid over the slices and serve with Honey-Roasted Carrots & Parsnips.

HONEY-ROASTED CARROTS & PARSNIPS

Carrots and parsnips are naturally sweet, which comes out even more when they're roasted—and shellacked with caramelized honey, plus a little soy sauce to balance it out. It's a beautiful, simple side that goes with just about any meal.

Serves 6 to 8

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil	Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons honey	1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 bunch medium carrots	1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
1 bunch medium parsnips, peeled	2 teaspoons black sesame seeds

Preheat the oven to 450°F. Line a large baking sheet with foil and heat it in the oven for 15 minutes.

In a large bowl, combine the olive oil and 1 tablespoon of the honey and toss with the carrots and parsnips to coat. Sprinkle with 1½ teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper and toss again. Carefully remove the preheated baking sheet from the oven and spread the carrots and parsnips over it in a single layer. Roast until the vegetables start to blister, 10 minutes.

In a separate large bowl, combine the soy sauce and remaining 1 tablespoon honey. Drizzle the mixture over the roasted vegetables and toss to coat. Sprinkle with the chopped parsley and sesame seeds.

WHISKEY-GLAZED SPICED NUTS

Little bowls of nuts are irresistible munchies, especially when cocktails are involved. These take the usually just-salty snack to a whole different place that's a little sweet, a little spicy, and a little boozy. I like to keep a batch of these in my freezer, so I have an instant snack for unexpected guests or for when a casual afternoon spent hanging around turns into an unplanned party.

Makes about 2 cups

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup raw unsalted cashews
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup raw unsalted walnuts
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup raw unsalted almonds
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 teaspoons whiskey
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup light brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon coarsely chopped fresh rosemary, plus more for garnish
10 to 12 splashes of hot sauce
Flaky sea salt

Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a large nonstick skillet, combine the cashews, walnuts, and almonds. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until they are just toasted, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the butter and whiskey and stir until the butter has completely melted and the nuts are coated, another 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the brown sugar and cook until it just starts to smoke, 3 to 4 minutes. Cook, stirring the nuts to keep them from burning, until the brown sugar coats the nuts completely, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the rosemary.

Spread the nuts over the prepared baking sheet. Drizzle with the hot sauce and sprinkle with sea salt. Toss to combine and then spread the nuts into a single layer. Let them cool.

Either garnish with fresh rosemary and serve immediately or store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to a month or the freezer for up to 3 months.



CHEESE BISCUIT CRACKERS

Flaky, salty, cheesy, crispy—need me to go on?

Serves 6 to 8

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter,
at room temperature
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
2 cups all-purpose flour
8 ounces sharp yellow cheddar
cheese, grated
2 cups Rice Krispies cereal,
crushed until very fine

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, whip the butter until completely smooth. Add the salt and mix to combine. Slowly add the flour and mix until completely combined. Turn off the machine and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Fold in the cheese and crushed cereal by hand until evenly combined. The mixture should have the consistency of cookie dough.

Form the dough into 1-inch balls and place on a large ungreased baking sheet, leaving 2 inches between each ball. Using the back of a fork, press down on the center of each ball until it forms a flat cracker shape. Press the fork in the opposite direction to make a crosshatch pattern. If necessary, dip the fork in hot water to keep it from sticking to the dough.

Bake the crackers for 15 to 20 minutes, until they have set but not yet turned golden brown. Let them cool completely before serving. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week.

PIMENTO CHEESE

I started making this classic Southern offering—known as the “caviar of the South”—for two reasons: one, I got completely hooked when I had it for the first time in South Carolina, and two, my husband totally loves it, especially on sandwiches. Normally it’s just a mix of cheddar cheese, mayo, and pimentos, those little red things you find stuffed into olives. I add a little Asiago cheese to glam it up a bit, but don’t get it twisted—this is one down and dirty dish, and people go nuts for it. This is an especially great dip to make a day or even two ahead because the flavors continue melding as they sit.

Makes about 3 cups

- 2 cups grated sharp cheddar cheese
- ½ cup grated asiago cheese
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 (4-ounce) jar pimentos, undrained
- Sliced country bread, toasted, for serving

In a medium bowl, combine the cheeses and mayonnaise.

In a mini food processor, pulse the pimentos and their juices a few times until coarsely chopped. Add to the cheese mixture, stir to combine well, and serve with toasted bread. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for 1 week.



MUSHROOM PÂTÉ

This is a fun yet elegant twist on a traditional pâté. Instead of emulsifying ground meat and fat, I cook down wild mushrooms for that same rich flavor, then add a dose of creamy cashews (so it’s vegan, too). It’s got a smooth, silky texture that’s perfect for slathering on toast.

Makes 1½ cups

- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ cups diced yellow onions
- 1½ pounds mixed fresh mushrooms, such as oyster, maitake, cremini, or shiitake, stemmed and coarsely chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup dry sherry
- ¼ cup raw unsalted cashews, soaked in cold water for at least 1 hour or overnight

In a small pot, bring 1 cup water to a boil. Remove from the heat. Add the dried porcini mushrooms and let them soak for about 30 minutes. Drain the porcinis and finely chop. Set aside.

In a large sauté pan, melt the butter with the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring, until tender, 7 to 8 minutes. Add the porcinis, fresh mushrooms, thyme, and a pinch each of salt and pepper. Raise the heat to high and cook, stirring occasionally, until the fresh mushrooms have released their liquid and it has evaporated, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the sherry and cook until it has also evaporated, about 2 minutes. Remove the mixture from the heat and let it cool slightly. Reserve ⅓ cup of the mushrooms and set aside.

Place the rest of the mushroom mixture in a food processor or blender. Drain the soaked cashews, reserving the soaking water. Add the drained cashews and ¼ cup of the reserved soaking water to the mushroom mixture in the blender and blend on high. Continue to add more soaking water until the consistency is similar to hummus. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the reserved ⅓ cup mushroom mixture.

Serve warm or cold. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for 1 week.

BAKED PEARS WITH CURRANTS & CINNAMON

This is one of those deceptively simple desserts that takes almost no time to make but looks like edible art on the table. While most poached or baked pear recipes call for the pears to be peeled and cored before cooking, I like to leave mine be. It helps the pears keep their gorgeous, voluptuous shape and celebrates the natural beauty of the fruit. It's a stunning addition to a holiday table, or whenever you want something beautiful, warm, and sweet to eat. Swap out the butter for coconut oil to make it vegan.

Serves 10 to 12

6 Anjou pears, halved lengthwise
3 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
3 tablespoons unsalted butter,
cut into ½-inch cubes,
or 3 tablespoons coconut oil
¾ cup white wine
½ cup dried currants
Crème fraîche or mascarpone,
for serving (optional)

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

In a shallow 2-quart baking dish, arrange the pears cut-side up. Sprinkle the pears with the sugar and cinnamon and add a small pat of butter to each pear. Carefully pour the wine into the bottom of the pan. Sprinkle the currants over the pears (it's okay if some fall into the wine). Bake the pears until they're fork-tender, about 50 minutes. Let cool for 5 to 10 minutes.

To serve, spoon the pears onto a plate and add a dollop of crème fraîche, if desired. Drizzle with some of the juices and currants from the baking pan.



MOM'S CREAM CHEESE PIE

Without fail, this was the dessert that got requested at every holiday, birthday, and special event. My mom would have to make two or three as backup, just to make sure everyone got their fill. I was always the first one with both hands in the air volunteering to make this with her, and now I've become the trusted maker of the pie. While I'm known for putting a new spin on things, this is one recipe that I haven't changed one bit—it's perfect in every way. It's a cross between a cheesecake and a pie, with a tangy, creamy filling sitting in a buttery graham cracker crust. It's always on my table for celebrations and always makes me feel like I'm home.

It's also a major perk that you can make this pie a day or two ahead and refrigerate it until you're ready to serve.

Serves 6 to 8

FOR THE GRAHAM CRACKER CRUST:

1½ cups graham cracker crumbs (from 8 to 10 graham crackers)
6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted
¼ cup powdered sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

FOR THE CREAM CHEESE FILLING:

1½ (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, at room temperature
2 large eggs, at room temperature
¾ cup granulated sugar
2 teaspoons pure vanilla bean paste (see Note, page 223)

FOR THE SOUR CREAM TOPPING:

1 cup sour cream
3½ tablespoons granulated sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

For the graham cracker crust: Preheat the oven to 350°F.

In a medium bowl, combine the graham cracker crumbs, melted butter, powdered sugar, and cinnamon. Stir until the crumbs are evenly moistened with butter. Press the mixture into the bottom and up the sides of a 9-inch pie dish and bake for 10 minutes, until the crust is set, golden, and fragrant. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool before filling. Keep the oven on.

For the cream cheese filling: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or in a large bowl using a handheld mixer, whisk together the cream cheese, eggs, granulated sugar, and vanilla until smooth. Carefully pour the mixture into the cooled crust. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until set. Keep the oven on and let the pie cool on the wire rack for 5 minutes.

For the sour cream topping: In a small bowl, combine the sour cream, granulated sugar, and vanilla and mix until smooth. Spread the topping over the pie and bake for 10 minutes. Let cool on the wire rack. Refrigerate for at least 4 to 5 hours or up to overnight, until completely chilled, before serving.



KEY LIME BARS

My dad loves key lime anything—pie, bars, cheesecake. I've come to love its bright, tart flavor, especially as a refreshing counterpart to heavier, richer desserts. While key limes are what give these bars their signature flavor, you could use regular limes and still end up with a perfectly puckery dessert.

Makes 8 bars

FOR THE CRUST:

1 cup all-purpose flour
¼ cup powdered sugar,
plus more for dusting
Pinch of kosher salt
8 tablespoons (1 stick)
cold unsalted butter,
cut into ½-inch cubes

FOR THE TOPPING:

3 large eggs, at room temperature
1½ cups granulated sugar
Pinch of kosher salt
¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon grated key lime zest
½ cup key lime juice
(from about ¾ pound key limes)

For the crust: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line an 8-inch square baking pan with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, powdered sugar, and salt. Use your hands or a pastry blender to work the butter into the flour mixture until pea-size pieces form. Press the crust evenly into the prepared pan and bake for 20 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown. Set aside and reduce the oven temperature to 325°F.

For the topping: In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, sugar, and salt until light yellow and creamy. Whisk in the flour until well incorporated. Add the key lime zest and juice and whisk until smooth.

Pour the key lime topping over the crust and return the pan to the oven. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the topping is set but still jiggles when you lightly move the pan.

Dust with powdered sugar while still hot, then let cool completely before cutting into 8 bars.

COCONUT-KAHLÚA RICE PUDDING

Rice pudding has always been one of Mom's favorite desserts. Here I've just dressed it up with coconut flakes and coconut milk, plus a dash of Kahlúa. It's just as good served hot off the stovetop as it is chilled.

Serves 2 or 3

1 cup Arborio rice
1 cup unsweetened shredded
coconut
1 (13.5-ounce) can unsweetened
full-fat coconut milk
2 tablespoons Kahlúa or other
coffee liqueur
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
(see Note, page 223)
1 teaspoon coconut extract
½ cup sweetened condensed milk

Bring 4 cups water to a boil in a medium pot over medium heat. Add the rice and cook until it has softened but still has bite, about 15 minutes.

While the rice is cooking, toast half the shredded coconut in a small sauté pan, stirring often, until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Set aside.

Drain the rice and return it to the pot. Add the coconut milk, ½ cup of the untoasted shredded coconut, the Kahlúa, vanilla, and coconut extract. Bring to a simmer over low heat and cook, stirring continuously, for 15 to 20 minutes, until the rice is tender and the pudding is thick. Stir in the condensed milk.

Ladle the pudding into serving dishes and top with the toasted coconut. Or let the pudding cool to room temperature, then chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve.



CHOCOLATE BISCOTTI

Somewhere along the line, “biscotti” started to be synonymous with “cardboard.” True, these biscuits are supposed to have a drier, crispier texture than a typical cookie because they’re double baked, but that shouldn’t mean they have to be bland or boring. I give mine a lighter twist with almond flour and agave, but the deep chocolaty flavor they get from cocoa and espresso powders is anything but dainty. These are just as good a couple of days after you’ve made them as they are fresh out of the oven. In fact, I’d argue that I like them even more when they’ve had time to dry out a little because they’re even better for dipping in coffee or tea. These are also the perfect treat for packing up in pretty bags or tins as gifts.

Makes 24 biscotti

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup almond flour
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons instant espresso powder
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 3 large eggs plus 1 large egg white
- 1½ tablespoons agave nectar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla bean paste (see Note, page 223)
- 1 cup sliced almonds, toasted (see Note, page 38)
- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, combine the flours, cocoa powder, baking powder, espresso powder, and salt. Set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream together the sugar and butter on medium speed for 2 minutes. One at a time, add the eggs and egg white and mix until completely incorporated. Mix in the agave and vanilla. Slowly add the flour mixture and mix just until incorporated. Turn off the machine and use a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to fold in the toasted almonds and chopped chocolate.

On the prepared baking sheet, divide the dough in half and shape it into two 8-by-13-inch rectangles. Bake for 35 minutes. Let the biscotti logs cool for 15 minutes. Transfer the logs to a cutting board and slice them into ½-inch-thick pieces. Return the biscotti cut-side down to the prepared baking sheet and bake for 18 to 20 minutes more, until golden. Transfer to a wire rack to cool before serving. These will keep in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week.