



CORRECT LINE COOKING

Torte-ology

Since you last savoured the sweet words of this column, your trusty chef has packed her pastry cutter, pepper grinder and pans and headed for Canberra. Our peripheral capital has greeted me with open maw, chewed me up and is in the process of digesting me. Whether I emerge as pap grey as the average Canberra backyard remains to be seen.

Social life here is fairly limited. Indeed some would say that a night out in Canberra rates about equal on the fun scale with having a pap smear. But I have not yet given up, dear reader. The search for an inland sea of cappuccino will continue. As I wander around the mirage of Brunswick St, Fitzroy hovers just out of my grasp, replete with the driest dry martinis and clothes of a darker hue than pink. Sometimes Acland St, St Kilda appears in the sky above Parliament House. Lascivious eclairs and fruit tarts flaunting themselves in shop windows; poppy seeds and cardamom adding a hint of spice and whispering of more sophisticated pleasures than your average donut. There is no Acland St in Canberra, so I have had to 'do it myself' and turn my hand to butter and eggs, sugar, flour and milk. In short, cakes.

Baking cakes is a wonderful indulgence and should be approached ar-

dently and gently. If buying a quick eclair in Acland St is nice enough, imagine the joy of your very own cake nestling on a plate under a sheet of icing. Cakes are sincere creatures and it takes a long time to get them right, but multiple pleasures await those with patience and a flexible hand. Cakes should be a symbol of domestic contentment. This can of course spill over into the maudlin; I discovered a brand of flour called Mothers Choice in Canberra, which tends to take the fun out of dressing up in a frilly apron. Expressions such as 'bun in the oven' also go to show notions of fecundity, femininity and the average sponge. I will leave it to someone else to sift through these profound jottings. Myself, I'd rather be creaming.



Sponge

This is a basic recipe, yet I believe that the ability to create something gloriously insubstantial and delicate and then to smother it in 12 litres of cream is a much under-estimated human achievement. This recipe comes from the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union cookbook, but it can still be approached ardently.

1 cup sugar
4 eggs
1 cup SR flour
1 tablespoon boiling water.

Separate the whites and beat until thick and creamy, add sugar and beat in the egg yolks. Fold in sifted flour, and finally the boiling water. Put into sponge tins and bake in a moderate oven.

A few notes. 'Fold' is a gentle movement. Sponge tins are little round ones, and a 'moderate' oven is about 180 degrees. After your sponge is ready, let it cool, and then you can have fun with cream, strawberries, icing, whatever.

Ginger-brandy cheese cake

This is my favourite recipe from the *Moosewood Cookbook* by Mollie Katzen. So favourite in fact that the page is plastered with what seems to be the filling for an entire cheesecake. Many times I have secreted the last piece from marauding dinner guests and had it for breakfast the next day. It sure beats muesli, although it's not good for a hangover.

1. Make a crust in a spring-form pan (ie, one with a detachable bottom) by crushing a packet of ginger nut biscuits. Mix in two tablespoons of honey and five tablespoons of melted butter. Press the mixture into the bottom of the pan and up the sides.

2. Blend together 275 grams of cream cheese, one and a third cups of sour cream, 4 eggs, 5 tablespoons of honey, 1 teaspoon of grated ginger root. Pour into the tin and bake for about 45 minutes at about 180 degrees.

3. When the cake is cold, prepare a glaze. Whisk 3/4 cup of orange juice into 2 tablespoons of cornflour in a saucepan over a moderate heat until it goes thick and glossy. Remove from heat and, while still whisking, add some brandy, grated orange peel, 2 tablespoons of honey. Pour over the cake.

The urge for sweetness can descend into the pornographic. I have in my possession an American book called *The Sweet Treat Cookbook* which gives "new ways to blend your favourite M&M/Mars candies into superb desserts and treats for all occasions". One of the delights therein is Hungarian Beef Stew. The recipe calls for three Forever Yours or Milky Way bars chopped. Or there's Gado Gado Chicken Salad with three Munch peanut bars, crushed. My favourite is the Tomato Aspic with two packets of Starburst fruit chews. Sticky, tacky and incredibly sad. Desserts should not descend into the culinary equivalent of *Debbie Does Dallas*. May detumescence never devil your sponge.

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