

Party time with Mardi Gras king cake

By ALISON LADMAN
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If you won't be lucky enough to be in New Orleans for Mardi Gras, you can still bake up a taste of it at home.

Granted, you'll need to supply your own revelry in the streets, but a slice of this delicious king cake should get you in the mood.

The top is decorated with the colors of Mardi Gras: purple, green and gold. You also can color the icing and decorate or you can drizzle with white icing and decorate with colored sugars.

KING CAKE

Start to finish: 4 hours
(45 minutes active)

For the dough:

1 cup warm milk
½ cup granulated sugar
Zest of 1 lemon
4 eggs, room temperature
2 egg yolks, room temperature
½ cup (1 stick) butter, room temperature
½ teaspoon nutmeg
2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon instant or fast-acting yeast
5 to 6 cups all-purpose flour

For the filling:

½ cup raisins
4 ounces cream cheese
½ cup dark brown sugar
½ cup all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons cinnamon
½ cup chopped toasted pecans

For the decoration:

3 cups powdered sugar
¼ cup lemon juice
Purple, green and gold colored sugars

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the milk, sugar, zest, eggs, egg yolks



AP PHOTO

A slice of king cake, topped with the colors of Mardi Gras, will give you a bit of the annual New Orleans celebration right in your own home.

and butter.

With the mixer running on the lowest setting, add the nutmeg, salt, yeast and 5 cups of the flour. Mix until a dough comes together. If the dough is too dry, add a tablespoon of water; if it is too wet, add a couple tablespoons of flour. The dough should be soft and slightly sticky.

Increase the mixer speed to 2 and knead for 4 to 5 minutes, or until the dough is smooth and elastic. Cover and allow to rise until doubled, about 1

hour.

Meanwhile, make the filling. In a small saucepan, combine the raisins and enough water to cover. Bring to a boil over medium-high. Remove from the heat and let soak for 15 minutes. Drain the raisins, then transfer them to a kitchen towel and pat dry.

In a food processor, combine the raisins, cream cheese, brown sugar, flour and cinnamon. Pulse together until combined, then add the

pecans and pulse just until incorporated.

When the dough has risen, coat a baking sheet with cooking spray.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll into a long rectangle, about 22-by-14-inches.

Spread the filling over the surface of the dough, leaving a 2-inch border along the edges. Roll the dough up into a tight log starting with one of the long sides. Pinch the seam shut and turn until the seam is on the bottom.

Move the log onto the prepared baking sheet. Insert one end of the log into the other end to form a ring. Loosely cover and allow to rise until puffy and almost doubled in size, about 1 hour. Toward the end of the rising time, heat the oven to 350 degrees.

Bake the cake for 45 to 55 minutes, or until golden and cooked through. Transfer to a wire rack to cool.

To make the icing, in a medium bowl stir together the powdered sugar and lemon juice until smooth. Drizzle over the top of the cooled king cake. Immediately sprinkle with the colored sugars before the icing begins to harden. Makes 16 servings.

Nutrition information per serving (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 437 calories; 118 calories from fat (27 percent of total calories); 13 g fat (6 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 104 mg cholesterol; 74 g carbohydrate; 8 g protein; 2 g fiber; 290 mg sodium.

Soup

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are refreshing and enjoyable. Spicy soups and heavier cream soups are not always ideally-suited to the heat of summer, though fish soups such as Manhattan clam chowder and chicken soups work well."

In the winter, Sable recommends heavier, heartier fare.

"Cream soups, chili of all kinds, Hungarian noodle and barley-based soups are really filling and warming in the cold weather," he said.

Sable offers a number of other tips to help shortcut the soup-making process for home cooks.

"The fact is, people often over-think the process of making soup," he said. "It's not that difficult, it just requires planning out the ingredients you need in advance and writing them down."

"Soup is such a totally different animal," Sable said. "If it's done properly,

it can have such complex flavors that hit you at different times. It really depends on how you make it and when you add each ingredient. You can't just throw anything in a pot."

Sable does say, though, that "soup is very forgiving, and ingredients can be adjusted at any time. However, it's much easier to add and adjust things than it is to take ingredients out once they've been included. The process has to be done carefully and thoughtfully, allowing the soup to cook for a while to let the flavors mingle before tasting."

Sable's favorite?

"I love beef vegetable soup," he said. "It was the first soup I ever learned to make with my mom because it was my dad's favorite — and it's my favorite, too."

Sable said soup just tastes good.

"People should eat more soup," he said.

That Hot Dog Place is at 30 Monmouth St. in Red Bank. For more information, call 732-219-6999 or visit online at www.soupmeister.com.

Great soups are just a few steps away

CLASSIC CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

Pinch each of thyme and rosemary
3 to 4 quarts of water

Whole chicken, cut up with skin left on
1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil
4 stalks celery, diced
Medium onion, chopped or diced
1 pound of carrots, sliced ¼-inch thick
Salt and pepper to taste
3 to 4 quarts water
½ bunch of parsley, chopped (just leaves, not stems)
16 ounce package of your favorite pasta

Put oil in bottom of large pot to coat, and heat briefly on medium-high flame.

Put chicken in pot, and fry on medium-high heat for 15-20 minutes to get chicken skin browned a bit, which draws flavor out.

Toss in celery, onion and carrots and saute for another 10-15 minutes until they all get a bit soft. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Add 3-4 quarts of water, and bring to a boil, then lower heat, cover, and simmer for about 1½ hours, allowing a little steam to escape from a space between the pot and cover.

Put chicken pieces out to cool.

Add chopped parsley to the soup pot as well as salt and pepper to taste again, and simmer for another 15-20 minutes, then let soup sit with the fire turned off while you cook a package of your favorite pasta according to package directions.

Cut up some of the cooled chicken and add back to soup. Pour soup over the pasta at the table to keep the pasta al dente. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

WHITE BEAN AND ESCAROLE SOUP

1-2 tablespoons olive oil
1 pound dried white beans (Great Northern), soaked overnight and drained
4 stalks celery, diced
Medium onion, chopped or diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 large bunch of escarole (1 ½-2 pound head), thoroughly washed, with root end removed and greens chopped
Salt and pepper to taste

Put oil in bottom of large pot to coat, and heat briefly on medium-high flame.

Add sausage (it will look like chopped meat), and saute in pan on medium-high heat until browned, stirring regularly so it doesn't clump.

After 10 minutes, when sausage is about halfway cooked, add onion and saute for another 10 minutes until sausage is fully cooked and onion is soft and translucent.

Turn off heat and drain off fat, then return pot to medium-high heat and add garlic, tomatoes and red wine, and bring all to a boil.

Add basil, pepper and beef stock, bring back to a boil, then simmer for about 1 hour, covered, allowing a little steam to escape from a space between the pot and cover.

In a separate pan, saute zucchini in olive oil until a little brown, then add slices to soup pot.

Cook ditalini or your favorite pasta according to package directions, and pour soup over pasta at table to keep the pasta al dente, grating a blend of Romano/Parmesan cheese on top if desired. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

All recipes courtesy Gary Sable of That Hot Dog

Cake

FROM PAGE D1

"A friend of mine is a big fan of sweet potatoes, and he asked me to make a king cake with them for him," Navarre said. "It's a lot like a sweet potato casserole, with brown sugar and pecans."

Rhonda Ruckman, pastry chef for the Donald Link restaurants and retail shop Butcher, was eager to experiment with some new flavors, after having been away from the city — and Mardi Gras — for several years.

"I'm definitely doing the classic cake, but I wanted to try some new things," Ruckman said. "I'm making a chocolate creme cake with a wonderful brioche dough, a layer of sour cream, devil food crumbs and chocolate chips."



AP PHOTO

A selection of Mardis Gras king cakes prepared by pastry chef Jean-Luc Albin.

For most bakeries the cream cheese cakes, or a combination of cream cheese and fruit, is the most popular of the king cakes. With strawberry fillings close behind.

At Randazzo's King Cakes, customers lined up by the hundreds to

get their king cakes on Jan. 6 (or Twelfth Night), the traditional opening of the Carnival season.

Randazzo's offers a half-dozen flavors, it's royal king cake, which is quartered off with cream cheese, apple, lemon and strawberry fillings in each section, and even a fleur-de-lis king cake, with black and gold icing in a nod to the New Orleans Saints.

Manny Randazzo, the second generation to operate the bakery, says the new flavors may have their fans, but at his bakeries the traditional king cake remains the big seller.

"It can get pretty crazy with all the fills, the double fills, the flavors," Randazzo said. "But still 75 percent of our sales are still the traditional cake. People who say it's dry or not flavorful enough have not had one with a rich brioche and the hint of cinnamon. It's definitely a crowd-pleaser."

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