



Chef Lynda Lacher

Welcome back food lovers. Chocolate is always a great way to indulge your senses. Try these decadent chocolate recipes for Valentine's Day or following a special meal. They are sure to impress.

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Photography by Mark Woolcott with Food Styling by Patricia Bainter

Chocolate for Your Valentine

Molten Lava Cakes

Serves 6

- 8 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate
- 8 Tbsp. softened butter (1 stick), divided
- Granulated sugar for ramekins
- 1½ cups powdered sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2 egg yolks
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 Tbsp. liquor of your choice (e.g., Amaretto, Grand Marnier)

Preheat oven to 400°. Coat six 6 oz. ramekins with one tablespoon of butter and granulated sugar, set aside.

Melt the chocolate and the remaining butter in a double boiler pan. Add the powdered sugar to the chocolate mixture and whisk. Remove from heat. Whisk the eggs and yolks until smooth; blend into the chocolate mixture. Add the flour and mix well. Stir in the vanilla and liquor.

Divide batter evenly among the ramekins and place on a baking sheet. Put into the oven and bake for 14–16 minutes. The edges should be firm but the center runny. Check with a toothpick. Serve in the ramekin or run a knife around the edge to loosen and invert onto a dessert plate.

Serving ideas:

Serve with a raspberry coulis (sauce).

Make a heart shaped cut-out (stencil), place on each cake and sprinkle with powdered sugar, remove stencil.

Three Nut Chocolate Rum Tart

Serves 6–8

For the crust

- 1½ sticks salted butter, at room temperature
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 2 large egg yolks
- ½ tsp. vanilla
- 2 cups all-purpose flour

In a mixer, cream butter and sugar until smooth and fluffy. Add egg yolks and vanilla and beat until smooth. Add flour one cup at a time, beating until just combined and dough comes together. Press dough into the bottom and sides of 10" inch tart pan with removable bottom and freeze for one hour.

For the filling

- 3 eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ tsp. salt
- Zest of one orange or lemon
- ½ cup dark corn syrup
- ½ cup rum
- ¼ cup butter (½ stick), melted
- 1 cup bittersweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup pecans, chopped
- ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- ½ cup almonds, chopped

Preheat oven to 350°. In a bowl, place the eggs, sugar, salt, zest, corn syrup,

rum and butter. Blend together with a mixer or by hand until smooth.

Remove the tart shell from the freezer. Sprinkle the chocolate chips over the bottom of the tart. Sprinkle the nuts over the chocolate chips. Pour the egg mixture evenly over the nuts and chocolate chips. Bake on the bottom rack for 40–45 minutes or until firm. Cool completely.

Variations:

- 1) Use whatever combination of nuts you desire...peanuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia.
- 2) Use brandy in place of the rum.
- 3) Replace the zest with finely chopped crystallized ginger.

Chocolate Cherry Bread Pudding

Serves 8–10

- Butter or non-stick cooking spray
- 1 pound loaf of bread, crust removed and sliced (challah, Vienna or brioche work well)
- 1½ cups pitted cherries, fresh or thawed if frozen
- 1½ cups semisweet chocolate chips or chopped bars
- 6 whole eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. nutmeg
- 3½ cups whole milk or half & half
- 2 tsp. almond extract
- ¾ cup sliced almonds

Cut each slice of bread in half and layer the bread, cherries and chocolate in

a buttered 9x13" deep baking dish or 2-quart casserole. Set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs, sugar, salt and nutmeg. Add the milk or half & half and almond extract, whisk until blended. Pour the egg custard over the bread and press down to saturate the bread. Hold bread down with a weighted cover for 15 minutes or cover and refrigerate for 1–4 hours.

Heat oven to 350°. Cover with parchment paper and foil. Bake until custard has started to set, about 25 minutes. Uncover, sprinkle with sliced almonds and continue baking until the pudding is puffed and golden on top, 30–35 minutes more.

Transfer to a wire rack and cool for 15 to 20 minutes before serving.

Make Ahead Tip:

Prepare the bread pudding, but do not cook. Refrigerate overnight. Let stand at room temperature while the oven preheats. Bake as directed.

Brownies With Cherry Port Sauce

- 1 cup + 2 Tbsp. all-purpose flour or cake flour (for finer texture)
- 2 Tbsp. natural cocoa (not Dutch processed cocoa)
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 stick salted butter at room temperature
- 6 oz. unsweetened chocolate
- 2 cups sugar

- ¼ tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Heat the oven to 350°F with an oven rack positioned in the middle. Butter a 9" square pan, line the pan bottom and sides with parchment and then butter the parchment. Set aside.

In a mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa and baking powder. Set aside.

In a double boiler over simmering water, melt the butter and chocolate. Remove the pan from heat, whisk in the sugar and salt. Add the vanilla. Mix in the eggs, one at a time, until each is blended. Add the flour/cocoa mixture gradually until incorporated and the mixture is smooth. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread to evenly distribute. Top with nuts if desired.

Bake until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out almost clean, with a few moist crumbs clinging to it, about 35–45 minutes. Do not over bake. Cool brownies for 15 minutes, then remove by running a knife around the inside edge of the pan. Lift brownies out with the ends of the parchment paper.

Note:

This recipe can be doubled, if desired, by using a 13x9" pan and increasing the baking time slightly.

For the Cherry Port Sauce

- ½ cup dried cherries, chopped roughly
- ½ cup tawny port
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 8 oz. semisweet chocolate, finely chopped

In a small saucepan, bring the cherries and port to a boil over medium heat. Turn off the heat and steep for 10 minutes. Remove the cherries and set aside.

Place the finely chopped chocolate in a bowl. Set aside.

Add the cream to the saucepan with the port and heat until steaming, just under a boil. Pour the port/cream mixture into the chopped chocolate; let sit two minutes. Add the cherries into the chocolate mixture (sauce); whisk until smooth and shiny. Let cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally to prevent a skin from forming.

Spread the sauce evenly over the cooled brownies and let set up for 1 hour. Cut the brownies into squares with a sharp knife.

Lynda Lacher is a Le Cordon Bleu trained professional chef who provides group cooking classes, private cooking instruction and nutritional counseling. To contact Lynda, please send e-mail to cheflacher@yahoo.com or call 303-779-0989.