

## Mount St. Syrup - An Adventure in Carrots for a Holiday Potluck

By Amy B. - Every year at my office we have a Holiday potluck where everyone either donates money to be given to a charity or we bring a food dish. Last year I donated money and the year before that I donated money, so I thought I should make something this year. And it was mostly because I knew there would not be much available I could eat at the party if I did not bring it myself. But what would be easy, inexpensive and good enough to share? I decided on a side of vegetables, carrots to be precise. With a nice glaze I thought...

I found the recipe on allrecipes.com. It seemed to be a good idea at the time; I went to the store and bought four pounds of carrots, maple syrup, and agave nectar. I got home and rinsed, peeled, and chopped my carrots, feeling pretty jolly and excited about the dish. It would be a dish of course and would be perfect for not only me, but the many vegetarian Indian people in my office.

I dumped half the carrots into a big saucepan to start cooking them. Not all of the carrots fit into one pan, so I loaded up three pans all together. I felt like a real chef, three out of four burners on and popping. I started the glaze. I dumped into a saucepan apple juice, a tablespoon of agave nectar, maple syrup, cornstarch and a whole slew of vegan butter. I turned up the burner and waited for it to boil up. I was stirring furiously to make the cornstarch dissolve in the clumpy mess in the pan.

The windows in my kitchen were starting to fog up due to the four burners running at the same time. This was at night so it kind of looked like something racy was going on in the kitchen; it was hot! I thought about opening a window but it was also 20 degrees outside. So I sweated. Then out of nowhere, disaster struck. Do you remember those volcanoes you used to make out of cornstarch and baking soda? You brought the Paper Mache volcano your mom made for you, painted with brown and green, maybe a Lego tree stuck to the cardboard at the base. Then you dump baking soda (I think) into the little hole on top and POOF! Out comes a bubbly mess to earn you that perfect A. Yes that happened to me.

My glaze that was actually looking kind of all right started bubbling. All of a sudden it poured out over the top of the pan, covering the stovetop, dangerously close to my precious carrots! I shrieked in horror. I never did the volcano thing in school and was not going to start now. I quickly threw the pan into the sink. I stood there at the sink wondering what I had done wrong. I emptied the leftover sludge into the sink and melted it with hot water to clean it up.

I started laughing when I realized I had not read the directions for the glaze. I went back online to check. Ah yes, the cornstarch was supposed to dissolve before I applied heat. I swear, I was a chemistry major in college, so how did I forget this? I started over again. Apple juice and water, then add the cornstarch. When that was dissolved, a tad of agave nectar, then maple syrup. I melted more butter and brought it all to a boil. I stirred for another 2 minutes and shut the heat off and relaxed. I had drained my carrots before I started the new glaze so I was finished. I poured the glaze over the carrots and put them into a casserole dish. It still looked a little weird to me, so I didn't take a picture I just threw it in the fridge; I would wait until tomorrow!

That was last night. Today was the party and we all gathered in the conference room with our food, 70% desserts and 30% real food. 15% of the real food was chili as we were having a chili contest. I left my carrots out on the buffet line and prayed people would eat them. I saw three people take them and as far as I can tell here they are still alive. My closest co-worker said they tasted wonderful. I tried them after that and felt they had a nice sweet apple flavor, although the texture was a little strange. There was also an underlying maple flavor that I had really wanted. Ok, it was yummy.

Lesson learned: Never mix science and cooking. They are supposed to be pretty much the same thing, but I don't think it really is. Meanwhile I am going to break out my chemistry books to see if I can re-learn a thing or two. Not altering the chemistry, I did modify the ingredients of the original recipe slightly:

### Glaze Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1/2 cup apple juice
- 1/2 cup water
- 6 tablespoons maple syrup
- 5 tablespoons Earth Balance butter, melted
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg