

The Ice Dream Cookbook - "So Dreamy"

[Dried Apricot Pistachio Ice Dream]

By Ricki of Diet, Dessert, and Dogs ~ When I was contacted about a month ago to see if I'd be interested in examining a review copy of the upcoming The Ice Dream Cookbook by Chef Rachel Albert-Matesz, I have to admit I was a bit hesitant at first. Despite my weak-kneed response to most sweets, I've never been terribly smitten with frozen desserts, though I do enjoy a scoop or two every summer (and used to LOVE those chocolate-dipped soft-serve cones we get here from the ice-cream truck that jingles along the streets in summertime).

Then I found out that Rachel is a natural foods chef whose recipes are very much in line with my own and the NAG diet. When I asked whether there were enough vegan recipes for me to try, she responded that virtually all the recipes in the book were already vegan or easily adaptable. In addition, all were gluten free and naturally sweetened. Well, how could I resist?

The Ice Dream Cookbook is actually Albert-Matesz's second book, on the heels of The Garden of Eating: A Produce-Dominated Diet and Cookbook (2004), which won both the USA Book News for "Best Cookbook 2004" and the Glyph Award for "Best Cookbook" 2005. She's also written for the likes of Natural Home, Living Without, Yoga Journal, Oxygen Women's Fitness, Muscle & Fitness, Veggie Life, Vegetarian Times, Vegetarian Journal, and Macrobiotics Today, among others. Both a cooking class instructor and a faculty member at the Southwest Institute of Healing Arts in Tempe, Arizona, she also hosts a healthy food segment on the show "Your Life A to Z" in Phoenix. Clearly, this woman has had quite a bit of experience developing recipes, so I had very high expectations for the ice dream creations in her book. I'm happy to report that they didn't disappoint.

The book is more than just a collection of recipes, however. Starting with the introduction in which Albert-Matesz outlines her path toward healthy cooking and how she came to write a frozen dessert cookbook, The Ice Dream Cookbook offers a wealth of information for anyone who's interested in making frozen desserts—or any desserts, really. Chapter One ("Essential Ingredients and Shopping Tips") outlines the dangers of sugar and (for some) gluten as well as other questionable foods, along with an exhaustive glossary of preferred ingredients and shopping tips. In Chapter Two, she describes the equipment you'll need to make your own ice dream, from the many varieties of ice cream maker (electric or manual), right down to the bowls and knives that are best. The following chapter covers techniques for measuring and mixing to ensure your success when you whip up the frozen desserts. From there, it's on to the multitude of flavors—and recipes!

Starting with basic varieties such as vanilla, chocolate or cinnamon ice dream, the book then moves on to more exotic fare such as Avocado, Macaroon Madness, Lemon Cookie Crumble, Green Tea, Chunky Chestnut, Carob Banana, or Mango Orange flavors, among others. I couldn't resist trying one from almost every section (and it was a difficult choice, indeed). The book wraps up with three additional chapters, with recipes for accompaniments to your ice dream: Sauces, A La Mode (pies, tarts, etc.) and Additional Indulgences (cookies for ice dream sandwiches and other confections).

Overall, I was immensely impressed with the book and really enjoyed whipping up the frozen treats. Because I use a Donvier hand-cranked (non-electric) ice cream maker, my only frustration was having to re-freeze the ice cream container between batches! With all these recipes for amazing desserts, who wants to wait 24 hours before trying out another flavor?

Read on to see what I tried* (and for a sample recipe!):

Dried Apricot Pistachio Ice Dream

This was the first recipe I attempted, and I was amazed at how soft and scoop-able the dessert was, even days after being placed in the freezer. In this case, I used the lowest proportion of sweetener suggested in the recipe (a range is given), and while we certainly enjoyed the result, I think I'd opt for more sweetener next time (the recipes all include some stevia—I assume to reduce the amount of agave or honey—so I might just play with using all-agave instead of the stevia next time). The combination of tangy apricot and chewy pistachio is brilliant here.

Avocado Ice Dream

Anyone who reads this blog regularly knows I love avocado (and even devoted an entire Lucky Comestible series to it!), so I found this recipe irresistible. The avocado lends a creaminess and silkiness to the dessert, and with the combination of chocolate chunks (one of the variations provided), it's truly addictive. This one didn't last long!

Cocoa Ice Dream (with candied ginger)

Not wanting to neglect the "basic" flavors, I chose (of course) chocolate. This recipe is made with cocoa (there's another made with dark chocolate) and was just delicious. By this time, I was feeling pretty confident, so I just threw in my own addition of chopped candied ginger, for a truly winning combination.

Graham Crackers Given my limited experience with gluten-free flours, I thought it would be fun to try out one of the baking recipes in the book. These crackers were easy to prepare and baked up beautifully. Mine came out a little too crispy to eat on their own, so I'm wondering if I overbaked them (the recipe does caution against letting them crisp too much in the oven). The flavor was lovely, though—just like "regular" graham crackers. And they'd be perfect for an ice cream sandwich, in which they'd absorb some of the moisture from the filling without becoming mushy.

Banana Daiquiri Ice Cream
This last recipe was hands down our favorite here at the DDD household—even The Girls got a teeny lick off my fingers ("Thanks, Mum! Say, is there any more of that stuff around?"). The combination of creamy coconut milk, smooth and velvety bananas and tart lime was incomparable. And with banana and a dash of rum in the mix, the dessert never freezes to the point of solid, so it's soft and easy to scoop no matter how long it's stored. Which was a good thing, because we scooped aplenty.

Rachel was kind enough to provide the recipe for this lovely treat, so you can help yourselves to a sample dessert from the book as well.

What a fabulous way to cap off the summer! The Ice Cream Cookbook is available online. **Banana Daiquiri Ice Cream** © Copyright 2008 Rachel Albert-Matesz, The Ice Cream Cookbook (www.TheHealthyCookingCoach.com)
Hands On: 30 minutes / Churning: 20 to 25 minutes / Yield: 4 to 5 1/2 cups; 8 servings
Here's a grown up version of banana ice cream that I almost left out of the book. Don and I weren't impressed with it, but we didn't want to toss it. So I gave it to a few friends. They raved about it. In fact, two little boys wouldn't let their parents have any of it. Banana lovers, judge for yourself. If you don't like liqueur, try the variation with rum flavoring or try the Roasted Banana Ice Cream. Note: If using bottled lime juice, taste it before you use it. If left to sit too long in the refrigerator, lime juice (as well as lemon juice) can develop a strong bitter flavor.

Garnish with coarsely chopped macadamia nuts and fresh or frozen (but thawed) sweet cherries or the Cherry Sauce. **Ingredients:**

1/3 cup fresh lime juice (from 2 to 3 limes)

1/2 to 1 teaspoon lime zest (finely grated lime peel; colored part only) 2 teaspoons unflavored gelatin or agar agar powder (not the flakes) 3 tablespoons honey or agavé nectar; additional 2 tablespoons as needed

1/8 teaspoon finely ground, unrefined sea salt

1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon pure stevia extract powder or 1/2 to 1 teaspoon clear stevia extract liquid (start with less; add more only if needed)

2 cups unsweetened, preservative-free coconut milk (regular not lite), mixed well before measuring 2 cups packed ripe bananas, sliced (2 large, or 3 to 4 medium) 2 tablespoons coconut rum or dark rum or 1 teaspoon natural rum flavoring 1/4 cup coarsely chopped macadamia nuts for garnish, optional

1. Grate the zest from the limes using a microplane or the small holes of a cheese grater. Set aside.
2. Juice the limes and add to a small saucepan. Slowly sprinkle with gelatin or agar agar powder. Let stand for 2 minutes until it softens and dry spots disappear. Warm over medium-low heat, without stirring, until gelatin or agar agar dissolves. Scrape the mixture into a blender, Vita-Mix, or food processor. Cover and process until smooth.
3. Add the honey or agavé, sea salt, and stevia. Blend. Add the coconut milk, banana, lime zest, and rum, or rum flavoring. Blend until smooth, stopping to scrape the sides with a spatula. For a sweeter taste add an additional 1/8 teaspoon stevia and/or 1 tablespoon honey. Blend, taste, and repeat if needed.
4. Pour into one or more wide mouth jars. Cover and refrigerate for at least 6 hours before churning.
5. Scrape the chilled custard into the canister of your ice cream maker. Churn according to the manufacturer's instructions.
6. Serve immediately, or spoon into several 8- to 16- ounce freezer-safe containers. Cover and freeze for 3 or more hours for a firmer texture.
7. Soften solidly frozen dessert in the refrigerator for 45 minutes or on the counter for 20 to 30 minutes before serving [note: I found this step wasn't necessary with this particular recipe].

1 serving (regular): 234 calories, 2.5 grams protein, 26 grams carbohydrate, 56 grams fat, milligrams sodium
1 serving (half lite): 299 calories, 2 grams protein, 24 grams carbohydrate, 10 grams fat, 47 milligrams sodium
Variations: Lite Banana Daiquiri Ice Cream: Replace half of the coconut milk with lite (reduced fat) coconut milk. Alternatively, use 100% lite coconut milk, but plan to use the batch immediately or within 24 hours before it becomes hard and icy. Strawberry Daiquiri Ice Cream: Replace bananas with fresh or frozen (but thawed), unsweetened strawberries and their juices. Adjust the sweetness with 1 or 2 more more tablespoons honey or agavé nectar as needed.