

Decadent French Yule Log: New Year's Resolutions Start Monday, Right?

Almond cake, ganache, creme brulée, a chocolate crisp, and chocolate mousse doesn't exactly shout "New Year's Resolution," but when you put the phrase dairy-free in front of this assortment of goodies, it is impossible to pass up! Those of you who have been around the foodie blogosphere for a while are probably quite familiar with the Daring Bakers. This ginormous (and growing) group of baking bloggers takes on a specific recipe challenge each month. However, it was just last year that the Daring Bakers relaxed their rules, permitting "alternative" bakers to make substitutions and changes to the original recipe as needed. And thus, dairy-free, gluten-free, and vegan bloggers were able to join in. In December, I was particularly smitten by the daring baker challenge as posted by Dog Hill Kitchen. She not only made the recipe as intended, but she also made a dairy-free version, comparing the two and breaking down each portion of the five part cake, so that you can make any or all of the components ...

"This month's Daring Baker challenge was a French Yule Log. Different from the rolled cake style yule log, this year's yule log is a layered, frozen confection that includes a cake/biscuit, ganache, creme brulée, and a chocolate crisp (feuilleté) all floating in chocolate mousse. I had my doubts about how successful this recipe would be dairy-free so I decided to also make a full-sized log with cow's milk (real dairy) ingredients. With the challenge falling around Christmas, I knew I would have enough dairy eaters to finish it off. So Alex, my son who has a dairy allergy, wouldn't feel left out I also made a smaller log that was dairy-free. For both logs I went with an Ebony and Ivory theme, alternating white and dark chocolate. Here's the breakdown of the components and my thoughts on each:

Element #1 Chocolate Dacquoise (Almond Cake)

The dacquoise was the easiest part because the recipe was originally dairy-free. I made a double batch of the chocolate version given which includes 3 tablespoons of sifted cocoa.

Thoughts: I spread the batter a little too thin. It wasn't quite enough to cover the entire mold and I would have liked the bottom layer thicker. I liked the chocolate flavor a lot. It could have used a pinch of salt, I thought.

Element #2 Dark Chocolate Mousse

For the dairy version I made no changes to the dark chocolate mousse recipe given. For Alex's dairy-free log I used Rich Whip, a dairy-free whipped cream substitute also known as BCoW (Blue Can of Wonder). I learned about Rich Whip from another blogging mom from Michigan who writes at Speedbump Kitchen. The ingredients in Rich Whip are just short of plastic but it does taste just like Cool-whip and is safe for Alex. Sometimes nutritional compromises must be made. For my small dairy-free log I used $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of unwhipped Rich's Whip Topping, 2 teaspoons of cocoa powder, a tiny pinch of salt and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of vanilla extract. I whipped the topping, added the vanilla and salt and sifted in the cocoa. Then I whipped it until the cocoa was evenly distributed.

Thoughts: The dairy-free version came out beautifully. It was light with just enough chocolate flavor. The dairy version was good but a little too heavy and rich for me.

Element #3 White Chocolate Ganache

For the dairy log I followed the directions for the white chocolate ganache insert with no changes. For Alex's dairy-free log, I used 2 oz of dairy-free white chocolate chips with 2 teaspoons of soy milk and 1 teaspoon of Earth Balance margarine. I melted the ingredients carefully in the microwave (1.5 minutes), stirred them together until smooth and piped them in.

Thoughts: The dairy version of this is wonderful! I love the caramel flavor and the slight caramel chew to it. I wish I had made Alex's with caramelized sugar and will be trying that soon. I have had trouble finding a reliable dairy-free ganache recipe but this was spot on. I'll be keeping it around to use again.

Element #4 White Chocolate Praline Feuilleté (Crisp) with Cocoa Crispy Rice Cereal

To save time, I made a double batch of the crisp with dairy-free white chocolate and used it in both logs. I used homemade praline paste with pecans from the Filbert Gateau recipe, which was part of July's DB challenge (link at the end of this post). Then I melted dairy-free white chocolate chips and Earth Balance margarine in the yule log recipe proportions in the microwave. I hate the mess of a double boiler and melting chocolate in the microwave is so easy. I had some New Morning Cocoa Crispy Rice Cereal in the house and so used that for my crisp component. Thus the crisp became another expression of the ebony and ivory theme. (I was getting carried away by this point.)

Thoughts: That praline paste is to die for! I wasn't in the mood for another nut-based cake back in July but I loved the recipe for homemade praline paste. Thanks Chris for choosing that recipe, I've used the components several times.

Element #5 Vanilla Crème Brulée

I didn't change anything in the vanilla crème brulée directions for the dairy log. For Alex's dairy-free log I decided to cheat and made a Tofutti ice cream insert. I used Tofutti Vanilla Almond Bark which is one of their best flavors.

Thoughts: I made the creme brulée layer too thin. It was the first component I made and I thought with my size pan I could get a small log and a full-sized log out of the recipe, but it gave me too thin of a layer. Also, creme brulée without that crispy, caramelized sugar top just doesn't seem right. Creme brulée is all about the cracking the top! Alex's ice

cream layer was really good.

Element #6 White Chocolate Icing

For the dairy-log I followed the provided recipe for white chocolate icing. For Alex's dairy-free log I tried using the recipe as written using dairy-free ingredients, which was a big mistake. After letting it cool, it was too runny so I added another ounce of chocolate and warmed it until the chocolate was incorporated. Still too runny, so I tried adding a teaspoon of soy milk powder. This helped a little but by now I was done playing with it and just went ahead and poured it over the log. It didn't coat thickly enough and the mousse showed through. Bah, you can't win them all.

Thoughts: I coated my dairy-free log first and with the different properties of dairy-free white chocolate it just didn't get thick enough to coat well. Then when I made the icing with dairy I was nervous about it not covering well and let it cool too much. This caused the icing to set into drips on the sides which was not the look I was going for. I wasn't a big fan of the gelatin texture of either icing and would have preferred a gelatin-less ganache coating.

Element #7 Decoration

For the dairy log I made a chocolate ganache, again using a component of the Filbert Gateau recipe (link at end). For Alex's log I used the same proportions as in the ganache insert (1 oz of chocolate, 1 teaspoon of soy milk and 1/2 teaspoon of Earth Balance margarine).

Overall impressions: This was a fun recipe with a lot of techniques that I have never used or only used once before. It was a great learning experience and very satisfying to complete. Overall the two logs were interesting to try side by side. My favorite components were the caramel-white chocolate ganache from the dairy log and the mousse from the dairy-free log. And what did Alex think? He pulled the icing and ganache decoration from the top and that was all he wanted to eat. Kids-- you just never know what will please them! My husband was a big fan of the dairy-free log and my family seemed to enjoy the dairy log. I served both on Christmas Eve and the leftovers on the day after Christmas. Here are some more pictures:
The components for my dairy-free yule log
I'm never left alone when I'm taking food photos
The finished logs: dairy-free on the left, real dairy on the right
Slices of both logs (dairy on the left, dairy-free on the right)

This month's challenge is brought to us by the adventurous Hilda from Saffron and Blueberry and Marion from Il en Faut Peu Pour Etre Heureux. They have chosen a French Yule Log by Flore from Florilege Gourmand.

Recipe Links:

For the complete recipe (Beware, it's huge!) visit Saffron and Blueberry or Il en Faut Peu Pour Etre Heureux. The original recipe comes from a French recipe site, Florilege Gourmand.

Dairy-free Ingredients:

Rich's Whip Topping, New Morning Cocoa Crispy Rice Cereal, Tofutti Vanilla Almond Bark, and my source for dairy-free white chocolate Chocolate Emporium.