

Sweet Sundays: Vegan Butter Tarts and a Chocolatey Date Cake

There are a few things you may not know about one of my very favorite bloggers, Ricki Heller. One is that she has a new cookbook out called Sweet Freedom, and oh how sweet it is! Two is that the book includes some of her most requested recipes from a popular bakery business she ran previously. Three (and this one is a doozy) is that she doesn't use any refined sugars, refined flours, eggs, dairy, or wheat flour in her recipes! Yes, that lovely, buttery tart pictured (also see the picture below where the rich, caramely filling just oozes out) has not an ounce of dairy butter, nor does it rely on margarine or soy in anyway ... it is an all natural, rich and indulgent treat. And the cake, well as Ricki says, this cake is "always a hit!" How does she do it? Get a taste of these recipes and you will find out ...

Mrs. K’s Date Cake

Feature recipe from Sweet Freedom by Ricki Heller

This is the kind of cake you like to have on hand as an after-school snack, or when you’re feeling peckish mid-morning. Baked in a square pan, it will keep, covered on the counter, for up to 4 days, longer if refrigerated (bring to room temperature before indulging).

Cake:

- Heaping 1/2 cup (75 g) finely chopped dried unsweetened dates
- 1 cup (240 ml) boiling water
- 1/2 cup (90 g) Sucanat (or other unrefined evaporated cane juice)
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) finely ground flax seeds
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) unsweetened coconut milk, almond milk or soymilk
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) sunflower or other light-tasting oil, preferably organic
- 2 tsp (10 ml) pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup plus 3 Tbsp (170 g) light spelt flour
- 1 heaping Tbsp (15 ml) dark cocoa powder (preferably not Dutch process)
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 ml) baking powder
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 ml) baking soda
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) fine sea salt

Topping:

- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) Sucanat (or other unrefined evaporated cane juice)
- 1/4 cup (20 g) unsweetened shredded coconut
- 1/2 cup (100 g) dairy-free dark chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350F (180C). Line an 8-1/2” (21 cm) square pan with parchment paper, or spray with nonstick spray.

Make the cake:

Place the dates in a medium bowl and pour the boiling water over them; stir briefly. Add the 1/2 cup (90 g) Sucanat, flax seeds, coconut milk, oil and vanilla, and stir to blend. Allow the mixture to sit until it reaches room temperature, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl sift together the flour, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Pour the cooled wet mixture over the dry and stir to blend. Turn into the prepared pan and smooth the top.

Sprinkle the topping ingredients over the cake:

First, sprinkle the 2 Tbsp (30 ml) Sucanat evenly over the surface of the batter. Cover with a sprinkling of the coconut, and end with the chocolate chips.

Bake for 35-40 minutes, rotating pan about halfway through, until a tester inserted in the center of the cake come out clean. Allow to cool in the pan for at least 20 minutes before cutting (if you cut this cake while it’s still warm, the still-melty chips will cling to the knife and you will end up with a blob of goo instead of a piece of cake). Makes 9 large or 12 medium-sized pieces. May be frozen.

Butter Tarts, Glorious and Free (of Eggs and Dairy)

Feature recipe from Sweet Freedom by Ricki Heller

In Ontario, where I live, butter tarts are the quintessential Canadian dessert. Much like a pecan pie without the pecans, the traditional butter tarts are rich and gooey with butter, eggs and lots of sugar. Here's my adapted version, every bit as delectable, but so much kinder to your health!

Crust:

- 1-2/3 cups (220 g) whole spelt flour
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) fine sea salt
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) coconut oil, preferably organic, melted
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) light agave nectar

Filling:

- 1/4 cup (35 g) raisins
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) brown rice syrup
- 1/4 cup (60 ml) light agave nectar
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) organic cornstarch
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) coconut oil, preferably organic, melted
- 1 tsp (5 ml) pure vanilla extract
- 2 tsp (10 ml) brandy or rum (or use another tsp/5 ml vanilla)
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) finely ground chia seeds (flax is not suitable for this recipe)
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) baking powder

Preheat oven to 325F (165C). Lightly grease 8 individual tart pans (I used 3-inch or 7.5 cm pans with removable bottoms). If you're using solid pans (without removable bottoms), it's worth lining these with parchment paper rounds and then greasing the rounds, as the bottoms may stick to the pan otherwise.

Make the crust:

In a medium bowl, sift the flour and salt. Set aside.

In a small bowl, melt the 1/2 cup (120 ml) coconut oil and then whisk in the agave nectar until combined. Pour the coconut-agave mixture over the flour mixture and toss with a fork until it comes together. Knead with your hands just until the wet ingredients are well incorporated. You should have a very soft dough that just holds its shape (if dough is really too soft, sprinkle more flour, about one Tbsp or 15 ml at a time, until you reach a just barely firm texture--this dough should be very soft!). Divide dough into 8 equal portions among the tart pans.

Dust your hands with flour. Beginning with the sides of the tart pans, press the dough evenly to cover each pan; dust hands with flour periodically to prevent the dough from sticking. Place the tart pans on a cookie sheet and bake for 10-12 minutes until the crust is just starting to puff up. Remove from oven and sprinkle about 1/2 Tbsp (7.5 ml) of the raisins in the bottom of each shell (4-6 raisins).

While the crusts bake, make the filling:

In a medium bowl, whisk together the brown rice syrup and agave nectar with the cornstarch until the mixture is smooth. Whisk in the melted 2 Tbsp (30 ml) coconut oil, vanilla, brandy and chia seeds (be sure there are no little lumps of chia left in the mixture). Add the baking powder last and mix quickly just to blend.

Divide the mixture equally among the tart pans so the pans are about 3/4 full, or filling is almost even with the top of the crusts (you may have a bit of filling left over--it makes a nice topping over ice cream or pancakes). Sweet Freedom is available on Amazon, and the ebook version is available direct from Ricki's blog, Diet Dessert & Dogs. Do you have a recipe that you would like featured in our Sweet Sundays? Send us an email.