Someone’s in the kitchen with...

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Hal Rubenstein
New York Magazine food critic

Ice Box Cake

“There’s no birthday cake that anyone in my family wants more than this one.”

6 boxes Nabisco chocolate wafer cookies
6 pints heavy cream
2 cups sugar
Vanilla

“Mixmaster up a batch of whipped cream. Make it sweet, make it rich, make it peak. Add sugar and vanilla to taste. Open a box of the wafer cookies (ignore the recipe for devil’s food sheet cake—it’s not nearly as sinful). Make a sandwich with two cookies and a generous helping of cream in the middle.

And now for the tricky part: Stand the sandwich on its side on a rectangular tray. Have someone hold it, or use a plate with a slight edge until you get the hang of it. Once you get it up, keep making sandwiches ad nauseam (which you will become, because you can’t help but eat all the broken cookies), lining them up until you have a cylindrical row about one-and-a-half feet long or until you’ve reached the other side of the tray. Now make another parallel cylinder alongside it. Keep doing this until there are about six, or whatever the tray will allow. With a spatula, cover the entire concoction with the remaining whipped cream, shaping it into the semblance of a sheet cake.

Take the remaining broken cookies (there better be some!), grind them up in a food processor or blender and sprinkle the crumbs on top of the cake. Garnish with whatever makes you happy. Refrigerate for 24 hours (for you impatient types, wait at least 18). The cookies will soften to a wonderfully rich texture. Take the cake out of the fridge, cut it with a butter knife and eat it immediately, preferably with your fingers.”

Scott Williams
Writer

Cucumber Dip

“This dip is a family favorite. It takes me back to my grandmother’s kitchen when I was a kid, hand-grating the cucumbers and onions. I strongly suggest a food processor to avert unnecessary elbow wear ’n’ tear.”

3–4 large cucumbers
1 yellow onion
1–11/2 pints sour cream
2 tbsp. mayonnaise
2–21/2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
Salt and pepper

Peel and grate cucumbers and onion. Place gratings in a strainer and press out excess liquid, then place in a large bowl. Add sour cream and mayo. Add Worcestershire, salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate for several hours; the flavors need time to meld together. Use potato chips for dipping.

Dominic Hamilton-Little
Writer, Performance Artist

Tomato Basil Salad

“Nothing tastes more like summer than fresh basil, which my mother grows in large tubs on the terrace. My father grows tomatoes, and we always knew the perfect summer lunch had arrived when her basil met his tomatoes, still warm from the sun, in this delicious and easy salad. The heightened simplicity of this dish relies on fresh ingredients—store-bought tomatoes are not an option—so
head over to the farmer’s market.

For four servings, slice five tomatoes (right off the vine if possible) in rounds and place them in a serving dish. Chop, but not too finely, a generous bunch of basil, which you then scatter over the tomatoes. Season with sea salt and fresh ground pepper, or drizzle a little balsamic dressing over it all.”

Monica Johnson
Mom

Sun Tea

“My mom and I used to make sun tea when I was a child. I’d sit and wait for it to be ready, and she’d say, ‘It’s not time yet, it’s not time yet.’ It always tasted perfect—I’ve never tasted any sun tea that’s been messed up.”

3 family-sized tea bags, any flavor
Sugar and lemon (to taste)
Put tea bags in a
gallon pitcher of water and set in the sun for three to five hours. Sweeten with sugar and lemon. Pour over ice.

Florent Morellet
Restaurateur

Orange Cake

“This cake is a perfect cool and sweet ending to a warm, summer family dinner in the garden. I can almost hear the crickets chirping—if it were not for the conversation getting louder and more passionate. We’ve all had a little too much to drink and are acting so very French.”

9 eggs
3 egg yolks
1 cup sugar
2 tbsp. melted butter
2 oranges, 2 lemons

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grate the rinds of the oranges and lemons, then squeeze out all the juice. Beat the eggs and yolks, as if you’re making an omelette. Add sugar, melted butter, orange and lemon juice, and the grated rinds. Butter a two-inch-deep baking dish and layer it with wax paper. Butter the wax paper. Pour in the mixture and bake for 50 minutes. Refrigerate and serve the next day. Slice peeled oranges or kiwis on top for decoration.

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