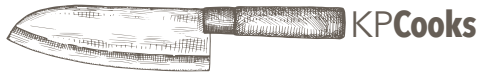


A Tale of Two Puddings



As fall slip-slides away, our culinary attention turns to winter and the upcoming holidays. While we regretfully say farewell to summer foods (until next year), heartier dishes now take center stage when it comes to planning family and friend get-togethers. Who doesn't look forward to meals focusing on comfort food, making us feel good while we stare down our rainy season?

As the holidays approach, it's nostalgic to reach back in time and search out recipes from years gone by; perhaps those that haven't been made in a long, long time, but deserve a place at the table again. One of the two recipes fit the bill for me this year, made even better by the fact these are two "rival" countries (Sweden and Norway) coming to the same holiday table. D tente anyone?

Rommegrot

While Norwegians, Finns and Swedes all claim versions of this delicious warm pudding, served during the winter months and especially during the holidays, the version below is from a Norwegian friend, devoted to her family culture. Made with sour cream (life is short, make your own if possible), whole milk, a little flour, butter and salt, it is topped with a drizzle of melted butter, cinnamon and sugar. While I haven't made it in years (that will change this holiday season), I remember making this with her while helping ourselves to plenty of taste tests along the way. It is truly sublime and most definitely qualifies as comfort food.

2 cups top-of-the-line sour cream, or make your own (recipe below). You can also substitute heavy whipping cream.

1 cup whole milk
   cup flour
 2 tablespoons white sugar
 1 teaspoon salt
 Melted butter for topping

Cinnamon sugar mix, also for topping

Heat milk just to a boil but do not scald. Remove from heat and keep warm. Put sour cream into a medium saucepan, slowly bringing it to a simmer, stirring continually. Allow to simmer for 5 minutes, while continuing to stir. Slowly whisk in flour to sour cream (about 2 tablespoons at a time). Once flour is fully incorporated, add 2 tablespoons sugar and the salt, and mix well. Slowly add in hot milk, whisking while adding, until evenly mixed and thickened. Spoon into bowls and serve, topping each bowl with melted butter, cinnamon and sugar. What's not to like?

Homemade sour cream:

  cup whole milk
   teaspoon distilled white vinegar
 1 cup heavy cream

Combine milk and vinegar and let stand for 10 minutes. Pour heavy cream into a jar. Stir in milk and vinegar mixture, cover the jar and let stand at room temperature for 24 hours. Chill before using. Makes 1 cup.

Aunt Sig's Swedish Rice Pudding

My paternal Great Aunt Signe made this every Christmas. While rommegrot is served warm, this rice pudding is served chilled, topped with lingonberries. This delicious pudding graces our holiday table every year. Aunt Sig (as we called her) would be proud to see her recipe in print.

1 cup white rice, uncooked
 1 quart, plus 2 tablespoons whole milk
 1 packet (  ounce) unflavored gelatin
 1 teaspoon salt
 1 cup sugar
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 1 pint whipping cream
 1 whole, blanched almond
 1 jar lingonberries

In a heavy saucepan over medium heat, bring rice and 1 quart of whole milk to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring frequently, for about 20 minutes or until rice is tender, being careful not to scorch. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, sprinkle gelatin over remaining 2 tablespoons of milk and stir to soften. Add softened gelatin, sugar, salt and vanilla to cooked rice. Stir until well combined, then refrigerate for at least an hour or until well chilled. Whip the cream until it holds stiff peaks, then fold into chilled rice mixture. Fold in almond.

Served chilled with lingonberries. The person who finds the almond can expect good luck in the coming year. This recipe can be halved, but why would you?

Take the challenge! Warm cream pudding topped with butter, cinnamon and sugar or chilled rice pudding with whipped cream and lingonberries? Your taste buds will thank you, whichever way you go.