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Housekeepers' Chat

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Simple Desserts." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,  
U. S. D. A.

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Just as I was finishing the breakfast dishes this morning, who should tap on the back door and then come straight into my kitchen but Marian Lee?

"Delighted to see you," I said, "and flattered to have you visit me at any hour of the day. But I would like to know what brings you way over to my house at this hour in the morning."

"Serious business, Aunt Sammy. The truth is that I'm in search of a charitable aunt who is willing to help a housekeeper in distress."

"If you mean me, by any chance, any services I can offer are at your disposal. What kind of help do you need?"

"Help for my imagination. I'd like to have you give it some special treatment, Aunt Sammy. It works all right when I am inventing fairy stories for the children, but when it comes to planning desserts for them it is sadly lacking. The truth is that when I plan meals I can only think of two desserts for the children--baked apples and custard. So we have one one day and the other the next. And, as the children say, that grows tiresome.

"When I began to plan the menus for today, I was determined to think of something different, but my mind simply wouldn't work. I was plumb disgusted at myself. So I decided to appeal to you for some suggestions to help out my failing imagination. Some simple, easily-made desserts, good for children and grown-ups alike is what I want. You know the kind--appetizing, nourishing and easily digested."

Shades of my childhood! As Marian Lee talked, favorite desserts came trooping into my mind's eye, desserts I used to love when I was a child and desserts I enjoy making nowadays when my young friends come to visit me. There was the raspberry flummery made by a Canadian aunt of mine. There was floating island with bits of bright red jelly on fluffy, white-of-egg islands sailing on a sea of yellow custard--a simple dessert but one that has always delighted the childish heart. Then there was apricot whip, just apricot pulp combined with white of egg and sweetened. Sometimes it was baked in the oven and sometimes not. Then there was apple Brown Betty--a nice name for a pudding, I always thought. A series of tapioca favorites came into the picture--some made with



fruit, some just of the plain creamy kind. Then there was an extra special dessert known as banana delight made with custard, sweet crackers and sliced bananas.

Thinking of all these dishes, I told Marian Lee that I thought I could suggest fifty-seven varieties, or more, of simple, nourishing desserts, all easily prepared.

"And I'll wager that they'll all be popular with everyone around your table from Great aunt Het to Cornelius, Junior," I said.

When I started to describe them all, however, Marian Lee held up her hand.

"Go slow, please, Aunt Sammy, and turn the corners gently or I shall not be able to follow you. You take my breath away. One dessert at a time, please. And couldn't we classify the different varieties so that I can put them down in my notebook? Don't sigh, Aunt Sammy. I learned this notebook habit from you."

Probably Marion Lee is right. Childhood memories are likely to make me go off into raptures and forget the practical, even when I'm thinking about puddings.

Some of the best, nourishing, easily-made desserts contain such valuable foods as milk, eggs and fruit, combined with sweetening and often starch of some sort for thickening.

In most of the custard desserts the eggs provide the thickening necessary. Baked, steamed and soft custards are all milk and egg mixtures thickened by cooking the egg. Use a very low temperature to cook a custard thickened only with egg. Always keep the water below the boiling point to prevent the custard from curdling. Many delicious combinations may be made with soft custard. Banana float for example, is made by pouring chilled soft custard over sliced bananas and garnishing with dates or cherries. Orange and peach custard can be made the same way. For special occasions such a dish can be garnished with meringue and browned in the oven.

Several old favorites in the pudding line are made with milk and eggs added to some starchy material like rice or tapioca, cornstarch or breadcrumbs. A very nice rice pudding may be made by heating a quart of milk in the double boiler, adding 1/2 cup of rice, cooking for an hour--or until the rice is soft with occasional stirring. Then combine 2 slightly-beaten eggs and one-fourth cup of sugar with a half teaspoon of salt, and mix this with the rice and milk. As soon as the egg is added, take the pudding from the fire. Add vanilla, chill and serve with cream. Easy, isn't it? Cream tapioca pudding is made by the same method except that the eggs are usually separated and the stiffly beaten whites folded in the last thing.

Then there are the desserts thickened only by starch such as creamy rice pudding, a small amount of rice baked in a large amount of milk. There is also cornstarch pudding, or Blanc Mange, if you prefer the French name for it.



Here are a few pointers for Marion Lee's notebook, about making corn-starch pudding. First, there are many ways to vary the standard recipe. Brown or maple sugar may be used for sweetening. Chocolate or caramel flavoring and canned fruit, as well as lemon or orange may all be used successfully. Corn-starch has more thickening power than flour and a cornstarch mixture becomes thicker on cooling. Be sure, therefore, to follow the recipe carefully, measuring cornstarch accurately. Nothing is more unpalatable than a pudding made with too much cornstarch. When eggs are used in any starch pudding, the amount of starch will be reduced. Eggs are used not only for thickening but also for flavor and texture.

To prevent lumps, the starch grains should be separated before the hot liquid is added. Mix the starch first with sugar and then combine with enough cold liquid to make a thin paste. Stir some of the hot milk into this paste and then add the mixture to the rest of the hot milk in the double boiler and stir frequently for the twenty-five minutes while it is cooking. If eggs are used, add them after the starch is cooked.

It is time for our menu to-day. First on the program is broiled liver and bacon. Yes, broiled for the children rather than fried. Both bacon and liver are delicious if cooked on the broiling rack turning frequently. Broiled liver and bacon; Stewed tomatoes; Creamed celery; and, for dessert, that extra special I mentioned a while ago--Banana delight pudding.

Now a recipe for that delightful banana pudding. Seven ingredients:

1 quart milk	1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 cup sugar	Sweet crackers or cookies
1/8 teaspoon salt	Bananas
4 or 5 eggs	

I'll repeat that list. (Repeat).

Heat the milk, sugar, and salt in a double boiler. Beat the egg yolks lightly, and slowly add some of the heated milk. Pour back into the double boiler, and stir constantly until the custard coats the spoon. Remove at once from the fire, place the pan in a bowl of cold water, and stir the custard occasionally as it cools. Add the vanilla. Grease a baking dish, put in the bottom a layer of sweet crackers, and slice over them a layer of banana. Pour over this some of the custard and fill the dish about three-quarters full with these layers. Make a meringue of the whites of the eggs and 1 tablespoon of sugar to each egg. Spread over the pudding and bake for about 20 minutes in a slow oven (250° F.) until golden brown. Then let the pudding stand until thoroughly chilled before serving.

