CHEESECAKE CREATIONS

By Margaret H. Koehler

CHEESECAKE is an instantly palpable word; saying it one can almost taste something delectably soft and smooth. Currently in vogue, it represents the *haute couture* of the dessert world and is featured on menus at the most exclusive restaurants; yet, some of the most memorable examples may be found in relatively nondescript corner delicatessens. Were an international popularity contest to be held among desserts, cheesecake would have an excellent chance of being crowned the winner.

Cheesecake is a very personal, to-each-his-own sort of fare. Connoisseurs, forks poised in the process of sampling, argue—usually amiably—about the relative merits of one form over another, and there are hundreds of minor variations of the "New York" and "sour cream" types, which are the most familiar.

Although one may buy New York style cheesecake in Paris or sour cream style in Vienna and feel very much at home, cheesecake is apt to dress quite differently in other countries. The Russian *vatrushka* and the German *Käsekuchen* are two examples that, though within the genre, are certainly different. Cheesecake has an intriguing way of assimilating new and seemingly incompatible ingredients with considerable success. Chocolate, pumpkin, and rum cheesecakes are just a few delicious demonstrations of unlikely flavor affinities.

A trendy favorite now, cheesecake, per se, goes back a long time. Its origin is obscure, with many countries and ethnic groups laying claim to having produced the first. The date that first cheesecake was baked may never be known, but as far back as Colonial days, for example, William Penn's son brought recipes of his mother's to the Pennsylvania colony, including one for Penn's favorite cheesecake.

Styles change, but the versatile cheesecake is a classic —forever in culinary fashion. We have selected the following favorites from our recipe collection to help illustrate the endless variations. A few hints: Cheesecakes often crack while baking, and some rise high and later fall, but these are not matters for concern. Keep in mind, though, that cheesecakes do not take kindly to sudden changes in temperature, so don't open the oven door during baking.

Cranberry Cheesecake

Into a large bowl sift together 1 cup flour and ¼ cup sugar, add 1 stick (½ cup) cold butter, cut into bits, 1 large egg yolk, lightly beaten, 1 teaspoon grated orange rind, and ¼ teaspoon each of vanilla and orange extract, and blend the mixture until it is well combined. Form the dough into a ball, knead it lightly with the heel of the hand against a smooth surface for a few seconds to distribute the fat evenly, and re-form it into a ball. Dust the dough with flour and chill it, wrapped in wax paper, for at least 1 hour. Press the dough onto the bottom and sides of a well-buttered 9-inch springform pan and chill the shell until it is to be filled.

In a large bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer beat 2½ pounds cream cheese, softened, until it is light and fluffy. Add 1¾ cups sugar, 3 tablespoons flour, 1 teaspoon grated orange rind, ½ teaspoon each of vanilla and orange extract, and a pinch of salt and beat the mixture until it is well combined. Beat in 5 whole large eggs and 2 egg yolks at room temperature, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition, and stir in ¼ cup heavy cream. Pour the batter into the

From the top: cranberry cheesecake (recipe above) and Mexican cheesecake and pumpkin cheesecake (recipes on page 68) on Imperial "Revere" glass cake stands from Bloomingdale's, 1000 Third Avenue, New York City. *Photographed at* GOURMET's *studios.*

shell and bake the cake in the middle of a preheated very hot oven (450° F.) for 12 minutes. Reduce the heat to slow (300° F.) and bake the cake for 1 hour more. Let the cake cool in the pan on a rack for 20 minutes.

In a stainless steel or enameled saucepan combine 2 cups cranberries, rinsed and picked over, 1 cup sugar, and ½ cup water, bring the liquid to a boil, and simmer the mixture for 3 minutes. Add ¼ cup sugar and 1 tablespoon cornstarch combined with 2 tablespoons water and cook the mixture, stirring, until it is thickened. Let the mixture cool, spread it evenly on the cake, and chill the cake, loosely covered, for at least 2 hours. Remove the sides of the pan and transfer the cake to a cake stand or plate.

Mexican Cheesecake

In a bowl combine 1½ cups chocolate wafer crumbs, ⅓ cup sugar, and ¾ stick (6 tablespoons) butter, melted, press the mixture onto the bottom and halfway up the sides of a 9-inch springform pan, and bake the shell in a preheated moderate oven (350° F.) for 8 minutes. Let the shell cool in the pan on a rack.

In the top of a double boiler sprinkle 2 tablespoons unflavored gelatin over ½ cup each of coffee-flavored liqueur and cold water to soften for 10 minutes. Beat in 3 large egg yolks, ¼ cup sugar, 2 teaspoons instant espresso dissolved in 1 tablespoon hot water, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, and a pinch of salt, set the pan over boiling water, and cook the mixture, stirring, for 5 minutes, or until it begins to thicken. Remove the pan from the heat and let the mixture cool slightly.

In a large bowl beat 1 pound cream cheese, softened, until it is light and fluffy. Add the gelatin mixture, beat the mixture until it is smooth, and chill it for 30 minutes, or until it is thickened slightly. In a bowl beat 3 large egg whites at room temperature with a pinch each of cream of tartar and salt until they hold stiff peaks. In a chilled bowl beat 1 cup heavy cream until it holds stiff peaks. Fold the whites and the cream into the cream cheese mixture, pour the mixture into the shell, and chill the cake, loosely covered, for at least 3 hours, or until the filling is set. Remove the sides of the pan and transfer the cake to a cake stand or plate. Decorate the cake with chocolate curls sprinkled with cinnamon.

Chocolate Curls

In the top of a double boiler set over simmering water melt 3 ounces semisweet chocolate and stir it until it is smooth. With a metal spatula spread it in a very thin layer on the surface of 2 or 3 inverted cake pans. Chill the chocolate for 10 to 15 minutes, or until it loses its shine and is solid but still pliable. Removing one pan from the refrigerator at a time, put a metal spatula under an edge of the chocolate and push it firmly away from you along the pan so that the chocolate curls as it is pushed. Chill the chocolate for several minutes more if it becomes too soft to curl. Transfer the curls to a sheet of wax paper and chill them as they are made.

Pumpkin Cheesecake

Sprinkle ¼ cup gingersnap crumbs onto the bottom and sides of a well-buttered 9-inch springform pan and chill the pan until it is to be filled.

In a large bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer beat 2 pounds cream cheese, softened, until it is light and fluffy. Add 1½ cups sugar, ⅓ cup flour, 1½ teaspoons cinnamon, 1 teaspoon each of nutmeg and ground cloves, ¼ teaspoon ground allspice, and a pinch of salt and beat the mixture until it is well combined. Beat in 6 large eggs at room temperature, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. Fold in 2 cups (a 1-pound tin) pumpkin purée, pour the batter into the pan, and bake the cake in the middle of a preheated slow oven (325° F.) for 1 hour and 30 minutes. The cake will be firm around the edges and soft in the center. Turn off the heat, open the oven door, and let the cake stand in the oven for 30 minutes. Let the cake cool completely in the pan on a rack and chill it, loosely covered, for at least 2 hours. Remove the sides of the pan and transfer the cake to a cake stand or plate. Decorate the cake with whipped cream and chopped glacéed walnuts or pecans or minced candied orange peel.

Glacéed Nuts

In a small deep saucepan combine 2 cups sugar and 1 cup water and bring the mixture to a boil over moderate heat, stirring and washing down any sugar crystals clinging to the sides with a brush dipped in cold water until the sugar is dissolved. Cook the syrup, undisturbed, until it reaches the hard-crack stage, or a candy thermometer registers 280° F., and remove the pan from the heat. Working quickly but carefully with tongs, dip nuts, 1 at a time, into the syrup, coating them completely, transfer them to a greased baking sheet, and let them cool completely. The nuts keep for about 1 week in an airtight container.

New York Cheesecake

In a large bowl cream together 1 pound each of cream cheese, softened, and ricotta and 1½ cups sugar and beat in 4 large eggs at room temperature, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. Add ½ stick (¼ cup) butter, melted and cooled, 3 tablespoons each of flour and cornstarch, and 2½ teaspoons vanilla and beat the mixture until it is well combined. Fold in 2 cups sour cream, pour the batter into an ungreased 9-inch springform pan, and bake the cake in the middle of a preheated moderately slow oven (325° F.) for 1 hour. The cake will be soft in the center. Turn off the heat (do not open the oven door) and let the cake stand in the oven for 2 hours. Let the cake cool completely in the pan on a rack and chill it, loosely covered, for at least 2 hours. Remove the sides of the pan and transfer the cake to a cake stand or plate.

Chocolate Cheesecake

In a bowl combine 1⅓ cups chocolate wafer crumbs, ½ stick (¼ cup) butter, melted, and 2 tablespoons sugar, press the mixture onto the bottom and sides of a well-buttered 9-inch springform pan, and chill the shell until it is to be filled.

In a saucepan scald 1 cup heavy cream, remove the pan from the heat, and let the cream cool for 5 minutes. Add 8 ounces semisweet chocolate, cut into bits, stir the mixture until the chocolate is melted, and in the bowl of an electric mixer beat the mixture until it is cooled and light in texture.

In a large bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer beat 4 large egg yolks at room temperature with ½ cup sugar until the mixture is thick and lemon colored and forms a ribbon when the beater is lifted. Add the chocolate mixture and beat the mixture until it is well combined. In a food processor fitted with the steel blade or in the bowl of an electric mixer blend 1½ pounds cream cheese, softened, 1 cup sour cream, 2 tablespoons cornstarch, and 1 teaspoon almond extract until the mixture is smooth. Add the cream cheese mixture to the chocolate mixture and stir the mixture until it is well combined.

In a bowl beat 4 large egg whites at room temperature with a pinch each of cream of tartar and salt until they hold soft peaks, add ¼ cup sugar, and beat the whites until they hold stiff peaks. Fold the whites into the chocolate mixture and pour the batter into the shell. Put the springform pan in a baking pan, add enough hot water to the baking pan to reach halfway up the sides of the springform pan, and bake the cake in a preheated slow oven (300° F.) for 1 hour and 30 minutes. Turn off the heat (do not open the oven door) and let the cake