NUTMEG CAKE

SERVES 8–10

While nutmeg adds a subtle note to many desserts, it claims center stage in this traditional spiced Armenian cake (pictured on page 80). We based this recipe on one in *A World of Cake* by Krystina Castella (Storey Publishing, 2010). For a source for cake stencils, see page 134.

- **12 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed, plus more for pan**
- **3 cups flour, plus more for pan**
- **4 ½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg**
- **2 tsp. baking powder**
- **1 tsp. ground cinnamon**
- **¾ tsp. baking soda**
- **½ tsp. kosher salt**
- **2 cups packed light brown sugar**
- **1 ½ cups sour cream**
- **1 cup milk**
- **2 eggs, beaten**
- **½ cup finely chopped walnuts**
- **Confectioners' sugar, for dusting**

Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour a 5" x 12" cake pan; set aside. In a food processor, combine flour, nutmeg, baking powder, cinnamon, baking soda, and salt; pulse to combine. Add butter and pulse until pea-size crumbs form. Add brown sugar, sour cream, milk, and eggs; process until smooth. Add walnuts; stir in with a rubber spatula. Transfer batter to prepared pan; smooth top. Bake until a toothpick inserted into center of cake comes out clean, 45–50 minutes. Transfer to a rack; let cool. To serve, unmold cake, top with a cake stencil, and dust top with confectioners' sugar. Remove stencil; cut into squares to serve.

CAYO ROMANO COCKTAIL

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

Freshly grated nutmeg rounds out the flavor of this shaken rum-and-citrus juice cocktail from Cienfuegos, a bar in New York City.

- **1 oz. dark aged rum**
- **1 oz. silver rum**
- **1 oz. ginger liqueur, such as Canton**

Cayo Romano cocktail

- **¾ oz. fresh lime juice**
- **¾ oz. fresh orange juice**
- **1 dash allspice pimento dram (optional; see page 134)**
- **1 dash Angostura bitters**
- **Freshly grated nutmeg and superfine sugar, to taste**

Fill a cocktail shaker with 2 cups cracked ice. Add all ingredients, cover, and shake vigorously for 10–15 seconds until chilled. Strain cocktail and serve up in a chilled highball glass.

NUTMEG CUSTARD TARTS

SERVES 8

Creamy and spicy, these classic English custard tarts (pictured on page 81) boast all the hallmarks of our favorite eggnogs. We based this recipe on one from British journalist and cookbook author Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

- **½ cup sugar**
- **8 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened**
- **3 eggs**
- **2 ½ cups flour**
- **¼ tsp. kosher salt**
- **2 ⅔ cups heavy cream**
- **⅔ cup milk**
- **2 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg, plus more for garnish**
- **½ vanilla bean, seeds scraped and reserved**
- **½ cup packed light brown sugar**
- **4 egg yolks**

❶ Make the pastry: In a large bowl, beat together sugar and butter with a hand mixer on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, 1–2 minutes. Add 1 lightly beaten egg and beat until smooth. Add flour and salt and mix on low speed until a crumbly dough forms. Transfer to a lightly floured work surface and flatten dough into a disk; divide disk into 4 equal portions and flatten each portion into a disk. Working with 1 disk at a time, roll out to ⅛" thickness, transfer to a 6"-diameter 12-oz. tart tin, and transfer tin to a baking sheet; repeat with remaining disks and tins. Trim edges and lightly prick bottoms with tines of a fork; refrigerator for 1 hour.

❷ Heat oven to 375°. Line each tin with a parchment paper circle and fill with dried beans or pie weights; bake until just set, 15 minutes. Remove weights and parchment and continue baking tart shells until the edges are golden brown, 12–15 minutes more. Transfer tins to a wire rack and let tart shells cool. Reduce oven temperature to 300°.

❸ Make the filling: Heat cream, milk, nutmeg, and vanilla seeds in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat until it begins to simmer; remove from heat. In a large bowl, whisk together remaining eggs, brown sugar, and egg

NUTMEG'S OTHER HALF

Mace is the waxy red web—technically, an aril—that encases the nutmeg seed. An extension of the seed stalk that transfers nutrients from fruit to seed, the aril is high in myristicin, the same fragrant compound that in high doses has a narcotic effect on humans and is toxic to bugs (an obvious evolutionary advantage in the tropics). To birds, though, the mace's come-hither shade of red is beguilingly attractive, and so the seeds travel and the tree proliferates. Usually dried and sold in shards called blades, mace is more fragile than nutmeg, and more expensive. You can buy it ground up, but mace loses its pungency quickly once pulverized. Lior Lev Secarz, who owns the online spice shop La Boîte à Epices and creates custom spice blends for chefs including Daniel Boulud and Eric Ripert, buys arils that are largely intact. "Mace has more citrus notes, more floral notes than nutmeg does," he says. "I use it in a fresh blend, something with bright herbs and spices." Secarz's antecedents, the spice merchants of the Middle Ages, would lure customers with blends such as Moroccan *ras el hanout*, which usually contains mace. It's also not unusual for cooks in North Africa to blend mace and paprika and infuse them in oil to create a flavor base for meat and poultry dishes. Secarz rarely grinds mace; it's very oily and can make a spice blend clump together. "I'll break the mace into chips instead," he says. "That way, you get this intermittent hit of mace as you chew. The coarse texture adds complexity." —*B.K.*

TODD COLEMAN; ILLUSTRATION, RHONDA WEAVER