THE LAST TOUCH

Butter Up! If you want to hit a culinary home run, try brown butter. It is quick to make and adds a toasty dimension to pound cake, scrambled eggs, and more.

BROWN BUTTER POUND CAKE

MAKES 1 (8½- BY 4½-INCH) LOAF

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 3½ HR (INCLUDES COOLING)

- 2¼ sticks unsalted butter
- 2 cups sifted cake flour (not self-rising; sift before measuring)
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 4 large eggs
- ½ tsp pure vanilla extract

▸Preheat oven to 325°F with rack in middle. Butter and lightly flour an 8½- by 4½-inch loaf pan.

▸Heat butter in a 10-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until milk solids on bottom are a dark chocolate brown. Transfer to a shallow bowl and chill in freezer until just congealed, about 15 minutes.

▸Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt.

▸Beat together brown butter and sugars with an electric mixer until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add eggs 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla. At low speed, mix in flour mixture until just incorporated.

▸Transfer batter to pan, smoothing top, then rap pan on counter to settle batter. Bake until golden-brown and a wooden pick inserted into center comes out clean, 1 to 1¼ hours. Cool in pan 30 minutes, then invert cake onto a rack and cool completely, right side up, 1 hour.

BROWN BUTTER SCRAMBLED EGGS

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

- 8 large eggs
- 2 Tbsp chopped chives, divided
- ½ stick unsalted butter

ACCOMPANIMENT: toast

▸Beat eggs with 1 Tbsp chives and ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper in a bowl with a fork until well blended.

▸Heat butter in a 10-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until milk solids on bottom are a dark chocolate brown. Reduce heat to medium-low, then add eggs and cook, whisking constantly, until thickened to consistency of soft porridge with small curds. Spoon over toast and sprinkle with remaining Tbsp chives.

PECAN BROWN BUTTER COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 42 COOKIES

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

- 1½ sticks unsalted butter
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ¾ tsp salt
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups pecans (7 oz), toasted (see Tips, page 142), cooled, and chopped

▸Preheat oven to 350°F with racks in upper and lower thirds.

▸Heat butter in a 10-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until milk solids on bottom are a dark chocolate brown. Transfer to a shallow bowl and chill in freezer until just congealed, about 15 minutes.

▸Blend brown butter with sugars, flour, baking soda, salt, and eggs in a food processor until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and stir in pecans.

▸Spoon tablespoons of batter onto parchment-lined baking sheets, arranging them about 1 inch apart.

▸Bake, switching position of sheets halfway through, until browned, 15 to 18 minutes. Transfer cookies to a rack to cool (cookies will crisp as they cool).

FENNEL-DUSTED CHICKEN WITH BROWN BUTTER AND CAPERS

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

- 1 Tbsp fennel seeds, finely ground
- 4 chicken cutlets (about 1½ lb)
- ½ stick unsalted butter, divided
- 1 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 Tbsp drained capers, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh orange juice

▸Stir together fennel seeds, ¾ tsp salt, and ½ tsp pepper. Pat chicken dry, then sprinkle both sides with fennel mixture.

▸Heat 2 Tbsp butter with oil in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until foam subsides, then cook 2 cutlets, turning once, until just cooked through, 4 to 5 minutes total. Transfer to a plate and cover loosely. Add remaining 2 cutlets to skillet and cook, then transfer to plate. (Butter will brown as chicken cooks.)

▸Add capers and orange juice to skillet along with any meat juices from plate and bring to a boil, scraping up brown bits. Remove from heat and swirl in remaining 2 Tbsp butter. Pour over chicken.

FOR MORE ABOUT MAKING BROWN BUTTER, SEE KITCHEN NOTEBOOK, PAGE 135.

RECIPES BY PAUL GRIMES