

2. In a large bowl, cream together granulated sugar and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup butter. Add eggs, buttermilk, and 1 teaspoon vanilla and beat until well blended.

3. In a small bowl, whisk $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cocoa in 1 cup boiling water. Add to sugar mixture and beat to blend. In a medium bowl, combine flour, salt, baking soda, and cinnamon. Add to sugar-cocoa mixture and beat on low speed to combine thoroughly.

4. Pour batter into prepared baking pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

5. In a 2-quart pan over high heat, whisk together remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cocoa and the milk and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and add remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, cut into small pieces, and stir until melted. Whisk in powdered sugar and remaining 1 teaspoon vanilla. Mix until smooth. Stir in pecans (if using). Pour mixture over the still-warm cake. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Per serving: 457 cal., 35% (162 cal.) from fat; 4.6 g protein; 18 g fat (10 g sat.); 73 g carbo (1.6 g fiber); 482 mg sodium; 78 mg chol.

Blue Cheese Cocktail Crackers

BETTY CORNELISON, PORTLAND

These savory little bites are great to serve with drinks. They're also a tasty snack for game day.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 35 minutes

MAKES: About 4 dozen crackers

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cream cheese, at room temperature

1 cup butter, at room temperature

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups crumbled blue cheese

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 cups crisp rice cereal, such as Rice Krispies

2 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. With a mixer on medium speed, cream together cream cheese and butter until light and fluffy. Add cayenne, blue cheese, flour, rice cereal, and bacon (if using)

and beat on medium-low speed until well blended. The dough will be stiff.

2. Roll 1-tablespoon portions into balls and place slightly apart on baking sheets. Flatten each ball with a fork.

3. Bake until crackers are golden brown, 12 to 15 minutes.

Per serving: 80 cal., 66% (53 cal.) from fat; 1.7 g protein; 5.9 g fat (3.7 g sat.); 5 g carbo (0.2 g fiber); 116 mg sodium; 16 mg chol.

Lemon-Artichoke Chicken

CHARLOTTE CORKERY, AUBURN, CA

This dish is elegant enough for company but simple enough for week-night meals. (Valentine's Day, anyone?)

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 1 hour

MAKES: 4 servings

4 boned, skinned chicken breast halves (about 8 oz. each), rinsed, dried, and pounded to an even thickness of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon each salt and pepper

2 tablespoons butter

1 can (14 oz.) quartered artichoke hearts, drained

2 tablespoons dry sherry

2 tablespoons grated lemon peel

2 teaspoons lemon juice

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup whipping cream

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated parmesan cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Sprinkle chicken on both sides with salt and pepper. In a 10-inch frying pan over medium-high heat, melt the butter. Add chicken in batches and cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, about 4 minutes per side. Transfer chicken to a 9- by 13-inch baking dish and add artichoke hearts.

2. Add sherry, lemon peel, and lemon juice to remaining butter in frying pan; stir over medium heat until well blended and hot, 2 to 3 minutes. Add cream and stir. Remove from heat and pour sauce over chicken. Sprinkle with cheese.

3. Bake until sauce is bubbling and golden brown on top, 20 to 25 minutes.

Per serving: 437 cal., 39% (171 cal.) from fat; 57 g protein; 19 g fat (11 g sat.); 6.6 g carbo (1.1 g fiber); 600 mg sodium; 184 mg chol. ●