

Cookbook Giveaway and a Vegan Chocolate Orange Cake

It is Advent and Coptic Christians, of whom I am a poor example of late, are fasting for 43 days leading up to the Nativity feast on January 7th (per the Gregorian calendar).

During the fast of the Holy Nativity we should abstain from dairy and meat. Thus vegan cakes are abundant.

What I love about this cake is it takes very little time to make and the ingredients are pantry staples. Lately I've been stocking this [orange peel](#) which is super convenient to have during Christmas time when you don't want to run to the store just to buy an orange.

This cake recipe comes from my mother and we have been baking it for decades. It is yummy whether or not you are abstaining from dairy. And it's one of the recipes included in my [Egyptian cookbook](#).

Speaking of which I decided to do something fun with this post. DH claims I am not fun and that when I bake I go into mad scientist mode and thus transform my kitchen into a hostile environment. That is not far from the truth. In my defense, one can not keep track of puff pastry turns if one's husband is sitting in the kitchen constantly chattering about his eBay deals and football scores. But, I digress. Fun.

Right. Amazon no longer has my cookbooks in stock because I have the last dozen or so copies in my home. So I decided to have a giveaway. I will send a free copy of my cookbook to a randomly selected person. It will be my Christmas gift to you. You must do two things: 1) Leave a comment below this post and tell me about a post that you have enjoyed reading and/or a recipe you made from this blog; 2) subscribe to this blog if you haven't already because I will need your email to notify you if you're the winner of the giveaway. That's fun,

right? I will pick the winner on December 20th. Merry Christmas! Happy Nativity Feast!

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Updated Recipe and Technique for Dios Beigli

The first time I can remember having this traditional Hungarian pastry was when my husband's cousin, Judith, sent us a loaf for our first Christmas as a married couple. I knew right away that I must have had something like this before because it is one of those classic combinations of syrupy walnuts and sweet dough that is ubiquitous in traditional desserts. In fact, it is very similar to the filling used in baklava. I have posted a recipe for beigli previously but have not been completely satisfied with it as I was getting ruptured fillings and cracks in the dough. I am much happier with this recipe and, as you can see, have managed to reproduce the beautiful mosaic pattern that comes from layering an egg yolk then an egg white wash.

I'm still working on perfecting the poppy seed filling so stay tuned...

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Rough Puff Pastry Part Trois: How to Assemble a Banana Tarte Tatin

This post is the third part in a series about rough puff pastry highlighting the versatility of this marvelous pastry dough. You can make a large quantity of puff pastry and keep it in your fridge for about one week (or the freezer for two months) and pull out small quantities at a time to make turnovers, galettes, palmiers, millefeuille, cheese straws – just to name a few.

A tarte Tatin is basically an upside pastry with caramelized fruit. It is a very humble dessert in my opinion. If you are accustomed to the denser and heartier American pies a tarte Tatin can seem like an accident (indeed, its origin may have been so) or a repurposing of leftovers. I believe that is the beauty of French pastry – you can spend all day turning out a gateau St. Honore or spend less than an hour making a tarte Tatin that is just as elegant in its own right.

[Adapted from Edd Kimber's "Patisserie Made Simple."](#)

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How to Form Brioche Suisse

Brioche Suisse seems so foreboding at first glance but it has become my go-to weekend breakfast treat. My current pastry bible, [Edd Kimber's "Patisserie Made Simple,"](#) gives perfect instruction for making them from start to finish. But I have found a little cheat for those times when I just can't babysit the mixer. This [bread machine](#) has become my new best friend in the kitchen. I make the brioche dough in there and then put it in the fridge overnight. I make the creme patissiere while the bread machine is going and also pop it in the fridge overnight. In the morning I form the brioche Suisse and let them proof for about an hour before baking.

The best way I found to proof my pastry is to put the trays in these [jumbo Ziploc bags](#) with a mug of boiling hot water.

They are perfect for weekend guests or a parent coffee at school. I challenge you to reach beyond a breakfast casserole !

By the way, I should mention that there are two reasons for my recent flurry of posts: the baby goes to bed at 7:30 now and ... it's football season. I'm a football widow. Isn't that the term?

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Angry Birds Cake

I made this cake in April of this year for a little boy whose father bid on an auction at our church fundraiser. (I just had a vision of Sister Margaret, my 7th grade English teacher, chiding me for using too many prepositional phrases in that sentence. Actually, she was the only one of the nuns I liked so I don't mind envisioning her. But I digress...)

We had a silent auction at our church fundraiser. I volunteered to make a cake. I actually didn't think there would be any bids but apparently there was a bidding war! So this little boy liked Angry Birds and I really got a kick out of making this cake – especially the beaks.

I probably should have posted this earlier because I would have remembered the difficulty I was having with LMF back in April. Sometimes I feel like Dory. I can remember my name but the rest of my short term memory was blitzed back in December when I had the third baby. (If you're a parent of one of my patients – I'm just kidding. I promise).

What I learned from this cake:

When making LMF (Liz Marek Fondant), definitely stop adding powdered sugar when it gets to be smooth and elastic. I think too much PS is one of the reasons I have been having so much trouble with it drying out lately. I bought [20 gauge vinyl](#) from Joann's a while ago and I use it to cover my counter when I'm rolling out fondant. It helps to keep your fondant clean while rolling it out. It also eliminates the need for any dusting. At most I will use a smear of shortening. Again, I forgot this while I was making the Angry Birds cake and doused my vinyl with CS – drying out my fondant even further.

I did read through the comments under the LMF recipe and gleaned some tips for working with her fondant:

1)When making dark colors and the fondant gets sticky, use a little PS to dry it up a bit.

2) When making LMF, only add PS until you reach a taffy-like texture

3) If your LMF is dry, give it a couple of spritzes of water and a little extra Wilton fondant. Then heat for 30 seconds and pull like taffy with shortening on your hands.

One more thing that I found helpful when rolling out fondant is to roll out to the exact measurement of the cake, not an inch extra as I was initially taught. The fondant will stretch anyway as you are covering your cake and having too much fondant will put too much weight on the edges of the cake and potentially create tears. Just make sure you roll it out into a circle.

I used modeling chocolate for the beaks. I made them last and did not have time for them to dry. Modeling chocolate works best for pieces that you need to put on the cake right away and hold their shape. For the best mixing chart and information to make modeling chocolate check out: www.cakepaperparty.com. I always use Mercken's candy melts in super white for my modeling chocolate and I use a 4:1 ratio of chocolate to corn syrup.



Spiderman Cake

It's been a long time since I posted... maternity leave ended in March and I was back to the real world with two kids in school and the new baby. My cake decorating has slowed down considerably this year and its not exactly like riding a bike.

Some of my skills have improved with experience and knowledge but my hands are not as agile with fondant as they used to be when I made cakes more often. However, every project is a chance to learn, right? So here are the details of the Spiderman cake or, as my son used to call him, "Siderman."

The baking:

Both tiers were chocolate mud cake. I bought an 8"x3" Fat Daddio's pan when I first started baking cakes but I had a devil of a time getting cakes to bake evenly in that pan because it was so deep. I tried Wilton flower nails and Ateco nails which did not help. Then I stumbled upon the [Fat Daddio's heating rod](#). The cake baked evenly and in record time.

The filling and the frosting:

I had a problem with the bottom because I didn't give it time to settle. I filled it with a cookie and cream buttercream and then chilled it for 15 minutes and started ganaching it right away. The next day it had a slight barrel shape – it was bulging. It turned out fine in the end because I covered it up with the cityscape but that's the kind of omission that really impacts your outcome.

The top tier did not have that problem because I filled it with ganache and let it sit out at room temperature to settle.

What worked beautifully for this cake was the upside down ganache method. I tried it once ages ago but was too scared to keep flipping cakes so I tried so many other frosting techniques that never worked perfectly for me. I tried using a board on top and on bottom which was okay but was time consuming and not always perfect because the top and bottom boards would sometimes shift out of alignment. I tried free-handing it but that inevitably led to some kind of lopsidedness. I need a lot more practice to do that perfectly and quickly. I bought the adjustable cake scraper from Evil

Cake Genius but after several tries I do not believe it works well with ganache. I even designed and developed a prototype for my own acrylic footed cake scraper which did not work well with ganache either. Then I tried the upside down method again and it worked so well that for the first time ever I did not get frustrated frosting my cakes AND I got perfect edges.

The fondant:

Aiyiyi was I mad covering these cakes! I had made LMF ahead of time but it was rubbish once I started covering the cakes. The blue fondant literally ripped all around the edge and just fell off. I had to panel wrap the bottom tier. I tried kneading and heating the red fondant but I found it was just as hard and non-elastic as the blue fondant so I threw it in the bin. I might try one more time with less PS and a different brand of marshmallows because it used to work for me.

I had to quickly color some Satin Ice for the top tier and forgot that I never, ever add cornstarch to Satin Ice. So that dried out as well and I got some elephant skin and a tear. But silver lining– I discovered [fondant gunge](#) and patched it up.

The decorations:

I had planned on cutting out the city skyline and then the windows one by one until I discovered this [stencil](#). It was so easy to make the skyline and looked so much more streamlined.

I deliberated for weeks about how best to create the spiderweb. I alternated between piping royal icing and extruding ropes of fondant and went with the latter. I first outlined the cake and then with DH's help extruded the web directly onto the cake.

DH looks forward to getting a shout out on these posts so let me also mention that if it wasn't for his idea to make little

craters on the moon it would not have been recognizable as a moon. DH has developed the George Costanza method of “leaving [the kitchen] on a high note.” He likes to give me one good idea then take his leave to avoid messing anything up. But this time he outdid himself and also came up with the great idea to make those teeny tiny stars with my star tip.







By the way, I based my design on this [cake](#).