

YOU ASKED FOR IT

A delicate brown-butter cake to feed a crowd; a creamy root-vegetable soup that nods to Southeast Asia; and the power of hot sauce in a classic spinach side

I VISITED A GREAT wine and tapas bar called Just a Taste, in Ithaca, New York. For dessert we sampled a delicious almond brown-butter cake. I would be very grateful if you could obtain the recipe.

ALEX SANSKY

BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

ALMOND BROWN-BUTTER CAKE

Adapted from Just a Taste

SERVES 8 TO 12 (DESSERT)

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 3½ HR
(INCLUDES COOLING)

Like a giant financier, this simple cake is the perfect pastry to showcase fragrant almond and deep brown-butter flavors.

- 2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter, plus additional for greasing pan
- 1½ cups slivered almonds (5 oz), toasted (see Tips, page 127)
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 7 large egg whites, at room temperature for 30 minutes
- 2 cups confectioners sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: a 9- to 9½-inch (24-cm) springform pan; parchment paper

►Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F. ►Invert bottom of springform pan (to make it easier to slide cake off bottom), then lock on side and butter bottom and side. Line bottom with a round of parchment paper, then butter parchment. ►Cook butter in a 1- to 1½-quart heavy saucepan over moderately low heat until it is golden brown and has a nutty fragrance, 10 to 15 minutes (bottom of pan will be covered with brown specks). Remove from heat and cool to warm, about 20 minutes. ►Pulse almonds with flour in a food processor until finely ground. Beat together egg whites, confectioners sugar, and salt in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed until just smooth (but not foamy), then add almond mixture and beat until just combined. Add butter in a slow stream, beating, then continue beating until batter is combined. ►Transfer batter to pan and bake until cake begins to pull away from sides of pan and a wooden pick

or skewer inserted in center of cake comes out clean, 40 to 45 minutes. Cool in pan on a rack 5 minutes, then remove side and bottom of pan and cool cake completely on rack. Discard parchment and serve.

PLEASE TRY TO SEND ME the recipe for the Jerusalem artichoke soup served at The Sycamore House in Bay St. Louis.

CINDY LAUTENSCHLAGER

NEW ORLEANS

JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE SOUP

Adapted from The Sycamore House

SERVES 4 TO 6

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 HR

This American-grown tuber is more familiar under its new name, the Sun Choke (see Kitchen Notebook, page 119). Paired with lemongrass, it creates a rich, delicious soup.

- 1¼ lb Jerusalem artichokes (also labeled Sun Chokes)
- 1½ tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 fresh lemongrass stalk, root end trimmed and 1 or 2 outer leaves discarded
- 2 cups water
- 1¾ cups heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon white pepper

ACCOMPANIMENT: well-stirred crème fraîche

►Peel artichokes and cut into ½-inch-thick slices, transferring to a bowl of cold water as cut. ►Melt butter in a 3½- to 4-quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat until foam subsides, then cook onion, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Drain artichokes in a colander, then add to onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until onion is pale golden, 10 to 12 minutes. ►Meanwhile, cut off and discard top of lemongrass, leaving a 6-inch stalk, then smash with side of a large knife. ►Add lemongrass and water to artichoke mixture and boil over high heat, stirring occasionally, until liquid is reduced by half, about 8 minutes. Add cream and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally,

until artichokes are very tender, 15 to 20 minutes. ►Remove from heat and discard lemongrass. Blend soup in a blender, in batches if necessary, until very smooth (use caution when blending hot liquids). If soup is too thick, thin with water. Season soup with salt and pepper.

THE BENCHMARK of creamed spinach is served at Harry Bissett's New Orleans Cafe & Oyster Bar, in Athens, Georgia. I've tried to duplicate it, but just can't get it right. Please help.

JOANNE HILBURN

DUBLIN, GEORGIA

CREAMED SPINACH

Adapted from Harry Bissett's New Orleans Cafe & Oyster Bar

SERVES 6 (SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 30 MIN

Feel free to add more hot sauce to this rich side dish—the heat is a wonderful change.

- 4 (12- to 14-oz) bunches spinach, coarse stems discarded
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¾ teaspoon hot sauce such as Tabasco
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ oz finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (¼ cup; see Tips, page 127)

►Cook spinach in a 5- to 6-quart pot of boiling salted water (see Tips, page 127), uncovered, stirring once or twice, until tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain in a colander and rinse under cold water to stop cooking, then drain well. Squeeze excess water from spinach with your hands, then coarsely chop. ►Melt butter in a 2½- to 3-quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat. Add flour and cook roux, whisking, 2 minutes. Whisk in cream, hot sauce, nutmeg, salt, and pepper and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, whisking constantly, 2 minutes (sauce will be thick). Stir in spinach and cheese and cook, stirring, until heated through.◀