

Cooking With Spirits

Written by Debbi Covington
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Spirits can play a surprisingly versatile role in cooking!



The good news is that spirits are used in modest quantities and burn out most of their alcohol content during the cooking process. The BETTER news is that even though the majority of the alcohol does dissipate, the taste definitely lingers on and can add flavor to countless recipes! Use spirits in both savory and sweet dishes. Add a few tablespoons of bourbon to any honey-flavored basting sauce for ham or pork; use any type of whiskey as a flambe liquid for peppered steaks. Add a dash or two of scotch to a gravy to be served with roasted game birds. Rum is excellent in cakes and sweet breads and combines well with bananas and chocolate. A splash of gin improves the taste of rhubarb and almost any kind of fruit compote. Cheers!

Bourboned Pork Roast Flambe

1 (3 to 5 pound) pork loin roast
2 tablespoons spicy brown mustard
Salt
Pepper
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons flour
1 cup brown sugar
1-1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1/2 cup bourbon

Rub roast with mustard, salt, pepper, and garlic. Mix together flour and brown sugar. Press mixture onto roast. Brown meat on top of stove in vegetable oil in a large skillet. Place browned roast in a preheated 450 degree oven for 15 to 20 minutes, until very brown. Remove pan from oven. Place in a safe place. Carefully pour bourbon over roast. Standing back with an outstretched arm, ignite with a long match. Use caution — it will ignite immediately, shooting up blue flames a couple of feet into the air. Let the flames burn out naturally, about 1 minute. Cover roast with aluminum foil. Return to oven and reduce heat to 350 degrees. Roast for an additional 20 minutes per pound. Serve roast with pan drippings. Serves 8 to 12.

Scallops with Gin in Patty Shells

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1 pound scallops
Flour for dredging
Salt
Pepper
6 puff pastry shells, baked according to package directions
1/4 cup butter
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1/3 cup gin
1 cup heavy cream
Juice of 1/2 lemon
3 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
Italian parsley, to garnish
Paprika, to garnish

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Season flour with salt and pepper. Toss the scallops in the seasoned flour to coat on all sides and shake off excess flour. Heat the butter and oil in a heavy skillet large enough to hold the scallops in one layer without crowding. Add the scallops and cook over high heat, shaking the skillet and stirring the scallops, about 1-1/2 minutes. Meanwhile, warm the gin in a small saucepan. Pour the gin over the scallops and set it a light. When the flames start to diminish, add the cream and stir lightly to blend. Add the lemon juice, salt and pepper to taste and the chopped parsley. Spoon the scallop mixture into the hot patty shells and garnish with fresh parsley and paprika. Serves 6.

Sherried Vidalia Onions

4 medium Vidalia onions, sliced
4 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3/4 cup beef broth
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1/4 cup dry sherry
1 cup grated Swiss cheese
4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
1-1/2 cups herb-seasoned stuffing mix or croutons
3 tablespoons butter, melted

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Cook onions in 4 tablespoons butter until barely tender. Mix flour and beef broth together, then add to onion mixture. Stir in pepper and sherry and cook until thickened and bubbly. Turn into a 1-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with Swiss and Parmesan cheeses. Toss stuffing mix with 3 tablespoons melted butter and spoon over cheese and onion mixture. Place under broiler just until cheese melts, about 1 minute. Serves 6.

Bourbon Sweet Potatoes

6 medium-sized sweet potatoes, unpeeled (4 pounds)
1/2 cup butter, melted
1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar
1/3 cup orange juice
1/4 cup bourbon
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
1/2 cup chopped pecans

Cook sweet potatoes in boiling water to cover 30 to 35 minutes or until tender. Let cool to touch; peel and mash potatoes. Combine sweet potatoes, butter, and next five ingredients; mash until blended. Spoon mixture into a lightly greased 1-1/2 quart baking dish. Sprinkle chopped pecans around edge of dish. Bake at 375 degrees for 45 minutes. Serves 8.

Bread Pudding with Rum Sauce

3 cups French bread (about 1/2 loaf)
2 eggs
2 egg yolks
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
Pinch salt
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

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1/4 cup golden raisins
2 ounces rum
1/2 cup pecan pieces, toasted
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
4 tablespoons light brown sugar
1/4 cup rum
2 tablespoons cream

Cube bread and place in a large bowl. (Day old, dry bread is best.) Combine eggs, egg yolks, sugar, cream, milk, and vanilla. Mix well. Season with salt, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Pour mixture over bread cubes and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight. Do not mix or crush bread. Soak raisins in 2 ounces of rum for 8 hours or overnight. Gently fold raisins and pecans into bread mixture. Do not over-mix. Grease a 2-quart baking dish and fill with the pudding mixture. Cut 1 tablespoon of butter into tiny pieces. Dot the surface of the pudding with butter pieces. Cover with aluminum foil. Place baking dish into larger baking dish and fill with hot water up to half the height of the smaller baking dish. Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 45 minutes. Remove foil. Continue to bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until top is golden brown and center of pudding is set. Remove from water and cool slightly. In a small saucepan, melt remaining 3 tablespoons butter. Add brown sugar and rum. Cook over low heat until smooth. Add cream and warm through. Serve with bread pudding. Serves 6.

Irish Whiskey Cake

1 (18.25-ounce) package yellow cake mix
1 (3.4-ounce) package vanilla instant pudding mix
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup water
1/3 cup Irish whiskey
4 large eggs
1 cup finely chopped slivered almonds
1 tablespoon caraway seed (or 1/2 cup dried currants)
1 teaspoon lemon zest
1 cup powdered sugar
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon Irish whiskey

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Grease and flour a Bundt pan. Place the cake mix, pudding mix, oil, water, whiskey, and eggs in a large mixing bowl. Blend with an electric mixer until batter is

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thick and well blended. Fold in the almonds, currants, and lemon zest. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, smoothing it out with the rubber spatula. Bake until the cake is golden brown and begins to pull away from the sides of the pan, about 50 minutes. Cool the cake in the pan on a wire rack for 20 minutes. Invert the cake onto a rack to cool for 30 minutes more. Combine the powdered sugar, lemon juice, and whiskey in a small bowl and stir until smooth. Slide the cake onto a serving platter and pour the glaze over the cake, letting it drizzle down the sides and into the center. Let the glaze set before slicing the cake. Store, covered, at room temperature. Serves 12.

Peach Poppy Seed Muffins

2/3 cup pureed peaches (can use baby food peaches)
1 teaspoon baking soda
10 tablespoons butter, softened
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon peach schnapps or vanilla
3 tablespoons poppy seeds
1/4 cup peach schnapps
1/2 cup powdered sugar

Stir baking soda into pureed peaches and prepare for the mixture to foam. Cream butter and sugar until mixture is smooth, then add eggs one at a time. Alternately add flour and peach puree. Stir in salt, schnapps, and poppy seeds. Fill 12 greased muffin cups nearly to the top. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or until a wooden toothpick inserted in one of the muffins comes out clean. Cool in pan for 5 minutes. Remove muffins and place on baking racks to cool. Mix 1/4 cups schnapps with powdered sugar. Drizzle over warm muffins. Store in an airtight container. Serves 8 to 10.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by

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