

A Valentine's Fiesta

By Marion Lawrence with Kelley Cleary Coffeen
Photography by Marty Snortum Studio

The Southwest can be described by many adjectives, but one does it best – BOLD! Bold scenery, bold history, bold art, bold attitudes, and bold flavors. We are all familiar with the time-honored tradition of chile, mild or hot, red or green. But there are other ingredients that set the tone of Southwestern cuisine: cinnamon, cayenne, ginger, and chocolate, just to name a few. Each of these dessert recipes highlights the wonderful, unique flavor combinations of our region.

Mexican Chocolate Gingerbread Fun Cookies

Ginger and Mexican sweet chocolate compliment each other in this simple Valentine cookie. I start with a mix and add a few key ingredients to create a cookie that's definitely south of the border.

1 (14.5oz.) Gingerbread cake/cookie mix
½ cup all-purpose flour
3 tbsp. molasses
3 tbsp. hot water
2 tbsp. butter or margarine, melted
1 three ounce cake of Ibarra Mexican
sweet chocolate, melted*

Preheat oven to 375°. Combine all ingredients in bowl with a spoon until dough forms. Divide dough in half. Place half of dough on floured surface. If dough is too soft to roll, place in refrigerator for 30 minutes. Roll ⅛ inch thick for crispy or ¼ inch for chewy cookies. Cut with a floured cookie cutter.

Place cookies on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake 6-9 minutes, or until edges are firm. Do not overbake. Cool 1 minute before removing from cookie sheet. Cool completely then frost, or cover with melted semi-sweet chocolate, and decorate.

Frosting: Combine 1 cup confectioner's sugar, 3 tbsp. warm water and ½ tsp. vanilla. (Tint with food color if desired).

Makes about 2 dozen 3-inch cookies.

*This type of chocolate becomes soft but not liquid when melted, so be careful not to burn. Ibarra chocolate can be found in the Mexican food section of your local grocery store.



Chocolate Tres Leches Cake

Traditionally this is a white, vanilla flavored cake infused with sweet milk, whole milk and cream. My chocolate version combines different levels of chocolate flavor with a touch of brown sugar, leaving you with the rich, intense flavor of our region.

CAKE:

- 6 eggs, separated
- 2 cups light brown sugar, packed
- 2 cups all purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cocoa powder
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

SAUCE:

- 1 (12 oz.) can evaporated milk
- 1 (14 oz.) can sweetened condensed milk
- 5 (1-ounce) squares of unsweetened chocolate, melted*
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy whipping cream
- *for a slightly sweeter cake, use three (3) 1 ounce squares unsweetened chocolate and two (2) 1 ounce squares of semi-sweet chocolate.

CHOCOLATE GANACHE:

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy whipping cream
- 12 ounces semi-sweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease two 9 inch or 10 inch heart shaped or round pans, and dust with cocoa powder, knocking out the excess.

Cake: In a large bowl combine flour, cocoa, and baking powder. In a medium bowl, combine the milk and vanilla. Set both aside. Place the egg whites in a clean bowl and beat at a high speed until peaks are formed. Turn the mixer down to a medium speed and gradually add the sugar to the egg whites. Once the sugar is dissolved, add the egg yolks and beat for 3 minutes. Next combine the flour, milk and eggs together until well blended.

Divide batter equally into two pans and bake for 30-35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in layer comes out clean. Leave in the baking pans. While cake is still



warm, punch holes in cake with wooden skewer. Pour sauce (see below) over cake. Allow cake to cool in refrigerator before covering with the ganache.

Sauce: While cake is baking, combine evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk and melted chocolate in a blender. Blend on low to medium speed for one to one and a half minutes. Pour the sauce over the warm cakes.

Ganache: In a small, heavy saucepan on medium heat, stir the cream and chocolate together until the chocolate is melted and mixture is blended. Add vanilla and stir for 1 minute.

TO ASSEMBLE CAKE:

Remove layers from refrigerator. As cake begins to reach room temperature, it will be very moist, so handle with care. Run spatula around the inside of the pan and slightly under layers to loosen. Place prepared cardboard or plate over one pan

and invert. Pour some frosting over the layer and spread with a spatula. Using your hand or a spatula to hold second layer in pan, invert onto frosted layer and carefully lift pan away. Set the cake on a rack over a jellyroll pan and pour the warm frosting over the cake, smoothing with a spatula to completely coat top and sides of cake.

Let stand at room temperature for 10 minutes and scrape any excess frosting from the jellyroll pan back into the saucepan. Heat the excess frosting, stirring until smooth. Cool slightly and pour over the cake, again smoothing with a spatula over the top and sides. Refrigerate until glaze is set. Let cake stand a room temperature for at least 15 minutes before serving. Garnish as desired. For garnish, pipe a border around the bottom, add some chocolate-dipped maraschino cherries to the top with some mint leaves, or dust with powdered sugar.

Crêpes con Rojo Loco

This elegant chocolate crêpe dessert, with just a hint of cinnamon rolled around vibrantly colored pears poached in a bold, New Mexico red wine will surely make the heart of that special someone beat faster.



(serves 6)

CRÊPES:

2 oz. semisweet chocolate, broken into pieces
1 cup milk
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup light cream, or half-and-half
2 teaspoons light brown sugar, tightly packed
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs

FILLING:

6 small ripe Bosc or Bartlett pears, firm
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Grated zest of 1 lemon and 1 orange
(or 1 tablespoon each of dried lemon peel and orange peel)
1 cinnamon stick
1 cup light brown sugar, tightly packed
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
3 cups La Viña Rojo Loco New Mexico Red Table Wine

SAUCE:

5 ounces semisweet chocolate, broken into pieces
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons Rojo Loco wine

Peel the pears, remove cores and slice. Cover with water in a bowl mixed with the lemon juice until ready to use.

TO PREPARE PEARS: In a large saucepan, combine the zest, sugar, water, wine and cinnamon stick; bring to a boil. Add the sliced pears and reduce heat to a simmer. Cook the pears uncovered for about 15 - 20 minutes or until a fork can easily penetrate a slice of pear. Remove the pears from the poaching liquid with a slotted spoon and set aside in a bowl. Continue simmering the poaching liquid until it is slightly thickened. Let the liquid cool and then pour it over the pears through a strainer. Refrigerate overnight or up to 2 days.

TO PREPARE CRÊPES: Place the chocolate in a saucepan with the sugar and milk. Heat gently until the chocolate has dissolved. Pour into a blender or food processor and add the cream, cocoa powder, cinnamon, flour and eggs. Process until smooth then pour into a bowl and chill for 30 minutes. (May be made the day before and refrigerated overnight.)

Heat a crêpe pan, grease lightly with a little oil or melted butter, then pour in just enough batter to cover the bottom of the pan, swirling to coat it evenly. Cook over medium heat until the crêpe has set (1-2 minutes), then turn it over to cook the other side (30-45 seconds). Slide the crêpe onto a plate. Repeat until all the batter is used (10-12 crêpes) greasing lightly before each one unless a non-stick pan is used. Stack crêpes between non-stick waxed paper and set aside.

TO ASSEMBLE: Reheat filling. Divide filling between the crêpes and roll up carefully, placing crêpe seam side down on plate. Garnish with chocolate sauce and whipped cream. Add a mint leaf and some glazed pecans if desired.

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