Just Desserts

BY KATE SHERWOOD

Unless you’re talking a piece of fresh fruit—arguably the best way on earth to finish a meal—dessert is a land mine. By the time you’ve done smacking your lips, odds are you’ve absorbed a nice dose of sugar, white flour, and butter.

Here are four fruit-rich desserts that go easy on the dicey stuff, but that can go toe-to-toe with the most decadent meal enders.

Got a question or suggestion? Write to healthycook@cspinet.org.

Cherry-Almond Clafoutis

A happy collision between custard and cake. To make your own almond flour, pulse 1¼ cups of blanched almonds in a food processor until they reach the consistency of corn meal.

1 tsp. butter
⅛ cup - 1 Tbs. sugar
1 cup low-fat (1%) milk
3 large eggs
⅛ cup almond flour (meal)
⅛ cup whole-wheat pastry flour
½ tsp. almond extract
1 lb. fresh or frozen cherries, pitted

Preheat the oven to 325°. Butter a 9-inch square or round baking dish and sprinkle the bottom with 1 Tbs. of sugar. In a large bowl, whisk together the ¼ cup of sugar with the milk, eggs, almond flour, whole-wheat flour, and extract until the batter is smooth.

Scatter the cherries (if frozen, no need to thaw) in the baking dish and pour in the batter. Bake for about 50 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let cool slightly before serving. Serves 8.

PER SERVING (¾ cup)
Calories: 180 Added Sugar: 2 tsp.
Total Fat: 8 g Cholesterol: 80 mg
Sat Fat: 1.5 g Carbohydrates: 24 g
Protein: 7 g Fiber: 3 g

Honey-Glazed Nectarines

You can also use firm, ripe red or black plums.

2 Tbs. dark brown sugar
¼ cup honey
1 Tbs. butter
6 nectarines, halved and pitted

Stir the first 3 ingredients in a large nonstick skillet over moderately high heat until the liquid bubbles vigorously. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the nectarine halves, cut side down. Cook without stirring until the nectarines start to caramelize, about 3 minutes. Turn to coat with syrup and remove from the heat. Serve warm. Serves 6.

PER SERVING (2 nectarine halves)
Calories: 140 Added Sugar: 3 tsp.
Total Fat: 2.5 g Cholesterol: 0 mg
Sat Fat: 1.5 g Carbohydrates: 31 g
Protein: 2 g Fiber: 2 g

Yogurt Panna Cotta

So luxuriously creamy, your guests won’t believe it’s made from fat-free yogurt.

1 cup low-fat (1%) milk
⅛–⅓ cup sugar
1 envelope plain powdered gelatin
2 Tbs. cold water
2 cups plain fat-free Greek yogurt
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 pints (4 cups) berries

In a large saucepan, heat the milk with the sugar over low heat, stirring, until the sugar is dissolved, about 3 minutes. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, mix the gelatin with the water and let stand for 2 minutes. Whisk the gelatin into the warm milk and let cool.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the yogurt and vanilla extract. Whisk in the milk. Pour ½ cup of the milk mixture into each of 8 serving glasses. Refrigerate until set, about 2 hours. Top with the berries. Serves 8.

PER SERVING (1 cup)
Calories: 130 Added Sugar: 1½–3 tsp.
Total Fat: 0.5 g Cholesterol: 0 mg
Sat Fat: 0 g Carbohydrates: 24 g
Protein: 8 g Fiber: 4 g

* Dish needs to chill for 2 hours before serving.

Port-Poached Plums

Use a potato peeler to remove a wide strip of orange peel. (Try to avoid the white pith that’s just below the peel.) About half the alcohol—but none of the flavor—evaporates.

1 3-inch strip of orange peel
6 cloves
1 stick cinnamon
2 cups Port wine
¼ cup sugar
6 large, firm, red or black plums, pitted and cut into eighths

Push the cloves firmly into the orange peel. Combine the peel, cinnamon stick, Port, and sugar in a skillet. Bring to a boil and stir to dissolve the sugar. Add the plums and reduce the heat. Gently simmer the plums until tender, about 10 minutes.

Remove the plums, orange peel with cloves, and cinnamon stick. Discard the peel, cloves, and cinnamon. Boil the poaching liquid until reduced to about ½ cup. Allow to cool slightly and serve over the warm plums. Serves 6.

PER SERVING (8 slices)
Calories: 150 Added Sugar: 2 tsp.
Total Fat: 0 g Cholesterol: 0 mg
Sat Fat: 0 g Carbohydrates: 28 g
Protein: 1 g Fiber: 2 g

* Dish needs to chill for 2 hours before serving.