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From TREE to TABLE

Inspired by the beauty and productivity of British orchards, photographer and cookery writer Stuart Ovenden has created a range of recipes for baking with apples and pears

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STUART OVENDEN • FOOD AND DRINK EDITOR ALISON WALKER

Some of my earliest memories are of the orchard in the village with a crab apple tree planted at each end. I often wondered why the crab apples were there; to me, they seemed to offer no merit to the casual scrumper nor (and more importantly) the orchard owner. I know now why they

are planted in commercial orchards; they have a long flowering period in spring and are terrific pollination partners for cultivated apples. The walk to school took us through trees festooned with blossom in spring, heavy crops of fruit hanging off branches in late summer and the muggy ferment of the last days of

autumn, air thick with dust and vinegar. I often think of an orchard as an almost self-contained environment; there's something appealing about the vivid polarisation of the seasons that it offers up each year. It feels only natural to want to spend as much time as possible in these beautiful, complex spaces.

RUSSET AND RUM TARTE TATIN

Preparation 15 minutes **Cooking** about 40 minutes **Serves** 6 conservatively, 4 if you're feeling indulgent

A decent tarte tatin is one of the cornerstones of the orchard repertoire – I have made countless variations over the years, but this has to be my favourite. If you prefer, the rum can be replaced with Calvados and the results are equally enjoyable, although it does compromise the pleasingly alliterative recipe title somewhat...

4 Russet apples
60g golden caster sugar

40g light soft brown sugar
50g butter
50ml dark rum
150g puff pastry

- 1 Preheat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Peel, core and halve the apples. For the caramel, melt the sugars on the hob in a heavy-bottomed, 20cm ovenproof pan. Keep a watchful eye on this; when it starts to smoke, take the pan off the heat and stir in the butter and rum. Mix through quickly and thoroughly.
- 2 Turn the heat down, return the pan to the hob and cook the apples in the

caramel for 5 minutes or until they start to soften slightly. Arrange the apples curved-side down in the pan and set to one side (off the heat).

- 3 Roll the puff pastry out thinly and use a 22cm-23cm plate as a guide to cut out a large pastry circle. Drape it over the apples, tuck the edges in around the fruit and bake for 20-25 minutes, or until the puff pastry is firm and golden.
- 4 Let the tarte tatin cool for 5 minutes, place a plate on top of the pastry and carefully turn over. Remove the pan and spoon over any leftover caramel. Eat immediately. 🍴



BROWN BUTTER DOUGHNUTS WITH EMBER & BAY-BAKED PEARS & CHOCOLATE SAUCE

Preparation 45 minutes, plus rising

Cooking about 1 hour Makes 20

I love an autumn barbecue, and baking pears in the remnants of a fire is a great way to cook them. Make sure the embers aren't too hot, although if the pears catch slightly on the outside, it doesn't matter – it's the soft flesh inside that you're after.

FOR THE DOUGHNUTS

75ml buttermilk

75ml whole milk

7g fast-action dried yeast

60g unsalted butter

250g strong white bread flour

40g caster sugar, plus extra for coating

1 egg, beaten

1½ litres vegetable oil, for deep frying

FOR THE CHOCOLATE SAUCE

200g dark chocolate

125ml double cream

75ml whole milk

2 tbsp golden syrup

FOR THE PEARS

10 ripe pears

6-8 branches of bay leaves, about 25cm in length, soaked overnight in water

4 tbsp Eau de Vie Poire William

- 1 Warm the buttermilk and milk in a pan; remove from the heat and stir in the yeast. Set aside for 15-20 minutes. In a separate pan, heat the butter on a medium temperature until it starts to colour. Watch closely – it should smell nutty. Take off the heat, transfer to a bowl and leave to cool for 10 minutes.
- 2 Sift the flour into a large mixing bowl then add the yeasty milk, butter, caster sugar, egg and a good pinch of salt. Bring together into a dough and knead on a floured surface for 10 minutes. Lightly brush a bowl with vegetable oil, pop the dough in and cover. Leave in a warm place until doubled in size. Knock

the dough back, chop into 20 pieces, then roll into small balls. Transfer to oiled baking sheets and cover loosely with oiled sheets of clingfilm. Leave to prove for 30 minutes. Heat the oil to 180°C, then fry the doughnuts in batches for 2½ minutes on each side until golden. Transfer to kitchen paper, then toss in caster sugar while warm.

- 3 Melt the sauce ingredients together in a small pan, stirring regularly until shiny and smooth.
- 4 When the embers of your fire are glowing, remove the bay branches from the water and dry with kitchen paper. Lay a sheet of foil on a work surface, then arrange 3 or 4 branches in the centre. Sit half of the pears on top, gather up the foil and scrunch to create a parcel – spoon in 2 tbsp of the Poire William just before sealing. Repeat with the second parcel, nestle into the embers and bake for 30-40 minutes, or until the pears are soft to the touch. ➔





PEAR NUSSKUCHEN

*Preparation 35 minutes Cooking 1 hour
30 minutes Serves 8-10*

Half of my family hail from Germany and I've eaten plenty of great German cakes over the years – a good Nusskuchen is hard to beat. Each autumn, I contemplate the naïve romantic notion of gathering my own hazelnuts from the hedge of coppiced hazel that leads into the orchard; I've yet to get there before the squirrels.

100g hazelnuts, plus a few whole ones to decorate
200g unsalted butter
200g caster sugar
4 eggs, plus two egg whites
200g plain flour
4 tbsp milk
1 tsp baking powder
4 tbsp strong coffee
7 pears
2 tbsp caster sugar

1 star anise
300ml double cream
icing sugar, to decorate

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Grease and line two 20cm cake tins. Blitz the nuts in a food processor until fine. Cream the butter and sugar together with an electric whisk until pale and fluffy, then whisk in the 4 eggs, one at a time. With a spoon, mix in the nuts, flour, milk, baking powder and coffee.
- 2 Whisk the 2 egg whites in a separate bowl until they form stiff peaks, then carefully fold into the cake mixture with a metal spoon.
- 3 Divide the mixture equally between the lined cake tins, then bake for 25-30 minutes until golden and a skewer comes out cleanly from the centre of the cakes. Leave to cool for 10 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack.

- 4 Turn the oven down to 140°C (120°C fan oven) gas mark 1. To make some dried pear slices for the decoration, firstly cover a baking sheet with parchment, then thinly slice 3 of the pears and spread them on the sheet. Bake for one hour, flipping the slices halfway through. Set aside to cool.
- 5 Peel, core and chop the remaining 4 pears, then add to a pan with 2 tbsp caster sugar, a splash of water and the star anise. Simmer on low for 20 minutes or so (depending on how ripe your pears are) until the pear has softened but not dissolved to a purée. Cool before using.
- 6 To assemble, whisk the cream until thick, then spoon over the base cake layer. Spoon a layer of the cooked pears on the cream, then top with the second cake. Arrange the dried pear slices on top with a few hazelnuts, then dust with icing sugar. ➔



PEAR AND RAISIN CHELSEA BUNS

*Preparation 40 minutes, plus
rising and standing Cooking
30 minutes Makes 7*

Choose the ripest pears that you can find for this delicious Chelsea bun filling.

FOR THE FILLING

2 pears, peeled, cored and chopped
100g raisins
75ml Calvados or pear brandy
35g butter, softened
50g soft brown sugar

FOR THE DOUGH

220ml full-fat milk
50g butter
400g white bread flour
7g fast-action dried yeast
45g golden caster sugar
10g fine salt
1 egg, beaten

TO BAKE/GLAZE

1 egg, beaten
3 tbsp sieved apricot jam
3 tsp demerara sugar

- 1 To make the filling, tip the pears, raisins and Calvados or pear brandy into a small bowl and set aside to soak.
- 2 To prepare the dough, gently warm the milk in a pan, then stir in 50g butter; once it has melted, remove from the heat. Mix the flour, yeast, caster sugar and salt together in a large mixing bowl, then stir in the warm milk and beaten egg. Tip the dough onto a floured surface and knead for 5-10 minutes until smooth and elastic. Brush a clean bowl with oil, sit the dough inside and cover with a tea towel. Leave in a warm place to rise until roughly doubled in size.
- 3 Knock the dough back on a flour-dusted surface, then roll out to a 20cm x 30cm

rectangle – about the size of an A4 sheet of paper. For the filling, use the back of a spoon to spread the softened butter out evenly onto the dough, then scatter over the fruit and brown sugar. Roll the dough into a Swiss roll shape from one of the long sides, then cut into 7 pinwheels. Line a large tray with baking parchment and arrange with a 1cm gap between each bun. Cover with a tea towel and leave for a second prove – until roughly doubled in size again.

- 4 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Brush the buns with beaten egg and bake on the middle shelf for 20-25 minutes until golden. While they are cooling, heat the jam in a small pan until runny, then brush over the buns. Sprinkle over the demerara sugar and leave for 15 minutes. They will keep for a few days in an airtight container, but you can't beat them just baked. ➔

**BAKED TOFFEE APPLE
CHEESECAKE**

Preparation 35 minutes, plus chilling

Cooking 40 minutes


Discovery has to be one of my favourite eating apples. It's an early one; I've picked them in late July after long, hot summers and found them to be perfectly ripe. The flesh has a vibrant magenta blush when cut, while the taste is crisp, sweet and refreshing in the still heat of a sun-baked afternoon in the orchard. This apple variety is a natural partner for sticky toffee and works brilliantly in this baked cheesecake recipe – good eaters such as Cox or Braeburn are more than worthy alternatives if you're unable to find them.

- 75g butter
- 200g ginger biscuits
- 6 Discovery apples
- 600g cream cheese


- 100ml double cream
- 150g caster sugar
- 50g plain flour
- vanilla essence
- FOR THE TOFFEE SAUCE**
- 300ml double cream
- 100g light brown sugar
- 75g butter
- a few drops of vanilla essence

- 1 Grease a 23cm spring-form cake tin with butter and line with parchment. Blitz the biscuits in a food processor until fine and tip into a bowl. Melt the rest of the butter and add. Spread the biscuit mix onto the bottom of the tin; use the back of a spoon to flatten it into an even layer. Put in the fridge to chill.
- 2 Preheat oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Peel, core and finely chop two of the apples. Whisk the cream cheese, double cream, caster sugar,

flour and vanilla essence together, then stir in the chopped apple. Pour the mixture over the biscuit base and bake for 30-40 minutes, after which the centre of the cheesecake should have a uniform wobble when gently shaken. Turn the oven off and leave the cheesecake in the oven until it has cooled.

- 5 To make the toffee, melt the cream, sugar, butter, a pinch of salt and a few drops of vanilla essence together in a pan. Bring to a low bubble and keep stirring until the liquid is a thick, golden toffee colour. Spoon a thin layer of toffee onto the cheesecake. Core, slice and arrange the remaining 4 apples on top. Use a pastry brush to thinly coat the apple slices with toffee (this will create a seal and stop them going brown). Drizzle over the remaining toffee before serving. 





CL BOOK OFFER
 Extracted from *The Orchard Cook: Recipes From Tree to Table* by Stuart Ovenden (Clearview, £25). CL readers can order a copy for the special price of £20, including p&p, until 31 December 2018. Call 01256 302959, quoting the reference QN1.