

Pear Heaven!

By Lee Borrowman

The Moraga Park and Recreation Foundation held its annual Pear Festival last Saturday on what turned out to be a bright and warm autumn day. A little breeze in the morning cleared the skies and the sun shone with that familiar lower-in-the-sky light that says “summer’s over...”

At the Pear Festival were arts and crafts, informational booths by many of Moraga’s community organizations, and

of course the special pear pies baked by Nation’s just for the Festival. Kids raced around the park between sno-cones, face painting and brightly colored inflatables. A few tackled the chess set whose game pieces were often taller than the player.

At about 1:00, Mayor Mike Metcalf thanked all of the volunteers who made the day a success, and announced the winners of the day’s contests.

In the Pear Coloring Contest there were winners in each of five age groups:

Ages 1-2: 1st place to Serge Vyatkin, age 1
 Ages 3-4: 1st place to Lohehs Nazzri, age 4
 Ages 5-7: 1st place to Jillian Yick, age 7
 Ages 8-9: 1st place to Sarva Vyatkin, age 8
 Ages 10-11: 1st place to Madeline Tolley, age 11

Your friendly neighborhood newspaper editor had the great pleasure of joining the real food experts in judging the Pear Recipe Contest. Pears can be difficult to work with – it’s very easy to overwhelm them with other flavors, or cook them to death resulting not in a tasty treat but in pear-flavored mush. Hafiz Haidan, co-owner of Amoroma,

and Derek Grogg, souz chef at Michael’s, gave careful consideration to each and every creation. Gift certificates were awarded to the top three recipes, generously donated by Amoroma, Terzetto’s and Chef Chao. The winners have graciously allowed us to share their recipes with you.



First Place: Brian Pergamit Caramelized Pear Gingerbread Cake

2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons unsalted butter, divided	1/4 tsp pumpkin pie spice
3 large, firm-ripe pears, peeled, cored, and sliced into 1/2-inch wedges	1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1/4-1/2 cup light brown sugar	3 tbsp sugar
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour	1 large egg
3/4 tsp baking soda	1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/2 tsp salt	1/4 cup cane syrup or molasses
1 tsp ground ginger	3 tbsp boiling water
	1/4 tsp vanilla
	2 1/2 tbsp minced crystallized ginger

In a large skillet, melt the butter over high heat. Add the pears and cook until the pears are tender and slightly caramelized, but still retain their shape, 2 to 3 minutes on each side. (You may need to cook the pears in 2 batches so as not to overcrowd the pan.) When the pears begin to have a nice color on both sides, add the brown sugar and pecans and cook, stirring gently, to coat the pears with the sugar. Remove from the heat and cool slightly.

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F, and using the 2 teaspoons of butter, lightly grease a 10-inch round cake pan with 2-inch sides. Arrange the slightly cooled pears in a single layer in the bottom of the cake pan. Pour any syrup from caramelizing into the cake pan as well.

Into a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking soda, salt, ginger, pumpkin pie spice, and cinnamon. In a separate medium bowl, whisk together the sugar, eggs, vegetable oil, molasses, and boiling water. Add sugar mixture to the flour mixture, blending just until combined. Add vanilla. Fold the crystallized ginger into the batter and pour into the prepared pan over the pears.

Bake for 20 - 25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake portion comes out clean. Allow cake to cool on a wire rack for 10 - 15 minutes. Place a large plate or cake stand on top of the cake and carefully invert the cake.

Option: Add 1/4 cup of pecans to pear mix

Second Place: Marjorie Zedaker Pears Carmel

6 pears, not too ripe, peeled, halved and cored	1/3 stick butter (in pieces)
3/4 tbsp sugar	1 cup or less heavy cream

Distribute sugar and butter over pears in baking pan. Bake for 35 minutes at 425F; test for softness, baste, add cream, and bake 10-15 minutes; baste. Serve warm (not hot) or cool.

Third Place: Irlene Van Ardenne Pear Toasts with Gorgonzola Shells

1/4 lb. gorgonzola	1 T pear liqueur, such as Mathilde
4 oz. mascarpone cheese	3 medium pears, quartered and cored
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream	Juice of 1/2 a lemon
Fresh ground pepper	6 large Sweet Batard slices, cut in half
3/4 cup sugar	Olive oil
1/2 cup water	1 1/2 oz. Arugula, washed and spun dry

To make gorgonzola shells: whip cream till stiff, blend in mascarpone, gorgonzola and pepper to taste. Press into shell molds (I used the Demarle mini-madeleine tray) and freeze.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat sugar and water in a small pan until dissolved. Add pear liqueur and lemon juice. Place pears in a pan, cover with poaching liquid, and bake about 40 minutes, till soft, turning pears half-way through. Allow pears to cool, then slice carefully to fan.

Toast bread in oven or on grill.

To assemble, place toasts on serving plate, top with arugula, drizzle with olive oil, arrange pears fanned over the greens and finish with a gorgonzola shell.

Makes 12 appetizers



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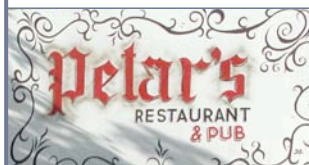


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