

Published October 22nd, 2014

Moraga Pear Festival Recipe Contest Winners 2014

By Susie Iventosch



Elaine Cable's winning Harvest Pear Blondie with Salted Caramel Sauce Photo Susie Iventosch

Once again, we have some excellent recipes from the recent Moraga Pear Recipe Contest! The winning recipe in the adult category went to Elaine Cable for her Harvest Pear Blondies with Salted Caramel Sauce. These blondies are really delicious, with an oatmeal crust and topping, but I wound up using Starbuck's caramel sauce, after mine turned out more like rock candy than caramel sauce!

Elaine also made Pear and Brie Empanadas with Pear Vinaigrette to win the appetizer category. Other winners included Lilana Spindler for her Pear and Chicken Salad Pitas. Audrey Spindler won the youth dessert with a lovely cinnamon and brown sugar Pear Crisp, while A.J. Russell took home a prize for Gluten-free Pear and White Chocolate Chip Muffins! In a fun new category this year, Chris Lloyd and Tony Rillo won the Adult Spirits award with a fermented concoction of pears, sugar, white raisins and water!

The pears have been delicious this year, and continue to be good into the fall months, so it should be great timing to try out these new recipes.

Harvest Pear Blondies with Salted Caramel Sauce Elaine Cable, 2014 Adult Dessert Winner

Harvest Pear Blondies Ingredients

- 2 cups all purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- Scant 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 3 cups quick cooking rolled oats
- 1 1/3 cups light brown sugar
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, melted
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 to 5 ripe pears, any variety (Elaine used Starkrimson)

Instructions for Harvest Pear Blondies

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a 9x13 inch pan with foil or parchment paper, making sure it extends over the edges of the pan for easy removal. Place prepared pan in the freezer.

Sift together flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg. Stir in the oats and sugar. In a separate small bowl, stir together the melted butter, eggs and vanilla. Mix liquid mixture into the oat mixture.

Press half of the dough into the prepared pan. Set aside.

Place the remaining dough between two 15-inch lengths of wax paper. Roll out into a 9x13 inch rectangle. Slide a flat cookie sheet under the dough and wax paper and transfer it to the freezer for a few minutes.

Peel, quarter and core the pears. Cut each quarter lengthwise into five or six slices. Place the pear slices in rows, each slice slightly overlapping the last, on top of the bottom layer of dough.

Remove the rolled-out rectangle from the freezer. Peel off the top piece of paper and turn the dough over the pears. Remove the remaining paper and press down on the edges of the dough to seal it.

Bake for 25-30 minutes. Cool in the pan. Lift cake out using the edges of the foil and cut into squares or bars. Chilling makes the bars easier to cut and freeze well.

Salted Caramel Sauce Ingredients

2 cups granulated sugar

12 tablespoons unsalted butter at room temperature and cut into pieces

1 cup heavy cream, at room temperature

1 tablespoon fleur de sel (or another sea salt)

Instructions for Salted Caramel Sauce

In a 2 to 3 quart saucepan, melt the sugar over medium-high heat. Watch carefully, so sugar doesn't burn.

Once all the sugar has melted watch your caramel CAREFULLY ... seriously ... do not walk away; swirling the pan occasionally. As soon as the sugar turns amber in color add your butter and whisk vigorously. It will bubble up aggressively, but just keep whisking until all the butter has melted.

Remove the pan from the heat and slowly pour in the cream while whisking vigorously. The caramel is going to bubble aggressively again, (that's what you want). Whisk until all the cream is incorporated and then whisk in the fleur de sel.

Set the sauce aside to cool for 15 minutes prior to pouring it into a glass jar to cool completely.

You can refrigerate the sauce for up to 2 weeks but you will need to warm it before using. I gently heated mine in a sauce pot with warm water or at 5 second intervals in the microwave (yes, 5 second intervals).

Savory Pear and Brie Empanadas with Fresh Pear Vinaigrette

Elaine Cable

2014 Adult Appetizer Winner

Ingredients for Empanadas

6 ripe pears, peeled, cored and diced (any variety will work, I used Bosc and Bartlett)

½ medium onion finely diced

½ Shallot finely diced

6 ounces Applewood smoked bacon diced

Approx. 2 tablespoons sage finely minced

1 tablespoon golden brown sugar

1/8 teaspoon ground pepper

½ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

¼ to ½ cup water

1 egg beaten

Approx. 6-8 ounces Brie

15 fresh or frozen Empanada discs thawed (Elaine used frozen)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

Directions for filling

Add diced pears to a large sauté pan, and place on medium high heat. Add brown sugar, and simmer, stirring often until most of the liquid has evaporated and mixture begins to thicken. Add minced sage and all the spices. Continue to cook over medium high heat adding water as needed while pears continue to cook down and become soft. After approximately 8-10 minutes, pears should be soft and beginning to caramelize and the mixture should be reduced by about half. Remove from heat and set aside to cool.

Heat another sauté pan on medium high and add diced bacon. Cook until almost crisp then add diced onion and shallot to the pan. Continue to cook until bacon is crisp and onions/shallots are brown and soft. Remove bacon mixture from pan, drain onto paper towel and let cool.

Once cooled, combine pear mixture with bacon mixture, gently folding into one another.

Prepare two baking sheets by lining with parchment paper.

Directions for assembly

Laying out empanada discs on baking sheets, place approximately 1 tablespoon of pear filling in the center of each disc. Place approx ½ ounce Brie over mixture, then fold over other half of empanada disc. Seal both edges of disc by either crimping the dough or folding over the edges, making sure all edges are sealed. Once all empanadas are formed, lightly brush tops with beaten egg.

Place in 350 degree preheated oven for 8-10 minutes, until tops are golden brown.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes approximately 15 empanadas,

Ingredients for Fresh Pear Vinaigrette

1 ripe pear, peeled, cored and diced
1 tablespoon sugar
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon minced garlic
¼ cup champagne or apple cider vinegar
½ cup extra virgin olive oil

Place all ingredients except oil in food processor and blend until smooth. Slowly add in oil to create an emulsion. Place in container and refrigerate.

Use vinaigrette as a dipping sauce or drizzle with the empanadas.

Pear and Chicken Salad Pitas

Lilana Spindler

2014 Adult "Other" Winner

Ingredients

1 barely ripe pear, peeled and cut in ¾ inch cubes
1 breast chicken, cooked and chopped into ¾-inch cubes
1 handful pecans, coarsely chopped and toasted in oven
1 small bunch of grapes, individually cut in half
1 stalk of celery, chopped
Juice from ½ lemon
1 tablespoon plain yogurt
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
salt and pepper
1 cup shredded lettuce

4 pita breads

Mix first nine ingredients gently and refrigerate until ready to assemble. Cut Pitas in half. Fill each half with a bit of lettuce and half cup of the pear salad. Enjoy cold!

Pear Crisp

Audrey Spindler

2014 Youth Dessert Winner

Ingredients

3 pears

½ cup brown sugar

½ cup butter

2 teaspoons cinnamon

2 cups oats

Directions

Slice and skin 3 pears and lay on bottom of 8-inch pie dish. Melt ½ cup butter in a medium size mixing bowl. Mix in 2 cups of oats and ½ cup brown sugar. Slowly add 2 teaspoons cinnamon while mixing. Pour out over pears in dish so a thick layer settles. Optional: lay a few pear slices over and drizzle cinnamon.

Cook in preheated 350 degree oven for 30 minutes or until golden brown.

Gluten-Free Pear and White Chocolate Chip Muffins

A. J. Russell – 11 years old

2014 Youth "Other" Winner

Ingredients

6 tablespoons softened butter

2 eggs, lightly beaten

½ teaspoon gluten-free vanilla

1 cup milk

Bag of Glutino gluten-free pantry muffin mix

2 pears, skinned and chopped

¼ cup gluten-free white chocolate baking chips

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

Line muffin tins with foil liners

Beat together butter, eggs and vanilla

Stir in milk and mix

Fold in pear and chips

Fill tin 2/3 full of batter

Bake 16-20 minutes until tooth pick comes out clean

Makes 15 muffins

Pear Spirits

Chris Lloyd and Tony Rillo, Vincenza Ranch Vineyard

2014 Adult Spirits Winner

Per five gallons

2 lbs. pears

1 lb. sugar

1 lb. white raisins

4 gallons water

Add cuvee yeast to start fermentation.

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