

Moraga Pear Festival Recipe Contest Winners 2014

By 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.

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

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
½ 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).

Other winning recipes can be found on our website:
www.lamorindaweekly.com under the "food" tab!

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Susie Iventosch is the author of Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net. Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com.

This recipe can be found on our website:

www.lamorindaweekly.com.

If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.

Family Focus

Creating a Low Stress Environment at Home

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

There's an expression, "If Momma ain't happy ain't no one happy," and we can certainly include "Poppa" in this too. Children are highly susceptible to parents' stress levels. It is rare to see highly anxious parents with a very placid child. Children are shaped by their environment, so it is important for parents to not only teach them coping skills, but to model them as well.

Ways to help our children be physically and emotionally healthy with lowered stress levels have already been drilled into our heads: the importance of sufficient sleep, exercise, relaxation, social interaction, healthy eating habits, time management skills, and limited media and screen exposure. In addition, we recognize the necessity for a healthy family system with mutual cooperation, respect, and open communication. This is a huge agenda, to be sure.

While many parents are busy figuring out ways to help our children flourish, we may not be applying the same criteria to ourselves. And just like second-hand smoke, second-

hand stress can be harmful to our children.

Here are some additional ways to reduce stress that aren't always highlighted:

Adjust your expectations of yourself and others

This is one of the main stressors I see among parents in our community. Those who are able to accept their own limitations are usually happier, less anxious, and better able to accept others' limitations. For example, it is natural to run out of time, energy, and motivation occasionally. We are also limited by our ability levels and by our personality construct (for example, true introverts will not be able to sustain a highly social existence).

Can you acknowledge that you can't perform math beyond middle school level (like me)? Can you be okay with rarely getting everything done that you had hoped? Can you overeat occasionally without guilt and shame? Can you accept that some people are highly skilled in areas that you would like to be, but are not? Can you say no to requests without feeling

bad about yourself?

Modeling imperfection to our children is a good thing. When we readily admit our own deficiencies, we are letting them know that we can more easily tolerate theirs as well. And we are helping them learn to do the same with themselves and others. It is important to note that adjusting our expectations of ourselves does not mean abandoning goals for self-improvement. It is always positive to challenge ourselves to do better, but it helps to first have a solid baseline of self-acceptance in place.

Adjusting your expectations for others is especially crucial with children. If your expectations are not in sync with your child's abilities or motivational level, you may tend to express criticism and frustration. Your child, and your relationship with him, will not flourish this way; rather, he needs encouragement and understanding. Once he has acceptance and support, he will be better able to tackle new challenges.

Lighten Up

Those who can laugh at them-

selves easily have a huge advantage.

If we are able to do this, we can take in stride some of the inevitable mistakes we make, and at the same time show our children a way to handle their own mistakes. Hopefully, parents and children can apply this with each other as well, and not pounce when we catch the other making mistakes. Seeing humor in situations and not taking ourselves too seriously allows us to lower the potential stressfulness of our missteps.

Be Realistic

This is related to reducing expectations. Do we really think our children are going to routinely jump up to help with dishes or laundry without being asked? Or that they will readily comply when they are asked? Do we expect our smart but unmotivated child to get A's? If you have yelled at your child, should she be able to get over it quickly? And if she holds onto a grudge, do you say she is being too sensitive? (This is a complaint I hear frequently in my practice.)

We still want to enforce certain rules and expectations, but with a

lighter approach. Most children balk at being ordered around, scolded, and criticized. Figuring out how best to gain cooperation from your child is every parent's task. Some recent Family Focus columns have addressed this issue. When we are able to view our children realistically, we can increase our level of tolerance and decrease our level of stress – a huge benefit for the entire family.



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