

Local child chefs land a winning title in Moraga Pear Recipe Contest

By Susie Iventosch



Sherwood siblings in cooking gear!

Photos Celine Sherwood

The 20th annual Moraga Pear & Wine Festival was held on Sept. 22, celebrating Moraga's pear history and offering plenty of fun for families including a pie-eating contest, music, wine tasting, face painting and inflatable bouncy houses. But, the activity that is always most dear to my heart is the annual Pear Recipe Contest. I just love to see all that pear creativity coming out of Lamorinda kitchens.

This year's adult winners included Tom Smith for his Cream Cheese and Pear Tart; Elaine Cable for her Pear and Chèvre "Cigars"; anonymously submitted Pear Pistachio Sweet Rolls and Ana Patterson for both her Pear Stuffed Crepes and Endive with Pear appetizer. The winning youth entry was awarded to the Sherwood Siblings — Ben, 8, Eva, 6, Lilly, 4, and Annie, (who goes by Tweety), 2. And were they ever excited when they heard the announcement of their winning entry!

Their recipe, which according to their mom, Celine Sherwood, was a last minute experiment because Ben and Eva brought a Pear Festival flyer home from school only the day before the contest. As the kids inquired about the meaning of a recipe contest in general, they all realized that this particular event offered a youth category. Inspired by this news, they loaded up the car and headed for Safeway to buy ingredients for their recipe. In the end, their masterpiece combined three different recipes — an Italian cake made with mascarpone cheese, an apple bundt cake, and baked pears filled with cinnamon ricotta.

"We only had time to make one cake, so we didn't have time to make a test cake that we could taste and tweak," Celine said. "We weren't even sure it was going to be edible!"

In fact, they never even had a chance to taste the cake until they brought leftovers home after the contest. But, it helped enormously that cake is one of the Sherwood children's favorite things to make when they get to work in the kitchen.

"My favorite thing to cook is cake," Eva pointed out. "And my dad's favorite to eat is pumpkin cheesecake."

Ben added, "I love to make chocolate chip cookies, but Oreos cake is the best."

"I really love rainbow cake with swirly colors," Lilly reported.

Tweety remained silent, but I'm told she loves pizza best!

The Sherwood's Ricotta Pear Cake is especially interesting because it has no leavening agent, so it is very dense and moist, almost like a pudding-cake. It also calls for very ripe, almost overly ripe pears, which lend a very fruity taste. What I loved most about the cake is the shape, because they baked the cake in the Nordic Ware Rose Bundt pan, one of Celine's favorite kitchen utensils. When I made the cake at home, I used a regular bundt pan, but the Sherwood kids' cake was so much prettier than mine. I'm definitely going to have to add that pan to my inventory.

For the Sherwood family, home baking was born of necessity. Lilly has a serious nut allergy and it became very difficult for Celine to find baked goods that were nut-free

and prepared in a completely nut-free facility. Baking at home allows Lilly to enjoy all the fun childhood treats without fear of anaphylaxis shock. But what prompted the children's involvement in the kitchen was the discovery that Ben, who was struggling in kindergarten, is "Twice Exceptional" (2e for short). These individuals are both gifted (high IQ) and have a disability that can range from dyslexia and auditory or sensory processing issues to Tourette's or any other issues that may interfere with the person's ability to learn in a traditional environment. They are considered "exceptional" due to the fact their intellectual abilities coexist with their special needs. Unlike most people who fall somewhere in the middle of the bell curve when tested in various skill sets and abilities, 2e individuals fall on the far ends of the IQ curve and can be in the 95th percentile in some areas while in the bottom percentile in others.

Celine realized they needed a way to get Ben hooked into developing areas he struggled with like reading, math, fine motor and executive functioning skills. After trying different kinds of activities and programs that didn't pan out, she put his motivation for sweets to work, thinking that baking would incorporate many of the skills he needed help with such as measuring, reading, and working together with his sisters, all the while enjoying the "sweets" of his labor.

While this is not foolproof and didn't address all of Ben's issues, it was a great way for Celine to observe his struggles first-hand and help guide him through it. "As I said, it wasn't a miracle life-changing thing for us, but it was something we could do at home and together," Celine said. "We started with cookies and after several failures due to Ben and Eva fighting, or not paying attention to recipes, they slowly learned, through eating several batches of less than spectacular cookies, that baking is a science and when they don't cooperate, 'things taste bad' as they would say."

I would suggest the "proof is in the Ricotta Pear (Pudding) Cake" that the Sherwood family has come a long way from inedible batches of cookies and struggling to work together in the kitchen. When I had the pleasure of meeting Celine and her adorable children, they were all super enthusiastic about their love of cooking and their favorite cooking utensils and aprons, and so pumped on their first-ever recipe contest results. They are already planning and concocting ideas for next year's contest. The Sherwood family has been a true inspiration to me, both as a mom and a cook, and as a member of this community.

Celine highly credits the entire Camino Pablo Elementary School staff and faculty, who have gone above and beyond to help not only Ben, but all students at the school to succeed and meet their potential.

More of the Sherwood family recipes, including Celine Sherwood's Smashed Carrots, a savory and sweet pairing that both her children and I rave about, as well as her Winter Wild Rice dish, will be featured in an upcoming issue.

To see all of the winning recipes from the Pear & Wine Festival, visit www.lamorindaweekly.com.

Moraga Pear Festival Recipe Contest Winners 2018 Youth Recipe Contest Winner

Ricotta Pear Bundt Cake

The Sherwood Siblings (Ben, Eva, Lilly and Annie)

2018 Youth Dessert Winner

Ingredients
 ½ cup unsalted butter (melted)
 2 eggs
 1 teaspoon honey
 ¾ cup milk
 1/3 cup ricotta cheese (can substitute mascarpone or cream cheese)
 2/3 cup granulated sugar
 2/3 cup all-purpose flour
 3 overly ripe pears (peeled and cubed)
 ½ teaspoon cinnamon
 ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
 ¼ teaspoon cardamom
 PAM baking spray with flour (in blue can with read cap)

Directions:

1. Heat oven to 350 F (325 F for convection ovens)
2. Spray Nordic Ware Rose Bundt pan with PAM baking spray until well coated and place in fridge.
3. In a large bowl, add all wet ingredients (melted butter, eggs, honey, milk and ricotta cheese) and beat with hand mixer until blended (does not have to be completely smooth).
4. Add sugar and flour to bowl and mix until batter forms.
5. In a separate bowl, place the cubed pears, cinnamon, ground ginger and cardamom and toss until the pears are coated with the spices.
6. Add pears to cake batter and gently fold the pears into the batter.
7. Pour batter into a well chilled bundt pan and smooth the top evenly.
8. Place in oven and bake for 30-40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean.
9. Let cake cool completely and turn out onto a cake plate.

***A chocolate version can be made by adding 1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder during step 4 of the directions.

This cake is great as a dessert served with caramel sauce and/or a scoop of ice cream.



The Sherwood siblings with their award winning Ricotta Pear Bundt Cake. From left: Ben, 8, Lilly, 4, Eva, 6, and Annie, 2.

Cream Cheese and Pear Tart Tom Smith

2018 Adult Dessert Winner

Ingredients

Crust:
 1 stick butter softened
 1/3 cup sugar
 ½ tsp vanilla
 2/3 cup finely chopped walnuts
 ¾ cup flour

Directions

Pre-heat oven to 350 F. In a medium bowl, mix together the butter, sugar and vanilla. Add the walnuts and flour and mix. Press mixture into bottom of 10-11 inch tart pan. Bake the crust for 10 minutes and cool.

Fillings:

8 oz cream cheese (softened)
 1 egg
 ¼ cup sugar
 ½ tsp vanilla
 2-3 pears but into thin slices
 1 tsp sugar
 ½ teaspoon cinnamon

Directions

Increase the oven temperature to 350 F and pre-heat. Mix the cream cheese, egg, ¼ cup sugar and vanilla in a small bowl. Spread mixture over tart base. Place pear slices around top of cream cheese mixture. Mix 1 tsp. sugar and cinnamon together and sprinkle on top of the pears. Bake 25 minutes.

Cool and refrigerate prior to serving.

Pear and Chevre "Cigar" with Thyme Pear Honey

Elaine Cable

2018 Adult Appetizer Winner

Ingredients

For "Cigars"
 2-3 ripe pears (I use Bartlett), peeled and diced
 ½ shallot, finely minced
 3 Tbsp butter
 1 5oz log of quality Chevre
 1 package phyllo dough, thawed
 4 Tbsp honey
 1 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves
 Pinch of salt and pepper
 Parchment paper
 Baking sheet

For Thyme Pear Honey:

3 Tbsp honey
 1 Tbsp pear, finely mashed
 pinch of fresh thyme leaves

Instructions

"Cigars"

1. Pre-heat oven to 350 F.
2. Melt 2 Tbsp butter in a saucepan, over medium heat. Reserve the other Tbsp for later use.
3. Add diced pear, minced shallot, salt and pepper
4. Turn heat to medium-low and stir mixture occasionally until lightly caramelized.
5. You want the mixture to be thick, not juicy. This may take up to 15 minutes to achieve.
6. After mixture is thickened, turn off heat and set aside.

Next:

1. Cut phyllo sheet in half lengthwise and then in half cross ways to make 4 rectangles measuring

approximately 6" by 8".

2. Brush the rectangles with remaining Tbsp of butter, making sure to reserve a little to brush over the tops.
3. Sprinkle some thyme leaves along the short edge of the phyllo rectangles, then lightly fold over to encase the thyme.
4. Spread about a Tbsp of the cooled pear mixture along the opposite short edge of the rectangles, then crumble some of the chevre in a line on top of the pear mixture.
5. Starting with the pear/chevre side, roll the phyllo once over the pear/chevre mixture and continue rolling to the folded-over thyme edge, then rolling over it to seal.
6. Complete step 5 with remaining phyllo rectangles.

Place "cigars" on a parchment-lined baking sheet and brush the tops with the remaining melted butter.

Bake in a 350 degree oven for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown.

Serve immediately with a drizzle of pear honey and a sprinkle of thyme leaves.

Pear Honey:

Warm 3 Tbsp of honey in a saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the Tbsp of finely mashed pear. Mix well to incorporate. Add the pinch of fresh thyme, last. Cool slightly and drizzle over warm "cigars" just before serving.