

# A perfect stack of sumptuous strawberries and cream



Cornmeal Strawberry Shortcake with Crème Fraîche

Photos Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

I found some hydroponic strawberries at the market the other day, which not only piqued my curiosity, but also totally reminded me that we're getting close to strawberry shortcake season! Soon we will have beautiful, local strawberries adorning the produce shelves, but for now, if you can find hydroponic berries, give them a try. Those I bought were very jammy and delicious. Hydroponics is a method of growing plants without soil. The roots are exposed either directly to a mineral nutrient solution in a water solvent or they can be exposed through an inert medium such as perlite, clay pellets, vermiculite or peat moss. This is a more efficient growing method, because in soil, the roots expend time and energy searching the soil for nutrients and water, whereas in hydroponics, the roots are constantly exposed and these things are readily available for the plant's growth. For this reason, the plants grow much faster than in soil. The

nutritional value may or may not be on par with plants grown in soil. I've read both sides of the argument, but not being a nutritionist, I cannot really say for sure. For information, visit [www.simplyhydro.com/strawberries](http://www.simplyhydro.com/strawberries).

This recipe has five layering components: shortcake, strawberry glaze, strawberry crème fraîche strawberries and whipped cream. You can arrange them however you please, but my order is: shortcake, strawberry glaze, strawberry cream fraiche, strawberries, whipped cream and repeat. While I normally use heavy whipping cream for the topping, this time I discovered CocoWhip, which is a coconut milk-based topping. It was delicious, but Cool Whip or home-made whipped cream would also be perfect!



Susie can be reached at [suziventosch@gmail.com](mailto:suziventosch@gmail.com). This recipe can be found on our website: [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://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.

## Shortcake

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 1 cube butter, (1/2 cup) unsalted, chilled and cut into small pieces
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup milk or cream (or Half & Half — your choice)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 425 F.

Place all dries in a mixing bowl. Cut in butter with fingers or a pastry cutter, until crumbly and fine. Stir in egg, milk and vanilla. Mix until dough comes together. Turn dough out onto a floured board or cloth and roll or press into a circle about 1-inch thick. Using a 3-inch diameter biscuit cutter or a glass, cut out 6 rounds of dough. Place on parchment paper and bake for about 12 minutes, or until tops are golden-brown. Remove from oven and cool. When ready to assemble split shortcakes in half horizontally.

## Strawberry Glaze

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 pint fresh strawberries, stems and leaves removed
- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### DIRECTIONS

Place strawberries and water in a medium sized pot. Bring to a boil and cook for about 4-5 minutes, occasionally stirring with a spoon to mash the berries as it cooks. Remove from heat, and strain berries through a sieve, smashing the pulp with the bottom of the spoon to get as much of the pulp through the sieve as possible. Discard any remaining pulp.

Return strawberry purée to the same pot. Mix the cornstarch and sugar together, and whisk into strawberry purée. Bring to a boil and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently with the whisk, until sauce begins to thicken and will coat the back of a spoon. Remove from heat, stir in vanilla and cool to room temperature.

## Strawberry Crème Fraiche

- 8 ounces crème fraiche
- ¼ cup of the strawberry glaze

Gently fold together.

### Strawberries

- 2 pints fresh strawberries, stems removed and sliced or cut into bite-sized pieces

## Whipped Cream or CocoWhip Topping

- 1 cup whipping cream, or
- 1 container CoolWhip or CocoWhip

To assemble, cut shortcakes in half horizontally. Spread a spoonful of the strawberry glaze over the bottom half. Next drop a spoonful of the Strawberry Crème Fraiche, followed by sliced strawberries and finally whipped cream. Add top half of shortcake and repeat the process, ending with one or two strawberry slices on the very top.



# A Sunset Stroll restaurant tour May 7 in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty

Locals and visitors can nibble and sip their way through a selection of offerings by restaurants and local vintners from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. May 7 at the annual Orinda Restaurant Tour. This year the theme is "A Sunset Stroll," with more restaurants

represented than last year. The Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors the event, has been granted use of a portion of Vashell Way for tables and music. Vashell Way, which runs behind Casa Orinda, will be closed to traffic for about 60 feet.

There will be some new restaurants, and some old, and

some with a twist. Saffron, the Indian restaurant in Theatre Square, was in the tour last year and will participate again. Shelby's is a long-time restaurant in Orinda, but they have a new menu. La Piazza has a new owner and Zamboni's Pizza was recently reopened by its new owner after necessary updates.

Rumor has it that Cine Cuvee may return with lobster sliders this year. Other restaurants returning this year include Casa Orinda, The Fourth Bore, Loards, Rheem Steaks, and Piccolo Napoli, which will be serving meatballs.

The Lamorinda Winegrowers Association will be pouring a free glass with every \$40 ticket.

The wine will be available at check-in at 51 Moraga Way, the Compass Real Estate Parking Lot. Overseeing this portion of the tour will be Holly Hinkle of Compass and Ally Fattore, of Mechanics Bank. Juliette Don of Chevron helped secure the restaurant participants with T.J. D'Amato, Chamber of Commerce president.

# The up and downside of AP courses

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

Depending on how your particular school treats AP classes, an AP class can be worth a full

grade higher than the regular track class (that's how some students push their GPAs beyond the 'perfect' 4.0). And even if your high school does not inflate AP grades, many college admissions offices do it for you.

Good AP scores may reduce your eventual college course load and this could result in a shorter time in college. Generally, a high score on an Advanced Placement exam will equate to one semester of a college course. A high score is often a four or five out of the five-point scale used to score an Advanced Placement test. While it is theoretically possible for you to bypass an entire semester of college by taking several AP classes (which can save you thousands of dollars), it is not common. Many colleges do not accept AP scores for course credit. Others may require you to take its version of a similar course. The rationale offered is so you learn the material in a way that provides a proper foundation for the university's

particular academic curriculum. Other colleges may offer you the chance to take an assessment exam before accepting an AP score for course credit. The assessment exam is usually quite comprehensive and a passing score can be difficult to achieve, unless you have reviewed and studied the material. Your brain loses a great deal of content over time. Even then, the assessment may be the final for that course, and it is likely to be difficult to pass. For example, one of my daughters scored a solid five on an AP biology exam in her senior year of high school, but MIT would not accept the course for credit until she passed their introduction to biology course for bioengineering majors. The passing grade was a 70 percent and she scored 68 percent, not making the cut for MIT. On a more optimistic note, our University of California system is often quite willing to accept AP courses in high school for college credit. One of my clients graduated in 3.5 years because UC Berkeley accepted all five of her AP classes for course credit.

Admissions often view AP classes as one indicator of your intellectual vitality and willingness to take the initiative to challenge yourself in high school. Since AP coursework is taught at the college level, good grades in these classes and strong scores on the exams can prove you are ready for college success.

As you ponder the question of taking one or more AP classes, it is important to weigh the pros and cons and make a decision that provides reasonable balance. One way to do this is to limit the AP classes you take to those subjects that resonate with your interests and

possible majors or career paths.

It is important to weigh carefully the potential bump in GPA and the beneficial effect on college admission outcomes with the fact that AP classes do take more time. It is not uncommon for one AP class to involve two or more hours of homework each weeknight. That's time you might spend studying for your other classes, preparing for standardized tests and pursuing your extracurricular activities – not to mention getting some much needed sleep. And that, too, would be time well spent!



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate and graduate school study. Over the past two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. The number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write [elizabeth@doingcollege.com](mailto:elizabeth@doingcollege.com); Visit [www.doingcollege.com](http://www.doingcollege.com); or Call: 925.385.0562.



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