

Easy ways to incorporate CURRANTS into YOUR diet!

JAM

Just when you thought jammin' was a thing of the past, currants create tart, make-you-pucker-up jam!

- ☞ Swirl jam into homemade ice cream bodies before freezing
- ☞ Spread jam on top of cream cheese on a toasted, hearty bread or a warm plain scone
- ☞ Make a tart compote and add atop rice pudding

RAW

These tart berries, when paired with sweeter fruit, help accentuate the sweetness of other fruits!

- ☞ Add raw currants to a fruit salad
- ☞ Use currants as a garnish on cake or tarts
- ☞ Mix currants into a greens salad with a sharp cheese such as parmesan or pecorino

BAKING

Use currants as a substitute for other small berries like blueberries or lingon berries.

- ☞ Toss a few into scones, muffins, or even pancakes
- ☞ Swirl currants or currant jam into lemon curd and spread on a crepe

SNACKS

These little buggers are high in antioxidants!

- ☞ Go ahead, take a handful for your desk and enjoy a tart jolt at work!
- ☞ Swirl vanilla or plain yogurt with honey, currants and blueberries. Stick your bowl the freezer for about 45 minutes. Pull it out and enjoy a slightly icy, ice cream like dessert!

A tart of fromage frais and white currants

A year after planting, I picked my first decent crop of Versailles Blanche currants. I wanted to celebrate their delicate beauty and translucency. I could, I suppose, have set them in a golden jelly (elderflower, perhaps, or Sauternes), turned them into a conserve, or mixed them with another suitable fruit. Instead they became a fruit tart, their sharpness taken further with a light filling of strained yogurt and fromage frais. I picked a sweet crust to support them, to balance the bracing freshness of the rest of the ingredients.

enough for 8

for the filling

- fromage frais – about 1 pound (500g)
- plain yogurt – 2 cups (450g)
- confectioners' sugar – 3 slightly heaping tablespoons, plus more for dusting
- the grated zest of a small orange
- white currants – 1 pound (450g)

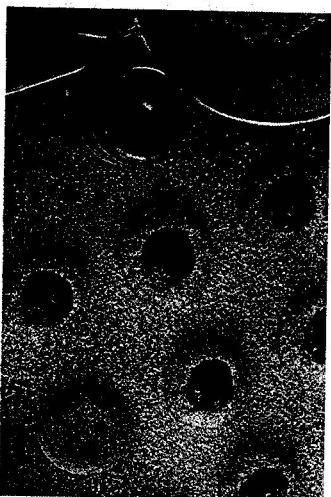
for the crust

- butter – 5 tablespoons (75g)
- lemon, orange, or ginger cookies – 10 ounces (300g)

Mix the fromage frais and yogurt. Line a colander or sieve with cheesecloth. Pour the mixture into the sieve, place the whole thing on a shallow dish to catch the drips, and put it in the fridge (you may well have to take a shelf out to fit it in). Leave overnight.

To make the crust, melt the butter. Crush the cookies to a coarse, open crumb, then mix them with the melted butter. Tip them into a loose-bottomed tart pan, about 9 inches (22cm) in diameter, then smooth them in, pushing them into the corners with your fingers. Chill for twenty minutes.

For the filling, tip the strained cheese mixture out of the cheesecloth into a bowl. Stir in the confectioners' sugar and grated orange zest. Smooth the filling into the chilled tart crust. Pull the currants from their stalks and pile them on top of the tart filling. Dust generously with confectioners' sugar. Leave for a few minutes before slicing.



Ricotta Thumbprint Cookies

Adapted from the blog, *Very Small Anna*

Ingredients

- 1 c sugar
- ½ c butter, softened
- 6-8 oz ricotta
- 1 t vanilla
- 1 egg
- 2 c AP flour
- 1 T baking powder
- ½ t salt
- lemon zest
- powdered sugar for dusting
- Oven at 350*

Process

- cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy
- beat in ricotta, vanilla, eggs and lemon zest
- sift dries
- incorporate dries to wet mix
- spoon onto parchment paper in 1T portions
- bake 12-15 minutes, turning pan at 7 minutes
- let sit one minute, then poke the center
- cool completely, then add jam

Little currant cakes

Ten years old, I would help my aunt make little cakes in her kitchen. The usual fairy cake mixture, some would be transformed into butterfly cakes, others with trickles of colored icing and pastel sprinkles. I'm not sure whether I was proud or embarrassed. Nowadays they would be decorated with a generous swirl of buttercream and called cupcakes. Occasionally, she would insist we put dried currants into the mixture, which I would later fastidiously pick out one by one.

Cookbooks are now awash with recipes for every possible type of cupcake and it is easy to see their charm. What with the instant sugar rush, the warm wave of nostalgia, and the ease with which they are produced, it is no wonder they are so popular. I see no need to add to the tidal wave of recipes, but a sudden notion to toss a handful of currants—red and black—into the raw cake batter resulted in cakes that had the warm butteriness of the genre but here and there a shot of dazzling, sour fruit. For those for whom buttercream holds no attraction.

makes 12

- butter – ½ cup (125g)
- golden baker's sugar – 1¼ cups (125g)
- large eggs – 2
- self-rising flour – 1 cup (125g)
- milk – 2 or 3 tablespoons
- red and black currants (or just black) – 5 ounces (150g), about 1½ cups, removed from their stalks

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line 12 muffin cups with paper liners. Put the butter, sugar, eggs, and flour into a food processor and blitz until all is well creamed. Introduce enough milk into the mixture (probably a couple of tablespoons) to produce a consistency that will fall lightly from the spoon. Stir in the currants.

Divide the mixture among the muffin cups and bake for about twenty to twenty-five minutes, until risen. They should be light but firm to the touch. They will fall slightly on cooling.

A rice pudding to show off a fruit compote

I rarely sully the warm, ivory purity of a rice pudding. I make an exception for a compote of currants, though. I never stir, preferring to take a small amount of the glistening compote on the spoon with a larger amount of rice. Should you stir, you risk ending up with a pudding the color of a bruise.

enough for 4

short-grain white rice – ½ cup (70g)
whole milk – a quart (1 liter)
butter – 2 tablespoons (30g)
superfine sugar – 2 tablespoons
a vanilla pod

for the currant compote

black currants – 8 ounces (250g), about 2 cups
sugar – 2 tablespoons
water – 2 tablespoons

Preheat the oven to 275°F (140°C). Put the rice, half the milk, the butter, sugar, and vanilla pod into an ovenproof dish. Slide it into the oven and leave it to get on with things quietly for an hour. Lift the pudding out of the oven and pour in the remaining milk, stirring gently. Leave to cook for a further hour and a half.

Rinse the currants and pull them from their stalks. Drop them into a stainless steel or enameled cast-iron pan and add the sugar and water. Bring to a boil over low heat, taking care that the fruit does not burn. Lower the heat and allow to bubble gently for five minutes or so, until the currants have started to burst and you have a small quantity of deep purple juice. Switch off the heat.

Serve the rice pudding in all its simplicity or with a spoonful of the warm currant compote. A dessert to bring peace and calm to all who eat it.

Pie Dough:

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 cup butter, softened
1/2 cup white sugar
2 egg yolks
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest, about 1 lemon

Currant Meringue Filling:

2 egg whites
1/2 cup white sugar
2 teaspoons cornstarch
2 1/4 cups red currants

In a medium bowl, whisk flour and baking powder to lighten. Mix in butter, sugar, egg yolks and lemon zest with a fork until mixture forms dough. Lightly knead several times in bowl to form dough into ball; wrap in plastic wrap and let rest in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to an hour.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Roll out dough into approximately an 11" round and place into a 9 inch springform pan (I think a 9" pie plate would work well too, but haven't tried this yet). Gently press in bottom of pan and up the side. The dough should extend about 1 inch up from base of pan. Bake for 25 minutes, or until golden-yellow. Remove from oven and cool slightly. Raise oven to 400 degrees.

To prepare the filling, beat egg whites in a medium bowl until stiff. Add cornstarch, and then gradually add sugar; beat for 5 minutes. Fold currants into meringue and spoon into slightly cooled crust. Smooth mixture evenly into crust. Bake in the oven for 10 minutes, or until top is highly browned.

CURRANT PIE

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3 1/2 c. fresh currants
2 eggs
3 tbsp. cornstarch
1 c. sugar

Separate eggs. Beat egg yolks and 1 tablespoon water. Mix cornstarch with sugar and add to egg mixture, then add to currants and mix. Pour into pie shell. Bake until knife comes out clean when inserted.