

EATING & DRINKING

Dessert Should Always Be Imminent

Do as pastry chefs do, and keep a stash of your favorite cookies, cakes and other sweet treats in the freezer, ready to bake

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

AS I WRITE this, I'm nibbling on a warm, gooey chocolate chip cookie I baked on a whim, without any messy measuring or mixing. It's a trick I learned from home-baking guru Dorie Greenspan: Make the dough, portion it out with an ice cream scoop, freeze those nuggets of goodness, then bake them on demand. The upside? Hot cookies in 10 minutes, whenever you feel like it. The downside? Hot cookies in 10 minutes, whenever you feel like it.

I've discovered that professional pastry chefs are also in the habit of stockpiling desserts. While savory chefs fixate on cooking to order, the unspoken craft of pastry lies in working ahead—way ahead.

At Walnut Street Café in Philadelphia, head baker Melissa Funk Weller, a veteran of restaurants such as Babbo and Per Se, pulls many of her pastry goods—scones, pies, cookies—straight from the

how you're going to get the best bake." The walk-in freezer at Café Altro Paradiso always contains a week's worth of crostatas stacked on sheet trays, ready for prime time. "It's like a party trick," she said. "You can just throw it in the oven. It's like having a frozen pizza—but you made it."

And it's just a superior way to make a tart. For starters, freezing preserves fruit at its peak. "It will hold its shape, it won't oxidize or color, it won't mush out or ripen," said Ms. Pickowicz. Then there's the crust, which must be flaky. To achieve this, she makes dough speckled with bits of butter, and freezes the crostata solid. It hits the oven, and magic happens. "When you flash pastry at high heat you're shocking it," she said. "As the butter melts it creates steam, and the force of the steam separates the layers of flour and creates the flakiness. If the butter is really cold, it doesn't melt out right away."

Not all frozen desserts are destined for the oven. Hillary Sterling, the chef at Vic's, an Italian restaurant in Manhattan, swears by her semifreddo, a three-ingredient wonder made from honey, egg yolks and heavy cream that comes to the table frozen—or, "semi-frozen," the literal translation of the name. "I like semifreddo because we can make it in one large batch and slice it when we need it, and the texture of it never changes," she said of the creamy dessert. "The honey brings down the freezing point, and the egg yolks prevent the semifreddo from being icy, and keeps it all together. It's like a cold slice of fluff."

Though Ms. Sterling molds her semifreddo in a large terrine, you can use a simple loaf pan, or even muffin tins for individual portions. "These desserts are designed for quick plating," she said. For home cooks, it's remarkably convenient. "You can make this on Tuesday if you're having a dinner party on Saturday," she added. "It's all good."

► Find a recipe for early-fall crostata at wsj.com/food



Zucchini Olive Oil Cake

This cake offers the surprising benefit of becoming more moist each day after it's baked. It's an ideal cake for breakfast, a snack or dessert. It also happens to be vegan. If you want to fancy it up a bit, ice the cake with a simple citrus glaze. ACTIVE TIME: 30 minutes TOTAL TIME: 1½ hours SERVES: 8 to 10

For the cake:	pastry flour	1 cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar	2 tablespoons lemon juice
Nonstick cooking spray	¾ teaspoon fine sea salt	Zest of 1 orange	2½ tablespoons orange juice
1½ cups flour, plus more for dusting	1 teaspoon baking powder	½ cup extra-virgin olive oil	1 cup powdered sugar, sifted
3 tablespoons flaxseed meal	½ teaspoon nutmeg	For the citrus glaze (optional):	
½ cup whole-wheat	2 small to medium, zucchini, trimmed		

1. Make cake: Place rack in middle of oven and preheat to 350 degrees. Spray a 9-inch springform pan with nonstick cooking spray and dust inside with flour, tapping out excess.
2. In a small bowl, combine flaxseed meal and 3 tablespoons warm water, and mix to combine. Set aside and let mixture soak 10 minutes.
3. In large bowl, whisk together whole-wheat pastry flour, salt, baking powder, baking soda and nutmeg. Set aside.
4. Place a box grater on a clean kitchen towel. Grate zucchini on large holes of grater. Wrap grated zucchini in towel and wring out as much water as possible. Set aside.
5. Use an electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment to beat sugar and orange zest on low speed until zest is evenly distributed, about 20 seconds. Gradually add olive oil and beat on medium speed until incorporated, 30 seconds. Add soaked flaxseed meal and beat on medium speed to aerate and emulsify batter, 1 minute. Add zucchini and mix on low speed to distribute. Add dry ingredients and mix on low speed until fully incorporated.
6. Pour batter into prepared pan. Use a spatula to smooth surface. Bake until cake is brown on top, pulls away from sides of pan and springs back when gently pressed, 55-60 minutes. Cool in pan 10 minutes. Remove sides of pan and let cake cool slightly on rack.
7. Meanwhile, make citrus glaze: In a small bowl, whisk together lemon and orange juices and confectioner's sugar until no lumps remain. Place a baking sheet under cooling rack. Use an offset spatula to spread glaze over cake. —Recipe adapted from Melissa Funk Weller of Walnut Street Café, Philadelphia

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freezer. "All we do is pop them in the oven in the morning," said Ms. Weller. "It's just a matter of how much can you do ahead. You want to make the work for the person who comes in the next day easy."

Freezing isn't just about time management. Certain foods improve after they've had a chance to rest. "When you age dough, sometimes it tastes better," said Ms. Weller. "That's the case with bread, and it's the case with some cakes, too." One such dessert is a zucchini-olive oil cake she adapted from the late Gina DePalma, another Babbo alum. To appeal to health-conscious customers, Ms. Weller makes the recipe vegan by using a binding mixture of flax meal and water in place of eggs. "We have six of them in the freezer at a time," she said. "There's no shame in it." And because the cake contains olive oil and zucchini, it actually gets more moist each day after baking, even after it's thawed. "It keeps so well, it's amazing."

More-elaborate desserts get the make-ahead treatment, too. Natasha Pickowicz, the pastry chef at Flora Bar and Café Altro Paradiso in New York City, has earned a reputation for her finely honed seasonal fruit crostatas. "Baking from frozen is the key to their success," she said of her single-crust pies. "That's



Honey Semifreddo With Toasted Almonds

ACTIVE TIME: 30 minutes TOTAL TIME: 8½ hours (includes freezing) SERVES: 6-8

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| ½ cup honey, plus more to drizzle | long sides. | steady stream. Continue to beat until mixture is pale and has doubled in volume, about 7 minutes. | Fold plastic wrap overhang across surface to cover, and freeze overnight. |
| 8 egg yolks | 2. Attach a candy thermometer to a small saucepan. Pour in honey, set over medium heat and heat to 240 degrees. | 4. In a medium bowl, beat cream until stiff peaks form. Fold whipped cream into yolk mixture. Pour mixture into prepared pan, smoothing surface with a spatula. | 5. To serve, slice semifreddo into 2-inch-thick slices. Sprinkle chopped toasted almonds over top and drizzle with honey. |
| 1 cup heavy cream | 3. Use an electric mixer to beat egg yolks at low speed. With motor running, slowly add heated honey in a | | —Adapted from Hillary Sterling of Vic's, New York |
| Chopped toasted almonds, to serve | 1. Spritz a 9- by 5-inch loaf pan with water, then line pan with plastic wrap, leaving a generous overhang on | | |

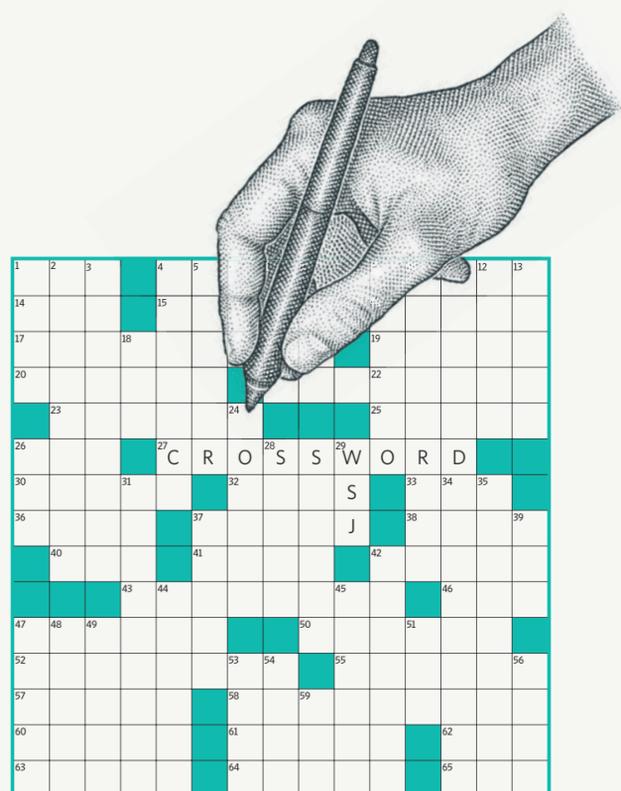
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