Festive fare: bring a plate

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CHRISTMAS is the season for parties and party fare. Most housewives will have a busy time from now until well after Christmas Day itself. There will be heavy demands for supplying the inevitable "plate" for party or social.

There will be parents' days, and break-up school parties. Every sporting and social club in the district will have a function to wind up the season, or round off the year's activities. All these are likely to require "a plate."

The housewife will also be faced with home entertaining, and she may sometimes be at a loss to know how to cope with it all. When she is confronted with a particularly busy week, her best plan is to make a large butter cake which will keep well. This may be baked in one large slab using a baking tin, or in several smaller rectangular cake tins. Pieces may be cut from the cake, and finished off in a variety of ways, with changes in icing, filling, flavouring, and decoration. Two foundation recipes are given.

If you wish the cake to keep for a week or longer, the first or richer cake mixture is recommended, as the larger proportion of fat keeps the cake moist.

For a cake which will be used fairly quickly, the plainer or cheaper recipe is quite satisfactory.

**BUTTER CAKE No. 1**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup butter (or substitute fat).
- 1⅓ cups castor sugar.
- 4 eggs.
- 3 cups self raising flour.
- 1 cup milk.
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence.

**Method:**
1. Line the tin with greased paper, or grease the tin well. If the tin is greased, a layer of greased paper in the bottom of the tin makes removal easier after cooking.
2. Cream the fat and the sugar until the grain has disappeared from the sugar. Essence may be added before the creaming.
3. Beat eggs, then add gradually to the creamed fat and sugar, beating well between each addition.
4. Sift in the flour.
5. Add milk, fold all ingredients together, carefully, until evenly mixed.
6. Turn into greased tin and bake in a moderate oven about 1 hour.

Temperature of oven 325° to 350° F.
BUTTER CAKE No. 2

Ingredients:
- ½ cup butter of substitute fat.
- 1 cup castor sugar.
- 2 eggs.
- 3 cups plain flour.
- 4 level teaspoons cream of tartar.
- 2 level teaspoons bicarbonate of soda.
- Pinch salt.
- 1 cup milk.
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence.

Method:
1. Make by the creaming method as in recipe No. 1.
2. Cool thoroughly before storing. Keep in an air tight tin until required.

Cake may be iced the next day or pieces cut off, filled and iced from day to day as required.

If required for lamingtons, cake should be kept for two days. Fresh cake breaks easily and is difficult to handle, when icing lamingtons.

With a little ingenuity that one large slab of cake can be turned into quite an assortment of cakes, both large and small.

Icings may be varied in colouring and flavouring, white, pink or chocolate. There are other delicious flavourings besides vanilla. Rosewater, lemon, orange-flower water, almonds are all delicate in flavour.

If you have a strawberry patch, crushed strawberries are delicious in both icings and fillings. Passion fruit juice or other juices may also be added as flavouring.

An iced slab cake may be split and spread with:
- Whipped cream, sweetened and flavoured.
- Mock cream.
- Jam.
- Lemon cheese.

The filling and perhaps the icing too is best done soon before the cake is to be eaten.

LAMINGTONS

Stale cake is cut into neat cubes or rectangles. Do not make these cakes too large.

There are two types of chocolate icing that may be used. The second, a chocolate sauce, is not suitable if lamingtons are to be stored for some days, as it will mould.

Ice the cakes then coat with desiccated coconut.

CHOCOLATE ICING No. 1

Ingredients:
- 1 cup icing sugar.
- 1 to 2 tablespoons milk or water.
- 1 level tablespoon cooking chocolate, or 2 level tablespoons cocoa.
- 1 teaspoon butter or copha.
- Vanilla.

Method:
1. Melt butter or copha in milk or water, add cocoa, bring to boil and cook for several minutes.
2. Partly cool mixture, then add icing sugar.

ICING No. 2

CHOCOLATE SAUCE COATING FOR LAMINGTONS

Ingredients:
- 1 cup water or milk and water.
- 1 level tablespoon cornflour.
- 1 level tablespoon cocoa or cooking chocolate.
- 1 level tablespoon sugar.
- Vanilla essence.

Method:
1. Blend the cornflour and cocoa to a smooth paste using some of the measured liquid.
2. Heat remainder of liquid and stir into blended mixture.
3. Return mixture to saucepan, stir until it boils and boil for 5 minutes stirring all the time.
4. Remove from stove add sugar and vanilla.
5. Cool mixture before using.

To Coat:
1. Place a piece of cake on a fork dip quickly in and out of the sauce, then spread sauce evenly using a knife or spatula.
2. Have ready a plastic bag containing coconut.
3. Place cake into the bag and shake gently until coated with coconut.
4. Lift lamington out and press carefully into shape using a flat knife or spatula.

VARIATIONS
1. Split the cake spread with raspberry jam in the centre before making up the lamingtons.
2. Cut a piece from the top of each lamington and place a teaspoonful of whipped cream inside each, then replace the top at an angle with the cream showing.
3. Lamington Block.—Make a slab of cake into one large lamington to be cut up at the supper table. This cake could be decorated with crystallised cherries for special occasions.
4. Cream Cake.—Take a piece of butter sponge, split, and fill with mock cream. Ice and decorate.
5. Strawberry Cream Cake.—Split a piece of butter sponge. Make a filling with whipped cream to which has been added crushed strawberries and a little icing sugar. Ice and decorate with fresh strawberries.

MERINGUES
In answer to a reader's request a recipe for meringues has been included in our "festive fare" recipes. Meringues keep well for a considerable time if stored in an air-tight tin. They are always popular at parties and for special occasions may be filled at the last minute with whipped cream which has been sweetened and flavoured with vanilla, a few crushed strawberries, or passion fruit pulp.

Here is the recipe:

Method:
1. Slightly grease a sheet of grease-proof paper, and place in readiness on a slab of wood ¾ in. thick or on a baking tray.
2. Take a large basin, making sure it is perfectly clean and dry. The slightest trace of grease from the paper greasing operations, will prevent the frothing of the eggs.
3. Place eggs and salt in basin and whisk until stiff. Test by turning the basin upside-down. If the mixture does not move in the basin it is ready for the addition of the sugar. Whisking beyond this stage will result in close, heavy meringues.
4. Sieve in the sugar, a little at a time and mix in gently and lightly with a metal spoon. Beat until stiff.
5. Lightly fold in the essence and cream of tartar or lemon juice.
Alternatively, run the mixture through a forcing bag with ½ in. nozzle, using a circular movement and piling meringue high. Use a wet knife to cut off the mixture from the forcing bag.
7. Place in a very slow oven to dry out and cook at least two hours.
If cooking in a wood stove it is best to put the meringues in the oven when fire is very low and going out. If made in the evening they may be left all night in the oven. Meringues when cooked should be crisp and dry and faintly tinged.

Temperature in gas or electric oven is 200° F., or very low if there is no thermostat.

Variations:
Meringues may be:
1. Pinked slightly, with a little cochineal or carmine colouring added to the meringue before cooking.
2. Lightly sprinkled with castor sugar before cooking.
3. Sprinkled with non-pariels (hundreds and thousands) before cooking.
4. Joined with whipped cream mixture as suggested earlier.
5. Served with icecream, meringues make a delicious sweet dish for summer dinners.
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