



Cakes & Biscuits

TSENTRALNY RYNOK, when the food wars aren't on, is a treasure trove. Everyone knows that. I was there a week ago and my timing couldn't have been better. The front door was barred by some very surly lads and truck loads of militia were pulling up. Strange, I thought, but nothing was going to put me off buying a kilo of sauerkraut to go as an appetizer with the smoked salmon and dill dish a friend was concocting that night.

Up through the side door and all of a sudden I thought I was back in boarding school — I entered the middle of a monumental food fight. Fruit was everywhere, tables overturned, barrels upended, people hurling vegetables and insults, everything a mushy, dangerous mess. Fortunately, the worst of it seemed to be over. I avoided looking too carefully at the broken glass on the ground or the excitable group of men knotted around the room and I figured that was to be the end of my shopping expedition.

Ah, ye of little faith! There in the middle of the mess was one stooped old woman carefully tending her stand of surprise surprise ... sauerkraut. "Aren't you scared about all this?" I asked incredulously as she swooped up my rubles and handed me a plastic bag of soppy cabbage. "No, deary," she replied. "Mafias come and go, but I'm still here selling my *kapusta*. Now, how about some mandarins as well?"

Muffins came to me late in life — a much regretted childhood treat judging by the joy it stirs in an American's heart and tummy. What is good about them is the speed with which they can be made. Half an hour (about the time it takes to brew a good cup, have a shower and wander around the apartment finding the missing sock) is all you need.

Apricot Muffins

<i>1 cup</i>	dried apricots, chopped
<i>5 cups</i>	flour
<i>2 tsp</i>	baking powder
<i>1/2 cups</i>	sugar
<i>1/2 cup</i>	butter, chopped into small pieces
<i>1/2 cup</i>	milk
<i>2</i>	eggs, lightly beaten

Sift the flour, baking powder and sugar together in a large bowl. Rub in the butter. Add the well drained apricots to the flour and butter mixture. Combine the milk and eggs in a jug and pour into the flour mixture and mix carefully with a fork. It is essential you don't over mix. The batter should be coarse and lumpy. Drop heaped tablespoons of the mixture into well-greased deep pans. Bake in a moderately hot oven for about 20 minutes. This mixture makes 12.

HEEDING PLEAS from sweet tooth friends, here is my favorite chocolate treat. Not being American, the concept of brownies and the curious response they evoke in ex-pats was new to me. People break down in sobs when you offer them freshly cooked slabs of chocolate goo. Now that I have become adept at whipping them up I can understand why. The amount of butter and sugar ought to send anyone over the edge.

Chewy Chocolate Brownies

<i>1/2 cup</i>	butter, cut into cubes
<i>1 cup</i>	brown sugar
<i>1</i>	egg
<i>1 tsp</i>	vanilla essence
<i>1/2 cup</i>	flour
<i>1/2 cup</i>	cocoa
<i>1 tsp</i>	salt

Preheat oven to 180° Celsius. Melt the butter and stir in the brown sugar. This isn't as easy as it seems as the sugar does take a while to stir in. Persist however, otherwise your brownies will be unaccountably crunchy. And this recipe calls for chewy. With a wooden spoon stir in the egg and vanilla. Next sift in the cocoa, flour and a pinch of salt and stir thoroughly. Pour the mixture into a large shallow greased baking tray and put in the middle shelf of the oven and bake for just 20 minutes. A second longer will result in rock hard chocolate bricks. If like me you mistrust your oven, there is no harm in undercooking a little. Turn the oven off a little sooner and let the brownies cook in a warm oven.

Wait a while before cutting up as the brownies will be very soft and you will end up eating half of what you cooked by telling yourself you will just eat the broken bits. Pretty soon you will be lying prone on the sofa with an acute chocolate overdose and wondering how you could have eaten so many.

SYDNEY — Why is it that when you are on holiday you spend less time guzzling oysters at seaside restaurants and more time at the dentist, doctor, optometrist and tax accountant?

This thought came to me as I was tied down in the dentist chair for my third (yes, third) visit in a week. While said torturer and his genial assistant were replacing fillings that “were on their way out” — I hadn’t had a squeak of trouble with them for the last 10 years, why now? — I realized the closest I was getting this week to gourmet delights was the tropical fruit dental mouthwash in the basin beside me. Naturally, as soon as I was unstrapped from the chair, relieved of hundreds of dollars, the first thing I wanted to do was go out and eat something really sweet.

As luck would have it, I found a recipe for a cake I hadn’t eaten in years — Gingerbread. Perfect because it is sweet and soft and I wouldn’t break any new fillings biting into it, and it is packed full of my favorite spice — ginger — supposedly the best ingredient to calm jaded nerves.

Gingerbread Cake

<i>1/2 cup</i>	golden syrup (or black treacle)
<i>6 tbsp</i>	water
<i>1</i>	egg
<i>4 tbsp</i>	buttermilk
<i>2 cups</i>	plain flour
<i>1 tsp</i>	baking soda
<i>5 heaped tsp</i>	ground ginger
<i>1 tsp</i>	cinnamon
<i>1/5 cup</i>	brown sugar, firmly packed
<i>Plus</i>	ice cream

Preheat the oven to 180° Celsius. Melt the golden syrup with the water and let cool. Beat together the egg with the buttermilk and set aside.

Sift together the flour, soda, spices and sugar. Add the egg mixture to the dry ingredients and the syrup mixture. Mix well with a wooden spoon. Pour the mixture into a greased baking tin and cook for 10 minutes in hot oven. This will activate the baking soda and get the cake to rise. After 10 minutes simply turn the oven down slightly and bake for 35 minutes.

Test the cake to see if it is done by inserting a small wooden skewer into the middle of the cake — if it comes out clean it is ready. Don't wait to see the cake pull away from the sides, or bounce back when you touch it. Gingerbread is best moist. When it is ready, leave it in its tin for a few minutes before turning out — and serve either piping hot with ice cream, or have it cold.

YOUR PESTERING and cajoling have taken their toll: I submit. Yes, I will give you a recipe for that much-revered eating institution Thanksgiving. Yes, I will give you a pumpkin pie recipe. Yes, I do love pumpkin pie, even though I'm not American.

And I can even tell you the Secret to the Success of Pumpkin Pie: it always tastes better for breakfast the next day.

My friend Sarah taught me that. If you are planning a big Thanksgiving feast make sure you don't disgrace yourself throughout the meal and beg to stay the night. That way you get to have the best food on Friday morning.

Karen's Grandma's Pumpkin Pie

2 cups	plain flour
2/5 cup	butter
7 tbsp	cold water
1-1/2 cups	cooked pumpkin
1/5 cup	brown sugar, firmly packed
2 tsp	ground cinnamon
1 tsp	ground nutmeg
2 tsp	ground ginger
1/2 tsp	salt
2	eggs, lightly beaten
1-1/2 cups	milk
1/2 cup	cream or evaporated milk
1 cup	whiskey
Plus	vanilla ice cream

Pie Shell: Place flour in a bowl. Cut the butter into small pieces and add to the flour. With two knives, cut the butter into the flour until it resembles breadcrumbs.

Add the water, one tablespoon at a time, mixing with a fork. Don't use all the water if you have already created a moist ball of dough. Divide the dough in half, wrap them well and refrigerate. For this dish you will only need one — or if you are making two pies, double the ingredients for the filling. Roll out your pastry in a buttered pie dish, making sure the dough is evenly distributed.

Pie Filling: Combine all the ingredients and pour into the pie shell. Bake for about 45 minutes. It is cooked when you insert a wooden skewer and it comes out clean. Remove and cool. Chill for as long as possible. Serve with vanilla ice cream.

LAST NIGHT I DISCOVERED the hardest job in the kitchen (apart from having to empty overflowing ashtrays with a hangover after a raucous dinner party the night before) — slivering almonds.

My standard lemon tea cake, which is delicious, needed something. I bought armfuls of lemons at the *rynok* this week and needed to use them. Usually I add a cup of walnuts to this cake. But it's the wrong season, they are distinctly wintry. So I decided on a cup of almonds instead. I combined the ingredients, and just as I waited for the butter to soften before I rubbed it into the dry ingredients I selected my first almond. A clean chop. It separated nicely, and I boldly moved on to almond number two. A clean chop — with one piece landing in the sink and the other scooting out to the parquet in the hallway. Odd. I selected another almond. The same thing happened again. Now I was getting cross. And cursing myself for not buying the packet of already slivered almonds that sat next to the uncut ones on the supermarket shelf.

Twenty minutes later I had about half a cup of beautifully slivered almonds in the cake mix, and the rest all over the kitchen floor.

A word about those of you who, like me, don't have an oven that was designed in the latter part of the 20th century. You are not alone. My oven is a standard Cold War model. It has no temperature gauge, the door doesn't close properly, you need a flashlight handy to peer into the gloom to watch the cake rise and worst of all, you need to light it with a match tied to the end of a chopstick because it throws quite a flame. Persist. Don't be defeated. You can make this cake.

Lemon Tea Cake

1-1/2 cups	plain flour
1 cup	sugar
1-1/2 tsp	baking powder
1 tsp	salt
1/2 cup	butter
2	eggs
1/2 cup	milk
1	lemon rind, grated
1/2 cup	almonds, slivered
Juice of one	lemon
1/4 cup	sugar

Preheat the oven to 180° Celsius. Line a 20-centimeter round ring cake tin. Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt together in a bowl. Rub in the butter with fingertips.

Mix the beaten eggs and milk together and gently stir into the mixture. Stir well, removing lumps, but don't overdo it. Fold in the grated lemon rind and almonds. Leave to stand a moment to ensure an even distribution of the mixture. Then put it in the oven. Cook for about half an hour, or until a thin wooden skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Once done, use a pastry brush or spatula to spread the combined juice and sugar over the top of the cake — don't wait until it has cooled.