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**I love Thanksgiving.** Having grown up in Massachusetts, I think I have a special affinity for the holiday. Every year, from kindergarten on, our teacher gave us a special Pilgrim project. It started with construction paper hats and headdresses. Later we studied New World agriculture. My lasting take away was that dead fish were used as fertilizer. Of course we read the famous Longfellow poem about Priscilla Mullins' romantic entanglements with Miles Standish and John Alden. There must have been more but those are the highlights. Party hats, dead fish and a love triangle.

Except for the big family dinner. My mom always made a big deal about Thanksgiving. For two or three days, she (who never really liked to cook) cooked up a storm. Mum stuck with tradition. Generation after generation, decade after decade, no one but no one had ever dared mess with the menu. There was turkey with gravy and bread stuffing, oyster dressing, butternut squash, turnip, creamed onions and mashed potatoes followed by pies, apple and pumpkin.

**And then I moved to Switzerland.** The Swiss do not celebrate Thanksgiving and, to add insult to injury, they frequently confuse it with Halloween. Even half a world away, I could not ignore this day of thanks. I decided to invite a dozen or so friends and colleagues for dinner. But not just any dinner, I promised them an authentic, New England Thanksgiving feast.

About a week before the party, I sat down with paper, pencil and the *Fanny Farmer Cookbook*. As I worked on my shopping list, it hit me. For my first big dinner party in my newly adopted country, I was going to serve a brown, alright make that brown and beige, dinner. Even dessert, apple pie, was brown. Then again, there would be cranberry sauce. So change that. This newbie expatriate (and newbie cook) was going to serve a brown dinner with jam.

### **But I had promised authentic and, so, I plunged ahead.**

A poultry farm in Arkansas shipped frozen turkeys to Switzerland. I had never cooked a turkey but there were directions on the shrink-wrap. (As well as a warning to remove the gizzards.) My mother's old standby, Pepperidge Farm stuffing mix, was nowhere to be found but fabulous artisanal bread was everywhere. The nearest butternut squash was an ocean away but Cinderella had left a slew of pumpkins. The market had of plenty of potatoes, onions and my favorite Granny Smith apples.

### **I could do this.**

The party was all set for Saturday night. On Thursday (Thanksgiving Day), I left work early and shopped 'til I dropped. Friday evening, fortified with a glass of wine and *Fanny Farmer*, I chopped and stirred until well past midnight. The next morning I was up at dawn for more chopping and stirring plus peeling and mashing, stuffing, trussing and basting.

Finally, with the turkey just about done, the doorbell rang. I greeted my guests nervously and explained that our authentic feast would be ... in a word ... monochromatic. Thankfully, my friends were polite, even curious. Not a disparaging word was heard. Indeed everyone seemed ready to embrace the experience and asked lots of questions. To this day I am convinced they saw the evening as an anthropological adventure.

**Sitting down to dinner,** we shared joyful toasts of thanks. Before long, the magic kicked in and dinner was less about brown food and more about good conversation, laughter and friendship.

I wish you all a wonderful Thanksgiving and bon appétit!

## Pumpkin Cheesecake

*Although brown, this rich and creamy cheesecake was not served at my first Thanksgiving party. I added it to the menu in the late nineties and it became an instant favorite. Enjoy!*

Serves 12-16

30-40 (enough for 2 cups finely ground crumbs) gingersnap cookies  
2 tablespoons brown sugar  
5 tablespoons butter, melted  
2 pounds cream cheese at room temperature  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
3 eggs  
1 1/2 cups pumpkin purée  
1 cup heavy cream  
1 tablespoon cognac or pure vanilla extract  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
1 teaspoon ginger  
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg  
1/2 teaspoon allspice  
1/4 teaspoon cloves  
Garnish: whipped cream

Set a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Break the gingersnaps into pieces, put in a food processor and process until finely ground. Add the brown sugar and pulse to combine.

Put the cookie crumbs and butter in 10-inch springform pan and mix with a fork until well combined. Firmly press the crumbs into the bottom and about 1/2-inch up the sides of the pan. Tightly wrap the bottom and sides of the pan in two large sheets of heavy duty aluminum foil and bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes. Cool the pan on a rack. Do not remove the foil.

Meanwhile, put the cream cheese, sugar and spices in a large bowl. Using an electric mixer, beat until smooth. Add the eggs one at a time, beating until smooth. Add the pumpkin, cream and cognac and beat until well combined.

Pour the pumpkin mixture into the springform pan and carefully place it in a large roasting pan. Add enough boiling water to come halfway up the sides of the springform pan.

Bake at 350 degrees until the cheesecake is golden, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Carefully lift the cheesecake from the roasting pan and remove the foil. Cool the cheesecake in the springform pan to room temperature on a rack. Still in the springform pan, cover and refrigerate overnight.

Using a thin knife, carefully cut around sides of the pan to loosen the cheesecake. Release the springform sides, cut the cheesecake into thin wedges and serve with a small dollop of whipped cream.