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I don't know about you but I have trouble keeping track of Easter. One year it's in March, the next it's in April. For a while there, I thought I must have missed it. But no, it's this coming Sunday. In case you are wondering, Easter is tied to the lunar calendar. It is the Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. That said, I have enough trouble figuring out if it's Thursday or Wednesday. Keeping track of the phases of the moon is probably beyond me.

Then again, knowing the current moon phase does have its perks. Being on the beach on just the right summer night to see the full moonrise over Kearsarge is one of life's special gifts. (It more than makes up for winter full moons. While the moon on the snow is lovely, to steal a phrase from Clement Moore, it gives "a luster of midday" that tends to keep me awake half the night.)

But enough of that and back to Easter. If you live in New England, chances are pretty good that you've searched for eggs in a blizzard at one time or another. It's just as likely that you dusted off the picnic table for a cookout at least once, hopefully more. Yes indeed, we have shivered in our new spring finery on more Easters than I can count. Conversely, I remember one spectacular Easter afternoon when all the kids jumped into the neighbor's pool. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for warm and sunny this year.

How will you celebrate this weekend? Will you greet the sun with a communal prayer? Host an Easter egg hunt for all the kids in the neighborhood? Gather your family for a delicious dinner? With any luck, a contingent of Nyes will be headed to Pleasant Lake for Easter. I'm not taking any chances and have already started doing my sun dance. I would love to take a walk around the lake in shorts and a t-shirt and spend some time on the beach. No, I don't expect a swim. Still, it would be nice put our feet in the sand while we catch up, admire the mountain and watch the ice melt. Ice out is not unlike watching paint dry but it's been a long, cold winter and we must find our entertainment when and where we can.

If I want to join the fun in the sun, Easter dinner needs to be easy. There is still a lot of snow in my yard, so eating outside is not an option. However, I'm thinking lamb on the grill* sounds wonderful. Next, I'll probably do something with asparagus but I'm not sure what. I still have plenty of time to figure it out! Finally, since most of my family members are chocoholics, a chocolaty dessert is probably in order.

Best wishes for a Happy Easter with friends and family. Bon appétit!



Susan

Chocolate-Espresso Cheesecake

This cheesecake is a family favorite and I usually save it for special occasions and holidays. I can make it one or two days ahead so it won't interfere with family fun. I hope your family enjoys it as much as mine does!

Serves 12-16

Cookie Crust

9 ounces chocolate wafers or Oreo cookies (about 2 cups crumbs)
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon espresso powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter, melted

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line the bottom of a 10-inch springform pan with parchment paper.



Put the cookies in a food processor and pulse until finely ground. Add the sugar, cinnamon, espresso powder and salt and pulse to combine.

Put the cookies in the springform pan, drizzle with the melted butter and toss to combine. Press the crumbs evenly into the bottom and about 1-inch up the sides of the pan.

Bake the crust until set, about 7 minutes. Cool the crust while you prepare the filling. Keep the oven at 350 degrees.

Chocolate Layer

6 ounces dark chocolate
2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese at room temperature
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon espresso powder
2 eggs at room temperature
1/2 cup sour cream
1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Put the chocolate in a microwave proof bowl and zap on medium for 30 second (or less) intervals until the chocolate is almost melted. Let chocolate sit for a minute or two and then whisk until smooth. Set aside to cool slightly.

Using an electric mixer, beat the cream cheese, sugar, cinnamon and espresso powder in a large bowl until smooth. Beat in the eggs 1 at a time. Add the sour cream and vanilla and beat until smooth. Slowly add the chocolate and beat until it is fully incorporated. Pour the chocolate layer into the springform pan and spread in an even layer.

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Espresso Layer

2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese at room temperature
3/4 cup sugar
3 tablespoons instant espresso powder
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
2 eggs at room temperature
1/2 cup sour cream
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Using an electric mixer, beat the cream cheese, sugar, cinnamon and espresso powder in a large bowl until smooth. Beat in the eggs 1 at a time. Add the sour cream and vanilla and beat until smooth. Pour the filling into the pan and spread evenly over the chocolate layer.

Wrap the springform pan in two layers of heavy aluminum foil and place it in a large roasting pan. Add enough boiling water to come halfway up the sides of the springform pan. Bake the cheesecake until slightly puffed, softly set and golden, about 1 1/4 hours. Transfer the springform pan to a rack and cool. Cover and refrigerate the cheesecake overnight or up to 2 days.

About 45 minutes before serving remove the cheesecake from the refrigerator. Use a knife to cut carefully around sides of pan to loosen the cheesecake. Release the spring and remove the sides. Cut the cheesecake into thin wedges and serve.

