

Favorite Recipes

July-September 2015

I hope you all enjoy these recipes as much as our family does!

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Oatmeal

We often like oatmeal, cooked in water, for breakfast topped with either fresh fruit or sometimes I cooked fruit into the oatmeal, like apples, mango, peaches, strawberries, etc. I've used regular oats, steel cut oats, and sometimes a combination of barley, buckwheat, oats, and flax seeds.

Here are some topping/mix-in ideas:

yogurt (we especially like the vanilla and coconut flavors, but plain is really nice too)

sweetened whipped cream

cinnamon

honey

almond milk

cinnamon toasted almonds, whole and/or crushed (these are easy to make, see the recipe under Spinach Berry Salad)

walnuts

coconut

granola

applesauce

jam

dried fruit (raisins, craisins, goji berries, cherries)

fresh berries

maple syrup

brown sugar

Egg Breakfast Scramble

We regularly have small amounts of leftover food like soups, curries, quinoa, rice, vegetables, fish, salad, meat, potatoes, spinach, cheese, salsa, herbs, hummus, olives, seasoning, etc. We like to mix different combinations of those types of things into a bowl with like five or six eggs and then scramble it together in a skillet. If the combination is really watery, like when we include leftover soup, we add some couscous into the mix to absorb the extra liquid. We've found this to be a super easy, delicious, and healthy breakfast, in addition to being a great way to use leftover food! We like having buttered english muffins on the side. Here is a recipe to make them at home too, if you're interested:

Homemade English Muffins

Ingredients

- 1 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 (.25 ounce) package active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water (110 degrees F/45 degrees C)
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 6 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt (might want to add more salt)

Directions

1. Warm the milk in a small saucepan until it bubbles, then remove from heat. Mix in the honey, stirring until dissolved. Let cool until lukewarm. In a small bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water. Let stand until creamy, about 10 minutes.
2. In a large bowl, combine the milk, yeast mixture, butter and 3 cups flour. Beat until smooth. Add salt and rest of flour, or enough to make a soft dough. Knead. Place in greased bowl, cover, and let rise.
3. Punch down. Roll out to about 1/2 inch thick. Cut rounds with biscuit cutter, drinking glass, or empty tuna can. Sprinkle waxed paper with cornmeal and set the rounds on this to rise. Dust tops of muffins with cornmeal also. Cover and let rise 1/2 hour.
4. Heat greased griddle. Cook muffins on griddle about 10 minutes on each side on medium heat. Keep baked muffins in a warm oven until all have been cooked. Allow to cool and place in plastic bags for storage. To use, split and toast.

Breakfast Frittatas

Breakfast frittatas are similar to the Egg Breakfast Scramble (see recipe located two above this one), except we pour the mixture into muffin tins, with liners inserted, and bake at 350 degrees F for 20-25 minutes, or until a knife inserted comes out clean. You could also add a bit of flour and buttermilk into the frittata batter as well, if you like.

Eggs Florentine

8 english muffins, toasted and buttered

2 cups fresh baby spinach

8 poached eggs

1 recipe Hollandaise sauce (see below)

Parmesan cheese, grated, to taste

(We've recently discovered we especially like the Mexican Queso Fresco cheese for these too.)

Place a handful of spinach on top of each freshly toasted and buttered english muffin. Place one warm poached egg on top of each handful of spinach. Drizzle freshly made Hollandaise sauce over each portion and top with a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese.

Serve with Banana Berry Avocado Smoothies (see recipe located two below this one), or a fresh fruit salad, if desired.

Hollandaise Sauce

Prep time: 10 minutes□

Yield: Makes about 1 cup of sauce, good for about 4-6 servings.□

3 egg yolks

1 tablespoon lemon juice

□1/2 teaspoon salt□

1/8 teaspoon cayenne (optional)□

10 tablespoons unsalted butter (if using salted butter, skip the added salt)□

1 Melt the butter slowly in a small pot. Try not to let it boil – you want the moisture in the butter to remain there and not steam away.

2 Add the egg yolks, lemon juice, salt and cayenne (if using) into your blender. Blend the egg yolk mixture at a medium to medium high speed until it lightens in color, about 20-30 seconds. The friction generated by the blender blades will heat the yolks a bit. The blending action will also introduce a little air into them, making your hollandaise a bit lighter.

3 Once the yolks have lightened in color, turn the blender down to its lowest setting (if you only have one speed on your blender it will still work), and drizzle in the hot melted butter slowly, while the blender is going. Continue to buzz for another couple seconds after the butter is all incorporated.

4 Turn off the blender and taste the sauce. It should be buttery, lemony and just lightly salty. If it is not salty or lemony enough, you can add a little lemon juice or salt to taste. If you want a thinner consistency, add a little warm water. Pulse briefly to incorporate the ingredients one more time.

Store until needed in a warm spot, like on or next to the stovetop. Use within an hour or so.

Banana Berry Avocado Smoothies

We especially like these when we are having eggs for breakfast, so we can have a combination of sweet and savory.

Ingredients:

Juice, any kind or combinations you like, to taste

(juices we've tried are orange, pomegranate, cranberry-grape, mango)

½ -1 avocado, chopped

½ -1 mango, chopped (optional)

1-2 kiwis fruits, cut in half and scooped out of their skin with a spoon (optional)

1-2 bananas, chopped

frozen mixed berries, to taste

yogurt of your choice, to taste
(our favorites are coconut, vanilla, or plain)

Preparation:

Blend it all up in a blender, according to your preferred ingredient proportions and combinations. Will keep in the fridge for a bit until ready to serve.

Japanese Curry Rice and/or Curry Udon

Every once in awhile we get a box of Japanese curry from the store and chop up some onions, carrots, and potatoes to cook into it, following the instructions on the box, and serve it with Asian white rice.

If you have leftovers of the curry, or if you just want a different way to use it, you can make a pot of Japanese Curry Udon. You'd just want to add enough chicken or fish broth to the curry and vegetables to make a soup and add some udon noodles, and bean sprouts. If you'd like it thicker you could add a bit of cornstarch by mixing about a tablespoon of cornstarch with a couple tablespoons of water in a small bowl before adding it to the pot. Soy sauce can be added to the pot for a bit more flavor, if desired. It's also good with some chopped up pickled ginger and/or thinly sliced green onions on top of the individual servings.

The udon shops in Japan usually have tempura vegetables available for purchase as a side dish as well, so that's something else you could add if you'd like to. One thing I especially enjoyed while we were in Japan was the poached eggs covered in tempura batter and fried. So delicious, especially with the curry udon. Here are a few different tempura recipes you could try:

Tempura

Egg Tempura

Batter:

1 cold egg
1/4 C cold water
1/4 C flour

Cut up a variety of vegetables in desired sizes (hard vegetables like carrots and cauliflower should be partially cooked first). Dip in batter and fry in hot oil until golden, about 2 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Lightly salt and dust with Parmesan cheese.

Egg Tempura with baking powder

1 egg, lightly beaten
Dash of salt
1/2 t baking powder (fresh)
1 C flour
1 C very cold water

Combine egg and water and blend well. Gradually add flour, mixing just enough to moisten. Stir in baking powder and salt. Makes 2 cups.

Vegan Tempura

Ingredients:

4 cups high-heat cooking oil (heated to 350 degrees)
1 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1/8 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
2/3 cups ice water or ice-cold carbonated water (or more as needed)
Veggies sliced and prepped for frying, harder vegetables will need to be cooked beforehand a bit.

Directions:

Heat the oil in a deep pot.

Whisk together the dry ingredients, then quickly stir in the water. Don't over-mix, stir until just combined, leaving some small lumps.

Dip the veggies one at a time into the batter, then carefully drop them into the oil. Be careful not to splash yourself with hot oil. Turn the veggies occasionally to make sure they cook evenly.

Fry the veggies in the hot oil for one to two minutes, or until the batter becomes crispy, golden,

and brown. Remove to a dish lined with paper towel. Serve immediately. Serves two to four.

White Chili

Total Time: 1 hr 6 min

Prep: 20 min

Cook: 46 min

Yield: 6 servings, serving size: 1 1/2 cups

Ingredients

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 medium onion, diced (about 1 1/2 cups)

2 stalks celery, diced (about 1/2 cup)

3 medium poblano peppers (about 4 ounces each), seeded and white ribs removed, finely diced (about 1 1/2 cups)

1 clove garlic, minced

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon ground coriander

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper, more to taste

1 pound ground white meat turkey, or pork

2 (15.5-ounce) cans white beans such as cannellini, preferably low-sodium, drained and rinsed

4 cups low-sodium chicken broth

3/4 teaspoon dried oregano

1 (15.5-ounce) can hominy, drained and rinsed

Salt

1/4 cup nonfat plain Greek-style yogurt

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Lime wedges

Directions

Heat the oil in large pot or Dutch oven over moderate heat. Add the onion, celery, poblanos, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are soft, about 8 minutes. Add the garlic, cumin, coriander and cayenne and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Add the ground turkey and cook, breaking up the meat with a spoon, until the meat is no longer

pink about 2 minutes. Add the white beans, broth and oregano. Cook, partially covered, stirring occasionally, for 25 minutes.

Add the hominy and salt and more cayenne pepper, to taste, and continue cooking, partially covered, 10 minutes longer. Ladle into individual bowls and top each serving with 1 tablespoon of yogurt and 1 1/2 teaspoons of cilantro. Garnish with a lime wedge.

Serve with slices of yogurt cornbread (see recipe below) spread with butter, or you may want to consider a side of baked, fried, or grilled polenta instead. :)

Yogurt Cornbread

Ingredients

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal (not coarse grind, unless you prefer it)
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1 cup milk (I used buttermilk)
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted

In a bowl, combine dry ingredients; mix well. Add remaining ingredients and stir just until moistened. Pour into a greased 8-in. square baking pan (I used two metal loaf pans and it turned out much better than when I used a square glass baking pan). Bake at 400 degrees F for 20-25 minutes or until bread tests done with a toothpick.

Black Bean and Chicken Enchiladas

- 1 1/2 tablespoons olive or grapeseed oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- 1 medium green pepper, chopped
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts, boiled in chicken broth and shredded.
- 4 ounce cream cheese, cut into chunks

2 (15 oz) cans black beans, rinsed, drained and divided

2 medium tomatoes, chopped

3/4 cup frozen corn kernels

1 medium jar green Mexican-style salsa

12 corn tortillas (6 inches)

1 (14 oz) can enchilada sauce (or use the recipe below to make your own)

1/2 C shredded cheddar cheese

1/2 C shredded monterey cheese

(You could also use some of the white, crumbly Mexican-style cheese, Queso Fresco, inside and on top of the enchiladas. That is the kind we always had in Mexico and we loved it!)

3 C chopped lettuce

1 1/2 cups nonfat plain Greek-style yogurt

1 cup fresh cilantro leaves

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, green pepper and cumin. Sauté 8 minutes. Add shredded chicken and chopped tomatoes and sauté 5 minutes. Stir in the cream cheese.

Slightly mash the black beans and stir them into the skillet along with the green salsa and frozen corn kernels and simmer 5 minutes, or until sauce thickens and reduces. Remove from heat and stir in 1/2 cup cilantro leaves.

Fry tortillas on both sides in a frying pan with a bit of oil. Top each tortilla with an equal amount of chicken/bean mixture. Roll up tortillas and place side by side in a shallow baking dish. Top tortillas with enchilada sauce and mixed shredded cheese.

Bake enchiladas 15-20 minutes, or until cheese is golden, sauce is bubbly, and the edges of the tortillas are slightly brown and crispy.

Sprinkle remaining 1/2 cup cilantro leaves over top of baked enchiladas.

Top each individual serving with 1/3 cup chopped lettuce and 1 tablespoon plain Greek-style yogurt.

This is really good served on a bed of crisp, shredded lettuce with sides of seasoned refried pinto beans and Mexican rice.

As a side note, when I have leftover White Chili (see recipe located two above this one), I use it to help make these enchiladas, since it has similar ingredients, and then I don't have to work so hard making the filling from scratch. I just add black beans, green salsa, and cheese. :)

Vegetarian Fry Bread Tacos

To make a non-vegetarian version of this recipe, add the Slow Cooker Shredded Beef. (see recipe located three below this one)

- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- 1 cup black olives, sliced
- 3 cups lettuce, chopped
- 1 cup Monterey cheese, grated
- 1 cup Queso Fresco (crumbly, white Mexican-style cheese), crumbled
- 1 cup Greek-style plain yogurt
- Lime wedges
- ¾ cup guacamole or 1 chopped or sliced avocado
- ¾ cup Mexican-style salsa
- 2 cups black bean dip (see recipe located below this one)
- 8 fry bread scones (see recipe located two below this one)

Serve fresh warm fry bread scones spread with warm black bean dip topped with cheeses, chopped lettuce, chopped tomatoes, black olives, Greek-style plain yogurt, and salsa, to taste.

Black Bean Dip

- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- freshly squeezed lime juice, to taste
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled, and minced (or to taste)
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1/2 cup strained tomatoes or tomato juice (or to taste)
- freshly ground sea salt, to taste

Purée everything together in a food processor or blender.

Fry Bread Scones

The dough can be made ahead and frozen. Just take it out of the freezer and put in the fridge in the morning so it can be thawed in time for making dinner.

2 cups warmed buttermilk
6 tablespoons oil or melted butter
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
5 cups flour
2 beaten eggs
1 teaspoon salt
4 1/2 teaspoons dry active yeast in 1/2 C warm water
2 tablespoons honey

Add eggs, salt, oil and baking soda and just 1 tablespoon honey to the buttermilk. Then put the yeast in the 1/2 cup warm water with 1 tablespoon honey. Let sit until foamy. Then add to buttermilk. Add flour. Roll 1/8 inch or 1/4 inch thick. Cut into squares of your desired size to fry in a frying pan with 1/2 inch of oil at medium high heat. I usually freeze half of the dough to save for another time.

Slow Cooker Shredded Beef

Prep Time: 10 Min

Cook Time: 8 Hr

Total Time: 8 Hr 10 Min

Ingredients

1 (2.5 lb) chuck roast
1 (14 oz) can beef broth
1 teaspoon chili powder, or to taste
1/2 Tablespoon ground cumin
1/2 Tablespoon onion powder
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
Juice of 1 Lime

Instructions

1 Spray crockpot with cooking spray. Place roast inside crock pot. Pour the beef broth over the roast and then squeeze with fresh lime juice.

2 In a small bowl, whisk together chili powder, cumin, onion powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Sprinkle the roast with the spice mixture.

3 Cover with lid, and cook on Low heat 8 to 10 hours, or on High heat 5 to 6 hours. Remove roast from crock pot and transfer to a large platter. Shred meat and remove any fat.

4 Return shredded beef to crock pot. Cover with lid and cook an additional 30 minutes. Remove beef with tongs to drain juices before serving.

Rotisserie Chicken Dinner

This is great when we don't want to spend too much time and effort in the kitchen, but still have a delicious, healthy dinner. We had this on one of our lazy nights when Brandon's Mom was visiting with us in Victoria. Many shops around the world sell ready-to-eat rotisserie chickens; we even bought one in Bordeaux, France! So, we buy those occasionally and spruce them up with home roasted vegetables. It's kind of fun to plop the chicken in the middle of the vegetables during the last part of their cooking time to make sure it's all nice and hot; it looks really beautiful that way, and then I can more easily pretend I did it all myself. :) In the case of Brandon's Mom visiting, we also had some of the most amazing watermelon I've ever tried as a bonus accompaniment to our meal. :) Try out this recipe for roasted vegetables:

Roasted Vegetables

potatoes (We like the new potatoes or fingerling potatoes), chopped
carrots, chopped
onions, chopped
garlic cloves, peeled

You could use any vegetables you want like zucchini, broccoli, mushrooms, butternut squash, yams, bell pepper, etc. We chop everything into medium pieces and leave the garlic cloves whole, then put it all together in a bowl and toss with olive or grapeseed oil and fresh herbs such as:

sage
rosemary
thyme
mint

You could also add a tablespoon or two of balsamic vinegar, if you'd like.

We spread the mixture into a roasting pan lined with parchment paper and roast everything together at 425 degrees Fahrenheit until tender, and serve immediately with a sprinkle of fresh chopped parsley. You could also add a bit of freshly grated Parmesan cheese to the top, or crumble some feta on top!

Butternut Squash Soup

1 large butternut squash, halved lengthwise and deseeded
6 cloves garlic, peeled
1 large onion, peeled and chopped
4 tablespoons butter or oil (grapeseed, coconut, or olive)
2 teaspoons dried marjoram
2 teaspoons ground thyme
2 teaspoons ground rosemary
2 cinnamon sticks
1 tablespoon ginger, peeled and grated
3 sticks celery, trimmed and chopped
3 carrots, peeled and chopped
2 medium yams or sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped
1 red bell pepper (optional)
1/2 - 1 fresh red chili, to taste, deseeded and finely chopped (optional)
2 large tart green apple, cored and chopped (squash and apple ratio should be 3:1)
8 cups vegetable or chicken broth
Freshly ground sea salt and pepper, to taste
1 8-ounce cream cheese
1/3 cup heavy cream (optional)
2 cups plain Greek yogurt
fresh sage leaves, to taste
Parmesan cheese, grated, to taste
toasted pumpkin seeds, to taste (optional)

Preheat oven to 425°F. Place squash, cut side up, in a baking pan. Brush oil or melted butter over the tops and insides of the squash halves. Toss garlic cloves with some oil and place them on the sheet with the squash. Bake until squash is very soft, about 50 minutes to 1 hour.

Heat oil or butter in a heavy large pot over medium-low heat. Sauté onions, garlic, ginger,

marjoram, thyme, rosemary, cinnamon sticks, carrots, celery, red pepper, and chili in butter or oil for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and set aside.

After the squash has been removed from the oven and is cool enough to handle, remove the squash from the peel using a knife or a large spoon. Discard the peel. Cut squash into 2-inch pieces.

Add squash, yams or sweet potatoes, apple, and broth (enough to cover the vegetables) to the pot containing the onion and spice mixture.

Bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer, cover, and simmer for 20-30 minutes, or until all vegetables are tender.

Remove cinnamon sticks.

Use an immersion blender to purée the soup, or work in batches and purée the soup in a standing blender.

Season soup with freshly ground sea salt and pepper, to taste. Stir and melt the cream cheese into the soup. Heat through; don't boil. Thin soup with more broth, if desired.

Gently stir cream into the soup.

Garnish each serving with a spoonful of plain Greek yogurt, a few fresh sage leaves, and grated parmesan cheese. May also add a sprinkling of toasted pumpkin seeds, if desired.

We like to serve this soup with a side of Spinach Berry Fruit Salad, see below.

Spinach Berry Salad

Layer together 1 or 2 bags baby spinach with your choice of a combination of fresh fruits such as chopped mangoes, sliced strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, and raspberries.

Creamy poppy seed dressing:

3/4 C vanilla yogurt
1/3 C honey
2 T cider vinegar
2 t poppy seeds

Mix dressing ingredients together and chill. Make the cinnamon toasted almonds (see recipe below).

Chop some of the cinnamon toasted almonds in a food processor, and sprinkle over salad as desired, along with some of the whole almonds. Drizzle with creamy poppy seed dressing to taste.

Cinnamon Toasted Almonds

1 egg white
3 t vanilla extract
2 C unblanched almonds
1/4 C sugar
1/4 C brown sugar
1/2 t salt
1/2 t ground cinnamon

In a large bowl, beat egg whites until frothy; beat in vanilla. Add almonds; stir gently to coat.

Combine the sugars, salt and cinnamon; add to nut mixture and stir gently to coat.

Spread evenly into parchment lined 15-in. x 10-in. x 1-in. baking pans.

Bake at 300° for 25-30 minutes or until almonds are crisp, stirring 3-4 times during cooking. Cool.

Store in an airtight container.

Baked fish with Asparagus and Quinoa

We like having baked fish occasionally, like salmon, trout, cod, tilapia, etc. It's super easy. We usually just put it in a covered pan in the oven with some thin, tender asparagus spears, butter, lemon juice and minced garlic. We serve it with quinoa on the side, and a delicious white wine if we're lucky.

Mango Quinoa Salad

This salad is great all on its own, but we've also used it as a topping for baked fish, like salmon. You could also just add your leftover chunked salmon to the mix and call it a salmon salad!

2 cups cooked quinoa* at room temperature, or chilled
1 14 oz can black beans, drained and rinsed

1 medium mango, peeled and diced
1 red bell pepper, diced
6 green onions, thinly sliced
1 handful chopped cilantro (about 1/2 cup)
4 tablespoon red wine vinegar
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1-2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
kosher salt
freshly cracked black pepper

**Quinoa can be cooked in water or broth.*

Place cooked quinoa in a large bowl. Add mango, red pepper, green onion, black beans, and cilantro. In a small bowl combine vinegar, olive oil, and lime juice. Whisk until smooth and pour on top of salad. Toss to combine and add salt and pepper to taste. Chill for at least one hour before serving.

Lentil Stew with Chorizo

2 C lentils
2 C carrots, chopped
2 C zucchini, chopped
2 C potatoes, chopped
2 C celery, chopped
1 onion, chopped
2-3 garlic cloves, diced
1 t basil
1 t oregano
1 t thyme
1 bay leaf
8 C water
2 T chicken bouillon
1 can tomatoes (stewed, crushed, or diced)
1/2 C tomato sauce
Chorizo
3 corn cobs, sliced into chunks
1 C spinach, thinly sliced
2 T vinegar (red wine, balsamic, or cider), or to taste
Salt (2t) and Pepper (1t), or to taste
Sour cream
Parsley

Rinse lentils. In a large slow cooker place lentils, carrots, zucchini, potatoes, celery, onions, garlic, basil, oregano, thyme, and bay leaf. Stir in chicken seasoning, water, and undrained tomatoes, and tomato sauce.

Cover; cook on low heat setting for 11 to 12 hours or on high heat setting for 5 to 6 hours.

Add ham and corn at the last 10 minutes of cooking time. Add spinach and cook until wilted. Add vinegar, salt, and pepper to taste. Discard the bay leaf before serving.

Each serving can be topped with a dollop of sour cream and a sprig of parsley. When we were in Barcelona we served this along with a glass of Sangre de Toro, red wine, which was really inexpensive in Spain, and delicious!

Oreo Truffles

One 16 oz package of your favorite Oreo's
One 8 oz package cream cheese
16 oz of your favorite chocolate, melted with a double boiler

Smash Oreos with either blender, food processor, or by hand. Mix softened cream cheese with Oreos and roll into balls. Freeze truffles for around half an hour until balls are firm. Dip truffles into chocolate and then let dry on wax paper.

Chewy Chocolate M&M Cookies

These are great on their own, and we also like to place a scoop of our favorite vanilla ice cream between two cookies, for homemade ice cream sandwiches.

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt
4 ounces coarsely chopped good-quality chocolate or 1/2 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
3/4 cup M&M's minis
1 1/2 cups sugar
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Whisk together flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt; set aside. Melt chocolate with butter in a small heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water; let cool slightly.

Put chocolate mixture, sugar, eggs, and vanilla in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix on medium speed until combined. Reduce speed to low; gradually mix in flour mixture. Fold in M&Ms.

Drop dough by heaping teaspoonfuls onto baking sheets lined with parchment paper or nonstick baking mats, spacing 2 inches apart. Bake until cookies are flat and surfaces crack, about 10 minutes (cookies should be soft, and they will firm up as they cool). Let cool on parchment on wire racks. Cookies can be stored between layers of parchment in airtight containers at room temperature up to 3 days.

Pumpkin Cream Pie

This pie is one my Grandma always made and it's always been my favorite.

1 small can pumpkin
1 large instant vanilla pudding
1 C cold milk
1 t pumpkin pie spice
1 C Cool Whip
whipping cream (whipped)
1-2 T powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Pour first 4 ingredients into a bowl; fold in Cool Whip. Fill cooked pie crust(s) (see recipe below). Fold powdered sugar and vanilla extract into whipped cream. Spread on top of pie filling.

Butter Pie Crust

Makes 2 nine-inch deep-dish crusts

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups all purpose flour

- You could also consider swapping out 1/2 cup of the flour with ground blanched almonds or almond flour.

1 tablespoon sugar

3/4 teaspoon salt

1 cup (2 sticks) chilled unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

- It also helps to chill the butter cubes in the freezer for at least 15 minutes.

6 tablespoons (about) ice water

Preparation:

Mix flour, sugar, and salt in processor. Add butter; pulse until coarse meal forms. Gradually blend in enough ice water to form moist clumps. Gather dough into ball; divide in half. Handle dough as little as possible to keep the crust from becoming tough. Form dough into 2 balls; flatten into disks. Wrap each in plastic; chill 2 hours or overnight.

Gently transfer the dough to a 9-inch pie plate, preferably metal, by folding it in half and unfolding it into the plate. Do not stretch the dough as you line the pan, or it will spring back when baked. Gently lift the outer edges of the dough to give you enough slack to line the sides of the pan without stretching the dough.

Trim the overhanging dough to 1 inch from the edge of the pan. Roll the dough under itself into a cylinder that rests on the edge of the pan.

To crimp the edge, have one hand on the inside of the edge, and one hand on the outside, and use the index finger of the inside hand to push the dough between the thumb and index finger of the outside hand to form a U or V shape. Repeat around the edge of the pie plate, creating a crimped edge whose individual flutes are about an inch apart. As you are going along, if you notice that the edge is not perfectly symmetrical and that the amount of dough you'll have to crimp seems sparse in places, take a bit of trimmed scrap, wet it with a drop or two of water, and attach it to the sparse area by pressing it firmly into place.

Prick the sides and bottom of the crust all over with a fork. Refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour or overnight. This will relax the dough and help prevent the edges from caving in.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Line the chilled piecrust with foil and fill it with dried beans or pie weights. Bake for 15 minutes; remove the foil and the beans or weights. Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F.

Bake until the bottom looks dry but is not quite done and the edges are light golden, 5 to 7 minutes more. Let cool on a rack while you prepare the filling.

Note: This pie dough can be made ahead and refrigerated overnight or frozen (before or after rolling) for up to 3 months. Simply transfer the dough to the refrigerator the night before you plan to make pie, and it'll be ready to go.