

SHAKESPEAREAN DESSERTS

SHREWSBURY CAKES

“Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?”

So Sir Toby Belch teases the gloomy steward Malvolio in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

To the Elizabethans, a cake was not the glamorous, fluffy, frosted confection from the *Great British Bakeoff*, but more of a bread, small and often lightly sweetened. And in the end, they look like cookies (er, biscuits).

I chose Shrewsbury cakes because they’re simple, and according to various experts (not doing footnotes, here, I’m too lazy) they were most likely the sort of thing Sir Toby was thinking of. They are named for a town in Shropshire, or perhaps in Wales.

Supposedly, the earliest known receipt for Shrewsbury cakes was published in 1656. The earliest recipe I could find in the Google Rabbit Hole is from 1739:

To make Shrewsbury Cakes.

TAKE to one pound of sugar three pounds of the finest flour, a nutmeg grated, some beaten cinnamon ; the sugar and spice must be sifted into the flour, and wet it with three eggs, and as much melted butter as will make it of a good thicknes to roll into a paste ; mould it well and roll it, and cut it into what shape you please ; perfume them, and prick them before they go into the oven.

The Compleat Housewife or Accomplished Gentlewomens Companion by Eliza Smith (1739)

Yeah, not gonna try to recreate that just yet. But this recipe used cinnamon and nutmeg, as do a lot of others I’ve found. Some used rosewater or brandy and any combination of spices the author liked.

The recipe I decided to work with is this one adapted from bonnieandwine.com:

Shrewsbury Cakes

150 grams (2/3 cups) sugar
1/2 tsp cinnamon powder
1/2 tsp grated nutmeg
450 (3 cups) grams plain flour
1 egg
1 tsp rosewater
200 grams (3/4c + 2 T) butter, melted

Mix together all the dry ingredients. Beat together the egg with rosewater and pour it and the butter in the flour. Mix until everything has been incorporated. Roll the dough as thin as you please and bake at 325° F (convection) for 12 minutes or until the edges start to change colour.

GOOSEBERRY FOOL

The term “fool” for a British dessert comes from the French word “fouler” and refers to crushing fruit. A fool is a custard or cream that has crushed fruit folded or swirled through it. And gooseberries are a favorite when they are in season in the summer in temperate climates. They don't like it hot, so they're not Mediterranean.

This is a pretty basic recipe and this same preparation would adapt to any sweet fruit. Raspberries are also popular.

400g (1 15-ounce can) of [gooseberries](#), topped and tailed
70g (3/4 cup) of sugar, plus 1 tbsp extra set aside
200ml (7 ounces) of heavy cream
Powdered sugar, to serve
1 sprig of [mint](#), to serve

Place the gooseberries and the $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the sugar in a saucepan and place over a medium heat. Simmer gently until the gooseberries start to soften and break down, which should take around 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool

9

Add the remaining 1 tbsp of sugar to the cream and lightly whip until thickened, but not too stiff

10

Lightly mash the cooled gooseberries, leaving some intact, and swirl through the cream with a metal spoon. Spoon the fool into 4 glasses and chill until ready to serve

11

Add a sprig of mint and a dusting of icing sugar if you wish and serve the fool with shortbread fingers – or in this case, Shrewsbury cakes!

JELLIED HYPOCRAS

The ancient Romans loved Hippocras (or hypocras), spiced wine. The tradition has endured and Medieval monks used a cone-shaped filtering bag called a manicum hippocraticum, or Hippocrates' sleeve. We still drink spiced or mulled wine, usually in the winter.

But also in the Middle Ages, jellied spiced wine was a popular dish to be taken after meat (you, know, dessert). This was a labor-intensive dish, since the calves' feet had to be boiled for a long time. It was not a peasant dish. If cream was added to the mix, it was called a junket and was featured at royal weddings. And the recipes got a little elaborate:

From *A Book of Cookrye, Very Necessary For All Such As Delight Therin* probably 1591

To make jellie.

Take Calves feete and fley them, and faire washe them, and set them on to seethe in faire licour, and faire scum them, and when they be tender sod, faire straine out the licour, and see your licour be verye cleere, and put your licour into a pot, if there be a pottle of it, put a pottle of claret wine unto it, and two pound Sugar, a quartern of sinamon, half a quartern of ginger, an ounce of Nutmegs, an ounce of grains, some long Pepper, a few Cloves whole, a few Coliander sads, a little salt, Isonglasse being faire washed and laid in water a day before, Turnsole being aired be the fier and dusted, and when they be wel sod, let it run through a bag, and put two whites of Eggs in the bag.

Modernized ingredients for your own effort:

- 1 bottle (750ml) of Bordeaux wine ("Claret" was historically used to describe red wine from the Bordeaux region)
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 12 ounces sugar
- 1 whole nutmeg
- ~ 1 tsp cinnamon
- ~ 1/2 tsp ginger
- ~ 2 tsp grains of paradise
- 2 whole long pepper pods
- 3 whole cloves
- A few whole coriander seeds (about 6 seeds?)
- 4 packets Knox unflavored gelatin
- 1 egg white

Cook together the wine, sugar, spices, and some water to infuse the ypocras with the spices.

After simmering for around 10 minutes, then add the gelatin, turn the heat off, and stir continuously for 5 minutes. Beat in an egg white and strain the mix through a double layer of cheesecloth.

Transfer to lightly greased molds or a bowl and chill overnight.

I may try this someday, if I can find grains of Paradise and the proper 'long peppers'...

My version is simpler, quicker and truly as variable as Jell-O shots. Select your wine, your fruit and your other liquid (Juice? Water? Soda?) and go. Sometimes, I use flavored gelatin and just water or club soda instead of juice.

JELLIED HYPOCRAS

1 cup wine, chilled

1 cup water or juice, heated to a boil

1 packet unflavored gelatin

Sugar to taste

1 cup fruit, chopped

Place the gelatin in a bowl, add hot water or juice and stir till gelatin is dissolved.

Stir in sugar, if using.

Stir in the wine. Cover the bowl and chill about 30 minutes until soft-set.

Stir in the fruit, recover the bowl and chill at least 4 hours.

The mixture can also be divided among four wineglasses or smaller bowls.

Serve topped with whipped cream.