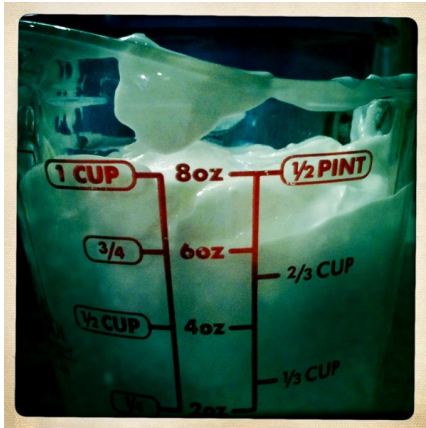


We're Back . . . and just in time for a holiday devoted to cheese!



Hello again friends! How are you? So, May was kinda busy. I mean, very busy. Actually, I have no idea how it went by so quickly but luckily it did cause it was kind of a nasty b*tch. But June, shalom to you dear, sweet June. It's officially beyond hot here in South Florida and what better time than the sweltering heat of June to start baking up a storm in preparation of Shavuot. Shavuot, which translates into 'weeks' in Hebrew, is one of those holidays I forget I truly love. Here is a holiday based entirely around love (love of Torah, love of Gd and love of learning) while also being a holiday based around the idea of renewal (renewal of the acceptance of the Torah, renewal of one's love of Gd and renewal of one's decision to keep learning). Shavuot is the day the Jewish people renew our acceptance of the Torah. However, like in every healthy relationship, this is no one-way street of devotion. Oh no my friends. Shavuot is also the day that Gd 'regifts' the Torah to the Jewish people so that we may renew our acceptance. Now, please do not see the word 'regift' and picture Gd handing over that bizarre yogurt maker no one registered for (but somehow got anyway). That's not the type of regifting we're talking about. It's an understanding that Gd knows the Torah and all it's complications is truly a gift or rather, a blessing, and Gd is telling the Jewish folk, "Look, I know this is complicated and the world is rough but I trust you and believe in you so much that I have no regrets in that original Torah-giving of 3300 years ago." It is customary to stay up all night learning

Torah on the first night of Shavuot. This ultimate all nighter is seen as an embodiment of the acceptance.



Prepping for Cheesecake

It's as if the Jewish people and Gd are renewing their vows together and then we get to eat a really great brunch of blintzes, cheesecake and other delicious dairy goodies. I'm not 100% sure of where this custom came from, but some believe that since Shavuot commemorates the receiving of the Torah, which included the kosher laws, the Jewish people could not cook meat in their pots, which had yet to be kashered. But that's besides the point. We're talking about a holiday that encourages the eating of my favorite food—cheese! Oh sweet, sweet cheese.



Cheesecake Filling

So, the first item up for Shavuot baking is actually a classic no-bake cheesecake. Cheese-freak that I am, I've never made a cheesecake. Now, because I have to make 2 days worth of meals in advance of the holiday (you can technically cook on a 'chag' but you can't start a new flame so a lot of people will keep their ovens on or a flame on their stove but I'm too paranoid for that business) so I opted for a no-bake cheesecake so I could also tackle some ultimate oatmeal cookies and a cauliflower cheddar soup. See below for the cheesecake and cookie recipes (you'll have to forgive me for not including the cauliflower soup—I got too dang tired as it was the last thing I made).

Chag Sameach!!

No-Bake Strawberry Cheesecake

What?

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 8 ounces prepared whipped topping, thawed
- 1 prepared graham cracker crust (6 ounces)
- 1 pound fresh strawberries, hulled and halved lengthwise

How?

1. Beat the cream cheese until smooth with an electric mixer. Gradually beat in the sugar. Beat in the sour cream and vanilla until just combined. Fold in the whipped topping.

Scrape mixture into the piecrust. (There may be some filling left over. If so, reserve it to be decoratively piped onto the top of the pie.) Chill in the refrigerator for 4 hours.

2. Starting in the center, arrange the strawberries in a circular pattern. Pipe with extra filling, if desired.



Cookie Perfection

Not Your Bubbe's Oatmeal Cookies

This is a half recipe. It makes a couple dozen standard-size cookies.

What?

1/2 cup (1 stick or 4 ounces) butter, softened

2/3 cup light brown sugar, packed

1 egg

1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

3/4 cup all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon salt (I often use a half teaspoon, but I like

more salt in my baked goods)

1 1/2 cups rolled oats

1/3 cup raisins (I don't like mine drowning in raisins)

1/3 cup walnuts, chopped (optional)

1/2 cup mini morsels of chocolate chips

How?

Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C).

In a large bowl, cream together the butter, brown sugar, egg and vanilla until smooth. In a separate bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt together. Stir this into the butter/sugar mixture. Stir in the oats, raisins and walnuts, if using them.

At this point you can either chill the dough for a bit in the fridge and then scoop it, or scoop the cookies onto a sheet and then chill



Pre-Cookie

the whole tray before baking them. You could also bake them right away, if you're impatient, but I do find that they end up slightly less thick.

The cookies should be two inches apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake them for 10 to 12 minutes (your baking time

will vary, depending on your oven and how cold the cookies were going in), taking them out when golden at the edges but still a little undercooked-looking on top. Let them sit on the hot baking sheet for five minutes before transferring them to a rack to cool.