

Passover: Beyond the Leavening



Food plays a pivotal role at Passover with much of the celebration revolving around the partaking and prohibition of specific foods. The prohibition aspect, which forbids leavening, poses a real challenge when preparing desserts. To help, here are several recipes from our forthcoming *Emanu-El Eats* cookbook.

NANNY OPPMAN'S PASSOVER WALNUT SPONGE CAKE

Congregant Sharon Oberman says she has had her grandmother's sponge cake every Passover of her life, but it wasn't easy getting the recipe so she could make it on her own.

"Like many fine cooks of her generation, my grandmother learned recipes from her mother and grandmother," Sharon explains.

"She memorized the ingredients and could tell by looking if the ingredient amount was right. To get our favorite recipes from her, my sister and I watched my grandmother cook, pouring back into a measuring cup each ingredient she was about to add to the mixing bowl so we could write down the exact amount.

"That is how this recipe, which continues to be a family favorite, came into being. Even though my grandmother is no longer with us, I always feel that she is in the kitchen with me, particularly at holiday time. This cake in particular is always a taste of the past."

(Serves 16 to 20)

- 12 extra-large or 13 large eggs, separated
- 1¾ cups sugar
- ¾ cup walnuts, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon rind, optional
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups plus 2 tablespoons matzo meal or matzo cake meal
- 5 tablespoons water

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly grease a 9-inch x 13-inch cake pan.
2. Place egg yolks in a large mixing bowl. Using an electric mixer on medium speed, blend the egg yolks with the sugar. When well blended add the nuts, lemon juice and lemon rind, if using, and continue mixing until the mixture has doubled in volume; set aside.
3. Place egg whites in a clean, large mixing bowl. Using an electric mixer, beat the egg whites until soft peaks form; set aside.



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4. Mix the salt with the matzo meal. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the matzo meal mixture into the egg yolk mixture. Stir in the water. Gently fold the egg whites into the yolk mixture, turning the bowl by quarter turns, until all the whites have disappeared into the batter.
5. Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan and bake until a cake tester inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean, about 50 minutes. Place pan on a rack and let cake cool completely before cutting into squares for serving. The cake will be very high when it comes out of the oven but will fall flat as it cools. Don't think anything is wrong with the cake.

Notes:

1. "Matzo cake meal was not available in my grandmother's youth," says Sharon, "so she always made the cake with regular matzo meal. I made it with cake meal, resulting in an airier, less dense cake. I like it both ways, and so did she."
2. Although the cake is delicious as is, a bowl of whipped cream passed alongside is a nice addition.
3. Store the cake at room temperature, tightly covered with plastic wrap. It will last several days, at least. "I've never had the leftovers last more than three days," says Sharon. "So I don't know how much longer it will last."

PASSOVER PIZZARELLE

Another Passover treat at the Oberman home is pizzarelle, an Italian fritter-like dessert. Sharon attended a Temple Emanu-El Women's Auxiliary pre-Passover luncheon in 2005 at a restaurant called Coco Pazzo where chef/owner Mark Strausman demonstrated a number of Passover recipes. "This one has become a personal favorite," Sharon says, noting, "I make it for Passover as well as other times of the year." Maple ice cream is her favorite accompaniment.

(Makes about 16)

- 2 12-ounce boxes of matzah
 - 4 cups milk
 - 3 eggs plus 2 additional egg yolks
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 3 tablespoons dried currants, cherries or cranberries, or chopped dried apricots
 - ½ cup honey
 - 1 cup ground almonds
 - Pinch of salt
 - 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
 - 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
 - 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 - 1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla
 - 1 orange, juiced
 - Matzo meal or additional matzah for thickening, if needed
 - 3 to 4 cups olive oil, for frying
 - Maple ice cream or powdered sugar, optional
1. In a large mixing bowl, break the matzah into roughly 1-inch pieces. Add the milk and mix well; refrigerate one hour.
 2. In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs, egg yolks and sugar together until smooth. Add to the soaked matzah and mix. Add the dried fruit, honey, ground almonds, salt, extra-virgin oil, cinnamon, nutmeg, brown sugar, vanilla and orange juice, and mix well. If the mixture is too loose to hold together in patties, then add matzo meal or additional crumbled matzah, a few tablespoons at a time, to get the right consistency.

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3. When ready to serve, heat 1 cup of the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat until very hot. Shape a few tablespoons of batter into a lump the size of a golf ball, flatten into a pancake and slip it gently into the hot oil. Repeat with remaining batter, taking care not to crowd the pan. The oil should sizzle around each *pizzarella*, and they should brown slowly on each side until the center is completely cooked. Drain on paper towels. Serve hot, accompanied by maple ice cream or other topping, if desired.
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CHOCOLATE CHIP SQUARES

Associate Director of Lifelong Learning Rachel Brumberg notes that the smaller you cut these squares, the less crumbly they will be. But crumbly or not, they're a Passover favorite in her home.

(Makes about 24)

- 1 cup margarine
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - 1 egg
 - 1 cup matzo cake meal
 - 1 cup chocolate chips
 - 1 cup nuts
1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Grease a 9-inch x 13-inch baking pan.
 2. In a mixing bowl, cream margarine, sugar, vanilla and salt. Add egg and beat well.
 3. Slowly add matzo cake meal; blend well. Stir in nuts and chips.
 4. Spread dough evenly in pan and bake about 20 to 25 minutes. Squares are done when cake is just beginning to brown around the edges. Let cool somewhat, then cut into squares while cake is still warm.
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SYLVIA SCHAEFFER'S COMPOTE

For a refreshing change of pace, try this fruit dessert from Temple Librarian Elizabeth F. Stabler. The compote can be eaten hot but is better if allowed to marinate several days, she says. Leftovers keep for weeks, refrigerated in glass jars.

(Serves about 12)

- 8 ounces each dried apricots, dried apples, dried pears or peaches and dates
 - 12 ounces pitted prunes
 - 4 ounces dried cherries, optional
 - 1 lemon
 - Water (you may substitute apple or orange juice for some of the water)
1. Prepare the fruit: Cut apple rings in quarters, pears or peaches in half; cut dates into small pieces so they melt into the compote; cut peel from lemon into ½-inch x 1-inch strips, being careful to avoid the white pith; cut lemon into 8 slices or wedges, removing pits.
 2. Put the fruit into a large pot. Add water (or a mix of water and fruit juice) to fill pot two-thirds the level of the fruit. Cook on low heat for at least one hour, stirring occasionally. Add hot water if needed. The compote is done when the lemons are soft and edible, having absorbed the sugars from the fruit, and all the fruits have melded.

TWELVE-EGG PASSOVER SPONGECAKE

This recipe from Marcia Waxman, past president of the Temple, was given to her by Rayminnie Friedman (of blessed memory). "Rayminnie was a wonderful cook," she says, "and this is the best spongecake I've ever tasted, which probably is attributable to the fact that Rayminnie was a chemist."

(Serves 12 to 16)

- 12 large eggs, separated
- 1½ cups sugar, divided
- Grated zest of one large lemon
- Grated zest of one medium orange
- ¼ cup orange juice
- Pinch of salt
- 1 cup matzo cake meal
- ¼ cup potato starch
- ½ cup finely ground walnuts

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, beat yolks with 1 cup of the sugar until they are thick, almost white, and ribbon when a little of the batter is allowed to drop back into the bowl from a spoon.
3. Stir in grated lemon and orange zests and orange juice.
4. In a clean, large mixing bowl, beat egg whites with a pinch of salt. As they begin to thicken, gradually beat in remaining ½ cup of sugar. Whites should stand in stiff, glossy peaks. They are perfect when they slide easily in a mass when the bowl is tipped.
5. Sprinkle cake meal, potato starch and ground nuts over whites. Add yolk mixture and fold all together, gently but thoroughly, with a rubber spatula until no egg white shows.
6. Pour mixture into a 9½- or 10-inch tube pan. Bake until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean and top of cake springs back when pressed with a fingertip, about 1 to 1¼ hours. Invert tube pan over a bottle and cool cake upside down for 2 hours before removing cake from pan.

EMANU-EL EATS is a labor of love undertaken by a dedicated group of Temple members and staff.

Food always has been an important part of Jewish life and culture, nourishing the soul as well as the body. In recognition of this and of the diversity that is the Emanu-El community today, work has begun on a cookbook that will pay tribute to the comforting foods of our varied past traditions and the excitement of modern Jewish cooking.



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