



Vanilla pancakes, blazin' beans, and chocolate cake - from the kitchen to the mulch pile - all in a day's work

By Portia Little

It all began with a four yards of bark mulch.

We'd need lots of energy for the work ahead spreading it in the yard, so we began the day with a huge pile of vanilla pancakes served with chunks of fresh fruit - blueberries, bananas, grapes, strawberries and orange segments - piled between the pancakes and topped with a splash of whipped cream.

It was a cool day, so we opted for some 'heat' for lunch - a big scoop of 'blazin' baked beans' with a kick from chipotle chiles in adobe sauce and with some brown sugar and barbecue sauce - served with pulled pork on bulkies.

Of course, all that manual labor called for some rewards.

A luscious chocolate cake would do for starters, this one a recipe from Ruth Reichl's "Garlic and Sapphires" book, Last Minute Chocolate Cake. It mixed up quickly and baked in a loaf pan to a lovely texture - the 300 degrees is not a misprint. Topping with vanilla ice cream was a must.

Thank you very much.

VANILLA SILVER DOLLAR PANCAKES

(from Penzeys Spices catalog, Spring 2006)

1 cup flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar (or vanilla sugar)
1 egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 cup milk
2 tablespoons butter, melted
Sweetened yogurt or whipped cream topping (optional)

Preheat electric griddle to 350 degrees or use pancake pan. Combine flour, baking powder, and salt in large bowl; mix in sugar. In container with pour spout, beat egg, vanilla, and milk. Pour in melted

butter. Make well in flour; add milk mixture gradually to form a batter. Drop 2 tablespoons batter onto hot griddle; cook 3-4 minutes on each side. To serve, layer up with fruit and powdered sugar and dollop of yogurt or whipped cream. Makes 12 pancakes.

BLAZIN' BAKED BEANS

(from Cooking Light, April 2006)

1/4 pound finely diced bacon slices
1-1/2 cups chopped onion
1/3 cup packed dark brown sugar
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons finely chopped chipotle chile, canned in adobe sauce
5 (16-ounce) cans navy beans, rinsed and drained
1 (18-ounce) jar low-sodium barbecue sauce

Preheat oven to 350 degrees
F. Cook bacon in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until crisp. Remove bacon from pan, reserving 1 tablespoon drippings in pan, and set bacon aside. Add onion to drippings; sauté 3 minutes. Combine bacon, onion, and remaining ingredients except cooking spray in large bowl; toss well. Spoon bean mixture into 13x9-inch or 2-1/2-quart baking dish coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Yield: 21 servings (serving size 1 cup).

LAST MINUTE CHOCOLATE CAKE

(from "Garlic and Sapphires" by Ruth Reichl, editor of Gourmet magazine)

4 ounces fine-quality unsweetened chocolate
3/4 stick (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter
3/4 cup brewed strong black coffee
2 tablespoons Grand Marnier

3/4 cup sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 300 degrees

F. Butter and flour a 9x5-inch loaf pan. Combine chocolate, butter, and coffee in top of double boiler or in very heavy pot; stir constantly over low heat until melted. Let mixture cool 15 minutes. Add Grand Marnier, sugar, egg, and

vanilla; stir well.

Stir flour, baking soda, and salt together, and add to chocolate mixture. Pour batter into prepared loaf pan and bake 30 to 40 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Serves 6.

Portia Little is the author of five theme gift cookbooks: *Recipes, Roses & Rhyme*; *The Easy Vegetarian*; *New England Seashore Recipes & Rhyme*; *Finger Lakes Food, Fact & Fancy*; and

Lusty Limericks & Luscious Desserts, which are available at Jamestown Designs, Conanicut Ship Store & Chandlery, Cathryn Jamieson Salon, and Grapes & Gourmet.