

One of my favorite childhood desserts was something my family dubbed “Apple Nasty,” because the apples looked rusty. Was it oxidation or simply the brown sugar and cinnamon? Hard to tell, since Apple Nasty was the pulverized product of mom’s new Cuisinart. Finished with a crumb layer, baked, and served with whipped cream, this family favorite wasn’t much to look at. But it was fast and delicious – everything an end-of-the-summer fruit dessert should be.

Now, as a professional baker, I know that Apple Nasty was a variation of a crisp and that there are prettier desserts that are almost as easy to make. Crisps are baked in deep dishes with a crumb topping. Cobblers are similar, but with a biscuit or pastry topping. For me, the real winner is clafoutis, the French version where the fruit is topped with a sweet pancakelike batter.

The fruit possibilities are endless, but right now, local, ripe plums are the way to go. With these desserts, the emphasis is on the fruit, not fancy crusts or long prep times, and they all go great with vanilla ice cream. Capture the flavors of the summer before they disappear with the beach towels.

PLUM CLAFOUTIS

SERVES 8

This recipe can be halved and baked in an 8-inch round cake pan or a 10-inch porcelain quiche pan. Cooking time is the same.

- 7 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 7 medium plums, pitted and cut into eighths (about 4 cups)
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1¼ cups milk
- 1½ tablespoons pure vanilla extract
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Confectioners’ sugar (for dusting)

Set the rack in the top third of the oven and heat the oven to 350 degrees. In a 9-by-13-inch nonreactive baking pan, pour the melted butter and swirl to coat the sides. In a medium bowl, toss the plums with ½ cup of the sugar and pour into the buttered pan.

In a food processor or blender, combine the remaining ½ cup of sugar, eggs, milk, vanilla, flour, and salt. Use about 10 one-second pulses to combine. Do not overmix. Pour the batter on top of the plums. Bake 45 to 55 minutes. The clafoutis is ready when it is lightly browned, slightly puffed, and a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. Remove from the oven and serve immediately or while still warm. Spoon onto serving plates. Dust with confectioners’ sugar right before serving.

PLUM CRISP

SERVES 8

- 9 medium plums, pitted and quartered (about 5 cups)
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 to 1¼ cups granulated sugar (depending on sweetness of plums)
- Salt

- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup toffee bits
- ½ cup quick oats
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 8 tablespoons cold unsalted butter

Have on hand a nonreactive 9-by-13-inch baking pan. Set the rack in the top third of the oven. Heat the oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl, toss the plums with the cornstarch, vanilla, ¾ to 1 cup of the sugar, and a pinch of salt. Pour into the baking pan.

In a medium bowl, combine ¼ cup granulated sugar, the brown sugar, toffee bits, oats, flour, pecans, and pinch of salt. With a pastry blender or your fingers, cut in the butter until it is barely incorporated. Sprinkle the mixture over the fruit. Bake until the topping is golden brown and the filling is bubbling, about 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 10 minutes. Spoon onto serving plates. Serve warm or at room temperature.



SWEET FINISH Denise Drower Swidey dusts turbinado sugar on a plum cobbler. She is the owner of Cook to Order (cook2order.com), where she creates “cookie bouquets” and gives cooking classes for adults and children. She is also executive studio chef for the upcoming season of *Simply Ming* on PBS.

KITCHEN AIDE

Pitting and Skinning Plums

Halve a plum, using the seam as a guide. Twist the halves in opposite directions to separate. Remove the pit, using a melon baller, if necessary. Cut the halves in two to make quarters. Try peeling each quarter. If the fruit won’t peel easily, bring a pot of water to a simmer, then drop the plum quarters into the hot water and let blanch for 15 to 30 seconds. Using a slotted spoon, remove them from the hot water and plunge them immediately into an ice-water bath. Using your fingers, peel the quarters, starting from the tip. Both European and Japanese plum varieties will work in these recipes.

PLUM COBBLER

SERVES 8

With this less-sweet topping, I recommend removing the tart skin of the plums. If you don’t, use the higher quantity of sugar.

- 9 medium plums, pitted, peeled (optional), and quartered (about 5 cups)
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- ¾ to 1 cup granulated sugar, plus 1 tablespoon
- ½ teaspoon salt, plus a pinch
- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for sprinkling
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- 6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ¾ cup milk, plus extra for brushing
- 1 tablespoon coarse sugar, such as turbinado (for dusting)

Have on hand a nonreactive 9-by-13-inch baking pan. Set the rack in the middle of the oven. Heat the oven to 375 degrees. In a medium bowl, toss the plums with the cornstarch, vanilla, sugar, and a pinch of salt. Pour into the pan.

In a food processor fitted with a metal blade, pulse together 1 tablespoon sugar, ½ teaspoon salt, the flour, and baking powder until well combined. Add the butter. Use about 10 one-second pulses to blend until the butter is the size of peas. Transfer mixture to a large bowl and add the milk all at once. Using a wooden spoon, mix until just combined. Gather the dough together and knead it against the sides of the bowl – about 10 turns.

On a lightly floured surface, use a floured rolling pin to roll the dough into a rectangle the same size as the pan. Lift the dough onto the rolling pin and ease it onto the filling. Cut several 2-inch vents. With a pastry brush, paint the dough with milk and dust with coarse sugar.

Bake for about 35 minutes or until the surface is golden brown and the filling is bubbling. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Cut into 8 pieces. Use a metal spatula to transfer the pieces to plates. Serve hot or warm.

Send comments and suggestions to cooking@globe.com.