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The True History of Tiramisu'

By Anna Maria Volpi

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Open an old Italian cookbook, browse through the index and... surprise! No Tiramisu'. My first encounter with Tiramisu' was in 1985. I was in Italy at that time: A friend of mine told me about this new recipe she got. She was so enthusiastic about it that I felt compelled to try it immediately. The taste was unbelievably good, as never I had tasted before. Since then I fell in love with this dessert.

Everybody knows by now that Tiramisu' means "pick-me-up" in Italian, for the high energetic content (eggs and sugar) and the caffeine of the strong espresso coffee. There are many different stories about the origin of Tiramisu'. It is a layered cake; therefore some place its origin in Tuscany, where another famous layered Italian dessert is very popular. It is called "Zuppa Inglese" (English Soup). It is not English and it is not a soup. Instead is a simple cake of ladyfingers or sponge cake, soaked in "alkermes" liquor, and alternated layers of chocolate and egg custard. Layered cakes have been around for long time. The brilliant idea in Tiramisu' is not in the technique of layering, but in the components. The great invention of combining together coffee, zabaglione cream, and chocolate: This is the true innovation in Tiramisu'.

I love to study history of food. In my book "The Timeless Art of Italian Cuisine - Centuries of Scrumptious Dining", there is extensive information about culinary history of the various regions of Italy. I tried to trace the origin of Tiramisu' investigating many Italian cookbooks. The first clue is by the famous Italian gastronome Giuseppe Maffioli. In his book "Il ghiottone Veneto", (The Venetian Glutton) first published in 1968, he talks extensively about Zabaglione custard. The name of this cream originates from Zabaja, a sweet dessert popular in the Illiria region. It is the coastal area across the Adriatic Sea that was Venetian territory for long time during the golden age of the "Repubblica Serenissima" (The Most Serene Republic) of Venice. Zabaglione was prepared in those times with sweet Cyprus wine.

"The groom's bachelor friends", says Maffioli, "at the end of the long wedding banquet, maliciously teasing, gave to him before the couple retired a big bottle of zabajon, to guarantee a successful and

The True History of Tiramisu'

prolonged honeymoon". "The zabajon", Maffioli continues, "was sometimes added of whipped cream, but in this case was served very cold, almost frozen, and accompanied by the baicoli, small thin Venetian cookies invented in the 1700's by a baker in the Santa Margherita suburb of Venice". As we can notice, the addition of whipped cream, the serving temperature, the cookies, all these elements are close to the modern Tiramisu' recipe. And even the allusion to the energetic properties of the Zabaglione, seem to refer to the Tiramisu' name.

Later in my research the oldest recipe I could find was in the book by Giovanni Capnist "I Dolci del Veneto" (The Desserts of Veneto). The first edition was published in 1983 and has a classic recipe for Tiramisu'. "Recent recipe with infinite variations from the town of Treviso", says Capnist, "discovery of restaurants more than family tradition".

But the final word on the origin of Tiramisu' is from the book by Fernando e Tina Raris "La Marca Gastronomica" published in 1998, a book entirely dedicated to the cuisine from the town of Treviso.

The authors remember what Giuseppe Maffioli wrote in an article in 1981: "Tiramisu' was born recently, just 10 years ago in the town of Treviso. It was proposed for the first time in the restaurant . The dessert and its name became immediately extremely popular, and this cake and the name were copied by many restaurants first in Treviso then all around Italy". Still today the restaurant "Le Beccherie" makes the dessert with the classical recipe: ladyfingers soaked in bitter strong espresso coffee, mascarpone–zabaglione cream, and bitter cocoa powder. Alba and Ado Campeol, owners of the restaurant regret they didn't patent the name and the recipe, especially to avoid all the speculation and guesses on the origin of this cake, and the diffusion of so many recipes that have nothing to do with the original Tiramisu'.

I tried countless different recipes from the infinite variations of Tiramisu', but the classic one, (the recipe I show on my website), the recipe from the "Le Beccherie" restaurant, is still the one I prepare today and the one I prefer.

As an example of one of the many delicious variation of Tiramisu' I am showing on my website a step–by–step recipe for the "Tiramisu' with Mixed Berries" that is quickly becoming a new classic.

Anna Maria Volpi
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Anna Maria Volpi is a chef, award winning cookbook writer, and cooking instructor. Her website and newsletter

has taken recipe–writing to a higher standard

featuring step–by–step illustrated traditional Italian recipes.

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Best Recipes: Terrific Tiramisu Dessert

By Donna Monday

Sometimes a dessert is just too divine to pass up on getting the recipe. This recipe for Terrific Tiramisu Dessert is one of them. A young woman named Shura showed up at an office party with this dreamy confection.

It's too indulgent to simply describe with words, but I'll say that this scrumptious version of the popular Italian dessert tiramisu is simply divine. With a mixture of espresso coffee, whip cream and Ladyfingers, the flavors will melt in your mouth and leave you wanting more.

If you're looking to make a very classy, delicious dessert cake for a special dinner party or holiday gathering, you can't go wrong with this Terrific Tiramisu dessert.

Shura's tips even provide you with optional ingredients and special instructions.

Begin making the Tiramisu at least 3 hours before serving time, or early in the day.

Terrific Tiramisu Dessert 1 16 oz container mascarpone cheese
(What I usually do is substitute with the following: 2 8 oz pkg cream cheese softened, *delete salt; in step 1, in a large bowl, with mixer at medium speed beat cream cheese and 3 tablespoons milk until smooth and fluffy. *Increase confectioner's sugar for cheese mixture to 2/3 cup) 1/2 teaspoon salt* 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons confectioner's sugar 3 tablespoons plus 1/3 cup espresso (recipe calls for coffee-flavored liqueur but I prefer espresso) 1 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract 3 1 oz squares semi-sweet chocolate, grated 1 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream 2 teaspoon instant espresso-coffee powder (This isn't too hard to get. Your supermarket may carry it in their Italian section) 2 3-4 1/2 oz pkgs Ladyfingers - a cookie of sorts. (The Italians call them Savoiardi. There are some American ones but they are not as good. Mushy, not crunchy. Try and get an Italian brand.)

Directions

- 1) In a large bowl, with wire whisk or fork, beat mascarpone (or cream cheese mixture), salt, 1/2 cup sugar, 3 tablespoons espresso, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, and 2/3 of grated chocolate (set aside remaining chocolate for top of dessert).
- 2) In small bowl, with mixer at medium speed, beat 1 cup heavy or whipping cream until stiff peaks form. With rubber spatula or wire whisk, fold whipped cream into cheese mixture.
- 3) In small bowl, stir instant espresso-powder, remaining 1/3 cup espresso, remaining 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (if you use liqueur, then add 1 tablespoons water).
- 4) If ladyfingers are sliced, separate them in half. Line 2 1/2 quart glass or crystal bowl with one-fourth of ladyfingers; drizzle 2 tablespoons of espresso mixture over them. Spoon one-third of the cheese mixture over ladyfingers. Repeat with ladyfingers, espresso mixture, and cheese mixture to make two

The True Hystory of Tiramisu'

more layers.

Drizzle remaining espresso mixture on ladyfingers. Sprinkle remaining grated chocolate over top of dessert. Reserving one tablespoon for garnish.

5) In a small bowl, with mixer at medium speed, beat remaining ½ cup cream and remaining 2 tablespoons confectioner's sugar until stiff peaks form.

6) Spoon whipped cream mixture into decorating bag with large star tube. Pipe large rosettes on top of dessert. (This is ideal, however my cake–decorating bag is in storage so I just use a plastic bag with a pin prick in it and make attractive blobs instead.)

7) Sprinkle reserved grated chocolate on whipped–cream rosettes. Refrigerate until chilled and flavors are blended (at least 2 hours).

Serve and enjoy.

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Donna Monday

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