

Independence Day

Independence Day Trifle

By Laura Joseph Mogil

My trifle story begins the week before the Fourth of July when my friend Hillary called to invite my husband, Bob, and me to her house for a party.

“What can I bring? I asked her. “How about dessert?”

Readily agreeing to my assignment, my alter-ego of The Inspired Chef took over and I started obsessing about what kind of tasty treat I could whip up to satisfy a patriotic sweet tooth. I went upstairs to my office and Googled “July 4 desserts.” In the end, I passed on “Red, White and Blueberry Cheesecake Pie” and “4th of July Lemon Bar Flags” (although those looked darn good), choosing to make my own version of trifle with fresh berries.

Now, you might ask — and you’d be totally justified — isn’t trifle a British dessert and isn’t it usually served at Christmastime? The answer is yes and yes. But I decided to call this adapted version “Independence Day Trifle” and serve it in America on July 4. (My sincere apologies to any Anglophiles reading this.)

You also might be wondering exactly what a trifle is, so I looked it up for you online. According to www.whatscookingamerica.net: “The word “trifle” comes from the old French term “trufle,” and literally means something whimsical or of little consequence. A proper English trifle is made with egg custard poured over sponge cake soaked in fruit and sherry and topped with whipped cream.”



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Eric Messer and Jan Fisher get ready to celebrate.

Trifles are traditionally made with canned fruit but I decided to make my trifle with fresh strawberries, raspberries and blueberries — much more appealing, especially when local produce is available in abundance in the summertime. I went to the grocery store, picked up a few pints of the berries, and then added a quart of heavy cream to my cart. Next on my list was Angel Food cake mix (another option is white cake mix). I also bought Jell-O vanilla pudding, but that’s only because I couldn’t find Bird’s Custard, which got rave reviews in several of the online trifle recipes I found. Back at home, I had sugar, orange juice and a lemon.

The day before Hillary’s party, I made the Angel Food cake according to the directions on the box (make sure you’ve got some eggs and vegetable oil) and the pudding (you’ll need a quart of whole or two percent milk). Trifles are often prepared with stale or oven-dried cake, so making it a day or two ahead is a good thing because the orange and berry juices can make fresh cake too soggy. The flip side is that you have to be on constant watch to make sure your spouse or kids don’t eat the cake before you get a chance to make your trifle. I caught my older son, Sam, with knife in hand, about to cut himself a piece of cake for a late-night treat.

The morning of the party, I went to work assembling the trifle. I recommend that you use a trifle bowl — a tall clear glass bowl typically on a pedestal — or something similar. I happen to have one that I bought to serve fruit salad. Mine is adorned with whimsically painted strawberries and is about six inches high, which is perfect for the layering (and the clear

glass is great to admire the white cake and custard interlaced with blue and red berries!).

After layering the cake, fruit soaked in orange juice, and custard (in that order), and topping it all with whipped cream, it’s nice to add a pretty garnish for the finishing touch. I took some strawberry halves and made a circle around the border of the trifle bowl. In the center, I put the remaining strawberries, plus a small mound of the blueberries and raspberries.

Independence Day Trifle

1 cake mix (Angel Food or white cake); you will also need the required eggs and oil

2 packets of custard or pudding mix (Bird’s Custard is preferred); you’ll also need milk

1 pint fresh strawberries

1 pint fresh raspberries

1 pint fresh blueberries

1/3 cup orange juice

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

1/4 cup sugar

1 1/2 cups heavy cream

- Prepare cake and custard according to package directions, and let cool completely. It’s best to do a day before.

- Reserve a cup of the fruit for garnish, and mix the remaining fruit with orange juice and fresh lemon juice. Let stand so fruit will release its juices.

- Whip the cream and add the sugar after stiff peaks form.

- To assemble: Cut the cake into large chunks and cover bottom of a trifle bowl with a layer of cake. Top with a layer of prepared fruit, then a layer of custard. Repeat the layers until you are out of ingredients or the bowl is full. Top with whipped cream and garnish with fresh fruit.

- Chill until serving time.



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