



SUMMER PUDDING

For the Love of Good Food

This week I am going to abandon France for England and the quintessential English summer dessert that has its origins in the 18th century. It was a favorite of the fashionable health spas of the time; the bread in the pudding being a substitute for butter-rich pastry. Despite this heart healthy content, the pudding has a satisfying rich flavor.

Historically the pudding was made with a raspberry and redcurrant ratio of 4:1 to give a balance of sweet and tart, but tastes move on. So long as you have a fruit that gives a slightly tart taste, the choice of soft red fruits can be up to you. The fruit must be firm but ripe to give the best juice, the difference between a good pudding and a great one.

The amount of sugar is a guide. You will always need some sugar to bring out the juice, but the actual amount can be varied according to taste and the ripeness of the fruit.

The other very important ingredient is the bread. Texture is crucial as it has to hold the fruit firm once the pudding is turned out, but also has to impart good flavor. Soft plastic bread turns slimy rather than moist – like eating a soggy cloth, sourdough often has too tight a texture to soak up the juice. My personal preference is for multigrain bread that gives a nutty flavor, but traditionally it is good firm white sandwich bread.

It is usually made in a pudding basin, but any shape will do and you can make individual moulds, but you must use thinner slices of bread.

Ingredients (serves 4-6)

2lbs of prepared fruits, a mixture of all or some of the following: raspberries, strawberries, stoned cherries, redcurrants, blueberries, gooseberries, rhubarb.

3 tablespoons water

1-3 tablespoons of sugar

6-8 large slices of white bread crusts removed.

2 pint pudding basin

1. Put all the fruit into a non-reactive pan and bring to the boil with the water and the sugar. Taste and adjust sugar if necessary.
2. Simmer for no longer than 3-4 minutes. The fruit should still be largely whole, shiny and there should be a lot of magenta colored juice in the pan.
3. Reserve 3 tablespoons of juice.
4. Cut a large round of bread for the base of the bowl. Cut the rest of the bread into 3 inch wide strips and line the basin pushing the pieces of bread tight to make sure no fruit can leak through. Leave a few slices to cover the fruit.
5. Pour the fruit gently into the basin careful not to disturb the bread.
6. Cover the fruit with the remaining slices of bread to make a lid, again making sure no fruit is showing.
7. Put some saran wrap on top of the bread, then a small plate or saucer, then add some heavy weight, like canned goods. The juice colors the bread purple.
8. Place in the refrigerator to cool down, preferably overnight.
9. When ready to serve, run a palette knife around the edge of the pudding, turn it onto a flat serving dish, shake slightly to dislodge from the basin then remove the basin.
10. Pour over the reserved juice and decorate with extra fruit if you wish. Serve cold with fresh cream or yogurt. It can even be served with ice cream (my husband's favorite).