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The Norwegian American

An eple a day: recipes from Norway

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Get ready for Norwegian Apple Day, celebrated on the last Tuesday in September

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The Norwegian American

I have become something of a gardener this year. No one is more surprised than I, as I successfully avoided yard work for years.

It turns out that while I like flowers, I find it immensely rewarding to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs to use in my kitchen.

This spring, we had a hogwire panel fence installed on the sloping side of our yard. It's meant to prevent our kids (and their toys) from falling between the rocky retaining wall and fence, but it doubles as an 80-foot-long trellis for growing vegetables and fruit to accompany three small raised beds.

For the inaugural growing season with the trellis, we planted snap peas, three types of pole beans and bush beans, a couple cucumber plants that failed spectacularly, and even a cold-hardy passion fruit vine with delicate purple-blue blooms that last for just 24 hours. My sons, ages 5 and almost 2, are enamored with the garden, always eager to help with the watering and harvesting. I love watching the boys (and their friends) help themselves to a garden snack during their outdoor play, plucking a pea or green bean right off the vine.

Anchoring the panel fence are three espalier fruit trees, which are trained to grow horizontally for easy harvesting and maintenance. The trees we selected have three different varieties grafted onto each tree. Neither the pear nor stone fruit trees fruited this year (as expected), but I was delighted when the apple tree produced eight picture-perfect apples.

The apples will be the last thing to harvest out of the garden this fall, and I have a feeling it will be worth the wait.

Apple season is in full swing in Norway right now, too. den norske epledagen (Norwegian Apple Day) is celebrated every year on the last Tuesday of September.

Apples are wildly popular in Norway, and considered the country's national fruit. In 2017, the average Norwegian consumed 10 kilos (22 pounds) of apples.

Norway's Opplysningskontoret for frukt og grønt (Information Office for Fruit and Vegetables) writes: "Norwegian apples ripen slowly through the summer with long days of sunshine and mild nights. Our apples have thin skins and a sweet taste with a bit of acidity, and are consistently crisp."

Some of the most popular apples in Norway are Aroma, Rød Prins/Kronprins, Julyred, and Åkerø, among others. The Red Gravenstein has been grown in Norway since the late 1700s.

Apples have an important place in Norwegian history, dating back to the Stone Age.

In Norse mythology, Idun is the goddess of apples, and the gods of Åsgard had to eat this apple for eternal youth.

In 1273, the church decided to tax apple production by introducing the "tithing provision." The clergy had realized that there could be money from apple cultivation and therefore determined that a 10th of the fruit value should go to the church.

During the excavation of the Oseberg ship in 1904, a bucket was found containing wild apples so well preserved that they were still red!

Telemark and Hardanger are known for their apple orchards. Apples trees were planted in the 13th century by Cistercian monks from England. Today, several farms offer tours, farmhouse cider, and apple products for sale.

To commemorate den norske epledagen this month, I have gathered some Norwegian apple recipes, both sweet and savory, to celebrate the season. I can't promise they will give eternal youth like Idun's apples, but they will be delicious!

Treasure Chests of Cod & Apple Skattekiste med torsk og epler

This recipe is charmingly called "Skattekiste," or treasure chest. It's a French cooking technique called en papillote (in parchment). It's an easy (and visually impressive) way to ensure the fish is moist, because it steams in its own juices. If you don't have baking parchment, aluminum foil is an excellent substitute. Serve the packets at the table, so each person can open their own "treasure chest."

Adapted from Matprat.no.

1½ lbs. cod

4 tbsps. butter, divided

½ cup toasted hazelnuts, chopped

2 crisp apples, thickly sliced

¼ cup raisins

¼ cup white wine, divided

handful of Italian parsley, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 400°F. Portion the cod into four even-sized pieces, and season the fillets on both sides with salt and pepper.

To assemble each packet: with a large square of parchment paper (or foil), place 1 tbsp. butter in the center and the cod on top. Place apple slices on top, and sprinkle with 2 tbsps. each of chopped hazelnuts and raisins. Fold up each packet, and pour in 1 tbsp. of white wine. Fold the edges to create a tight seal. Repeat with the remaining fillets.

Place the packets on a baking sheet, and bake for 15 minutes. Serve with boiled potatoes.

Norwegian Apple Cake

Norsk eplekake

Eplekake, apple cake, is a Norwegian dessert beloved across the country. There are many variations, but I have found that eplekake is a simple and unpretentious cake, equally welcome for dessert and breakfast. This is the version I like to make. It's naturally dairy-free!

Adapted from Ashley Rodriguez's recipe in *Date Night In*.

1½ cups all-purpose flour

¾ tsp. baking soda

¼ tsp. table salt

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

½ tsp. ground cardamom

½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

¾ cup sugar

¾ cup mild-flavored oil, such as a light olive oil or canola oil

2 eggs

½ tsp. vanilla extract

2 medium apples, cut into ½ inch cubes

3 tbsps. demarara sugar (often sold as sugar in the raw)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease the cake pan and line with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, combine flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, and sugar. In another bowl, whisk together oil, eggs, and vanilla extract. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients, and mix with a rubber spatula until combined. Fold in the apples.

Scrape the batter (which will be quite thick) into the prepared cake pan. Sprinkle with demarara sugar. Bake until a toothpick comes out clean, about 45 minutes.

Cool on a rack for 10 minutes before inverting and cooling completely.

Serve with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream if desired (though I rarely do).

Sauerkraut with apple & caraway Surkål med eple og karve

This year, I discovered how easy (and delicious) it is to ferment vegetables at home, making my own sauerkraut, pickled vegetables, hot sauce, and more. Cabbage is my favorite vegetable to ferment because of its versatility on the plate. Norwegian surkål is typically cooked on the stove for 45 minutes in a vinegar brine, but I love this naturally fermented version with its crunch and gut-healthy probiotics. This surkål takes about a week or two to ferment at room temperature, and it keeps for up to a year in the fridge.

Adapted from Tara.no.

1 head of green cabbage, about 2 lbs.

1 apple of your favorite variety

1 tbsp. fine sea salt

2 tsp. caraway seeds

specialty equipment:

wide-mouth quart glass jar

Ziploc bag

Remove the outer leaves of the cabbage, and rinse the cabbage well. Quarter, and remove the core. Slice the cabbage very thinly and place in a large bowl. Thinly slice the apple and place in the bowl. Sprinkle with the salt and caraway seeds, and massage it until the cabbage glistens. You should be able to taste the salt without it being overwhelming. Cover the bowl with a towel and set aside for an hour until liquid accumulates in the bottom of the bowl.

In a clean quart-size glass jar, transfer the cabbage mixture a handful or two at a time, tamping down with your fist or a wooden spoon (I use a cocktail muddler!) to remove air pockets. When you press down, you want to see the brine rise above the cabbage mixture. Repeat until all the cabbage is in the jar. Place a sealed, water-filled Ziploc bag on the cabbage mixture to weigh it down.

Set the jar on a baking sheet or plate, and set it aside to sit at room temperature, out of direct sunlight, for four to 14 days. You can start checking the kraut around the fourth day. The cabbage will have softened a bit and look more yellow than green, as if it's been cooked. I find that my kraut is to the right texture around day 10, but it depends on how warm your house is and your own personal preference. It stores in the fridge for up to 12 months, with a tight lid. Goes well with pork dishes, hot dogs, or enjoyed straight out of the jar.

Veiled Farm Girls

Tilslørte bondepiker

Tilslørte bondepiker, or veiled farm girls, is a classic Norwegian dessert. It's a layered dessert of a quick applesauce, toasted breadcrumbs, and whipped cream. I haven't found a definitive source for the name's origin, but some point to the famous Norwegian poet Ivar Aasen. It's simple and satisfying!

From *A Taste of Norway: Flavors from The Norwegian American* cookbook.

2 lbs. of your favorite apple

¼ cup water

⅓ cup sugar, divided

½ tsp. cinnamon

½ cup unsalted butter

1½ cups fresh breadcrumbs (you can also substitute crushed gingerbread cookies)

1½ cups whipping cream

½ tsp. vanilla extract

Peel, core, and cut apples into small chunks. In a small pot, simmer the apples on the stove with the water for 10 to 15 minutes, or until the apples are easily pierced with a fork and are starting to break down into applesauce. Set aside to cool, and add 2 tbsps. sugar and cinnamon.

In a sauté pan, melt the butter until foaming subsides. Add the breadcrumbs and 2 tbsps. sugar, and sauté until the bread crumbs are toasted to golden brown. Remove from heat and leave to cool.

In a separate bowl, whip the cream until soft peaks form with remaining sugar and vanilla extract.

In individual glass serving dishes or a trifle bowl, layer in the cooked apples, whipped cream, and bread crumbs, and repeat.

Do you have a favorite Norwegian apple recipe? Write to me at food@na-weekly.com!

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