

Forecast: Plenty Of Showers!!!

Family Features

These, though, are happy showers filled with good wishes, gifts and a celebration of events to come, like weddings or babies.

Such special occasions deserve special food, says Nancy Siler, vice president of consumer affairs and public relations at Wilton. She suggests cupcakes for dessert, but not just any cupcake. These are unique – shower-ready, decorated theme-appropriately with umbrellas.

They can be prepared from a mix or from scratch and baked and served in color-coordinated silicone baking cups. Siler suggests incorporating a grouping of cupcakes as part of the shower décor. Use them as the table centerpiece, arranged on a tray, or a tiered cupcake stand. Or if it's a sit-down meal, place a cupcake at each setting.

Construct the umbrella decorations from ready-to-use fondant that is tinted in the colors selected for the occasion. Step-by-step instructions ensure foolproof results, plus they can be made several days in advance, so on party day there's no last-minute mad rush. Cupcakes can be baked, iced and sprinkled a day in advance. Place the umbrellas on the mini cakes the day of the party.

Umbrellas in place, let the showers begin! For additional shower and party ideas, baking and decorating tips or to order supplies, visit www.wilton.com.



READY FOR SHOWERS

EACH SERVES 1

1 package (24 ounces) White Ready-To-Use Rolled Fondant
Rose, Royal Blue, Lemon Yellow Icing Color
Round Fondant Cut-Outs
Lollipop Sticks

Fondant Adhesive*
1 package (about 18 ounces) cake mix, any flavor
Water, vegetable oil and eggs to prepare cake mix
1 can (16 ounces) White Decorator Icing Heart Drops Sprinkles

Several days in advance, tint fondant rose, blue and yellow; roll out 1/8-inch thick. Cut circles using largest Round Cut-Out; cut across circle, slightly more than halfway. Using smallest Round Cut-Out, cut scalloped edge; with spatula, score umbrella rib lines. Let dry on waxed paper covered cake boards. Reserve remaining tinted fondant. Attach dried fondant pieces to lollipop sticks with Fondant Adhesive. Roll a 1/4-inch ball of matching fondant; attach to umbrella top with adhesive. Let dry.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Prepare cake mix following package instructions; place batter in Pastel Silicone Baking Cups supported by cookie sheet. Bake 18-20 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean; cool completely. Ice cupcakes smooth with icing; sprinkle with Heart Drops. Insert fondant umbrella. If desired, tie ribbon around stick.

* To make Fondant Adhesive for attaching dried fondant decorations to lollipop sticks, knead 1/4 teaspoon water into 1 ounce (1-1/2-inch ball) rolled fondant until it becomes soft and sticky. Apply to fondant decoration with brush or place in decorating bag and pipe it onto decoration.

A Celebration Showpiece

BY JENNY HARPER

Consumer Test Kitchen Project Manager for the Nestlé

'Tis the season of celebration! Bridal, baby and good-luck showers, graduations and family gatherings demand dishes that delight a crowd. If you're like me, you plan menus to wow your guests, securing your reputation as an inspired hostess.

Whoever you're "toasting" with your shower or party will appreciate your making the occasion extra-special. Some of my best tips for help with planning:

- Confer with your guest of honor to make sure you've got a complete invitation list. Ask for replies so you know how many guests to plan for.

- Coordinate the colors of your table with flowers prettily placed on the serving table. This time of year offers a wealth of fresh flowers.

- Plan a buffet, and for an elegant feel, use real tablecloths, napkins, plates, glassware and cutlery.

- Don't forget the camera! Or put disposable cameras on the table, collect cameras after the party and create memory book for guest of honor.

Whatever the occasion, this stunning, colorful dessert makes a beautiful presentation. And beyond the 'oohs' and 'aahs' of appreciation, your guests will savor the light and airy texture of this creamy, fruit-filled centerpiece dish. It owes its dreamy texture to evaporated milk.

No mystery why I call evaporated milk my "cooking essential" as it adds creaminess and rich flavor to my recipes. Evaporated milk also improves moistness in my baked goods, and whips up easily for a creamy, light and airy texture in desserts like mousses and this Rainbow Fruit Delight. Count on evaporated milk for a full, rich mouth-feel and always-delicious taste.

For other light and refreshing Shower menu ideas like Key Lime Mousse or Mini Custard Fruit Tarts, check out the inspired ideas at www.VeryBestBaking.com



RAINBOW FRUIT DELIGHT

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

Nonstick cooking spray
1 package (3 ounces) orange-flavored gelatin
1 1/2 cups boiling water, divided
1/2 cup mandarin oranges, drained
2 cans (12 ounces each) Carnation Evaporated Milk, chilled, divided
1 package (3 ounces) lemon-flavored gelatin
1/2 cup crushed pineapple, drained
1 package (3 ounces) strawberry-flavored gelatin
1/2 cup frozen strawberries (about 8) thawed, drained

COAT 9 x 5-inch baking pan with nonstick cooking spray.

FOR MANDARIN ORANGE LAYER:

DISSOLVE orange gelatin in 1/2 cup boiling water in small bowl. Let stand for 10 minutes. Place dissolved gelatin, mandarin oranges and 1 cup evaporated milk in blender; cover. Puree for 10 seconds or until well blended. Pour into loaf pan. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or until set.

FOR PINEAPPLE LEMON LAYER:

FOLLOW process for Mandarin Orange Layer substituting lemon gelatin and crushed pineapple. Pour mixture over Mandarin Orange Layer. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or until set.

FOR STRAWBERRY LAYER:

FOLLOW process for Mandarin Orange Layer substituting strawberry gelatin and strawberries. Pour mixture over Pineapple Lemon Layer. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

TO UNMOLD: Run point of knife around top of pan. Dip pan into a large pan of warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. Lift from water. Place serving platter on top of pan. Invert mold and platter together, shake slightly to loosen. Gently remove mold. Cut into slices and serve.

SERVES

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beyond four inches in front of their face and to get outside."

To gather input on offerings, the NPS is holding meetings on its visitor services programming plan. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for 7-8:30 p.m.

Tuesday at the Wagner Army and for 7-8:30 p.m. Thursday at the Niobrara, Neb., fire hall.

The current draft of the plan is available for review at www.nps.gov/mnrr. For questions or more information, email the project coordinator at Anne_Doherty-Stephan@nps.gov or call her at (605) 665-0209, Extension 29.

The NPS plans to move forward in a number of other areas, Mietz said. Those areas include water quality, invasive species, cottonwood regeneration, bank erosion, soil bioengineering and monitoring the impact of endangered species habitat.

The NPS works with Nebraska and South Dakota to coordinate river access for visitors, Mietz said. In addition, the NPS finds opportunities for additional work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he said.

At the federal level, the NPS and U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) are working together on Ponca State Park, Mietz said. The park in northeast Nebraska attracts 500,000 visitors annually, he said.

Mietz plans to increase the NPS presence with more law enforcement rangers along the

river. The rangers will work with issues such as the ban of personal watercraft on the MNR, he said.

The rangers will focus on public awareness during the first year, then tougher enforcement in the following years, Mietz said.

"How can we best educate folks and then move to enforcement?" he asked.

Mietz also promoted major events at Yankton during the next month. They include the National Junior Ranger Day and Fishing Derby on April 30 at the Gavins Point Fish Hatchery, the Watershed Education Festival on May 6 at Riverside Park, the Missouri River Clean-Up on May 7 kicking off at the Riverside Park boat ramp, and the Clean Boat Event on May 21 at sites below Gavins Point Dam.

The Watershed Education Festival anticipates 389 students in grades 7-12 from Yankton Middle School, Sacred Heart School of Yankton and Vermillion Middle School in South Dakota and Crofton, Lynch and Laurel-Concord in Nebraska.

The attendance has soared for the three-year festival, increasing from 165 students its initial year to 289 last year and 389 this year, said organizer Mary Robb with the City of Yankton.

"The kids love it, and the teachers look forward to it each year," she said. "It's free, it's close to all the schools in the area and it's a very educational experience right here in their back yard."

The festival provides unique opportunities, said NPS Ranger

Dugan Smith.

"It's more than having someone speak at you. There is interaction and hands-on learning," he said. "And people learn what our agencies do."

The festival will adjust to the greater demand and shouldn't have problems, said Paul Lepisto of Pierre, regional coordinator with the Izaak Walton League of America.

"Our group size has gone from 15 students the first year to 22 the next year and 30 to 35 this year," he said. "Our presenters will need to deal with a much larger group of students, but we can handle it with our teachers and volunteers."

The festival features 11 presenters, with students able to attend six of the 15-minute sessions. The morning will conclude with the keynote address by Vicki Richmond, director of Missouri River Relief. The Columbia, Mo., organization will also provide equipment and personnel for river clean-up while in the area.

The festival will broaden its topics this year, Smith said.

"We are emphasizing the cultural and historical as well as the environmental," he said. "Jerome Kills Small from the University of South Dakota will give a presentation on the Native American relationship with the Missouri River."

The festival has already become a tradition, Robb said.

"We had teachers from Vermillion and Sacred Heart tell us the first year, before they even got on the bus to return home, that we should make sure to invite them the next year," she

said. "And that was before we even decided to have it another year."

Many students return with their families for the next day's river clean-up, Lepisto said. The clean-up, now in its eighth year, picked up 2.6 tons of trash in just its first year.

"Missouri River Relief said this is one of their favorite places to come to," he said.

This year's clean-up faces a critical challenge, Lepisto said.

"The river is really going to run high this year, and that's going to make it much more difficult for the clean-up. The snow-pack will continue melting," he said.

"The Corps just announced (Thursday) that it was ramping up its Missouri River releases to 39,500 cfs (cubic feet per second). We're dealing with high water. We have to be careful where we drop off people for the clean-up, and they have to be careful where they walk."

The three May events at Yankton have created a river awareness that may have been lacking even among lifelong area residents, Lepisto said.

"People learn the different issues that the river is facing," he said. "They weren't aware that the Missouri River was facing those challenges. Now, they open their eyes and ears to what is going on in their back yard."

For more information on the events or to volunteer, contact Robb at mrobb@cityofyankton.org or (605) 668-5211; Smith at dugan_smith@nps.gov or (605) 665-0209; or Lepisto at plepisto@iwl.org or (605) 224-1770.

GAS

From Page 1A

Speculation has been on regulators' minds as oil prices climbed from about \$80 a barrel late last year to more than \$112 on Thursday.

A regulator whose agency will participate said the task force isn't for public relations purposes alone. In the past when oil prices soared, prosecutors tried to make examples of gas station owners or middlemen profiting from high prices. This task force is looking at financial markets, and seeking much bigger targets.

"We are definitely looking at trading in the markets that isn't nickel-and-dime stuff. They're big

enough that we would want the Justice Department involved. We would want people potentially to go to jail," said the regulator, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak freely about ongoing investigations.

Commodities markets rely on speculation. It's excessive speculation that regulators are trying to curb.

Bart Chilton, a member of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, has argued that speculation is excessive. But he said that determining how much of the oil-price increase stems from speculators, rather than a "fear premium" rising from Middle East instability, isn't a simple calculation.

"It really is more nuanced than that," he said. "They're having an impact, and I think a fairly

large impact. It's adding several dollars to the cost of a fill-up."

Proving market manipulation isn't easy. For most of the past decade, the Justice Department — focused on prosecuting terrorists — showed little appetite for tackling oil speculation.

"Up until recently, 75 percent of our criminal referrals to Justice were rejected. We end up with decent outcomes, but nobody goes to jail because it's not criminal prosecution if we do it," Chilton said, referring to the CFTC.

He tried unsuccessfully last year to persuade Congress to give the commission power to bring criminal charges in such instances, instead of civil cases that result in fines but do little to deter big Wall Street firms.

Large-scale investment by big

institutional investors, such as pension funds, is also thought to be pushing up oil prices. They are buying contracts for future delivery of oil on the assumption that prices will keep going up. Futures markets are designed to hedge against price shifts, but these big investors treat their oil contracts like stocks.

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Pictured: (back) Melody Buchmann, Gary Dybsetter, Justin Wagner & Scott Larsen; (front) Amy Beran, April Potts & Amy Johnson.

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