

# Get Lost In Desserts With Tropical Flavors



Tapioca coconut cake has a light flavor and a sublime texture.

BY SHARON K. GHAG  
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Dessert isn't simply magical, it's transportive.

One bite brings bliss, and a bowlful is paradise found. So there's no need for an expensive getaway when paradise lies in desserts with tropical flavors.

Pineapple upside down cake is the inspiration for pineapple pound cake with cream cheese frosting. The cake stacks up tall, and has the tell-tale texture and flavor of pineapple but is a far cry from the common upside-down version to which we're all accustomed.

Instant is fine, but pudding from scratch is a whole other world. The flavor is rich, the texture dreamy. If we hadn't gobbled up the coconut pudding so quickly, we would've taken it to new heights by folding in a cup or more of whipped cream and putting it in a premade pie crust.

Flan from a box is an instant hit, but flan from scratch is ethereal. Caramelizing half the sugar takes time, but otherwise making this dessert is easier than the boxed version: A quick blend and everything goes into the oven. And who doesn't want an excuse in the middle of winter to turn on the oven? It's OK to make this without coconut — to pacify the people who don't like the texture. And, certainly, omitting the coconut lets the flavors of the milks shine through.

Finally, there's tapioca cake. The tapioca pearls are suspended in a cooked egg mixture in a "cake" that's flavored with lime and coconut. The taste and texture are subtle — a perfect foil for any sauce.

## COCONUT PUDDING

**Ingredients:**  
2 cups whole milk  
2 cups (6 ounces) unsweetened shredded coconut  
1/2 cup cream of coconut, such as Coco Lopez  
1/2 cup sugar  
2 tablespoons cornstarch  
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour  
6 large egg yolks  
**Instructions:**  
Pour the milk into a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and stir in coconut. Let steep 30 minutes. Strain the liquid into a 2-cup measuring cup, pressing on the solids to extract the liquid. Discard solids.

Add enough cream of coconut to total 2 cups of liquid. Pour into saucepan and bring to a simmer over low heat.

In a medium heat-proof bowl, whisk together the sugar, cornstarch and flour. Add the egg yolks and whisk until the mixture is thick and pale. Whisking constantly, slowly pour about 1/2 cup milk into the yolk mixture. Slowly add the remaining milk, whisking constantly until completely combined.

Pour the mixture into the saucepan and cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until the mixture is thick enough for streaks from the whisk to show, 2 to 3 minutes. Pour into heat-proof bowl. Press parchment paper on surface. Refrigerate until chilled.

This recipe is adapted from "The Foothills Cuisine of Blackberry Farm," by Sam Beall (Clarkson Potter, \$60). In the book, the pudding is turned into a coconut cream pie with a macadamia nut crust and a meringue topping with unsweetened shredded coconut.

## TAPIOCA COCONUT CAKE

**Ingredients:**  
1 to 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, for greasing pan  
1-2 tablespoons turbinado sugar  
**Pudding**  
1 cup small-pearl tapioca  
2 cups whole milk  
3/4 cup dark brown sugar  
2 cans (about 14 ounces each) unsweetened coconut milk  
Pinch of kosher salt  
Juice and zest of 1 lime  
3 large eggs  
3 large egg yolks  
**Papaya sauce:** 1 papaya, peeled, seeded and diced; juice and zest of 1 lime  
**Instructions:**

Cut a piece of parchment paper to fit the bottom of a 9-inch springform pan. Grease the bottom and the sides of the pan with the butter. Place the parchment paper in the pan and grease with butter. Add the sugar and tilt the pan to coat the sides evenly.

Make the pudding: Put the tapioca in a medium bowl and add cold water to cover it. Let the tapioca soak for 1 hour. Drain the tapioca in a large strainer, rinse well under tepid running water, and set aside in the strainer.

In a large saucepan, combine the milk, brown sugar, coconut milk and salt and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Add the tapioca, stir, lower the heat to medium-low and simmer, stirring, until the tapioca is translucent but still slightly raw at the center, 1 to 2 minutes. Pour the pudding into a medium sheet pan, add the lime juice and zest, and stir to combine. Leave to cool for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, then transfer to a large bowl.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl, combine the eggs and yolks and whisk until just blended. Pour the eggs over the tapioca, fold to combine, and pour into the prepared pan. Bake until the cake is golden brown in spots and still jiggly in the center, 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer to a rack to cool, then refrigerate in the pan for at least 8 hours or overnight.

In a medium bowl, combine the papaya and lime juice and zest. Remove the pan ring, place a serving plate on the cake, and invert. Remove the pan bottom, peel off the paper, cut the cake into wedges and serve with the papaya. After baking, the cake will seem unset, but will become firm when refrigerated.

This recipe is from "Simply Ming in Your Kitchen: 80 Recipes to Watch, Learn, Cook & Enjoy," by Ming Tsai and Arthur Boehm Ming (Kyle Books, \$29.95).

## PINEAPPLE POUND CAKE

**Serves about 20**  
**Ingredients:**  
Nonstick cooking spray with flour  
3 cups all-purpose flour  
1 3/4 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon regular salt  
3 sticks (1 1/2 cups) unsalted butter, at room temperature  
2 1/2 cups sugar  
5 large eggs, at room temperature  
3 large egg yolks, at room temperature  
1 cup crushed pineapple, drained  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla  
2 teaspoons pineapple rum  
1/4 cup whole milk  
**Cream cheese frosting:** 8-ounce package cream cheese, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, 1 stick (8 tablespoons) butter, 1 pound powdered sugar, yellow food

coloring

**Instructions:**  
Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two 9-inch round baking pans with parchment paper and coat lightly with nonstick cooking spray.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter until light and fluffy and then add the sugar on low speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the eggs and egg yolks, one at a time, beating to blend and scraping the bowl as necessary. Add the crushed pineapple, vanilla and rum and mix on medium speed until blended.

Reduce the speed to low and alternately add the flour mixture and the milk to the butter mixture, beginning and ending with the flour and mixing until well incorporated.

Divide the batter between the prepared pans and bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before turning out onto a wire rack.

**Frosting:** In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese and vanilla on high speed until light and creamy, about 3 minutes. Reduce mixer speed to medium. Add the butter, scraping the bowl as necessary. Reduce speed to low and gradually add the powdered sugar, beating until blended. Increase mixer speed to high and beat until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Mix in a drop or two of yellow food coloring, if desired.

This recipe is from "The Brown Betty Cookbook: Modern Vintage Desserts and Stories From Philadelphia's Best Bakery," by Linda Hinton Brown and Norrinda Brown Hayat (Wiley, \$22.99).

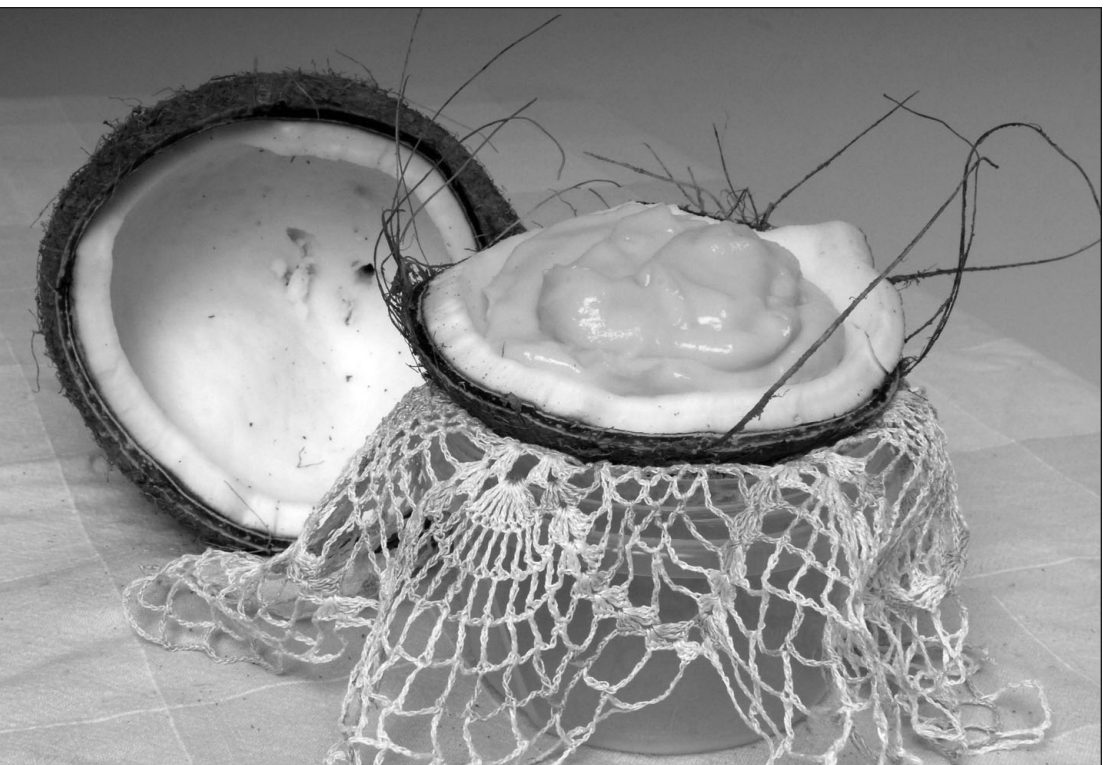
## CARAMEL FLAN CON COCO

**Ingredients:**  
1 cup sugar, divided use  
1 (12-ounce) can evaporated milk  
1 (13.5-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk  
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk  
3 egg yolks, plus 3 large eggs  
1/2 tablespoon pure vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 cup sweetened shredded coconut

**Instructions:**  
Preheat the oven to 275 degrees. Make sure the canned milks are open as you'll need to add them quickly when the caramel is done.

To make the caramel, combine 1/2 cup sugar and a little water (just enough to form a wet sand) in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Melt the sugar, stirring often, until there are no more lumps. (If any sugar touches the sides of the pan, be sure to wash all the crystals down into the sugar mixture with clean water and a pastry brush before the mixture comes to a full boil.)

Swirl the sugar mixture con-



Unsweetened coconut is steeped in milk to give coconut pudding a rich coconut flavor.



Caramelizing half of the sugar, then adding a rich combination of milks creates a flavor reminiscent of dulce de leche in caramel flan con coco.

stantly while holding the pan just above the flame, until the caramel reaches a deep amber color. Turn off the heat.

Carefully and quickly stir the milks in the order listed: evaporated, unsweetened coconut, sweetened condensed; the mixture will bubble and hiss. Transfer to a blender, then add the eggs, egg yolks, remaining sugar, vanilla and salt and blend until smooth. Set aside at room temperature for 30 minutes or more, allowing the custard to rest. Meanwhile, prepare the baking dishes: Scatter the shredded coconut in the bottom of each baking dish. Set the baking dishes in a large baking pan and pour in hot water to reach halfway up the sides of the dishes.

Divide the custard evenly among the baking dishes. Cover with aluminum foil and bake until set, 30 to 40 minutes for the smaller ones or 45 minutes to 1 hour for one large flan. To test for doneness, gently shake the baking pan: If the flans jiggle like a just-set Jell-O, take them out of the oven or they will become overdone. If the liquid is still sloshing around a bit, give them more time.

Once the flans are done, remove them from the water bath and let come to room temperature. Cover and refrigerate overnight before serving.

Note: Caramelizing half of the sugar, then adding the rich combination of milks creates a flavor reminiscent of dulce de leche.

This recipe is from "My Key West Kitchen: Recipes and Stories," by Norman Van Aken, Justin Van Aken and Charlie Trotter (Kyle Books, \$29.95).



THE MODESTO BEE 2013  
300 dpi Laurie McAdam illustration of a woman wearing sunglasses holding a boat drink while sitting on a half of pineapple with whip cream on top; the right dessert can transport you to a tropical paradise.

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