



A Midsummer Day's Dream

THIS IS CELEBRATION TIME. Graduation, weddings, Mother's and Father's Days. To me, spring is the most exciting time. Seemingly overnight, bare branches of forsythia and lilac produce swelling buds. Crocus and tulips magically force their tender stems through dry, parched dirt. Following even a short rainfall, lawns go from brown to verdant green. I read, "Spring is the season where the earth is liberated from winter's grasp." Glorious.

When I was a kid, my friends and I would ride our bikes to the park almost every day. School was out, and we had long days to "play." I don't remember making plans; we just knew to show up with a bag lunch. Sometimes one of us would have a quarter from our allowance. We could buy an ice cream bar which we all shared.

We would lay on the grass looking up at the billowy, white clouds in the impossibly blue sky.

We saw pictures in these clouds. My friend Bobby saw a whale with a lion on its back. "Oh yeah," said my friends when she pointed this out. I said "Oh, yeah" too, although I never did see that image. I didn't want to be left out.


Festive times bring family and friends together. Sometimes it's for a barbecue. Other times a sit-down dinner. Celebrations can have us eating hot dogs or prime rib. It's being together, sharing good times that counts. Just as pumpkin pie conjures memories of Thanksgiving and fall, this coconut cream pie with its swirls of whipped cream brings me back to the glory of spring and those thick, fluffy clouds. There's coconut in the luscious filling, more in the topping. This is a coconut dream. I swirl the whipped cream into fantastic billowy shapes. Perhaps I'll finally see that whale sporting a lion on its back. That would truly be a dream for a midsummer's day. 



PHOTO: GIRMANTAS URBONAS

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Coconut Cream Pie

INGREDIENTS:

Crust:

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
1 stick unsalted butter, chilled
¼ cup ice water

Filling:

3 tablespoons flour
Pinch kosher salt
½ cup sugar
Seeds from 1 vanilla bean, or 1
teaspoon vanilla bean paste

2 eggs

1 cup whole milk
1 cup unsweetened
coconut milk
2 cups sweetened
shredded coconut
4 tablespoons unsalted
butter, cut into pieces

Whipped Cream Topping:

2 cups chilled whipping
cream
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Make the crust: Place the flour, sugar, and salt in the bowl of a food processor and pulse once to mix. Add the butter, cut into pieces, and pulse until mixture resembles coarse meal. With the machine running, pour the ice water through the tube, and process just until the dough begins to clump together. Remove the dough from the processor and form into a disc. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour before rolling out.
2. On a floured surface, roll the dough into a 12-inch circle. Place in a 9-inch pie dish, being careful not to stretch the dough. Trim the overhang to 1 inch, then flute the edge with your fingers. Chill dough for at least 30 minutes before baking.
3. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Remove dough from refrigerator, prick all over with the tines of a fork, and line with foil. Fill with pie weights, dried beans, or rice. Bake in the center of the oven for 15 minutes. Carefully remove the foil and weights and return the crust to the oven for 5 minutes until golden. Remove from oven and cool to room temperature.
4. Meanwhile, make the filling: In a medium saucepan, whisk together the flour, salt, sugar, and seeds from the vanilla bean, if using. Lightly beat the eggs, then whisk into the flour mixture. Add the milk and coconut milk and whisk to combine. Fold in the shredded coconut. Place over moderate heat and bring to a simmer, stirring so that the coconut does not stick to the bottom of the pan. Cook for about 5 minutes until the custard thickens to pudding consistency. Remove from heat and stir in the pieces of butter and the vanilla bean paste if a vanilla bean wasn't used. Remove from heat, transfer to a bowl, and place a piece of plastic wrap directly on the filling. Refrigerate for several hours until completely cool.
5. Make the whipped cream topping: In a chilled bowl with chilled beaters, beat the cream with the sugar and vanilla until it thickens and triples in volume. Fill your cooled crust with the pastry cream, smoothing the top. Then scoop on the whipped cream, swirling it decoratively. (Cut into wedges and graciously accept the thundering applause.)



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