

# NATURAL HEALTH.

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21 IDEAS TO ...

## SIMPLIFY YOUR HOLIDAY

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- CREATE NEW TRADITIONS
- STAY FIT EFFORTLESSLY

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*plus:*  
**Can Soup  
Cure a Cold?**

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Insomnia  
Remedies**

**Acupressure  
For Puffy Eyes**

**Herbs that  
Beat Bad Breath**

**Sweet-Tooth Alert!  
6 Sugar-Free  
Holiday Desserts**





# NATURAL HEALTH.

December/January 2008 volume 38, issue 1

## features

### HEALTH

#### 64 **Simply Celebrate**

Follow our plan for a simpler celebration this year. You'll eat less, spend less, and enjoy the season more.

MEAGAN FRANCIS

### FOOD

#### 70 **Just Desserts**

Love sweets but hate all that sugar? Indulge in some treats made with all-natural sweeteners.

SUZANN PILEGGI

### FITNESS

#### 76 **Merry Fitness**

We asked real women how they stay active during the holidays. Learn their secrets.

SARAH BOWEN SHEA

### LIVING

#### 82 **Joyful Giving**

Delight loved ones and honor the plan with our 44 distinguished presents.

CHRISTINE RICHMOND & DANIEL MAZORI

## cover stories

#### 64 21 Ideas to Simplify Your Holiday

#### 91 5 Best Herbs for All-Day Energy

#### 82 The Ultimate All-Natural Gift Guide

#### 39 Can Soup Cure a Cold?

#### 18 3 Drug-Free Insomnia Remedies

#### 22 Acupressure for Puffy Eyes

#### 26 Herbs that Beat Bad Breath

#### 70 Sweet-Tooth Alert! 6 Sugar-Free Holiday Desserts

70



KUGELHOPF THIS TRADITIONAL  
HOLIDAY TREAT FROM ALSACE, FRANCE,  
IS SWEETENED WITH BIRCH SUGAR.  
(recipe, page 104)



*Can't resist your sugar craving?  
Indulge in holiday treats made  
with all-natural sweeteners.*

# Desserts

## **N**A CHRISTMAS CAROL, Charles

Dickens's 1843 holiday classic, Mrs.

Cratchit's plum pudding is the epitome of a holiday dessert—a highly anticipated once-a-year treat prepared with love and attention by a dotting parent. For centuries, sweet treats were reserved for only the most special of occasions because they relied on a rare and expensive ingredient: sugar. It wasn't until modern technology facilitated the production of refined sugars (pure sucrose extracted from sugar cane or sugar beets and most often taking the form of sugar crystals) and corn syrup (pure fructose and glucose extracted from corn) that desserts became the ubiquitous everyday treats they are today.

Our annual sugar consumption has ballooned from an average of 10 pounds per person in the early 19th century to more than 70 belly-busting pounds today. Researchers suggest our bodies need only about a teaspoon of sugar daily for basic metabolic functions—and that teaspoon can be found easily in fruits and whole grains. In reality, most of us take in more than 20 teaspoons a day, in the form of snacks, soft drinks, and "hidden" sugars like corn syrup in breads and salad dressings. These empty calories—offering no nutrients other than carbohydrates—spike blood sugar, leech minerals from the body, and weaken

By SUZANN PILEGGI

Photography by DASHA WRIGHT





**STRUFFOLI** THESE ITALIAN CONFECTIONS ARE DIPPED IN ORGANIC RAW HONEY. (recipe, page 104)

the immune system. Research also suggests ingesting simple sugars such as sucrose, fructose, and glucose can decrease the body's sensitivity to insulin and boost the production of triglycerides and bad cholesterol, increasing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

So how do you satisfy a holiday sweet tooth without sabotaging your health? Say hello to natural sweeteners: honey, maple syrup, molasses, and other potent ingredients derived from fruits, flowers, and vegetables. Experiment with these all-natural, unrefined alternatives—see “Naturally Sweet,” page 74, for nine suggestions—and you’ll be reconnected to a time when sweetness came from the field, not the factory. Many of these sweeteners, such as birch sugar and agave nectar, contain fewer calories per serving than refined white sugar and score much lower on the glycemic index,



**BAKELESS APPLE TART** THIS ALTERNATIVE TO CLASSIC APPLE PIE IS DUSTED WITH CINNAMON. (recipe, page 104)

FOOD STYLIST: MICHAEL PEDERSON; PROP STYLIST: KAREN QUATSOE



**BAKLAVA** THIS ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN SWEET IS TOPPED WITH RICE SYRUP & RAW HONEY. (recipe, page 104)



## NATURALLY SWEET

The best alternative sugars are satisfying and loaded with nutrients.

**BARLEY MALT** Made from fermented grains whose starches have turned to sugars, barley malt tastes slightly like malted milk balls.

**RAW HONEY** Loaded with natural enzymes, vitamins, and minerals, honey comes in a variety of colors, ranging from intensely flavorful dark brown to lighter (and milder) shades of gold. Always go organic, and because raw honey contains live spores, never use it to sweeten the food of an infant or toddler without consulting a doctor first.

**BROWN RICE SYRUP** The rich butter-scotch taste of this syrup, derived from cooked brown rice, mixes well with oatmeal and other hot whole grain cereals.

**STEVIA** From a South American herb, *Stevia rebaudiana*, stevia is much sweeter than sugar and has a slightly bitter licorice taste. Available in powder and liquid forms, it's good for diabetics because of its mild effect on blood sugar levels.

**MOLASSES** A potent and highly nutritious sweetener, molasses contains all the beneficial stuff that's stripped out of sugar cane during the refining process, including iron, manganese, zinc, copper, and chromium.

**DATE SUGAR** This ancient sweetener made from finely ground dates offers all the fruit's vitamins and minerals, plus the calming amino acid tryptophan.

**BIRCH SUGAR** With 40 percent fewer calories than white sugar and a low score on the glycemic index (which ranks a carbohydrate's effect on blood sugar and insulin), this sweetener, also known as xylitol, occurs naturally in tree fiber, corn, and some fruits.

**MAPLE SYRUP** Look for organic, 100 percent pure maple syrup, which contains only the sap of maple trees—and no added corn syrup.

**AGAVE NECTAR** Sweeter than refined sugar and with a lower rating on the glycemic index, the juice of the agave cactus is a good choice for diabetics or anyone seeking to avoid a sugar rush.



**CINNAMON-RAISIN RUGELACH** POPULAR AT HANUKKAH, THIS JEWISH DESSERT HAS A FILLING SWEETENED WITH AGAVE NECTAR. (recipe, page 106)



**COCONUT-CRUSTED SWEET POTATO PIE** THIS NATURALLY SWEET DESSERT IS ENHANCED WITH ORGANIC MAPLE SYRUP. (recipe, page 106)

which ranks carbohydrates according to their effects on blood sugar and insulin. Others, like honey and date sugar, are complete foods that offer vitamins and minerals.

These six holiday desserts, all made with natural sweeteners, are delicious ways to celebrate the season without going into sugar shock. Of course, while natural sweeteners are free of refined sugar and corn syrup, they are still forms of sugar, so moderation is key: Each dish is intended to serve about eight people, so if you find yourself grabbing more than your share, it might be time to move away from the dessert table.

(continued on page 104)



**LEARN MORE:** For a sugar-free Chocolate Chip Oatmeal Cookies recipe and tips on curbing sugar cravings, go to [naturalhealthmag.com/holidaydesserts](http://naturalhealthmag.com/holidaydesserts).



## Kugelhoppf

Serves 8

According to legend, this cake recipe and its traditional swirl-shaped pan were given to an Alsatian potter by the Three Kings. Here, we recommend a more readily accessible Bundt pan and, in place of confectioners' sugar, natural birch sugar.

- 6 ounces butter
- 1/2 cup birch sugar, plus more for dusting
- 4 eggs (yolks and whites separated)
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 3/4 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup blanched almond chips
- 13 ounces sifted spelt flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In an electric mixer, combine butter, birch sugar, egg yolks, and lemon zest until smooth. Mix in raisins and almonds and set aside.

2. In a small bowl, beat egg whites until frothy, then set aside.

3. In a large bowl, sift flour and baking powder together. Beat egg whites until stiff peaks begin to form, then fold them into the flour. Fold flour mix into the butter-and-sugar mix.

4. Fill a greased 8-inch Bundt pan with the batter and bake 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into cake comes out clean. Cool for 5 minutes; flip onto serving plate; dust with additional birch sugar.

**Per serving:** 483 calories, 23 g fat (12 g saturated), 52 g carbohydrates, 11 g protein, 7 g fiber, 299 mg sodium (13% Daily Value).

## Struffoli

Serves 8

Struffoli, honey-drenched Italian confections traditionally prepared with white flour and deep-fried, work equally well when made with spelt flour and baked in the oven.

- 13 ounces sifted spelt flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons butter
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 3 eggs
- 1 1/2 tablespoons anisette
- 2 tablespoons water
- 5 ounces organic raw honey
- Zest of 1 orange

1. In a large bowl, combine flour, butter, salt, eggs, and 1/2 tablespoon anisette and knead into a ball of dough; cover bowl

with a towel and refrigerate for 24 hours.

2. Remove dough from refrigerator and let stand for a half hour.

3. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut dough ball into smaller chunks and roll them into thin slices about 10 inches long. Cut long slices into 1/2-inch pieces.

4. On a thin baking sheet, bake 1/2-inch struffoli pieces in the oven for 10 minutes, or until dough turns golden. Remove from oven and let cool.

5. While struffoli are cooling, make the honey coating: In a large saucepan, heat 1 tablespoon anisette, water, and honey until just warm, allowing alcohol to evaporate. Add orange zest and stir. Using tongs or a tablespoon, carefully dip struffoli in honey mixture and transfer them to a serving plate.

**Per serving:** 283 calories, 5 g fat (1.3 g saturated), 49 g carbohydrates, 9 g protein, 6 g fiber, 332 mg sodium (14% Daily Value).

## Bakeless Apple Tart

Serves 8

The freshness and flavor of its uncooked ingredients are what make this alternative to traditional apple pie so delicious. Organic fruit and nuts—and the finest cinnamon available—are recommended.

- 2 cups walnuts, plus more for garnish
- 1 1/2 cups dates, pitted
- 3 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and sliced into 1/4-inch wedges
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, plus more for garnish
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 4 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

1. In a food processor, puree 2 cups walnuts into a fine powder and transfer to a large bowl; then finely chop dates and transfer to the same bowl. Knead walnut powder and chopped dates into a dough, press dough into a 9-inch pie plate, and refrigerate overnight.

2. In a large bowl, mix apple wedges, raisins, cinnamon, nutmeg, and lemon juice and refrigerate overnight.

3. The following day, spoon apple filling into pie crust, arranging six apple wedges decoratively on top, and garnish with additional cinnamon and chopped walnuts.

**Per serving:** 342 calories, 17 g fat (1.5 g saturated), 51 g carbohydrates, 5 g protein, 5.6 g fiber, 3 mg sodium (<1% Daily Value).

## Baklava

Serves 8

Dating back to at least the ancient Assyrians, baklava is popular throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East. Its signature phyllo dough (from the Greek word for "leaf") is tricky to make from scratch. For this recipe, purchase it premade.

- 2 cups ground walnuts
- 1/4 cup ground almonds
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 cup date sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 pound phyllo pastry sheets
- 4 ounces unsalted butter, melted
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 cup brown rice syrup
- 1/2 cup organic raw honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, combine walnuts, almonds, ground cloves, date sugar, cinnamon, and lemon zest.

2. In a buttered 9 x 12 baking dish, layer 10 sheets of phyllo dough, lightly buttering every other sheet. Spread 1/3 of nut filling over the phyllo. Layer 5 more phyllo sheets, buttering alternating sheets, then spread another 1/3 of the filling. Layer 5 more phyllo sheets, buttering alternative sheets, and spread the remainder of the filling. Cover with 5 more phyllo sheets, buttering alternating sheets. With a knife, cut diagonally to form diamond-shaped pieces. Drizzle any remaining melted butter over the top and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, until golden-brown.

3. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, combine water, brown rice syrup, honey, vanilla, whole cloves, and lemon juice, and cook over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes, until syrupy. Remove cloves. When baklava is done cooking, pour syrup over the top and allow to cool before serving.

**Per serving:** 647 calories, 30 g fat (9 g saturated), 91 g carbohydrates, 8 g protein, 3 g fiber, 345 mg sodium (15% Daily Value).

(Continued on page 106)



## just desserts

(Continued from page 104)

### Cinnamon-Raisin Rugelach

Serves 8

The original rugelach recipe came from Jewish communities in Europe. The miniature crescent-shaped pastries, stuffed with either raisins or chocolate, are especially popular at Hanukkah. Here, agave nectar is substituted for white sugar.

- 8 ounces cream cheese at room temperature
  - 1 cup unsalted butter at room temperature
  - 2 cups spelt or whole wheat flour
  - 1/2 cup agave nectar
  - 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
  - 3/4 cup raisins
1. In a food processor, blend cream cheese and butter until combined, about 3 minutes. Add flour and blend until dough is soft, about 2 minutes.
  2. On a floured surface, roll the dough into 4 balls, cover in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 3 hours.
  3. Preheat oven to 350°F. Remove dough from refrigerator and remove plastic wrap.

Roll dough balls into circles about 1/8 inch thick and 8 inches wide. Brush each circle generously with agave nectar, then sprinkle each with about 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon and about 1 1/2 tablespoons raisins.

4. With a knife or pizza cutter, cut circles into 14 wedges. Roll wedges up from wide end to narrow.

5. On a thin baking sheet, bake rugelach about 20 minutes, until lightly toasted.

**Per serving:** 527 calories, 34 g fat (21 g saturated), 51 g carbohydrates, 7 g protein, 5 g fiber, 90 mg sodium (4% Daily Value).

### Coconut-Crusted Sweet Potato Pie

Serves 8

Maple syrup adds a subtle note to naturally sweet coconut and sweet potato; crystallized ginger can be a sophisticated (and delicious) garnish.

- 2 1/2 cups unsweetened coconut, flaked
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 2 cups boiled and mashed sweet potatoes

2 eggs

- 1/2 cup tofu, light firm
- 2/3 cup organic maple syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom

Crystallized ginger (optional garnish)

1. Preheat oven to 300°F. Mix coconut and butter in a bowl. Press the mixture into a 9-inch pie plate. Bake for 15 minutes, or until golden. Remove crust from the oven and increase heat to 350°F.

2. In a food processor, combine mashed sweet potatoes, eggs, tofu, maple syrup, and spices. Puree until smooth. Pour mixture into the coconut crust and bake until the top is dry, about 30 minutes. Check to see if it's ready by inserting a knife into center of pie. If it doesn't come out clean, bake for another 10 to 15 minutes. Cool on a rack; garnish with crystallized ginger when cool, if desired.

**Per serving:** 410 calories, 28 g fat (28 g saturated), 38 g carbohydrates, 5.3 g protein, 6 g fiber, 65 mg sodium (3% Daily Value).

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