

THE KITCHEN FILES: READING LOCAL

COOKBOOK REVIEWS BY BARBARA REVSINE

CHOCOLATE & VANILLA

By Gale Gand

Clarkson Potter/Publishers, \$22.50

Pastry diva Gale Gand (Tru, Cenitare, Food Network), who grew up in north suburban Deerfield, focuses on everyone's favorite flavors in her newest book "*chocolate & vanilla*." Dozens of user-friendly recipes requiring varying degrees of expertise are included, making this truly a "something-for-everyone" book.



Half of "*chocolate & vanilla*" is devoted

to vanilla recipes, the other half to chocolate. To move from one section to the other, you have to turn the book over, a clever bit of mechanics that avoids even the slightest hint of favoritism.

Each of the halves begins with a brief history, a discussion of the cultivation and manufacturing processes, and an overview of the range of products available in the marketplace. The baking tips given at the beginning of the two segments are especially helpful. When Gand talks about melting chocolate, for example, she writes, "... making sure no water or condensation gets into the melting chocolate because water could cause it to stiffen or 'seize.' If that happens the chocolate almost never recovers."

Instructions for storage and suggestions for preparing dishes (or parts of dishes) in advance are included with each recipe, along with a list of the required equipment. The first is labeled "do-aheads," the second "you'll need," and both are clearly designated. Also a plus are the anecdotes concerning a recipe's origins and the reasons for its inclusion. Gand says the golden vanilla layer cake, for instance, "... is the one Gio (her son) and I make for Father's Day to satisfy all the father and grandfather figures in his life." Make the cake (recipe follows), and you'll have no trouble understanding the reasons for its popularity.

The following recipe is adapted from *chocolate & vanilla*.

LILY'S MARBLE CAKE

- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened

2 cups sugar

½ teaspoon salt

4 large eggs

¼ cup cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-processed

1 6-oz. can shredded, sweetened coconut (three-quarters of a cup)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter and flour a ten-inch tube pan. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour and baking powder. In a measuring cup, combine the milk and vanilla. Set aside.

In a mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter until light and fluffy, three to five minutes. Add the sugar and salt and continue to mix well for about three more minutes. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well to combine after each addition. Alternately add the milk mixture and the flour mixture in three additions. Continue mixing for five minutes (beating a long time is important here).

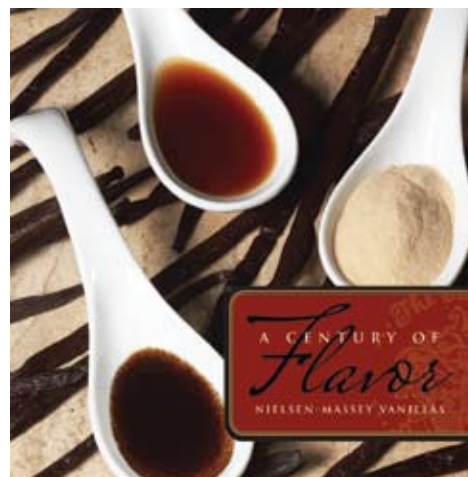
Stir one third of the batter into the cocoa powder in a medium bowl. Stir the coconut into the remaining golden batter. Pour the golden batter into the prepared pan, then drop large dollops of the chocolate batter into it. Cut through the batter once or twice with a table knife to make a chocolate marble pattern. Do not stir.

Bake for one hour fifteen minutes or until a skewer or toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let cool in the pan. Invert onto a platter (for the best taste, cover with plastic wrap and let sit overnight). Slice into wedges for serving. Makes one ten-inch tube cake, or twelve servings.

VANILLA

A Century of Flavor: Nielsen-Massey Vanillas

By Favorite Recipes Press, (\$27.95)



Chocolate grabs the headlines, but it actually takes a backseat to vanilla in both popularity and versatility. Some of the world's best vanilla is produced by Nielsen-Massey Vanillas Inc., a Waukegan based, family owned company founded in 1907. To celebrate its 100th birthday, the company recently published a

consumer oriented cookbook filled with product information and easy-to-use recipes for an array of sweet and savory dishes.

For anyone with an interest in food, vanilla's remarkable history and the challenges associated with its growth and pollination make interesting reading. While *A Century of Flavor* offers only a few tidbits, the company's earlier, pamphlet, *The Story of Vanilla* by Chat Nielsen Jr., goes into considerable detail. So does Gale Gand's new book *chocolate & vanilla*, also reviewed in this column.

In brief, vanilla, like chocolate, is native to Mexico, and the Aztecs often used it to flavor their chocolate beverages. Europeans quickly developed a fondness for vanilla, and in an effort to increase the supply, vines were planted in various parts of the world. While the transplants flourished, they didn't produce beans. It wasn't until 1836 that a botanist discovered the source of the problem. The tiny *Melipona* bee, a species found only in Mexico, was the primary means of pollination. Five years later, the method of hand pollination still in use today was developed.

Despite the breakthrough and the resulting increases in supply, vanilla remains an expensive flavoring. The flowers open for less than a day, so the window for pollination is extremely limited. Adding to the difficulty, vanilla flowers bloom at different times, even when they're on the same plant.

It takes eight to nine months for vanilla beans to mature. The curing process—exposure to the sun during the day, followed by nights wrapped in blankets and stored in a sweat box—is also lengthy and labor intensive. When fully cured, the beans are shipped to manufacturers such as Nielsen-Massey. In contrast to the mix of heat and/or pressure widely used to extract the flavoring from the beans, Nielsen-Massey uses a time-consuming cold process method that preserves all of the bean's flavor.

The "bourbon" in Nielsen-Massey's Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla is actually a geographical reference. Madagascar, an island off the east coast of Africa, is part of the Bourbon Islands chain. Approximately 60 percent of the world's vanilla is grown on the island, with the rest of the industry split between various locations, including Tahiti and Mexico. Each of the vanillas has a unique flavor profile, and Nielsen-Massey's product line includes all three, along with orange, lemon, almond, chocolate and coffee extracts, as well as rose water and orange blossom water. All of the company's products are kosher and gluten-free. There is also an organic Madagascar Bourbon line.

The following recipes are adapted from *A Century of Flavor*.

CREAMY VANILLA SWEET POTATOES

- 4 medium sweet potatoes
- Canola oil
- 2 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- ¼ cup real maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon Nielsen-Massey Tahitian Pure Vanilla Extract
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 5 strips bacon, crisp-cooked and crumbled

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Wash the sweet potatoes and lightly coat the skins with canola oil. Pierce each potato several times with a fork. Place the potatoes on a foil-lined baking sheet. Bake for 1 hour or until fork tender.



Cut the hot potatoes into halves. Scoop the potato pulp into a mixing bowl, discarding the skins. Beat at medium speed for 1 minute using an electric mixer. Add the cream cheese, butter, syrup, vanilla extract, salt and pepper. Whip until creamy.

Spoon the whipped potatoes into 6 ramekins coated with non-stick cooking spray and top with the bacon. Place the ramekins on a baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 375-degree oven for 5 to 8 minutes or until heated through. Alternatively, they may be reheated in a microwave for 2 to 3 minutes. Serves 6.

CHERRY VANILLA CHICKEN A LA NIELSEN

Adapted from *A Century of Flavor*.

- ¾ cup dried cherries, coarsely chopped
- ⅓ Cup Nielsen-Massey Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract
- 4 boneless skinless chicken breasts
- 2 tablespoons Nielsen-Massey Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Bean Paste
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
- 1 cup dry white wine

Soak the cherries in the vanilla extract in a bowl for 10 minutes. Rinse and pat dry the chicken. Cut a pocket in the thickest part of each chicken breast. Spoon ⅓ tablespoon of the vanilla paste into each pocket and stuff with the marinated cherries, reserving some for the sauce. Close each pocket securely with two wooden picks.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in an ovenproof skillet. Sauté the chicken in the hot oil over medium-high heat until golden brown on each side. Sprinkle with the rosemary. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or to 165 degrees on a meat thermometer.



Remove the chicken from the skillet and place one on each of four dinner plates. Remove the wooden picks. Place the skillet over medium-high heat. Pour the wine into the skillet, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon, to deglaze the pan. Add the reserved cherries and vanilla extract. Cook until the liquid is reduced. Spoon approximately two tablespoons of the cherries and sauce over each breast. Serves 4

GOLDEN SQUASH BISQUE

Adapted from *A Century of Flavor*.

2 acorn squash, peeled and quartered (About 2 cups)

3 tablespoons water

3 tablespoons butter

¼ cup finely diced onion

1 tablespoon flour

1 ½ cups (or more) organic chicken stock

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon white pepper

1 bay leaf

2 whole fresh sage leaves

1 cup heavy whipping cream, warmed

½ teaspoon Nielsen-Massey Pure Orange Extract

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place the squash in a covered baking dish with the water. Bake for 30 minutes or until fork tender.

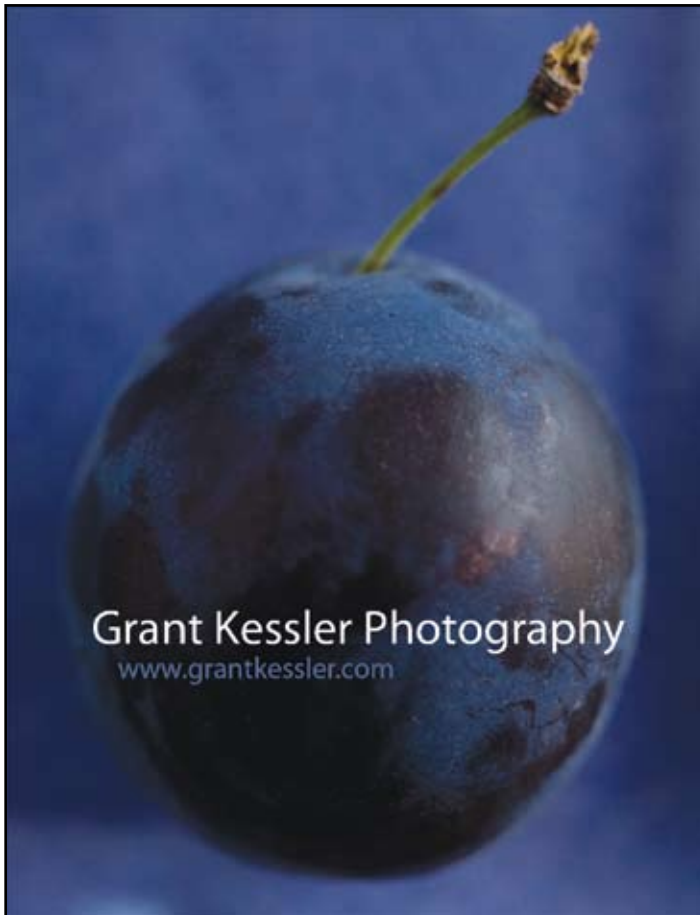
Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the onion and sauté until golden brown. Whisk in the flour until blended. Add 1 ½ cups chicken stock gradually, whisking constantly. Add the squash, salt and white pepper. Mash with a potato masher. Add the bay leaf and sage leaves. Simmer for 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

Remove the bay leaf and sage leaves. Spoon the squash mixture into a blender. Add the warm cream a little at a time, puréeing after each addition. Add the orange extract. Pour into the saucepan and re-heat thoroughly. If the bisque is too thick, you may change the consistency by adding additional stock ¼ cup at a time. Serves 4 to 6.

Wine Pairing – Golden Squash Bisque:

2006 Hickory Creek Dry Riesling
Lake Michigan Shore, Michigan

Hickory Creek Winery
www.hickorycreekwinery.com



When Barbara Revsine isn't traveling the world in search of the most interesting cuisine, she can likely be found with her nose in a cookbook, planning her next recipe. Check out her regular cookbook review column at www.ediblechicago.com