

# Hogtown HomeGrown

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**Inside this issue:**

Strawberry Shortcake	1
Farmer's Market Update	2
It's Time for Strawberries	2
Strawberry Milkshakes	2
Strawberry Smoothies	2
Chocolate Truffle Cheesecake	3
Chocolate Chocolate Chip Cookies	3
Katherine Hepburn's Brownies	3
Vegan Chili with Cocoa	4

## Chocolate + Strawberries = Romance

Valentine's Day is fast approaching—New Year's resolutions are fading from view—What does this mean for a "foodie"? An excuse to eat chocolate of course! Forget the Whitman's Sampler this year, how about Chocolate Truffle Cheesecake or Chocolate Chocolate Chip Cookies? Not into sweets? Put some spice in your life with Vegan Chili with Cocoa—that ought to heat things up! But let us not consider chocolate alone...

Strawberries are my real romance food, ever since the birth of our youngest son. For the last six weeks of my pregnancy, he had occupied any space I had for food, so by the time he was born, I was hungry, and not for hospital jello! My husband Jeff went out on a late night run to Albertsons and brought back a double paper bag full of snacks. Now keep in mind that it was very early January, yet nestled on top of the groceries was a plastic produce bag filled with over two pounds of the most gorgeous strawberries I had ever seen. I truly only intended to eat a few before taking a well-earned nap, so when a nurse came in to check my vitals, I let her have one. Andrew had settled into a deep sleep in his little bassinette and Jeff had fallen asleep on the pull-out bed—I was alone with the berries! That was it folks—I finished every last one before anyone woke up. Any other strawberries will pale in my memory—they were sweet, ripe, juicy and perfect! I never did ask how much they cost, because that bag of strawberries was one of the most romantic gifts I have ever received!

Now how do you combine a love of chocolate and a romance with strawberries? Drop by Thornebrook Chocolates and get Chocolate Covered Strawberries—milk or dark! Oh, and while you're there, get your valentine a little something too!

## Strawberry Shortcake

### INGREDIENTS

2 quarts strawberries, sliced  
1/4 cup sugar  
3 cups whole wheat flour  
1 tablespoon fresh baking powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
2 tablespoons sugar  
6 Tablespoons unsalted butter  
1 cup buttermilk (possibly a little more)  
8 ounces organic heavy cream, whipped

Stir the sugar into the strawberries, cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Mix dry ingredients, cut in butter until crumbly, add enough buttermilk to make a soft dough. Roll into large circles, 1" thick, or cut into small rounds. Bake in preheated 375 oven—15 minutes for small, up to 30 minutes for large. Split hot shortcakes, layer with strawberries and whipped cream. Eat immediately. Makes a great dinner!

# It's Local, It's Fresh, It's Strawberries

## Tricks and Tips

Have you ever fanned a strawberry as a garnish? Just make several vertical slices partway through the strawberry, leaving the stem end intact.

You then grasp the stem end and gently fan the strawberry out to reveal all that juicy, sweet goodness!

Red, ripe, sweet, juicy—and the season has just begun! Locally grown strawberries are starting to show up at the Farmer's Market, but the very first ones every year seem to come from Plant City, in the middle of Florida. Strawberries don't ripen after they are picked, so look for fully red berries, with little or no white cap. Turn the package over and check for squished or fuzzy berries. Wait to wash berries or remove the caps until just before using. If you are putting sugar on strawberries to make them juicy, try to let them sit covered in the refrigerator for at least 2-3 hours before serving. If we are having Strawberry Shortcake for dinner (we do at least once a year) I cut up and sugar the berries in the morning and let them "stew" in their own juices all day. Want to freeze some berries for smoothies? My favorite method is to pull off the leaves, wash the strawberries in a colander, dry well, let them sit on paper towels for a few minutes to drain completely, then pop them into freezer Ziplocs and into the freezer. They become literally as hard as rocks, but they act like ice in a smoothie. If you put frozen strawberries through a juicing machine, they make delicious "ice cream" that's actually good for you!

## What's fresh right now at the Farmer's Market?

Strawberries  
Broccoli, cauliflower and kohlrabi  
Spinach  
Oranges, tangerines, grapefruit, kumquats, lemons  
Greens—turnips, rutabagas, collards, kale  
Green cabbage and Chinese cabbage  
Red globe radish and Daikon Radish  
Red and White Scallions  
Tomatoes—grape, beefsteak, vine bunches, cherry  
Small hydroponic cucumbers  
Peppers—sweet bell and other mild varieties  
Sweet Potatoes  
Carrots—with green tops  
Strawberry plants and hanging baskets, pansies, petunias, paper whites, black-eyed susans, orchids  
Native Plants—indigo and columbine, with others

## Strawberry Milkshakes

2 cups fresh strawberries  
1 Tablespoon sugar  
1/2 cup milk or soy milk  
1 cup vanilla ice cream or soy substitute

In a blender, puree strawberries, sugar and milk. Add ice cream and blend to your desired smoothness. Serve in a tall glass with a dollop of whipped cream and a strawberry on top. Don't forget the straw!

## Strawberry Smoothies

2 cups frozen strawberries  
Juice (we prefer apple)  
1 banana (optional—it makes it creamier)

Place strawberries in a blender, cover with juice and blend. If you want banana, add it now, blend until smooth and serve. Try using frozen banana!

Strawberries in January? I bought the most wonderful strawberries on January 20th this year at the 441 Farmer's Market. When asked, the farmer I bought them from said "This variety is 'Champion.' I've grown them for 15 years. I won't change!" They were exceptional!

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# Chocolate Truffle Cheesecake Bites

## INGREDIENTS

3 - 8 ounce packages cream cheese (not fat free)  
1/4 cup sugar  
8 ounces dark chocolate  
1 cup heavy whipping cream  
3 eggs  
1 Tablespoon vanilla extract  
1/8 teaspoon salt  
48 gingersnaps  
48 mini foil baking cups

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a small saucepan, heat cream to a simmer, turn off heat, add chocolate and stir until melted. Set aside to cool. In a food processor, mix cream cheese, sugar, eggs, vanilla and salt until smooth, add cooled chocolate and mix well. Place gingersnaps in foil cups on a cookie sheet. Fill each 3/4 full, bake until set, about 20 minutes. Refrigerate when cooled.

## Tricks and Tips

These make fabulous presents. Make them ahead and store in the freezer until ready for gift-giving. The filling can also be baked in a graham cracker pie crust—it takes about 30 minutes at 350 degrees.

# Chocolate Chocolate Chip Cookies

## INGREDIENTS

2 sticks butter  
3/4 cup each white and brown sugar  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
2 cups flour  
1/2 cup dry cocoa  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
12 ounces chocolate chips  
1 cup walnuts, chopped (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream butter and sugars until creamy, beat in eggs and vanilla. Mix together flour, cocoa, soda and salt, then stir into butter mixture. Add chocolate chips and nuts, stir well. Drop by small teaspoonfuls onto parchment-covered cookie sheets—leave room for spreading. Bake 8-10 minutes. Giving these to your valentine? Try packaging cookies in tins with doilies between layers or use Chinese take-out containers for a different, fun gift look!

## Tricks and Tips

Want something more extraordinary from the world of chocolate chip cookies? Use three kinds of chips—semi-sweet, milk and bittersweet—or go for color contrast with white chocolate chips.

# Katharine Hepburn's Brownies

## INGREDIENTS

2 ounces unsweetened chocolate \*  
1 stick unsalted butter  
1 cup sugar  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1/4 cup flour (yes, only 1/4 cup!)  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1 cup chopped walnuts (I like pecans too)

\* If you want more chocolate, you'll have to increase the amount of flour. I have used 8 ounces of chocolate with 3/4 cup of flour.

Butter just the bottom of an 8x8 pan and set aside. Preheat oven to 325 degrees (300 degrees if pan is glass). Melt butter and chocolate. Remove from heat and stir in sugar. Add eggs and vanilla, then beat very fast and very well. Stir in flour, salt and nuts. Quickly push into the prepared pan and bake for 40 minutes. No doneness tests will work, just trust the recipe. Let cool a little before cutting and serving or you will burn your mouth! Although they don't really need it, try serving these brownies with ice cream or fresh whipped cream on top!

## Tricks and Tips

Definitely not your run-of-the-mill brownies—they are gooey and pudding-like when eaten warm. Yes, you will have to use a fork or spoon, but that won't keep you from eating a second brownie, will it?

# Hogtown HomeGrown

Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More  
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and more to come this month!*

*Thank you for making Hogtown HomeGrown a success!*

*Stefanie Samara Hamblen*

## Vegan Chili with Cocoa

Have a favorite chili recipe? Follow your regular recipe and add 1/4 cup of dry, unsweetened cocoa. It will deepen the flavor of the chili, rounding out the sharper spices.

- 1 pound dry pinto beans, soaked and cooked
- 1 pound red kidney beans, soaked and cooked
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 6 large cloves of garlic, smashed and chopped
- 2- 28 ounce cans crushed tomatoes with puree (fire-roasted, if available)
- 1 bag of frozen sweet corn
- 1/4 cup dry, unsweetened cocoa powder (Hershey's is fine)
- 1/4 cup each chili powder and ground cumin (you might want more chili powder)
- 1 Tablespoon each basil and oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cayenne or chipotle peppers (omit if you are not a fan of spicy food)
- 1 jalapeno (optional) (I leave it whole, but cut it open to remove the seeds and membranes)
- 1 teaspoon each salt and pepper

In a very large pot, sauté onions and garlic in olive oil. Add herbs/spices and stir over medium heat for 2 minutes. Add beans with 4 cups of cooking water. Stir in cocoa, cover and cook over low heat for one hour. Add tomatoes (and jalapeno), taste for seasoning and cook another hour. Stir in corn, cook 1/2 hour and serve. Our chili toppings include cheese, onions, green onions, sour cream, salsa and hot sauce. Sometimes we serve our chili Cincinnati-style, with cooked spaghetti, but we usually have cornbread. Use leftovers (and you will have lots, but it freezes well) to make Chili Cheese Baked Potatoes. If you have 4 cups of chili left over, email Hogtown HomeGrown for a Chili Corn Pone recipe—chili baked with a cornbread topping.