

Splendid Seder

Recipe for the perfect Passover

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Every spring, when I check my calendar and see the word Passover, I am reminded of the many years as a child going to my grandparent's house for the traditional Passover Seder. The memory for me is a fond one as it's a holiday geared so perfectly for children with the reading of The Four Questions and the hiding of the afikomen or matzoh. We lined up to be the one to read the 4 questions, and were crazy to find the missing matzoh all for the \$5 prize. I watched my grandmother cook and prepare her home, and this played an important part in the feeling I developed, and the many traditions I established at my home for this holiday.

As the tradition has moved from generation to generation, I am now lucky enough to host my parents, family and friends to my home to celebrate Passover.

My Poppy Lou and Uncle Arthur used to conduct the Seder, and after years of doing so, when it became too much, the tradition eventually got passed along to my father. Even though the Seder now happens at my house, I still have my dad conduct the service out of respect to him as he enjoys telling the story of the Jews flight from Egypt to freedom.

When I look at the faces of my kids, family and many friends that come to join our Seder, I am overwhelmed with a feeling of tradition.

This is a holiday where our meal is enjoyed at home, never in a restaurant, and always with the classic menu items that I love.

Now on to the meal...We start the night out with drinks and the most amazing chopped chicken liver (my Nanny Pearl's recipe) on matzoh. We enjoy gefilte fish with spicy beet horseradish (an acquired taste) and some dilled egg salad with chutney.

Once seated, the Seder is conducted and we start eating.

The best chicken soup ever is served with light and fluffy matzoh balls, pulled chicken, fresh dill & carrots. For dinner our buffet always starts with juicy braised beef brisket and the most delicious caramelized onion gravy. Tangy orange glazed chicken is what my kids love. Sides include potato matzoh kugel (a Jewish version of mashed potatoes topped with crunchy matzoh), some green veggies like olive oil roasted asparagus or sautéed garlic string beans with diced sweet peppers and lemon. Dessert is always my mother's famous flourless chocolate decadence cake with fresh raspberries and whipped cream. This over-the-top cake is impressive and its moistness would surprise your grandma every time. Try this recipe at home and you will be making it year round for all of your favorite parties.

If you are smart you would become my close friend to get the Passover invite as you don't want to miss this meal. Eat, Drink, Party!

Marcia's Flourless Chocolate Decadence Cake

Cake ingredients:

10 ounces of bittersweet dark chocolate, chopped
1 1/4 cups (2 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter, diced
10 large egg yolks
1/2 cup plus 6 tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons Tahitian vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon salt
9 large egg whites

Ganache ingredients:

8 ounces bittersweet dark chocolate, chopped
1 cup heavy whipping cream
1 1/2 cups pistachios, toasted, coarsely chopped
Whipped cream and fresh raspberries for garnish

For cake:

Position your rack in center of oven and preheat to 350°F. Butter 10-inch-diameter springform pan with 2 3/4-inch-high sides. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper. Place chocolate and 1 1/4 cups butter in medium metal bowl. Set bowl over saucepan of simmering water; stir until mixture is melted and smooth. Remove bowl from over water; cool to lukewarm, about 10 minutes.

Using electric mixer, beat egg yolks and 1/2 cup sugar in large bowl until very thick, about 5 minutes. Beat in vanilla and salt. Gently fold chocolate mixture into yolk mixture. Using clean dry beaters, beat egg whites and remaining 6 tablespoons sugar in another large bowl until peaks form. Fold 1/3 of beaten whites into chocolate mixture. Fold in remaining whites in 2 additions. Transfer batter to prepared pan.

Bake cake until tester inserted into center comes out with moist crumbs attached, about 45 minutes (cake will be puffed and soufflé-like while baking). Cool cake in pan on rack 15 minutes (cake will fall in

center). Run knife around cake sides to loosen; press edge of cake down to make level with center. Remove pan sides and cool cake completely. Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and store at room temperature.

For ganache:

Combine chocolate and cream in medium metal bowl. Set bowl over saucepan of simmering water and stir until chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth. Remove bowl from over water; let stand until ganache cools slightly but is still pourable, about 5 minutes.

Place cooled cake on rack set over rimmed baking sheet. Pour 1/2 cup ganache over top of cake. Using offset spatula, quickly spread ganache over top and sides of cake. Freeze cake 3 minutes. Pour remaining ganache over top of cake. Working quickly but gently and grasping pan bottom and rack together, slightly tilt rack with cake from side to side, allowing ganache to flow evenly over top and down sides of cake; smooth sides with spatula. Press pistachios onto sides of cake to adhere. Chill cake until ganache is set, about 1 hour.

Can be made 1 day ahead.

Cover and keep refrigerated. Let stand at room temperature 45 minutes before serving.

Cut cake into pieces and garnish with whipped cream and fresh raspberries.

With an extensive background in luxury event planning, honed at some of the country's most exclusive hotels, Jeffrey Selden leverages his two decades-long party history in his role as Managing Partner of his family owned business, Marcia Selden Catering and Event Planning. Whether it's an opulent party for 500, or an intimate private dinner, he holds an industrywide reputation as a power event-builder with a unique, creative vision and flawless results. Marcia Selden Catering and Event Planning has been named "Best of the Gold Coast" of Fairfield County by Moffly Media for several years running, and was recently honored by The Knot as "The Best of Weddings."

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