

PUMPKIN PRALINE TRIFLE - Gregory Holmes

STEP 1: Pralines

2 cups pecan halves

2 cups sugar

1/2 cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

pinch of salt

1 cup half and half

1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 350. Spread pecans on a dry sheet pan and place in oven for about eight minutes, or until just lightly brown, stirring once or twice while cooking. Remove from oven and cool.

Butter a baking sheet and set aside. In a sauce pan, over low heat, place sugars, soda, salt and cream, stirring with a wooden spoon until sugars dissolve. Cut butter into small pieces and add to sauce pan and continue to stir, incorporating butter into sugar/cream mixture. Place a candy thermometer into pan and turn heat to medium. Continue to cook until the thermometer reaches 236 without stirring.

Remove from heat, quickly add pecans, and stir. Add vanilla and continue to stir or beat with a wooden spoon until mixture starts to thicken and becomes opaque. Pour onto buttered baking sheet and try to smooth out. If necessary, you can butter the bottom of a second sheet pan and press lightly to make an even layer. The mixture can also be dropped onto sheet pan by the spoonful. The pralines can be cut up as needed for trifle, and the extra ones can be enjoyed another time.

Cool completely and remove from pan by breaking into smallish pieces or, if done with spoon method, simply cool and store in an airtight container in the fridge. This step can be done a few days in advance and makes more than enough for the trifle.

STEP 2: Custard

2/3 cup packed brown sugar

4 tablespoons corn starch

1/2 teaspoon salt

3 cups milk

2 eggs, plus 1/2 cup milk, beaten

2/3 cup pumpkin

2 teaspoons vanilla

Combine sugar, corn starch and salt in a medium-sized sauce pan and whisk. Add milk and bring to a boil over medium heat stirring constantly with a wire whisk. Continue to cook for one more minute. Remove from heat and add the beaten egg and milk combination. Blend thoroughly. Place back onto medium heat and continue to cook on for one minute longer, or until thickened. Be sure to constantly stir the custard at this point.

Remove from heat, add pumpkin and vanilla. Transfer into a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Be sure to carefully lay plastic lightly on the surface of the custard to keep a skin from forming. Cool completely and place in fridge until ready to assemble trifle. This can be made a few days ahead of time and kept in the fridge, in a tightly sealed container, leaving the layer of plastic on the surface.

STEP 3: Pumpkin bread

9-by-5-inch loaf pan

1 1/2 cups flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves OR 2 tablespoons pumpkin pie spice blend

Place all dry ingredients in a bowl, blend well, and set aside.

1/2 teaspoon vanilla

1/3 cup milk

1/4 stick butter, softened

1 cup sugar

1/3 cup packed brown sugar

2 large eggs

1 cup pumpkin puree

Optional: 1 cup chopped pecans and 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350. In a large bowl or mixer, blend butter with sugar and beat until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time and continue to beat, but turn mixer down to low. Slowly add dry mix a bit at a time. Scrape down sides of bowl and add pumpkin puree and blend one more time to incorporate. If adding nuts and chips, do so at this point. Pour into a well-buttered loaf pan and place in hot oven.

The cooking time is between 1 hour and 1 1/4 hours. The only way to know for sure if it's cooked is by checking with a toothpick. Remove from the oven and place on a cooling rack in pan for about 10 minutes. Remove the loaf from the pan and cool completely on rack. This step can be done ahead of time and will last for days wrapped tightly in plastic wrap with foil over the outside.

STEP 4: trifle

1 pint whipping cream

1 or 2 tablespoons confectioner's sugar

1 tablespoon Frangelico

1 cup Frangelico or more to drizzle into trifle

Whip cream and have ready for assembly. Sweet port wine, sherry, rum, coffee or nearly anything you like can be substituted for the Frangelico.

STEP 5: Assembly

Cut pumpkin bread into chunks or slices and arrange half of them into the bottom of a trifle bowl or other deep glass bowl, being sure to place against the sides of the glass. At the same time, mix some of the pralines in the bottom and around bread. Pour half of the Frangelico over pralines and pumpkin bread. Layer half of the custard, more pralines, the rest of the bread and again more pralines over the first layer. Top with the whipped cream and sprinkle with finely chopped pralines, cover and place in fridge until ready to serve. You can be as creative as you like with the layering, once you have the concept down. Be sure to have the trifle assembled at least four hours before serving it. It's even better to do it a day ahead of time.