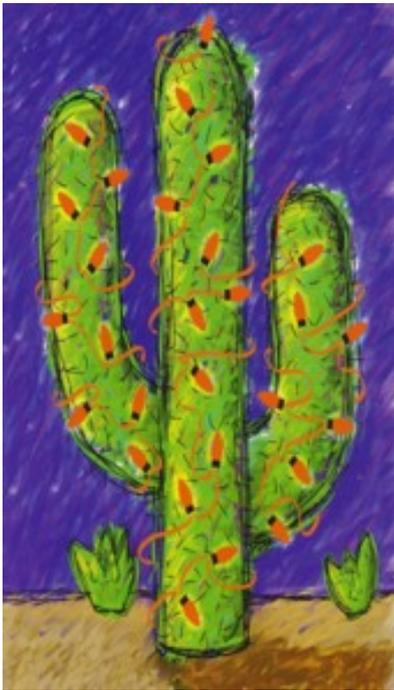


**By Denice Skrepcinski**



As a devout chilehead, I constantly look for a little bit of heat in my food. I've found my favorite recipes for fiery appetizers, sizzling soups, and exciting entrees. The only category that I was disappointed with was desserts. As rich, creamy, and decadent that desserts can be, there was something missing: a little spice, a little zing, a little heat. That's what I was searching for.

Entertaining for the holidays was always a challenge for me. There were so many traditional desserts that everyone wanted. My goal was to turn these rich desserts into decadent yet subtly, spicy finales to my holiday dinners. My first challenge was the traditional pecan pie. This was my mother-in-law's recipe, the recipe that everyone requests. It wouldn't be the holidays without it. It's a pretty standard recipe but is special because it's THE family recipe. I didn't know how the family would react to our annual pecan pie with my secret ingredient added. I followed the recipe as usual (and you can with your favorite recipe), just add 1/2 teaspoon Chimayo red chile powder or your favorite red chile to the ingredients. The result is incredible: a rich pecan flavor with a little tang that everyone loved. Now we have two traditional pecan pies for the holidays.

When I had success, I started experimenting with some of my favorite desserts. Holiday parties are the perfect venue for trying some new hot desserts. They are fun to serve because they are unusual and people are always anxious to find out what different kind of dessert they will be trying.

Serve these desserts with an espresso or a dark Italian roast coffee served with just a dab of whipped cream. Or if you want, try a sparkling rose or blanc de noir champagne. If you want a wine, try a crisp Gewurztraminer. These are fruity and light libations that will enhance the chile flavor without overwhelming the sweet and heat of the dessert.

Be sure you give a little warning to your company, just in case someone really doesn't like peppers or has an allergy. All of these dessert recipes can be made ahead. This allows you to enjoy the family gatherings and the holiday parties. Let dessert be the perfect ending to the perfect evening.

### Chimayo Chile Pecan Pie



Photo by Aaron Sandoval

This pecan pie recipe is a little less sweet than most, so it works well with the added zest of the chile powder. If you can't find Chimayo chile powder, just substitute any New Mexico red chile powder. If you only want a hint of heat, add 1 teaspoon. I usually add 2 teaspoons!

1 recipe for pie crust or a purchased pie crust  
3 eggs  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
3 tablespoons melted butter  
3/4 cup dark corn syrup  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 cup cream  
2 teaspoons Chimayo chile powder  
1 1/2 cups chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the eggs and brown sugar. Add the melted butter, cornsyrup,

vanilla extract, the salt, and the cream. Stir until all the ingredients are well blended. Sprinkle the chile powder over the mixture and whisk the mixture until the chile is incorporated. Add the pecans and stir.

Pour this mixture into an unbaked pie crust and bake for 45 to 50 minutes or until the filling is set and the crust is browned. Remove and let cool on a rack. Serve warm with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Yield: 8 to 10 small servings

Heat Scale: Medium

### Habanero and Lime Cheesecake

This is a classic cheesecake recipe, but the subtle flavor of habanero and lime zest really enhances the richness of the dessert. Serve it with a dollop of whipped cream or stream a little chocolate sauce over each slice. The habanero isn't overwhelmingly hot in this recipe and offers a combination of sweet and heat flavors.

1 1/4 cups chocolate wafers  
2 tablespoons sugar  
3 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted  
2 1/2 packages (8 ounce size) cream cheese, softened  
1 cup sugar  
1/2 teaspoon very finely minced habanero chile  
2 teaspoons grated lime zest  
Juice from 1/2 lime  
3 eggs

Heat the oven to 350 degrees.

Break up the chocolate cookies and place in blender. Blend until they become crumbs. Stir together the cookie crumbs and 2 tablespoons sugar. Mix in the butter thoroughly. Press this mixture evenly in bottom of a 9-inch springform pan. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool.

Reduce the oven temperature to 300 degrees.

In a large bowl, beat the cream cheese mixture until it is smooth. Gradually add 2 cups of sugar, beating the mixture until the sugar is thoroughly incorporated. Add the habanero lime zest, and lime juice. Blend them into mixture. Add the eggs, one at a time. Pour over the crust mixture.

Bake for 1 hour or until the center is firm. Cool to room temperature, then refrigerate.

Refrigerate for at least 3 hours before serving.

Yield: 12 servings  
Heat Scale: Medium

### **Chimayo Chile and Chocolate Mousse**

Don't be intimidated by the fact that this is a mousse recipe. Most can be a little tricky and some recipes can be down right risky. This one is foolproof. The consistency is perfect every time. You can vary the richness of this dessert by your choice of chocolate.

The chocolate pairs beautifully with the chile. It's a natural marriage of flavors. Purchase some inexpensive wine or dessert holiday glasses for a festive presentation. Or tie red and green ribbons around wine glasses that you already have. Make the dessert in advance, refrigerate and then just garnish with a little whipped cream, light sprinkling of chile powder and fresh mint for a gorgeous presentation.

1 tablespoon cold water  
1 teaspoon unflavored gelatin  
2 tablespoons boiling water  
1/2 cup sugar  
1/4 cup cocoa  
1/2 teaspoon Chimayo Chile powder or your favorite red chile powder  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1 cup heavy whipping cream

Put the cold water in a small bowl and sprinkle the gelatin over it. Let it stand for about one minute to soften. Add the boiling water and stir until the gelatin is completely dissolved. The mixture should be clear. Stir together the sugar, cocoa and red chile in a small mixer bowl. Add the heavy cream and the vanilla. With a hand mixer beat at medium speed until stiff peaks form. Pour in the gelatin mixture and beat until well blended. Spoon into serving dishes. Chill for at least 2 hours.

Yield: 4 servings  
Heat Scale: Mild

### **Cranberry & Chipotle Tiramisu**



Photo by Norman Johnson

This is a holiday version of the popular Italian dessert. It can be served in a large glass bowl or in individual dessert bowls or large wine goblets. The cranberry chutney can be made in advance and then the dessert can be put together the morning of the party. The red and white color is beautiful and very dramatic.

24 lady fingers, either purchased or homemade  
4 cups vanilla pudding, preferably homemade  
3 cups cranberry chutney  
1 cup whipped cream  
2 cups toasted almonds

In a large bowl or in individual glasses layer first the lady fingers, then vanilla pudding. Add a layer of the cranberry chutney. Sprinkle a few almonds over layers. Repeat the layering again until either bowl or glasses are filled.

Refrigerate until ready to serve. Garnish with whipped cream and toasted almonds.

Yield: 8 servings

Heat Scale: Mild

### **Cranberry Chutney**

12 ounces fresh cranberries  
1 red apple, unpeeled, but cored and cut into a very small dice  
1/2 cup tart orange marmalade  
1 (10 ounce) package frozen, sweetened raspberries, thawed and drained  
1 to 2 teaspoons chipotle en adobo, finely chopped  
1 cup sugar

Place the cranberries in bowl of a food processor. Pulsing the machine off and on, coarsely chop the berries.

Transfer the berries to a bowl, and stir in the apple, marmalade, raspberries, chipotle and sugar. Stir until well mixed. Chill until ready to assemble the tiramasu.

### **Red and Green Empanadas**



Photo by Norman Johnson

These little turnovers are like miniature pies. You can vary the fillings and really have fun experimenting with different jams and jellies. There are a lot of jellies flavored with peppers, so look in the jam and jelly section of your grocery store or a gourmet specialty store. You can always make your own hot variation by adding cayenne pepper, finely diced chiles of your choice to your favorite flavor of jam. If you don't have time to make your own pie crust, you can always substitute premade refrigerated pie crusts. These delectable little pies also make great holiday gifts.

### Pastry:

1 1/4 cups all purpose flour  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 cup unsalted butter  
1/4 cup solid shortening  
4 to 6 tablespoons ice water

### Filling

1 cup jalapeno jelly  
1 cup red chile pepper jelly

1 egg for glaze

Red and green sugar for garnish, optional

In a medium sized bowl, mix together the flour and salt. Cut the butter and shortening into small pieces, add to the flour mixture and with a fork or pastry blender cut the mixture until it resembles cornmeal. Add the ice water 1 tablespoon at a time until mixture holds together. Gather into a ball and flatten slightly. Wrap in plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator until mixture is chilled.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Remove the dough from refrigerator and place on a lightly floured surface. Roll the pastry out until it is 1/8 inch thick. With a biscuit cutter or cookie cutter, cut 3 inch rounds in pastry. Place 1 teaspoon of the flavored jellies in the center of each empanada. Fold the round over and seal the edges. Repeat until all the rounds are filled.

Lightly beat the egg. Brush the tops of the empanadas with the egg wash. Sprinkle red and green sugar on top. Place empanadas on a baking sheet. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until they are a golden brown. Remove and let them cool on a rack before serving.

Yield: 12 to 13 empanadas

Heat Scale: Mild to hot depending on your choice of jelly

### Peppered Strawberries in Champagne



Photo by Norman Johnson

After cooking all day and sometimes for days and days, it's nice to have a dessert recipe that is so easy and takes absolutely no time to prepare, but is still elegant and delicious. In most areas you can find beautiful strawberries year round. Use a good quality champagne as the flavor really infuses the strawberries. Serve a glass of champagne with the dessert for a truly decadent finale to dinner.

6 cups strawberries, rinsed and sliced, reserving 12 strawberries for garnishing

2 cups champagne

1 tablespoon ground black or green peppercorns

Juice from half lime

In a large bowl, combine the strawberries, champagne, and peppercorns. Let marinate for at least an hour. Spoon the strawberries into a bowl or stemmed glass. Garnish with the whole strawberry and lime slices, if desired.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

Heat Scale: Mild

