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Two desserts sweet as kisses

Valentine's Day is a celebration of love and it is a great time for desserts. Sweets for the sweet? Sugar doesn't judge! Sweets for all! And these sweets are special enough that you can seem like you're trying, but not trying too hard.

Panna cotta, like other moulded desserts, look impressive but are actually very easy. This version is made with buttermilk, giving it a more cultured flavour. Pomegranates add zing and colour, and calls to mind the fruit that Hades used to seduce Persephone to keep her in the underworld. Now that's romance.

Cookies are a more lighthearted dessert and shows your lover that you are youthful and a little playful. Try these Black Forest cookies, a double-chocolate cherry drop cookie with crunchy edges and a soft centre, just like you.

BUTTERMILK PANNA COTTA

1/3 cup (75 mL) pomegranate juice
1/2 tsp (2 mL) unflavoured gelatin
1/4 cup (50 mL) cold water
1 envelope unflavoured gelatin
2/3 cup (150 mL) whipping cream
1 1/3 cups (325 mL) buttermilk
1/2 cup (125 mL) sugar
1 tsp (5 mL) grated lemon peel
1/2 tsp (2 mL) almond extract
Fresh fruit

Place pomegranate juice in a small nonreactive saucepan. Sprinkle 1/2 tsp (2 mL) gelatin over pomegranate juice and let stand for 5 minutes or until softened. Cook over low heat, stirring until gelatin is dissolved. Divide pomegranate mixture among 6 lightly oiled 3/4 cup (175 mL) custard cups. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Place cold water in a bowl. Sprinkle 1 envelope gelatin over water and let stand for 5 minutes or until softened.

Heat cream in a medium saucepan over low heat until steaming and just beginning to simmer. Do not boil. Remove from heat. Stir in gelatin mixture, stirring until gelatin is dissolved. Add buttermilk, sugar, lemon peel and almond extract; stir until sugar is dissolved. Remove custard cups from refrigerator. Pour buttermilk



mixture gently over pomegranate mixture in custard cups. Pouring into the bowl of a spoon held over the custard cup helps to prevent the pomegranate mixture from breaking. Cover and refrigerate until firm or for up to 24 hours.

To serve, run a thin knife around sides of custard cups to loosen; unmould onto dessert plates. Serve with fruit. Serves 6.

BLACK FOREST COOKIES

The small amount of flour in these decadent chocolate cookies contributes to their unique texture.

2 cups (500 mL) chocolate chips, divided
1/2 cup (125 mL) butter
3/4 cup (175 mL) sugar
2 eggs
2 tsp (10 mL) vanilla
1/4 cup (50 mL) flour
1/4 cup (50 mL) cocoa
1/2 tsp (2 mL) baking powder
1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
1 cup (250 mL) dried cherries

Melt 1 cup (250 mL) chocolate chips and butter in a medium saucepan over low heat, stirring frequently until smooth. Remove from heat and cool for 5 minutes. Stir in sugar. Whisk in eggs, one at a time, until blended. Stir in vanilla. Combine flour, cocoa, baking powder and salt. Stir into chocolate mixture just until blended. Fold in remaining 1 cup (250 mL) chocolate chips and cherries. Let dough stand until slightly firm, about 20 - 30 minutes. Drop 1 tbsp (15 mL) measures of dough 2 inches (5 cm) apart onto parchment paper-lined cookie sheets. Bake at 350°F (180°C) for 10 - 12 minutes or just until edges of cookies are set. The centres of cookies will be soft. Do not overbake. Let cookies stand for 2 minutes on cookie sheets. Remove from cookie sheets and cool cookies on racks. Store in an airtight container in a cool dry place for up to 4 days. May be frozen. Makes 2 1/2 dozen cookies.