

# SHORT & SWEET

*Sophisticated Desserts in No Time at All*



*Melanie Barnard*

JAMES BEARD AWARD WINNER

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SOPHISTICATED DESSERTS IN NO TIME AT ALL

MELANIE BARNARD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANN STRATTON

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON NEW YORK

1999

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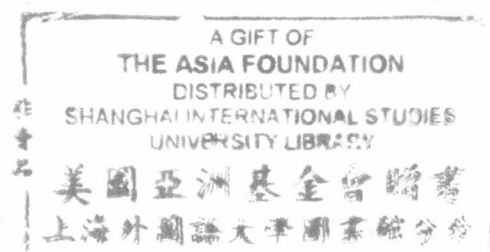
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# FOR MOM

When I was a child, my mother baked every single day, and there was always a full-fledged dessert at the dinner table. Coming home from school, I would sniff and try to guess just what it was that she had spent the morning making. If you think that my mind is playing tricks on me and that no mom like this ever really existed outside of television, ask anyone who lived on Gordon Lane in Erie, Pennsylvania, in the fifties and sixties. Mom had such a reputation for brownies that they were requested at my thirty-fifth high school reunion. Her spice cake with seafoam frosting is in its second generation as a top birthday choice, and people still comment on her cherry pies, though she maintains to this day that she never could get the filling quite right. My mother baked for love.

This book is for you, Mom. You *did* get the filling right.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

More than any book I've ever written, this one was just plain fun. And no wonder: imagine waking up in the morning and knowing you'll spend the day eating tarts and cookies and hot fudge sundaes! Not surprisingly, this project drew many willing tasters.

Tasting, of course, was just the beginning. I'm especially grateful to everyone who helped me. Thanks to:

Rux Martin, for believing that we all need a little dessert in our lives, and for her kind, witty, and sharp editorial eye.

Lori Galvin-Frost, whose constant watch over the book made it the best it could be.

Anne Chalmers, for creating a book design of real beauty.

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My husband, Scott, my three sons, and my daughter-in-law, who put up with my sweet nothings every day.

With all of you, life is a delicious dessert. Thank you.



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# INTRODUCTION

I'll never give up dessert. Not ever. A fudgy brownie with a glass of cold milk, a slice of warm apple pie with a wedge of cheddar, a mound of ice cream melting under rivulets of warm butterscotch sauce, or a slice of feathery layer cake with dollops of whipped cream are simply too much a part of my life to relegate to memory alone.

Like my mother and my grandmother before her, I know that a cake or pie cooling on the counter is a guarantee that the family will be on time for supper. My schedule no longer allows for all-day bake-a-thons, but lack of time isn't stopping me from serving dessert every day. I still make crisps and cobblers, pies and cookies, mousses and soufflés, and fabulous candies. I've found ways to prepare them in a fraction of the time they used to take.

*Short & Sweet* is about delicious simplification. With these recipes, you can make utterly irresistible desserts from just a few ingredients—no more than seven—and have them on the table in short order, almost always in less than half an hour. There are no gimmicks or tricks. Like all good recipes, the ones in this

book depend solely on excellent ingredients and sound techniques.

Choosing the right ingredients always makes a critical difference in both time and taste. Even the most sophisticated chocolate truffles require nothing more than chocolate, cream, and a little flavoring. A splash of aged balsamic vinegar on ripe strawberries sends the flavor soaring. When you start with perfectly ripe pears, all you have to do to put a classic Italian dessert on the table in less than five minutes is add a drizzle of anise liqueur, a bit of Parmesan cheese, and a grinding of black pepper. Using sweetened condensed milk ensures that fudge will turn out smooth and silken every time, with no need for split-second timing or an intimidating candy thermometer.

Proper handling can turn a mediocre fruit dessert into a memorable one. Store-bought apricots release sunny flavor when they're poached in a good wine, while plums can be brought to juicy perfection in just a few minutes with gentle braising. Roasting peaches, pears, or rhubarb intensifies their natural sweetness.

Some of the quickest and easiest desserts of all

are traditional ones. Many people think the first step in making butterscotch or chocolate pudding is opening a box of dusty-tasting mix, never dreaming that an infinitely better homemade version takes one additional minute to stir together. Fruit fools, swirls of pureed fruit and whipped cream, have unlimited flavor possibilities and are mindlessly simple. The billowy French and Italian custards known as sabayons and zabagliones whip up in just 10 minutes, rising to elegance with the aid of nothing more than a whisk and a saucepan. The most impressive dessert of all, the soufflé, is only an illusion of difficulty: in reality, it's no more than egg whites and yolks distinctively flavored with fruit, chocolate, liqueur, or a combination of the three.

Years of experience have taught me how to take nips and tucks to streamline preparation time. Traditional recipes for cookies have you soften the butter to room temperature before using a mixer to beat it with sugar, a step that's time-consuming, messy, and sometimes totally unnecessary. Often, all you have to do is to melt the butter in a saucepan, dump in the remaining few ingredients, and stir with a wooden spoon. No sifting flour, no beating butter, and no washing bowls and beaters.

This "melt-add-stir" technique saves at least 15 minutes and can be used for bar cookies, shortbreads, and drop cookies. Even simple cakes like gingerbread and crumb cake take easily to the one-pan method, and both are so moist and filled with spicy fragrance that they don't need any frosting.

Time-saving desserts often have cleaner, more vibrant flavors than their elaborate predecessors. Eliminating the egg-yolk custard in chocolate mousse, for example, highlights its suave decadence that is its *raison d'être*. Likewise, puffed peach soufflé doesn't need the conventional custard base because pureed dried peaches provide ample support and sing with ripe peach flavor.

Perhaps my most important realization has been that I no longer have to make every single thing from scratch. Fifty years ago, my Sicilian grandmother, a busy woman who knew the value of convenience products well before her time, created a signature layered dessert in about five minutes from vanilla ice cream, crumbled store-bought biscotti, and dried fruits soaked in liqueur. Palermo Parfaits remain a family favorite.

Following in her footsteps, I take advantage of the high-quality refrigerated pie crusts, puff pastry, and phyllo dough that are available. With them, I can make pies and tarts in fewer than 30 minutes, including baking time. Store-bought pound and angel food cakes become memorable when filled with jams or preserves, prepared lemon curd, or chocolate-hazelnut spread. The premium ice creams on the market beg to be instantly personalized with homemade sauces like hot fudge or butterscotch.

Now no matter how busy I am, I never need to sacrifice dessert. And with these recipes, you won't have to either.



# THE SHORT & SWEET BASIC PANTRY

IF YOU HAVE MOST OF THESE THINGS  
ON YOUR SHELF OR IN YOUR REFRIGERATOR OR FREEZER,  
YOU CAN ALWAYS MAKE A GREAT DESSERT.

## THE SHELF

*(Read labels: some products must be refrigerated after opening.)*

ALMOND PASTE, CANNED

BAKING SODA AND BAKING POWDER

CHOCOLATE: bittersweet, unsweetened, semisweet,  
German's, white, chocolate chips

CHOCOLATE PETIT FOUR OR TART SHELLS (found in  
candy stores and in many supermarkets in the  
candy section)

CHOCOLATE WAFER COOKIES, such as Nabisco Fa-  
mous Wafers

CHOCOLATE-HAZELNUT SPREAD, such as Nutella  
(found near the peanut butter in many super-  
markets)

CITRUS CURD, lemon and/or lime (found in the su-  
permarket near the jams and jellies)

COCOA POWDER, unsweetened, preferably European-  
style

COCONUT, shredded sweetened

CORN SYRUP, light and dark

DRIED FRUITS, such as raisins, currants, mixed  
chopped fruit, cranberries, cherries, and figs

FLAVORING EXTRACTS (vanilla, almond), pure

FLOUR, all-purpose

FRUIT PRESERVES, JAMS, AND MARMALADES

FRUIT SYRUPS (found in coffee shops and in some  
supermarkets near the cocktail mixes)

GINGERSNAPS

GRAHAM CRACKERS

HONEY

LIQUEURS AND LIQUORS: coffee-, anise-, raspberry-,  
and orange-flavored; rum and bourbon

MAPLE SYRUP

MARSHMALLOW FLUFF

MOLASSES

NONSTICK OIL SPRAY

NUT BUTTERS: smooth or chunky peanut, cashew, al-  
mond (found near the peanut butter in many su-  
permarkets)

NUTS, such as chopped skinned hazelnuts, peanuts,  
almonds, pecans

SPICES: cinnamon, cloves, ginger, allspice, mace

SUGAR: granulated, powdered, light and dark brown

WINES, such as marsala, dry white, dry sherry