



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

Finding the special spot in your own garden

“The Secret Garden” by Frances Hodgson Burnett was a favorite book in my younger years. It was a charming story about a young girl in India, whose parents died in a cholera epidemic. She was sent to live with a relative in a quirky old house with a secret, locked garden. The garden had been created for the owner’s late wife. After her death, he locked the garden as it made him sad. She discovered the garden, gained access, and became a better person when she and a handicapped friend gradually restored the garden.

The story had a moral, which is a good thing for a children’s book. It always appealed to me because of the whole idea of a secret place to get away to. The fantasy of having a secret place created to be beautiful, calming and peaceful has an appeal for many people. I used to go hide in the house to read books. Peace and quiet: nice.

I have often thought of designing a special place, or a corner of an existing garden. When you have a small yard, it can be enclosed and secluded creating your own personal space. A bench for reading or meditation, half-hidden among tall shrubs, or a gazebo with climbing vines creating shade is fairly easy to create. It takes at least two years for the climbing vines (wisteria, clematis, or honeysuckle, for example) to grow large enough to be useful shade on your gazebo or trellis.

Since we live in a dry area, it is wise to select drought-tolerant plants. If you love plants that require more water, plant them nearer to the faucet. Reserve the farther areas of your yard for the drought-tolerant plants and your whole garden will be happier and it will not take as long to water.

In this heat, don’t forget to water the trees. If you keep the trees well hydrated during the hot and/or dry weather, the trees will be less susceptible to winterkill this winter.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write: greengardencolumn@yahoo.com Thanks for reading!

Summer Dessert Mixes Meringue Pieces, Smashed Berries, Whipped Cream & Lemon Sorbet



E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune-TNS

Eton mess, the summer treat mix of broken up meringue pieces and smashed berries stirred into sweetened whipped cream, gets a boost in this version with homemade lemon sorbet.

WHAT A (SWEET) MESS

By JeanMarie Brownson
Chicago Tribune

I make ice cream when I crave Eton mess — that lovely pile of broken meringue, whipped cream and strawberries so beloved in the U.K. This convoluted cooking happens to me often — an ingredient left from one project prompts another. Egg yolks left over from making the meringues for the Eton mess mean custard or eggnog or, in this case, ice cream.

First, let’s talk about Eton mess. I encountered this perfect summer dessert while bicycling in Rutland County, England. Just as in the Wisconsin favorite schaum torte and the internationally known pavlova, crunchy meringue pairs with softly whipped cream to create an Eton mess. Tender, slightly sweet acidic fruit cuts the sweetness from the meringue and the richness from the cream. The difference is in the presentation. Folklore has it that Eton mess is a pavlova that hit the pavement during a college cricket match — hence its messy demeanor.

All the better for casual summer gather-

ings that don’t stress the cook.

To get the mess going, I beat egg whites with superfine sugar to peaks, then bake circles into meringue crispness. For the fruit, I macerate assorted fresh berries with a bit of sugar. Barely sweetened whipped cream holds the whole thing together. Serve the mess in small bowls with a garnish of mint.

For a speedy Eton mess, I simply use packaged meringues (such as those sold in plastic tubs at Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods), broken into bite-size bits, thawed frozen mixed berries and whipped topping.

As for the yolks that remain from the project, cook them gently in milk for a light, frozen custard-style of ice cream. My standard vanilla base combines mostly whole milk, heavy cream and a vanilla bean scraped to release its seeds. I’ll adjust the milk-to-cream ratios depending on the audience — more cream for company, less for family to control some calories.

Making ice cream truly is about cooking for pleasure since there are dozens of excellent commercial ice creams at most stores.

I use the vanilla beans I bought in Mexico, cream and milk from a local dairy, eggs from the farmers market. We gather round while the machine does the hard work of gently beating air into the base. When the soft, mounds of fluffy ice-cold cream are ready, we stir in our favorite caramelized nuts, chopped homemade cookies or shards of special chocolate bars purchased on vacation. After a few minutes of firming the mixture in the freezer, we indulge together at the table. Not at all the solitary ritual of eating ice cream straight from the carton in front of the television.

Typically, long periods of time transpire between my ice cream-making adventures. So, I start by re-reading the ice cream maker’s directions. I usually use the style of ice cream freezer with an electric motor and an insulated bowl that contains a freezer liquid. During the summer months, I leave the bowl in the freezer so a quart of ice cream can be ready quickly.

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Learning about Canada’s present — and its past

As we continued our Canadian visit and learned of the strength of the current residents of Saguenay, we were now to learn about their ancestors who settled here. We boarded school buses to travel along the bay into the forested area with its many varieties of trees, both deciduous and evergreen, which created a liveliness for both the past and present inhabitants.

Our destination was New France, a recreation of a 17th century Quebec colony, where the settlers and Indian tribes lived alongside one another each contributing for the good of all.

White men came to this area to get white pine for European needs. The wood industry that is still strong today started here. Early on there were trappers for the furs of the various abundant animals. The beaver pelts were especially prized to ship to Europe for making the beaver hats that were so desired by the elite. The Innu welcomed the early sailors with balsam fir tea to cure their scurvy and thus began a peaceful coexistence of the two cultures.

New France was created with a variety of buildings some old, some new to help us vision life in the very early days. There were stories told by colorful costumed actors



OUT & ABOUT
GINNY MAMMEN

and just enough discomfort for us to realize that life was extremely hard for these people. The following gives some of the information we received.

In 1617 a man named Louis La Baie built a square-log home with a thatched roof and became the first farmer/settler in the area. 1620 saw the establishment of Fort St Louis and in 1633 the first chapel was built and by 1640 a dorm was constructed for 20 new arrivals. This provided the newcomers with two basic rooms — one for the men and one for the women. A fireplace in each provided for heat and cooking and several wooden chests and a table made up the furnishings. Sleeping pads were made of straw and loosely woven cloth. The people were short (men about 5-feet tall) so door heights and ceilings were low which made it easier to heat in the cold weather.

The arrivals had a variety of experiences and trades they had used in the old country and here it was vital for their survival to use them. There were cabinetmakers, locksmiths, sawyers, and blacksmiths and teaching nuns. The

blacksmith had to do double duty for as well as making hinges, hooks, and horseshoes he was also the local dentist when it came to pulling teeth. Life was hard. They learned simple practices from the Indians such as using vinegar to treat lice, a common problem for both Indians and the newcomers due to the straw mattresses and the poor health habits they had to endure. They learned to make a fish stew which created a primary staple served with hardtack.

Following our visit with the settlers we went to the home of an Innu woman who told of her peoples’ lives. Before the settlers came they lived a very simple life in small groupings living a distance from each other using nature’s store for their needs. Bark from the birch trees was used for making many items. It took about six weeks to build a canoe using the bark, but if taken care of properly the canoe would last 10 to 15 years. This care included sinking the canoes in the bay during the winter months to preserve them. Birch bark was also used to make cooking pots into which they would place hot stones to cook soup. Their teepees were also constructed using the bark. Rocks, bone and wood were used to craft tools and other items for everyday tasks. Over

time trading posts were established where the two cultures could exchange goods and supplies including furs, blankets and tools. Words that came from the Innu language were Saguenay, Quebec, Canada and village.

The Huron Nation was present early on in this area. They had a very different life style from the Innu. Instead of teepees, they lived in longhouses with 12 or more families related through the women. They hunted and fished but their main diet revolved around their crops of beans, corn, squash and sunflowers — men clearing the fields and women planting and caring for the crops. They moved every 12 to 15 years because they had used up the nutrients in the soil and needed more fertile ground to produce their food. Because of moving so often they lost much of their language and culture. One interesting note was that the women in this tribe had great power. Although on all levels the leaders were men, the women had the responsibility of selecting the overall head. Many of these people lived to be 100 years of age and some feel it was due to their diet. Their influence on the settlers was mostly their knowledge of crop raising.

Our visit to New France ended

with a small feast where we were served salmon, bread, corn/bean salad, and sun choke. This was accompanied with a cup of balsam fir tea which tasted sort of like a Christmas tree smells.

We spent the afternoon in a beautiful auditorium in Saguenay with 2,300 other people watching a production rivaling any show that I have ever seen or even heard of. La Fabuleuse is a live two hour stage show in its 31st year featuring more than 150 local volunteer actors ranging in age from 4 to 70 along with cows, sheep, dogs, horses, rabbits, and geese.

It depicts 400 years of history of the area using live cannon fire, exploding bombs, gunshots and thunder plus employing lighting in a most unusual way to create fire and flooding. It was loud, it was exciting, it was creative, its costuming was incredible, it was entertaining and it was fabulous!

Over and over during this trip we saw evidence of people working together preserving the history of their cultures, buildings and even their fjords through a variety of ways. Being proud of their past, learning from it, preserving and sharing it has created a sound economic future for the people of this area. We should all do the same.

Enjoy!

