



DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART FLESHMAN

Memories leave a pot of gold, but clock debate is fatiguing

There is nothing more for me to say about Saint Patrick's Day that I haven't said before. The day has passed by us, closing down memories as well as activities.

The parties, the wearing of the green, the greetings, the acknowledgements seem tied to a different time, even a different world.

There was once a single postman who dressed in green from head to toe and earned the recognition of being called the "Green Mailman" as he spoke to all his folks along the way in cheerful and concerned smiles and words, a most unusual sight along his route.

But he retired and moved away into the oblivion of so many other traditions, making one wonder if he, truly, was there and vanished with regret for his loss.

Was it his green clothing from top to bottom, his green watch and green shoes, even, or was it the happy spirit that he carried in his postman's bag?

I wore green yesterday in remembrance and now move on with the world today. There is always something new or different to face each day and then left behind in memory.

But I do believe the memory of yesterdays left a pot of gold behind just for me.

Ticking clocks

It seems that everyone is getting into the Standard Time/Daylight Saving Time discussion, including newspapers beginning to take a stand along with the Senate Bill 320 in the Oregon Legislature, so why don't I?

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

How to choose? The lure of the garden catalogs

This time of year seems to be the garden catalog rush. The companies are trying to get their catalogs to you first. The mail order companies are really doing a great job on making beautiful catalogs. The photography is wonderful. I want at least one thing from each page!

Winter is getting to be tiresome for most people about now. A warm cozy chair and a mail order catalog and a pen are a dangerous combination. Rather, I should say, an expensive combination. In either case, you need to be ready for the arrival of your seeds.

In the garden centers you will notice displays of seed starting potting mixes along with racks of seeds. The seed starting mix is a mixture of ground peat moss and vermiculite and some weak fertilizer.

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Pasteis de nata — Portuguese custard tarts



Pasteis de nata

Colter Peterson/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

CUSTARD COMPLEX

■ Portuguese tarts aren't the easiest to make, but the finished product is worth the effort

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Have you ever watched "The Great British Baking Show," seen something that looked good and said to yourself, "I have got to try to make that?"

And then you never did, right?

I watched an episode recently (I'm about a year or two behind), told myself "I have got to try to make that" — and then I actually made it.

It was wonderfully, spectacularly, magnificently amazing.

The bakers on the show had to make a Portuguese custard tart called pasteis de nata. The contestants were baffled, because they had never even heard of them before. I had certainly never heard of them. Co-host Prue Leith apparently had not heard of them, either.

I'm not even sure that a lot of people in Portugal have heard of them.

Pasteis de nata, according to "The Great British Baking Show" and a number of online sources, was created sometime in the 1600s or before at a monastery in Lisbon. The story is that monasteries at the time used egg whites to starch their clothes, which left a lot of yolks.

The monks figured out a great way to use those yolks: Make a sweet custard with which to fill small tarts with a puff-pastry crust.

The tarts are pretty, too, a bright yellow center inside a flaky, golden brown crust. The cheerful yellow custard is traditionally mottled with small brown spots. To me, brown spots mean the custard was burned

— but apparently, it's the way they sell them in Portugal.

And as it turns out, the mottling helps. Without it, the tarts are just a little too sweet. The browning adds just enough depth to offset some of that rich sweetness and introduces an intriguing new level of complexity.

Unfortunately, the recipe is also a bit complex. This is not a dish for the beginning cook. It takes time to put it all together, the filling requires more steps (and more pots) than a typical custard and the crust is traditionally made with puff pastry — which needs knowledge, patience and skill.

That is why I choose to make a simplified version of puff pastry that the Brits, in that clever way of theirs, call rough puff pastry. It's easier to make than the real thing but is almost as good.

If even rough puff is too daunting, you could buy your own puff pastry dough at the grocery store. It won't taste as good as the rough puff you'd make yourself, but the results are certainly better than acceptable.

Puff pastry works by separating hundreds of layers of thin dough by an equal number of thin layers of butter. As the dough cooks, the butter turns to steam, and the pressure of the steam forces the layers of dough ever so delicately apart.

You get a light, shatteringly flaky crust that floods your mouth with buttery leaves of pastry.

The secret to making it is to keep the butter cold — if the butter is too soft, it will blend with the dough and not turn to steam. So, while you're folding the dough to create

all of those layers, you periodically have to refrigerate it for a half-hour or so. I even put my flour in the freezer for a while before using it, just to keep the dough chilled.

The filling is a standard custard (milk plus egg yolks plus heat) that is sweetened with a supersaturated sugar solution. That's just a combination of sugar and water that has had some of the water boiled out — it's what candy makers know as thread stage.

The custard is also flavored with a cinnamon stick and a couple of slices of lemon peel, which make it taste like more than just an ordinary custard. It tastes like a true pasteis de nata.

In Portugal, the pastries are often served with a sprinkling of powdered sugar and cinnamon on top, and they are best when they are still warm from the oven.

After you have enjoyed them, you can think about what to do with all of those egg whites. I'd suggest using them to starch a monastery's clothes.

PASTEIS DE NATA

Yield: 12 servings

For the rough puff pastry:

1 1/3 cups (150g) all-purpose flour, see note
Pinch of salt
2 tablespoons (25g) unsalted butter, diced and chilled, see note
2 to 3 ounces (4 to 6 tablespoons) ice water
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick or 60 g) unsalted butter, frozen

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