

Bakers share their favorite Sweet Holiday Recipes

By **ALLISON WARD**
The Columbus Dispatch

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The month and a half between the beginning of Thanksgiving week and New Year's Day represents the busiest time of year for Columbus-area bakeries.

Debbie Smith and her two daughters make more than 2,000 of their beloved springerle cookies at the Original Goodie Shop in Upper Arlington, not to mention many other sweet treats.

Because of her busy hours at her bakery, Sweet Tooth Cottage in Powell, Sue Bissonnette never gets to properly celebrate her husband's birthday on Dec. 12.

"That's the busiest week of the year," Bissonnette said. "It gears up around Halloween and doesn't stop."

Still, these bakers delight in their work that brings so many people joy during the holiday season, whether it's customers or family and friends. Yes, these busy bakers still find time and energy to make the favorite recipes of their spouses and children.

"Baking — I really think, it's about togetherness, no matter who you're baking with, whether that's girlfriends or family," Bissonnette said. "You create this love in the air with fun and laughs and drinks."

This year, The Dispatch asked four local bakers to share their favorite holiday dessert recipes, no matter if it's baked in the shop or at home.

Husband's love of pecan pie leads to quest for perfect recipe

Pecan pie always seemed like a rudimentary dessert to Juana Williams, one she didn't feel the need to make often.

That was, until she got tired of her husband Vance "ranting and raving" about the ones he got at another bakery during the holidays. (Pecan pie is his favorite sweet.)

As a lifelong baker, Williams knew she could do better.

Admittedly, she started too fancy with her efforts and failed epically, she said.

"But that only fueled me to make the perfect pecan pie," said Williams, who opened J's Sweet Treats and Wedding Cakes in 2016, first as a pop-up shop and then leaving a corporate job to run two brick-and-mortar bakeries (one on the South Side and one on Polaris Parkway). "I wasn't going to be defeated and watch him go to another business



Jenny Voll at her bakery Golden Delight in Gahanna, Ohio.

Barbara J. Perenic/The Columbus Dispatch-TNS



Springerle cookies from the Original Goodie Shop in Upper Arlington, Ohio, sit alongside the rolling pin used for the floral relief design.

Adam Cairns/The Columbus Dispatch-TNS

to get one."

It only took her a few more tries to get her recipe just right.

In her trials and errors, she learned that even though the ingredient list is short and they simply need to be added in the correct order, there are a few tips to follow.

"The key is it make it with high-quality pecans," Williams said. "Sometimes I'd run to the store and get some no-name pecans, but the taste of the pie — the nuttiness — is not as good if you aren't getting quality pecans."

Williams, who runs the two bakeries with her two adult daughters, said she's partial to the pecans from www.nuts.com and Sam's Club's variety that comes in a green bag.

She also said she prefers to use light corn syrup, and adds that ingredients should be room temperature when mixing, and

the oven should never be opened while the treat is baking.

Now, the pie is a mainstay in her bakery during the holidays — and because it's much easier to make than other pies on the menu, such as the labor-intensive sweet potato pie, she wonders why she hasn't been making it all these years.

"Ironically, people drive from all over for it," Williams said. "I had a guy come in here from Georgia and he'd never had a pecan pie from me before. He said it was the best one he's ever had." And now her husband agrees.

CLASSIC PECAN PIE

Makes 8 servings

1 cup Karo Light Syrup
3 eggs, room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar

2 tablespoons butter, melted
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1½ cups (6 ounces) coarsely chopped pecans
1 (9-inch) unbaked OR frozen deep-dish pie crust

Heat oven to 350.

Mix the syrup and eggs together. Pour in sugar and once that is mixed well, add melted butter and drop in vanilla. Stir really well with a rubber spatula or whisk. Stir pecans in lightly so they do not break.

Bake for one hour, but do not open the oven while it is baking to prevent cracking. Must cool to room temperature (at least two hours) before it is cut. Chill in refrigerator, if needed.

Powell baker's children still ask for chocolate chip scones every Christmas

If all of Sue Bissonnette's adult children are in the same house, she knows she's baking chocolate chip scones.

And typically, that happens frequently during the holidays.

She's not sure really when or why she started making them, and the recipe, she said, is cobbled from a few she's read over the years.

"I probably made them one time and they kept asking for them," Bissonnette said of her three children ages 20 to 24. "When they were young, they liked to cut them. I used a pizza slicer to cut them into the pie shape. Then, they brushed the egg wash or milk over the top. They were great at those tasks."

Never mind that this time of year, she's also making hundreds of dozens of iced sugar cookies, plus cakes, cheesecake bars

and other desserts at her Powell bakery Sweet Tooth Cottage, Bissonnette still relishes in making these annually for her family. (She already made a big batch for Thanksgiving morning.)

Plus, the scones are easy, with a pretty cut-and-dry recipe, she said. "You want your butter to be really cold when you blend it in — that's where the flakiness comes in," she said. "And it doesn't have to be chocolate chips. You can use nuts, cranberries or whatever you like."

Her children, however, were always partial to the chocolate chip versions.

Another nice feature of this recipe is the dough can be made ahead of time and refrigerated so it's a great breakfast item to take on vacation or while traveling this busy season.

Bissonnette doesn't sell the scones — nor coffee cake or other yeasty favorites — in her bakery; those are reserved for family and friends.

"The scones are really only kind of good out of the oven," she added.

The time in her own kitchen away from the bakery gives her extra quality time with her children, too.

"I'll still spend the holidays baking at home, making anything and everything," Bissonnette said. "It just reminds me of when my kids were little and I'd have them at the counter with mixers dumping everything in. Even though my kids are older, we'll still do that."

CHOCOLATE CHIP SCONES

Makes 8 to 10 large scones

2 cups all-purpose flour
¼ cup granulated white sugar
1½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces
½ cup mini semisweet chocolate chips
2/3 to ¾ cup cold buttermilk
1 teaspoon Madagascar vanilla
Heat oven to 400 degrees.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Cut the butter into this mixture with a pastry cutter or two knives. The mixture will look like coarse crumbs. Stir in chocolate chips.

Add the buttermilk and vanilla. Mix until the dough just comes together. Add more buttermilk or flour if needed to make a soft dough.

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Poinsettias are a popular plant for the Christmas season.

Tampa Bay Times, File

The Christmas flower



WENDY SCHMIDT
BETWEEN THE ROWS

Poinsettias are one of the most universally recognized symbols of Christmas. Long revered as "flores de noche buena" (flowers of the holy night), poinsettias have honored Christmas for many years in Mexico where they are native.

The Aztecs called the flower cuetlaxochitl. The milky white sap (latex) was used to control fevers and the red leaves (bracts) were used to make a reddish dye.

Egyptians use poinsettias to decorate trees for winter solstice.

In the 17th century, cuetlaxochitl began its journey into Christmas traditions. Franciscan monks started using the plant in Nativity processions.

In the 1820s, Joel R. Poinsett was appointed the first U.S. minister to Mexico. He was sent by President John Quincy Adams to Taxco, Mexico.

In its native land, poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is an outdoor shrub growing 10 feet high.

After Joel Poinsett brought cuttings back to the United States, Robert Buist began to propagate it. He was the first to cultivate and sell the plant to the public under the botanical name *E. Pulcherrima*. It wasn't until about 1836 that the plant began to be called poinsettia, after the Mexican ambassador.

Six weeks prior to Christmas more than 70 million poinsettias are sold for sales of at least \$250 million. Dec. 12 is National Poinsettia Day.

The Ecke ranch (Paul Ecke Sr.) developed the first poinsettia potted plants as we see today. 80% of the plants bought and sold in the USA come from Ecke ranch.

People usually don't try to keep poinsettia from year to year as it takes special treatment to cause the bracts to turn color. They must be kept in the dark for the majority of each day. The true bloom is the tiny flowers (calathia) in the center of the red leaves.

Try to keep your poinsettia on the cool side. Don't sit it on top of the TV, for instance. Poke holes in the foil or remove it so your poinsettia has good drainage. Keep it damp, not wet, but don't forget to give it a drink when it needs it.

Merry Christmas!