

LAGUNA BEACH

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Festive Favorites

Laguna Beach chefs reveal beloved holiday culinary traditions, complete with seasonal dessert recipes.

BY BEN MCBEE

Warm, saccharine smells waft out of the oven in pleasant contrast to the chill outside. For many people, cooking with the family is often when some of life's fondest memories are made, and the best time to do so is throughout the holiday season—with bad jokes and laughter, festive spirit in the air and maybe even a sneaky bite or two while no one's looking. But preparing, and later indulging in, a decadent dessert truly takes the cake; everyone

remembers sweet treats so special that they were only enjoyed once a year, at home, surrounded by loved ones. And nothing says the holidays quite like a revered tradition, handed down from generation to generation. These shared moments sometimes provide just the right ingredients to foster a lifelong passion for creating in the kitchen. Here, some of Laguna Beach's illustrious chefs and pastry artists, talk about the desserts they love to prepare during the holidays.

Vincent Terusa

PUMPKIN PIE

It's no contest: Pumpkin pie is the most iconic holiday dessert option. Made with hearty winter squash whisked into a comfort food filling, plus a whipped cream dollop on top, its enticing aroma makes this a timeless confection in many households. The iteration crafted by Selanne Steak Tavern's executive chef, Vincent Terusa, is no different.

"My dad was a delivery driver for Entenmann's, so I have fond memories of enjoying all sorts of pastries and desserts growing up, including their pumpkin pie," he says.

Over the years, Terusa has enhanced his own recipe. "I begin by making an easy 3-2-1 dough, which consists of three parts flour, two parts fat and one part liquid. For the fat, I use a brown butter, which helps make the crust flavorful and flaky. For the liquid, I use water and a good amount of reduced bourbon."

He then blind bakes the shell before shoveling in the filling, which he creates by cooking down bourbon with canned pumpkin. "This step adds a richness that is distinct from your basic pumpkin pie," Terusa says. "I also add a touch of bourbon to the whipping cream along with maple sugar to round out all the flavors."

PUMPKIN PIE

Yield: 1 pie

- 2 cups pumpkin puree
- 8 ounces cream cheese
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 1 egg, plus 2 egg yolks
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 1/4 teaspoon ginger powder
- Bourbon, to taste (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 F. In a mixer, blend together pumpkin puree and cream cheese until smooth. Add in brown sugar, then slowly add all remaining ingredients while mixing. Strain the mixture, then pour it into a par-baked (partially baked then flash frozen) pie crust. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes. Cool and let set.

