

LOVE CAKES

Makes 10 pancakes

Love, in all of its complexities, is nonetheless a simple idea that we all embrace. Love is a puppy. Love is the freshly fallen blanket of snow, sparkling in the sunshine out my window as I write. Love is my kids, whom I cannot touch physically, but whose thoughts and joys and experiences touch me daily. Love emanates from the comments posted by Manna fans on Facebook. And love fills my home with the fragrances of simmering soups and baking berry pies. Love comes in little bars of handcrafted chocolate in homey waxed-paper packages, from my favorite chocolatier: marzipan, peanut butter cream, pudding. There are silver love linings everywhere we look.

Love is also a plate of Manna's buttermilk pancakes served in bed on a tray with a rose. Steamy coffee, crisp bacon, and two tiny pitchers: one of chocolate maple syrup, warmed and intoxicating, the other of raspberry puree accented with orange liqueur. A very love-ly brunch.

For the Pancakes

1 1/2 cups flour
2 Tbsp. sugar
2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt

1 egg
2 Tbsp. butter, melted
1 1/2 cups buttermilk
1 tsp. vanilla

1. Combine dry ingredients (flour through salt) in a small bowl.
2. In a separate medium bowl, beat together the egg and butter until emulsified. Stir in buttermilk and vanilla until well mixed. Gently add in dry ingredients with a whisk until well-incorporated but still a little lumpy looking. Do NOT overmix or the cakes will be a little tougher - less fluffy and delicate.
3. Heat a griddle or other iron pan over a medium-low heat. When hot, lightly butter or spray with pan spray. Using a 1/3-cup measure, place batter on pan, leaving at least an inch or more in between pancakes. When bubbles start to form on the top of pancakes, and the edges are just getting dry, flip the cakes and let cook another minute or two, til done in the center.

NOTE: Check cakes as they are cooking, and adjust heat so they do not brown too quickly.

For the Chocolate Maple Syrup

1 cup maple syrup (preferable local to your state!)

2 Tbsp. cocoa

2 Tbsp. butter

A pinch of salt

Mix all ingredients in a small pot. Heat, whisk, cool, store. Keeps refrigerated, but serve gently warmed.

For the Raspberry Sauce

7 oz. frozen raspberries, thawed to room temperature

1/3 cup sugar

1/2 to 1 Tbsp. orange liqueur (such as Grand Mariner or Cointreau)

Puree all the ingredients in a food processor (or with an immersion blender) until very well blended and smooth. Strain through a sieve, pressing on the solids to extract as much liquid as possible. Store in a jar, refrigerated for a week or frozen indefinitely.