

## SWEETS!

Any, or all, of these recipes would be suitable for the book club that focuses on dessert.



It's Dorothy's birthday, she's living with the miserable, dysfunctional Grote family and her teacher – the only person who seems to care about her – surprises her with a birthday treat.

“Miss Larsen smiles, handing me a slice of currant bread. ‘My landlady made this.’

“The bread, dense and moist, tastes like Ireland.”

(This recipe is adapted from Nick Malgieri's “The Modern Baker” [DK Publishing, 2008].)

### **Dorothy's Birthday Currant Bread**

Makes 1 loaf

2 cups whole-wheat flour (see note)  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
½ teaspoon salt  
2 large eggs  
1/3 cup granulated sugar  
1/3 cup packed dark brown sugar  
1/3 cup vegetable oil  
¾ cup buttermilk or whole milk  
2 cups dried currants (or chopped raisins)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour an 8 ½-by-4 ½-inch loaf pan.

In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder and salt.

In a large bowl, whisk eggs then beat in sugars. Separately whisk in oil and then buttermilk, whisking until smooth after each addition. Fold in flour mixture and then quickly fold in currants. Scrape batter into pan and smooth the top.

Bake in preheated oven until well risen and toothpick inserted into center comes out clean, about 45 to 50 minutes. Cool bread in pan 5 minutes, then unmold onto a rack and cool completely before slicing.

Note: A combination of whole-wheat and all-purpose flour also can be used.



“Molly Molasses” was Molly Ayer’s nickname in “The Orphan Train.”  
(This recipe is from joyofbaking.com.)

## **‘Molly Molasses’ Cookies**

Makes about 3 dozen

2 cups flour  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
¼ teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1 teaspoon ground ginger  
½ teaspoon ground cloves  
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature  
1 cup packed dark brown sugar  
2 tablespoons vegetable, canola or safflower oil  
1/3 cup unsulfured molasses  
1 large egg  
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Garnish:

1 cup granulated sugar

In a large bowl, sift or whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt and spices.

In bowl of your electric mixer (or with a hand mixer), beat butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy (about 2 to 3 minutes). Add oil, molasses, egg and vanilla extract and beat until incorporated. Beat in flour mixture until well incorporated. Cover and chill batter until firm, about 2 hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

Place granulated sugar in a medium bowl. When dough has chilled sufficiently, roll into 1-inch balls. Then roll balls into sugar, coating thoroughly.

Place on baking sheets, spacing about 2 inches apart and, with bottom of a glass, flatten cookies slightly. Bake in preheated oven about 9 to 10 minutes or until tops of cookies have crinkles yet are barely dry. (They will look a little underdone.) Remove from oven and cool on a wire rack. Store in an airtight container up to a week.



When she was crossing the ocean with her family and everyone was seasick, Niamh's father "tried to distract us kids from our misery by getting us to close our eyes and visualize a perfect day."

The day she remembered was a day spent at her Gram's house in County Galway. A goose was roasting and Gram was rolling out dough for a rhubarb tart, "back and forth with the big rolling pin, dusting the yellow dough with handfuls of flour, stretching it to cover the brimming pie dish."

"When the tart's safely in the oven, we move to the front room...just the two of us, for afternoon tea, strong and black with plenty of sugar and currant bread, sliced and warm."

(This recipe is from [foodnetwork.com](http://foodnetwork.com), where it is attributed to Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger.)

## **Good-as-Gram's Rhubarb Tart**

Makes 8 servings

1 2/3 cups flour  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons powdered sugar  
1/2 cup (1 stick) chilled unsalted butter, cut into pieces  
2 large egg yolks  
2 tablespoons (about) ice water  
3 tablespoons apricot jam  
1 cup sugar  
1/4 cup water  
2 tablespoons brandy  
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice  
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg  
2 pounds fresh (or frozen) rhubarb, trimmed, cut diagonally into 1/2-inch-thick pieces

Mix flour, salt and powdered sugar in a food processor. Add butter and cut in using on/off turns until mixture resembles coarse meal. Add egg yolks and process briefly to blend. Add enough water by the tablespoon until mixture forms moist clumps.

Gather dough into a ball; flatten into a disk. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate 30 minutes.

Roll out dough on lightly floured surface to a 12-inch circle. Transfer to a 9-inch tart pan with removable bottom. Trim crust overhang to 1/4 inch. Fold overhang in, creating double-thick sides. Freeze crust 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Line crust with foil. Fill with dried beans or pie weights. Bake in preheated oven until sides are set, about 20 minutes. Remove foil and beans. Return crust to oven and bake until golden brown, piercing with a fork if bubbles form, about 15 minutes. Transfer pan to a rack. Brush crust with jam. Cool completely.

In a large, heavy skillet, combine sugar, water, brandy, lemon juice, cinnamon and nutmeg over medium heat. Stir until sugar dissolves. Bring to a boil. Add rhubarb and return to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cover pan and simmer until rhubarb begins to soften, about 5 minutes. Remove pan from heat. Let stand covered until rhubarb is tender, about 15 minutes. Uncover and cool completely.

Using a slotted spoon, remove rhubarb from cooking liquid and arrange decoratively in crust. Boil cooking liquid until reduced to a glaze consistency. Brush glaze over rhubarb.

## IRISH FARE

An entire menu of Irish dishes also would be suitable for a book club discussing “Orphan Train.” The currant bread and rhubarb tart both would qualify as Irish desserts.

Easy sources of Irish recipes: <http://www.irishabroad.com/culture/kitchen/recipes.asp>;

<http://www.food.com/slideshow/traditional-irish-foods-14>

<http://www.foodireland.com/recipes/>



Here’s one Irish dish that’s referenced in “The Orphan Train.”

When the family was living in New York, Niamh would often make the simple Irish potato dish champ, “a mash of potatoes, milk, green onions and salt,” for her younger siblings.

(This recipe is from [british.about.com](http://british.about.com).)

### Niamh’s Irish Champ

Makes 4 servings

- 1 ½ pounds potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 1 cup chopped green onions (see instructions below)
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- 4 to 6 tablespoons milk or cream
- Salt and pepper to taste

Simmer the potatoes in lightly salted water until cooked, about 20 minutes.

Finely chop the white part of the onions and roughly chop the green parts. Keep separate.

Drain potatoes and add butter and milk and mash potatoes until smooth and creamy.

Add the finely chopped white part of the onion and mix well.

Season well with salt and pepper. Serve with the green part of the onion sprinkled on the top.

## VEGETARIAN

Your book club could also go veggie in honor of Molly.

Her vegetarian diet was only one thing about her that her foster parents, especially her impossible-to-please foster “mother” Dina, refused to accept about her.

One week Molly took over the kitchen and made her kind of food: a stir-fry of tofu, red and green peppers, black beans and zucchini; cheese and mushroom quesadillas; eggplant lasagna; and vegetarian chili.

(This recipe, from cookbook author Martha Rose Shulman, ran in the *New York Times*.)

### Molly’s Eggplant Lasagna

Makes 6 servings

1 ¼ pounds eggplant  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus additional for drizzling  
Salt and freshly ground pepper  
8 ounces ricotta cheese  
1 egg  
2 tablespoons water  
Pinch (tiny!) of ground cinnamon  
Salt and freshly ground pepper  
2 cups marinara sauce  
½ pound no-boil lasagna noodles  
Chopped fresh basil  
4 ounces fresh mozzarella, shredded (optional)  
4 ounces (1 cup) freshly grated Parmesan

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking sheet with foil and brush foil lightly with olive oil.

Slice eggplant 1/3 inch thick, sprinkle with salt and toss with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Place on baking sheet and roast in preheated oven 15 to 20 minutes, until slices are lightly colored on the bottom and soft to the tip of a knife. Remove from oven and carefully fold foil over and crimp edges together (be careful not to burn yourself!). Let eggplant cool and steam in the foil packet 20 minutes. Set aside.

Meanwhile reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Lightly oil a rectangular baking dish.

In a bowl, blend ricotta cheese with egg, water, cinnamon and salt and pepper to taste. Set aside ½ cup tomato sauce and 3 tablespoons Parmesan to make sure you have enough for the top layer of the lasagna.

Spread a small spoonful of tomato sauce in a thin layer over bottom of baking dish. Top with a layer of lasagna noodles. Top noodles with a thin layer of ricotta. Spoon on a few dollops and then spread it with an offset or a rubber spatula. Top ricotta with half the eggplant and sprinkle basil and half the mozzarella over eggplant. Top with a layer of tomato sauce and a layer of Parmesan. Repeat layers, then add a final layer of lasagna noodles topped with ricotta if any remains and, most importantly, with the tomato sauce and Parmesan you set aside. Drizzle a little bit of olive oil over the top.

Cover dish tightly with foil and place in preheated oven. Bake 40 minutes, until noodles are tender and mixture is bubbling. Remove from heat and let sit 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Advance prep: You can assemble this up to a day ahead and refrigerate, or freeze for a month. The lasagna can be baked several hours ahead and reheated in a medium oven.



(This recipe originally ran in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.)

## **Beans & Barley Vegetarian Chili**

Makes about 12 servings

2 cups small dry red beans or kidney beans  
Cold water  
1 tablespoon salt  
1 large onion, diced  
2 large carrots, finely diced  
4 ribs celery, diced  
1 medium green bell pepper, diced  
1 tablespoon minced garlic or ½ tablespoon garlic powder  
1 teaspoon dried thyme  
1 tablespoon dried oregano  
1 tablespoon chili powder  
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
1 teaspoon black pepper  
1 tablespoon cumin  
¾ cup bulgur wheat  
2 cans (15 ounces each) tomato sauce  
1 tablespoon dried basil  
Shredded cheddar cheese for garnish

Put beans in large saucepan. Add about 4 cups water and bring to a boil. Pour off water through a colander and transfer beans to large, heavy-bottomed soup pot. Add about 2 quarts water and the salt and cook beans about 1 hour or until tender.

Add cut vegetables and all the herbs except basil to pot of beans and simmer 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender. Add bulgur and tomato sauce and simmer 15 minutes. Add basil and adjust salt if needed. Serve garnished with cheese.

## Molly's Tofu Stir-Fry

Makes 4 servings

1 ½ tablespoons olive oil  
½ tablespoon toasted sesame oil  
½ onion, diced  
1 red bell pepper, roughly diced  
1 green bell pepper, roughly diced  
3 small zucchini, thinly sliced  
2 to 3 tablespoons chopped fresh garden herbs  
1 container of firm tofu, cubed  
2 tablespoons soy sauce plus additional to taste  
¾ cup black beans (rinsed and drained)  
Pinch of hot pepper flakes (optional)  
Toasted sesame seeds for garnish (optional)  
3 cups hot cooked rice

Heat oils in a pan over medium-high heat and add onions. Sauté about 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add bell peppers and sauté 2 minutes. Add zucchini and cook another minute or two.

Add chopped fresh garden herbs, cubed tofu and soy sauce. Cook about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally and adding black beans after 3 minutes. Sprinkle with additional soy sauce, hot pepper flakes and/or toasted sesame seeds, as desired. Serve with rice.

## REUNION FEAST (Spoiler Alert!)

Yet another choice is to copy the menu prepared for Vivian's long-lost daughter's visit at the end of the book. Terry made fish chowder, corn chowder ("a nod to Molly") and cornbread, while Molly made a large green salad with balsamic dressing.



(This recipe is adapted from Mark Bittman's "Fish" [Hungry Minds, 1999].)

### Family Melting Pot Cod Chowder

Makes 4 servings

1/8 pound good-quality bacon, diced  
1 large onion, chopped  
3 medium potatoes (about 1 pound), peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes  
4 cups fish stock or chicken stock, preferably homemade  
1 to 2 pounds boneless cod, cut into 1-inch chunks  
2 cups corn kernels (frozen are fine)  
1 cup heavy whipping cream  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

In a 3- or 4-quart kettle, sauté bacon over medium heat until crisp. Remove bacon and reserve.

Still over medium heat, cook onion and potatoes in remaining bacon fat, stirring occasionally, until onion is soft and potato lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Heat stock separately.

When stock is warm, add it to potatoes and onions and simmer over medium-low heat until potatoes are just tender, about 10 minutes. Add fish chunks and corn and cook until fish is tender but not quite flaky, 8 minutes or so. Over low heat, add cream, then taste for salt and pepper (this chowder is good with lots). When heated through, garnish with the reserved bacon and serve.

Variation: Fillets of almost any white-fleshed fish can be substituted. Adjust cooking times accordingly.

(The Corn Chowder and Skillet Corn Bread recipes below are from “Chowders: One-Pot Meals — Clam, Corn & Beyond” by Jasper White [Scribner, 2000, \$30].)

## **Molly’s Corn Chowder**

Makes 6 first-course servings

3 medium ears fresh yellow or bicolor corn, husked  
4 ounces thick-sliced bacon, cut into 1/3-inch dice  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
1 medium onion (7 to 8 ounces), cut into 1/2-inch dice  
1/2 large red bell pepper (6 to 8 ounces), cut into 1/2-inch dice  
1 to 2 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves removed and chopped (1/2 teaspoon)  
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin  
1/8 teaspoon ground turmeric  
1 pound Yukon Gold or other all-purpose potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice  
3 cups chicken stock or broth, preferably homemade  
Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
2 teaspoons cornstarch, dissolved in 2 tablespoons water  
1 cup heavy whipping cream  
2 tablespoons minced fresh chives or thinly sliced green onions for garnish

Carefully remove most of the silk from the corn by hand, then rub ears with a towel to finish the job. Cut kernels from cobs and place kernels in bowl. You should have about 2 cups. Using back of your knife, scrape down cobs and add milky substance that oozes out to corn kernels.

Heat a 3- to 4- quart heavy pot over low heat and add bacon. Once it has rendered a few tablespoons of fat, increase heat to medium and cook until bacon is crisp. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of bacon fat, leaving bacon in pot.

To pot, add butter, onion, bell pepper, thyme, cumin and turmeric and sauté, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, about 8 minutes, until onion and pepper are tender but not browned.

Add corn kernels, potatoes and stock, turn up heat, cover and boil vigorously about 10 minutes. Some potatoes will have broken up, but most should retain their shape. Use back of spoon to smash a bit of corn and potatoes against side of pot. Reduce heat to medium and season with salt and pepper.

Stir cornstarch mixture and slowly pour it into pot, stirring constantly. As soon as chowder has come back to a boil and thickened slightly, remove from heat and stir in cream. Adjust seasoning if necessary.

If serving chowder within the hour, let it sit at room temperature for up to an hour, allowing flavors to meld.

If you are not serving chowder within the hour, let it cool a bit, then refrigerate. Cover chowder after it has chilled completely. When ready to serve, reheat chowder over low heat; don’t let it boil.

Ladle into cups or bowls and sprinkle with chopped chives.

## Terry's Skillet Corn Bread

Makes one 8-inch round corn bread

1 cup yellow cornmeal  
1 cup flour  
1 teaspoon kosher salt or scant  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt or fine sea salt  
2 tablespoons sugar  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
2 large eggs, beaten  
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons whole milk  
4 tablespoons bacon fat, unsalted butter or corn oil (divided) (see note)

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

In large mixing bowl, combine cornmeal, flour, salt, sugar and baking powder and whisk together to mix well. Add eggs and milk and mix well until you have a smooth batter.

Heat an 8- to 9-inch cast-iron skillet over low heat and add bacon fat or butter. When fat is melted, pour 3 tablespoons into the corn bread batter and mix well. If using oil, add the 3 tablespoons oil directly to batter.

Leave remaining 1 tablespoon of fat in skillet and increase heat to medium-high. When pan is hot (but not scorching hot), scrape in the batter; you will hear it sizzle.

Place skillet in oven and bake about 20 minutes, until corn bread is golden brown on top. To test, stick a skewer into center of corn bread; if it comes out clean, bread is done. Use a spatula to remove corn bread to a wire rack and let it cool 10 minutes, then cut into wedges and serve warm.