

Outlook on Lifestyle

Celebrate spring with strawberries



TAKE advantage of spring strawberries to make tempting muffins.

By Aileen Claire

Spring is in the air. What better way to begin a day than with home-made fresh strawberry muffins? Serve these for breakfast with softened cream cheese, apricot preserves or your own strawberry-apple butter. Send these along with the driver who snacks on the way to work or tuck into a school lunch.

FRESH STRAWBERRY MUFFINS

- 1 1/2 cups coarsely chopped strawberries
- 1/4 cup sugar, divided
- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour (unsifted)
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/4 cup butter or margarine, melted
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

In a small bowl combine strawberries and 1/4 cup sugar. Set aside for 1 hour. Drain and reserve liquid and strawberries separately. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Grease 12 cups in a muffin pan; set aside.

Combine flour, baking soda, nutmeg and salt; set aside. In a medium bowl, mix eggs, butter, vanilla extract, remaining 1/4 cup sugar and liquid from strawberries. Add flour mixture; stir just until combined. Fold in reserved strawberries. Spoon into prepared muffin cups. Bake until a cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Serve warm. This kitchen-tested recipe makes 12 muffins.

STRAWBERRY-APPLE BUTTER

- 1 pint strawberries
- 5 cups peeled and sliced tart cooking apples (about 1 1/4 pounds)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 Water
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Hull strawberries. Place in the container of an electric blender or food processor fitted with a metal wing blade. Whirl at high speed until pureed, scraping down sides of container if needed (makes about 1 1/2 cups). Remove and set aside.

In a medium-size enamel or stainless-steel saucepan combine apples, sugar and just enough water (about 1/4 cup) to keep apples from sticking to pan. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 15 minutes.

In food processor whirl half of the apples at a time until pureed. Return apples to saucepan along with orange peel, nutmeg and reserved strawberry puree. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, stirring frequently until thickened, about 1 hour. (Mixture is thick when a spoonful placed on a cold saucer has no moisture seeping from the edges.)

Immediately pour into hot 1/2-pint canning jars leaving 1/4-inch head space. Adjust caps. Process in boiling water bath according to manufacturer's directions for 10 minutes. Cool. Check seal. Remove rings before storing. Or refrigerate without processing in a tightly covered container for about 3 weeks. This kitchen-tested recipe makes 2 (1/2-pint) jars.

WOOF! Hilarious book for kids

WOOF! by Allan Ahlberg (Viking, 1986; 155 pages)

Allan Ahlberg is perhaps best known for picture books created in collaboration with his wife, Janet. Each Peach Pear Plum (1978) incorporates nursery rhyme and fairy tale characters into a cumulative rhyme. Janet is the illustrator and her husband writes the text. Their other books include Peekaboo! (1981), in which the game of Peekaboo can be played through strategically placed holes in the page, and The Baby's Catalogue (1982) which followed the discovery that their own baby's first reading material was mail-order catalogues.

In WOOF! Allan Ahlberg has struck out on his own, creating an hilarious story about a ten-year-old boy who unexpectedly turns into a Norfolk terrier. The first time this transformation occurs, Eric Banks is in bed trying to sleep. He feels an itchy prickliness around the collar of

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his pyjama jacket, then his nose grows cold and wet, and his ears turn floppy. One look at his paws, and he realizes what has happened. Eric spends the next few hours as a pup, chasing cats, begging for food and tracking scents. He is mildly alarmed at what has happened to his body, but before panic strikes, he feels himself returning to his former homo sapien state. This metamorphosis takes place rather frequently throughout the book. Eric is never given any warning that it is occurring, nor does he know if or when he will return to being a boy.

Allan Ahlberg may well have been a dog in an earlier life, for he clearly understands their habits and behaviour. Eric (the boy) shares

many of the character traits of Eric (the dog) - he is timid but dignified, kind to his little sister, and always loyal to his chum Roy. In short, Eric makes a very believable dog.

Eric views the world around him in a methodical, seemingly deadpan way. He is curious and interested to discover he has become a dog, but never resorts to hysterics. Using this calm, unflinchingly rational approach, Ahlberg adroitly takes a swipe at nearly every aspect of British domestic life. Schools, teachers, libraries, parents, food, bullies - the author's wry observations make fair game of them all.

This clever rump is easy enough for a child in Grade 3 or 4 to read by himself. I would heartily recommend WOOF! to anyone looking for a story to read aloud, as the humour is within the reach of a child, and developed enough to sustain an adult's interest.

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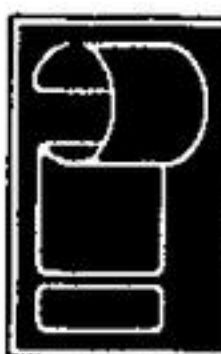
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