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*Alex Poltera*

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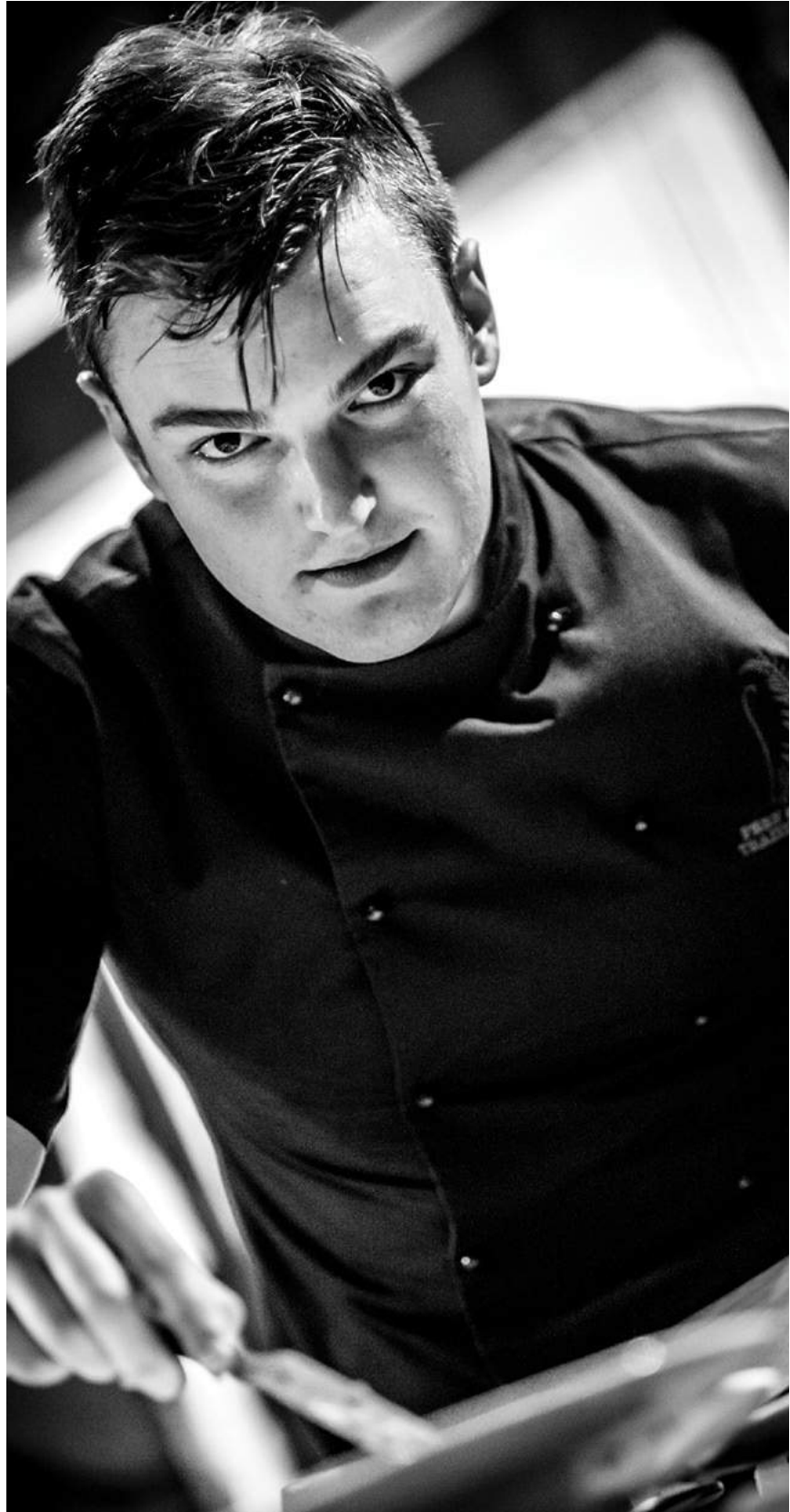
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# ASK A CHEF

*Chef Alex Poltera from Fern Hill Hotel in the KZN Midlands answers our readers questions and shares a delicious family favourite cheesecake.*

**Q: What icing could I prepare that can be stored at room temperature? - Simangele Xhosa**

A: Well, there's obviously royal icing and glacé icing (which need to be immediately covered with plastic wrap or dampened parchment paper to avoid drying out) and plastic icing which can be stored in an airtight container. For a buttercream style icing, a mixture of white margarine (like Wooden Spoon) with powdered sugar will last, for a while, at room temperature. The ingredient amounts are: 450 g icing sugar, ¼ Tbsp cream of tartar, 280 g white margarine, a pinch of salt and 1 Tbsp extract of your choice. Whip it up and add about ¾ cup water to make the consistency creamy



and 'spreadable'. Keep in an airtight container

**Q: What is the best way to store fish?** - Tracey Donalds

A: Frozen fish – in the freezer. Fresh fish – in the fridge or, if whole, on crushed ice.

**Q: Does salting eggplant add sodium to the recipe?**

- Timothy Kane

A: Well, yes. Salt is probably our highest contributor to our daily sodium intake. Salting eggplant is a method used to remove bitterness from the seeds of larger, older eggplants by basically removing the liquid in the seeds (degorging). The salt can be washed off after salting but a fair amount will always have sunk in. To avoid the necessity to salt eggplant, buy young, smaller eggplant, these do not require the salting step as they contain less seeds equalling less bitterness.

**Q: When I sauté mushrooms, they get all watery and lose their flavour, what could I do to avoid that?**

- Richard Grant

A: To reduce the amount of water loss from the mushroom, make sure your pan is very hot and contains enough hot butter or oil of your choice to effectively seal the outside of the mushroom when it hits the pan. This will lock in the flavour and moisture and the browning will add flavour as well. Don't overload the pan, rather do small batches and be sure not to cook them for too long.

**Q: What dishes can I prepare with ripe bananas?**

- Musi Nxele

A: Ripe bananas mostly work best in sweet applications such as milkshakes, muffins, flapjacks, banana bread, cake, cookies etc.

**Q: To prevent my fruits and vegetables from going bad, what is the best way to store them?**

- Lucelle Paddayachee

A: With fruit, I recommend making a solution of white spirit vinegar and water in your kitchen sink or a large bowl. Leave the fruit in it for about 10 minutes and then store in the fridge. This generally extends their shelf life by removing any bacteria. If leaving fruit at room temperature, make sure it is in a cool dry area. With vegetables, try to buy only what's necessary for a few days and be sure to rotate the contents of your fridge by using the 'First in, First out' method. Vegetables need good ventilation too, so remove them from cling-wrapped punnets or plastic wrappers (unless they're perforated, those generally do the trick). Look online for more specifics for different vegetables and fruit.

Follow Chef Alex Poltera on twitter @alexpoltera.

**DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION THAT YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK A CHEF? YOU CAN LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING YOUR QUESTIONS, FLOPS AND WIVES' TALE MYSTERIES, ANSWERED BY A PROFESSIONAL CHEF. SEND YOUR QUESTION TO PRESS@GINJAMEDIA.COM AND YOU COULD WIN IF PUBLISHED.**

*Stand a chance to win a dinner for two at Fern Hill Hotel's The Snooty Fox.*







*Chef Alex Poltera shares one of his family's delicious pudding recipes.*

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## **BRANDY ALEXANDER CHEESECAKE** *with Summer Fruits*

**EASY | SERVES 6-8**  
**PREP TIME: 30 MINS**  
**SETTING TIME: 4 HRS**

This recipe is a very special one. Every special occasion (after my childhood) my mother would make this cake for me. It was always eagerly anticipated after a birthday meal or celebration.

Based on the flavours of the classic Brandy Alexander cocktail which was popular in the early 20th century, this cheesecake really is a crowd pleaser and a trip down memory lane to when creamy alcoholic cocktails were the 'thing'. I choose to make it a little less sweet than most would prefer, but play around with the quantity of sugar and taste before allowing it to set to find your preference.

### **INGREDIENTS**

For the biscuit base

1 pack of chocolate digestive biscuits  
100 g hazelnuts  
(with the skins on)

75 g melted butter

For the cheesecake

250 g Philadelphia  
cream cheese

250 g crème fraîche

100 g icing sugar

1 tsp (5 ml) vanilla paste

200 ml whipping cream

1 Tbsp (15 ml) gelatine powder

3 Tbsps (45 ml) strong coffee

3 egg whites

For the topping

1 cup (250 ml) cream

1 Tbsp (15 ml) espresso or strong coffee

1 Tbsp (15 ml) Kahlua liqueur

1 Tbsp (15 ml) brandy

(or more if you'd prefer)

2 Tbsps (30 ml) icing sugar

### **BISCUIT BASE**

1. Pre-heat your oven to 180°C.

2. Toast the hazelnuts in the oven until fragrant. Remove, and place in a dry dish towel. Rub them together to remove the outer skins. \*The flavour of hazelnuts with the skin on is better and more intense than the blanched ones. Most of the flavour sits right under the skin hence I prefer them to the more convenient option.



3. Blitz the hazelnuts and biscuits in a food processor and add the melted butter to make a dense paste.

4. Line the base of a 20cm tart ring with the biscuit mix and refrigerate.

#### CHEESECAKE

1. Soften the cream cheese and crème fraîche with a spatula in a bowl. Add the icing sugar and vanilla and mix thoroughly.

2. Add the gelatine to the cold coffee and leave to soften.

3. Whip the cream until stiff and fold into cheese mixture.

4. Heat the coffee and gelatine over a low heat in a saucepan to allow it to dissolve. Do not let it boil. Add to the main mixture and mix in well with a whisk.

5. Beat the egg whites to form a stiff peak and fold into the mixture carefully maintaining the air bubbles as much as possible.

6. Pour the mixture into the tin with the biscuit base. Smooth the top with a palette knife and place in the refrigerator covered to set.

#### FOR THE TOPPING

1. Mix all the ingredients together and allow to stand for about an hour.

2. Pour into a stand mixer and whip until thickened. Pour over the set cheesecake and smooth out.

3. Place back in the fridge to firm up.

#### TO SERVE

1. Before removing the cheesecake from the ring, glaze with chocolate ganache or leave plain.

2. Remove and garnish with chocolate shards, fresh berries and mint.

Can last in the fridge for a couple of days. 🍷

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