

## LAST BEST PLATES

# Macarons offer playful elegance

In Billings, Amanda Brown bakes up playful sophistication. Since 2017, through her online company Batter + Crumb, she has offered macarons exuding refined whimsy through Facebook and Instagram.

These sweet meringue confections made with egg whites, confectioners' sugar, granulated sugar, and almond meal showcase a rainbow of colors with creamy flavorful fillings. Names such as birthday cake Oreo, cereal milk, French toast, and espresso Nutella make for fun deliciousness.

The recipe for the macaron or French macaroon, originated in Venice during the Renaissance, according to Larousse Gastronomique. The name came from the Italian maccherone and the Venetian macaron, meaning fine paste. Macarons have been made in the monastery in Cormery, France since 791 and legend has it that they were made in the shape of a monks' navel. These light, airy, crispy on the outside, and softly chewy on the inside, confections are not the same as the unleavened shredded coconut cookies for Passover.

When Sue Balter Reitz gave me my first box of macarons this summer, I became giddy. The cookies were truly too pretty to eat so I kept them in the box for most of a day, peeking inside the brown box often, anticipating the moment I would finally savor them.

Thirteen years ago, Brown shared, "I was baking cupcakes and got bored. It was not inspiring me anymore." "Cupcakes evolved to motherhood," Brown said of sons Ezra, now 8, and Otis, 5 1/2 years old.

Then, two years ago, Jeremiah Young of Kibler and Kirch called Brown to ask her



STELLA FONG

Amanda Brown of Batter + Crumb pipes creamy filling with Fruity Pebbles cereal on top of meringue confections.

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## FLASH IN THE PAN!

# Action packed celeriac

It's a farmers market cliché that celeriac is good in soup. I hear it when folks inquire as to how to use this fragrant root. But I've never quite known what to do with that guidance. Add celeriac to my Campbell's tomato soup? To a batch of clam chowder?



ARI LEVAUX

To my ramen? All I've ever done has been to substitute celeriac for celery, its close relative. If you can get it trimmed and peeled, this knobby subterranean dwelling plant part is a worthy replacement for its watery, stringy above-ground counterpart, with more carbs and less fiber, and an almost tingy flavor on the tongue.

Most celeriac bulbs include a hairy matrix of gnarly roots that radiate from the central orb. Sometimes these snakelike appendages have already been trimmed by the time of purchase, otherwise cut them off yourself.

My friends Steve and Luci grow softball-sized celeriacs that are almost as smooth. They weigh about a pound and a half, and cost about nine bucks each at the local store, I realized to my shock at the cash register after loading up.

I called Luci and tried to get a little sassy about the price, and to her credit she was having zero of that. She knows I know her celeriacs are free of roots, hairs, knobs and dirt. I had to acknowledge they were the finest I'd ever seen.

"The best I've encountered were in the Netherlands," Luci reflected. "I don't know what those Dutch farmers do. Maybe they spit-shine their celeriacs, or grow them in velvet soil."

I asked for some advice on what to do with her valuable roots, beyond randomly adding pieces to soup. She mentioned mashing it with potatoes, and grating it into salad. But their favorite way to use it is in none other than soup.

Not some other soup with celeriac, but celeriac soup, owning it like a jazz musician playing that funky note extra hard so we all know they meant to do it.

"Go trim and dice your gold-plated celeriac," Luci began, her sharp voice barely audible beneath the aggressive rapport of her knife on a cutting board, Steve cheerfully comment-bombing in the background. "I'll have to dispatch you quickly here," she added. I'm short on time." I kept quiet, not knowing who she was talking to.

She proceeded to bark her recipe at me while yelling at Steve. Meanwhile, she continued murdering something with her knife as she finished dispatching me with this delightful vegetarian soup. It's a subtle and satisfying dish, something

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## LOCAL FLAVOR

# Cause for celebration this Easter

Sunday, April 4, will be Easter Sunday and many families will be celebrating with a



BERNIE MASON

traditional Easter egg hunt and a special brunch or dinner. This year more families will be able to gather in person because of the number of people who have received the vaccine, which

will be a cause for celebration. Since bunnies are such a common theme for Easter, bake up a batch of the Orange Bunny Rolls to serve with eggs and a bowl of fruit for breakfast or brunch. The strawberry salad and pork roast are sure to be standout features for your Easter dinner. I wish you a happy spring and special Easter greetings.

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Greet your family Easter morning with a platter of these adorable bunny rolls. Orange marmalade flavors the inside of these tender yeast rolls as well as the icing.

BERNIE MASON

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## LeVaux

From C1

like vichyssoise, that beloved chilled potato leek soup, but with celeriac instead of potato joining the leeks.

The celeriac version is thinner and less starchy, with a smooth, strong celery flavor and a hint of parsley. On a whim, I made a batch with both potatoes and celeriac along with the leeks, and that was the best of all worlds: all the cream and thickness, with an extra layer of sweet earthiness. That version was my kids' favorite.

At the winter farmers market a few days later, I found the ingredients for the soup. A beautiful bunch of leeks, some glorious potatoes, and four Medusa-like celeriac — four bulbs at \$2 each.

After I trimmed and peeled those shaggy bulbs, I had about the same sized pile of lily-white cubes as from one of Luci's orbs. Given the savings in labor, and working with the sheer majesty of Luci's agricultural talent, hers is worth every penny. But when it isn't available from her I've no problem trimming down some uglier versions. The soup is always beautiful.

## Celeriac Vichyssoise

I messed around with what Luci gave me over the phone, and came up with my own version. My recipe includes potatoes, because if my kids like it that way chances are you will too. I have also taken to adding some herbs to the soup as it cooks. And mine has less dairy than Luci's, and no mayo, as that's my MO, but do as you must.

But it wouldn't have been right to withhold Luci's original version as a reference.

"Add about the same amount of celeriac and onions, including whatever greenery of onion you can muster, such as leeks, scallions and green onions, and two quarts of chicken stock, and cook until everything is tender. Season with salt, pepper and lemon juice. Use a submersible tool to puree it. Add butter, milk, cream, all that good stuff, and salt and lots of black pepper."

- 1 pound trimmed celeriac, cubed
- 1 pound leeks, chopped
- 1 pound potatoes, cubed
- 2 quarts chicken or veggie stock
- 1 tablespoon oregano
- Juice of a lemon
- 1 cup mayonnaise (I use Veganaise, which is superior) or heavy cream
- Salt and pepper
- Dill or another fresh herb as a garnish

On medium heat, cook the celeriac, leeks and potatoes in the stock with the oregano for about 20 minutes. Add the lemon juice and cream of choice and cook another five minutes. Allow to cool to a temperature that works with your blender situation. Blend. Season with salt and pepper. Blend again. Season and repeat. Garnish and serve.

*Ari LeVaux writes Flash in the Pan, a syndicated weekly food column carried in more than 60 newspapers nationwide. Though his audience is national, he says he "always writes about Montana. Usually."*



STELLA FONG PHOTOS

A variety pack of: dark chocolate, French toast, caramelized white chocolate raspberry, birthday cake Oreo, and Fruity Pebbles handmade by Amanda Brown of Batter + Crumb.

## Plates

From C1

to make mini cupcakes for one of his events.

Brown said, "I was willing to experiment with making macarons. I gave myself a couple of weeks to find the perfect recipe." After purchasing a recipe on Instagram that failed, Brown found a YouTube video that provided a recipe "that worked. I saw some batches were better than others. It was a science experiment. By tweaking it, I was making it my own." For the event she made macarons with a floral theme: lavender and rose.

"I didn't start promoting the macarons right away. I wanted to keep practicing," she said. However, Brown was grateful for clients who made requests and "I was willing to try things for people, to grow organically, offering a more consistent product." These days, aside from custom orders requiring three days of lead time, Brown is constantly baking new creations, relying on customers to trust her creative judgment.

The trust extends to the colors Brown puts into the cookie shells that alludes to flavor, but the taste is contributed solely from the creamy filling.

Over the years Brown has perfected her technique. Though the confections only have four key ingredients, creating the right texture requires finesse. "Go buy a humidifier," she strongly suggested.

Also, when beating the meringue, she recommended "do not overbeat it or it becomes too dry. The meringue needs to be velvety and fluffy."

Last Christmas, Brown did a pop-up shop at the Billings Seafood Guys retail outlet where she was discovered by the Yel-



Amanda Brown finishes her Fruity Pebbles macarons, piping creamy filling on top of her meringue cookies.



An Andes mint Oreo macaron takes on the color of "Andes Sky" with a filling of rich chocolate mint.

lowstone Valley Food Hub, and was included in one of their Valentine's Day Local Love combination packages. My husband and I chose Option #2, which included two beef tenderloins

from Charter Beef, one pound of scallops from the Billings Seafood Guys, and four macarons.

My husband, who is the food critic in our household, said upon the first bite of his half of the red velvet macaron, "This is really good." The confection was a brooding shade of red with a delicate shell encasing a soft, slightly chewy middle. Sandwiched between the cookies was a dark chocolate filling with a creamy texture. We proceeded to finish every crumb of the coconut, strawberry Oreo, and "better than \$x" macaron with a chocolate shell, fluffy vanilla cream, caramel and crushed toffee filling.

For Easter, she said, "I want to start airbrushing cookies." In the past, she has offered bunny

and egg-shaped macarons.

When your mood strikes for a macaron, got to Facebook or Instagram to Batter + Crumb for some playful elegance.

Stella Fong, author of 'Historic Restaurants of Billings and Billings Food' hosts 'Flavors Under the Big Sky: Celebrating the Bounty of the Region' for Yellowstone Public Radio.



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## Mason

From C1

### Orange Bunny Rolls

Great your family Easter morning with a platter of these adorable bunny rolls. Orange marmalade flavors the inside of these tender yeast rolls as well as the icing. These will likely become your new Easter tradition.

(Makes: 12 rolls)

**Ingredients:**

- 3 1/2-4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 package active dry yeast (2 1/4 teaspoons)
- 1 cup milk
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup butter
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 2/3 cup orange marmalade
- 1 egg (for egg wash)
- 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
- 1/4 cup orange marmalade

**Directions:**

In a large mixing bowl, stir together 2 cups of the flour and the yeast. In a medium saucepan, heat and stir together milk, granulated sugar, butter and kosher salt just until warm (120-130 degrees) and butter almost melts. Add milk mixture and the two eggs to the flour mixture. Stir until combined. Stir in as much of the remaining flour as you can. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead in enough remaining flour to make a moderately soft dough that is smooth and elastic (3-5 minutes). Shape the dough into a ball. Place in a moderately greased bowl; turn once. Cover; let rise in a warm place 1 hour or until double. Punch dough down. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Cover; let rest 10 minutes. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. On a lightly floured surface roll dough out into an 18x12-inch rectangle. Spread the 2/3 cup marmalade over dough, leaving a 4-inch border along one of the long sides. Starting from the filled long side, roll up rectangle. (Don't pinch dough to seal seam.) Slice into 12 equal pieces. Arrange pieces, spiral side up, on prepared baking sheets. To shape: Gently uncurl the 4 inches of the roll without marmalade and cut in half lengthwise using kitchen scissors. Bend each strip and pinch the ends to look like bunny ears. Cut thin lengthwise strips inside each ear. Cover rolls and let rise in a warm place about 30 minutes or until nearly double in size. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a small bowl, lightly beat remaining egg and 1 tablespoon water. Brush onto rolls. Bake rolls about 15 minutes, or until light brown. For icing: Stir together powdered sugar, the 1/4 cup marmalade, and 2 tablespoons water to make a drizzling consistency. Spoon icing over warm rolls. Let cool slightly before serving. Source: "Better Homes & Gardens Magazine", April 2021.

### Fruit-Pecan Pork Roast

For a switch from the traditional ham, how about serving this spectacular pork roast that will impress your guests, not only with the appearance, but the flavor the sweet, tangy, cranberry glaze adds to the pork.

**Ingredients:**

- 1 boneless rolled pork loin roast (3-3 1/2 pounds)
- 1/2 cup chopped green onions
- 4 tablespoons butter, divided
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 (14 oz.) can whole-berry cranberry sauce
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 cup apricot preserves

**Directions:**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place roast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. Bake roast, uncovered, 45 minutes. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, sauté onions in 1 tablespoon butter for 1 minute. Add orange juice and bay leaf; cook and stir over medium heat until thickened, about 4 minutes. Add the cranberry sauce, broth, pecans and vinegar; cook and stir until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Stir in the salt, pepper, sugar and remaining butter until butter

is melted. Discard bay leaf. Remove 1/4 cup sauce and stir in preserves; spoon over roast. Set remaining sauce aside. Bake 20-25 minutes longer until a thermometer reads 145 degrees. Let meat stand for 10 minutes before slicing. Serve with reserved sauce. Hints: Additional flavor can be added to your pork roast by cutting little slits in the roast and inserting 3 or 4 bay leaves. Source: "The Best Recipes from 106 Contests, Taste of Home Grand Prize Winners", 2012.

### Jell-O Strawberry Margarita Salad

For a refreshing spring salad to serve for your Easter dinner, this colorful strawberry salad is sure to be a big hit and the fresh fruit flavors will blend well with ham or other meat that is being served. The crushed tortilla chips are a surprise flavor and texture for the crust.

(Servings: 20)

**Ingredients:**

- 2 cups finely crushed tortilla chips
- 1/2 cup sugar, divided
- 6 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 1/2 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 2 1/4 cups thawed Cool Whip topping, divided
- 2 cups boiling water
- 1 package (6 oz.) strawberry flavored Jell-O
- 1 cup cold water
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- Zest and juice from 1 lime
- 4 cups fresh strawberries, sliced

**Directions:**

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Combine crushed chips, 1/4 cup sugar, and butter; press onto bottom of 13x9-inch pan sprayed with cooking spray. Bake 10 minutes. Cool. Beat cream cheese, milk and remaining sugar in medium bowl with mixer until blended. Stir in 1 cup Cool Whip; spread over crust, completely covering crust. Refrigerate until ready to use. Add boiling water to gelatin mix in large

bowl; stir 2 minutes until completely dissolved. Stir in cold water, orange juice, lime zest and juice. Refrigerate 1 1/2 hours or until thickened. Stir strawberries into gelatin mixture; spoon over cream cheese layer. Refrigerate 3 hours or until firm. Serve topped with remaining Cool Whip. If desired, sprinkle with additional lime zest and garnish with thin lime wedges before serving. Source: "Kraft Food & Family", Spring 2017.

*Bernie Mason writes the Local Flavor column for Lee Montana Newspapers. She was a Yellowstone County extension agent for 24 years. Mason grew up in Sidney in a family of German and Danish ancestry.*