

# Virtuous desserts

Afters remain a staple of the nursery menu, but how can you ensure they offer nutritional value? Here, nurseries suggest recipes that swap sugar for more healthy alternatives without compromising on taste

**N**ew recommendations on reducing children's intake of free sugars mean that early years settings need to look again at the food they are providing (see feature, pages 8-9).

However, puddings are still an essential element of nursery menus, and they can be a healthy choice too, as these recipes show.

growth of healthy bones. The cakes are a great green colour, and the children vote them a firm favourite.

## Ingredients (makes 40 cakes)

✓ 3 eggs ✓ 225g sugar ✓ 115ml oil  
 ✓ 1 tsp vanilla essence ✓ 480g petit pois pea puree ✓ 375g self-raising flour ✓ 1 tsp baking powder ✓ 1 tsp lemon juice ✓ 20g grated chocolate (dairy and nut free) ✓ Couple of leaves of fresh mint

## Method

- Defrost petit pois peas and blend together with the mint leaves to a smooth puree, making sure there are no shells remaining.

- Crack eggs into a bowl, lightly whisk.

- Add the oil, vanilla essence and pea mixture to the eggs, combine with a whisk.

- In a separate bowl sieve the flour and baking powder, add the sugar, fine grate the chocolate into the mix.

- Pour the wet mix into the flour and fold in.

- Spoon into the cupcake cases and bake in the oven at 160°C until just firm to the touch.

## JUICY LUCY PUDDING

**Margaret Taylor, principal, Meadows Children's Nursery, Northumberland**

At Meadows we use fresh fruit to sweeten our puddings rather than using sugar. If recipes do require sugar to alter the consistency, we use half the amount. If sugar is needed to adapt the taste, we do not add any. Natural fresh fruit is always offered

**Our puddings are developed using baking and steaming recipes, retaining all nutrients**



as an alternative for pudding. When tinned fruit is needed for a recipe we use those that come in natural juice rather than those that come in syrup.

**Ingredients** ✓ 6 medium-sized ripe pears, peeled, diced and cored ✓ 350g summer mixed fruits ✓ 50g blueberries ✓ 50g breadcrumbs ✓ Greek yoghurt

## Method

- Preheat the oven to 190°C

- Blitz the blueberries until smooth

- Mix the fruit with the blueberries then add the pears

- Tip into a deep baking dish and cover with foil. Put in the oven for 20 minutes until pears are tender.

- Scatter breadcrumbs over the fruit and bake uncovered in the oven until golden and crispy. Serve hot with Greek yoghurt.

## APPLE, BANANA AND BEETROOT CAKE

**Jane Harrison, director, Red Hen Day Nursery, Lincolnshire**

We tend to reduce the amount of sugar in all our pudding and cake recipes without any effect on the outcome and the children haven't even noticed. Sugar can be replaced by fruit in some recipes; for example, flapjack is both



## PEA CUPCAKES

**Jo Strover, area manager, Tootsies Private Day Nursery, Surrey**

We ensure all our meals are prepared from scratch; no processed or pre-prepared foods are used. By doing this we know what is going into the children's meals and ensure that no additional sugars are added to the food. An example would be a tomato pasta sauce – by making our own from scratch, it is only sweetened by the vegetables and not by adding sugars as many pre-prepared sauces do.

Petit pois are naturally sweet tasting, which means you are able to reduce the amount of sugar used in this recipe. Peas are naturally high in vitamin K, great to support the



**Desserts form part of a healthy balanced diet at Elmscot; Tootsies' cupcakes (left) use petit pois peas for their natural sweet taste and high levels of vitamin K**

- Combine all ingredients in a large storage container with a lid. Ensure the chia seeds are mixed in. For dairy-free, use soya yoghurt.
- Place the lid on the container and refrigerate overnight or for at least eight hours.
- Serve with extra raspberries, and a drizzle of agave if desired.

### **CARROT CAKE WITH ORANGE AND MASCARPONE CREAM** Stephanie Molnar, director, Elmscot Group, Cheshire

At Elmscot Group nurseries, we work hard to turn dessert from a nutritional afterthought into an imaginative opportunity to try new foods in new ways, bringing lots of colour and taste experiences.

Desserts are served with lunch and afternoon tea and vary every day, complementing the nutritional content of the main course to form part of a healthy balanced diet.

We make sure children are not overtired by serving meals at just the right time, to help ensure we catch children before energy levels fall but when they are quite hungry, which helps to make sure both main course and dessert are eaten well.

And no matter what is being served – gooseberries, kiwi fruit or anything unfamiliar – or our team always make it sound like the best treat imaginable to try to encourage enthusiasm about a variety of foods.

**Ingredients (serves 35)** ✓ 2 cups grated carrots ✓ 1 cup sultanas ✓ 1 x 8oz tinned pineapple, drained and chopped ✓ 2 tsp ground cinnamon ✓ 2 tsp baking powder ✓ 1½ tsp bicarbonate of soda ✓ 2 cups plain flour, sieved ✓ 2 cups caster sugar ✓ 1½ vegetable oil ✓ 4 unbeaten eggs

#### *Orange mascarpone cream*

✓ 500g mascarpone cheese (scale up according to number of portions) ✓ caster sugar to taste and orange juice to loosen cream ✓ 1 tbsp orange zest ✓ fresh oranges, skinned and segmented

#### **Method**

- Place all ingredients for the cake in the mixing bowl and mix until well blended. Pour mixture into a greased and lined tin and bake at 160°C for 35-40 minutes. Test with a skewer to check if cooked. The skewer

delicious and healthy when sugar is substituted by mashed banana and/or grated apple. Pudding recipes that contain vegetables are another way of making them more nutritious and provide a valuable learning experience for children when they help to grate vegetables like parsnips, beetroot, carrots, courgettes to include with other ingredients.

One of our most popular desserts is our cook's delicious milk pudding made with pudding rice, full-fat milk and half the amount of sugar stipulated. It is great served with fruit or a fruit coulis. Stewed fruit and custard is another good nursery pudding and can be served with flapjack too.

This recipe uses banana, apple and honey as a replacement for sugar.

**Ingredients (serves 20)** ✓ 200g runny honey ✓ 200ml sunflower oil ✓ 4 eggs ✓ 1 beetroot (medium) ✓ 1 apple ✓ 1 banana (ripe) ✓ 400g self-raising flour ✓ 1 tsp baking powder

#### **Method**

- Grate the beetroot and apple.
- Mash the banana.
- Add to the honey and oil and eggs in a large mixing bowl.
- Beat well before adding the flour and baking powder.
- Mix until smooth.

- Bake in a greased baking tin (9 x 9inch) at 180°C for approximately 50 minutes (until a skewer comes out clean).

### **LEMON RASPBERRY CHIA PUDDING**

Helen Rook, Little Green Rascals Organic Day Nursery, North Yorkshire

We support a healthy, balanced and organic diet for all children aged from birth up to four years. Our puddings are developed using baking and steaming recipes, retaining all nutrients, and we substitute refined sugar with natural sweeteners, including agave syrup, maintaining a balanced glycaemic index for the children.

Organic raw cane sugar is used if necessary, but on a much smaller scale. Fresh and dried fruit and coconut are used to add extra sweetness and flavour, which always goes down a treat in our puddings.

**Ingredients (serves 10)** ✓ 2½ cups plain Greek yoghurt ✓ 2½ cups full fat coconut milk ✓ 2½ tbsp lemon peel, raw ✓ 5 tbsp lemon juice ✓ 2½ cups raspberries ✓ 4 tbsp agave syrup ✓ 1 cup chia seeds

#### **Method**

- Mash the raspberries lightly.



## HEALTHY PUDDINGS

must be dry and clean when removed.

- To make the cream, add the orange zest to the mascarpone cheese and loosen with orange juice to an easy eating consistency. Add caster sugar to taste.
- The cake is very moist. It is delicious served warm with the fresh orange and mascarpone cream and fresh orange segments on the side.



### TRAFFIC LIGHT WAFFLES AND RAINBOW FRUIT SALAD

**Kate Andrews, teacher, Abbeywood Tots, Bristol**

#### Ingredients

*Waffles* ✓ 120g self-raising flour  
 ✓ 140g milk ✓ 1 egg ✓ 25g butter  
 ✓ 25g sugar ✓ 1 tsp cinnamon  
 ✓ 2 scoops of water melon ✓ 2 scoops of cantaloupe melon ✓ 2 scoops of galia melon

*Rainbow fruit salad* ✓ orange ✓ apple  
 ✓ pineapple ✓ peach ✓ kiwi ✓ blood orange ✓ pear

#### Method

- Place sugar and butter in a bowl and cream together.
- Slowly add the egg and milk and mix well.
- Add flour and cinnamon and mix for five minutes until you have a smooth waffle batter.
- Spoon waffle into waffle machine and cook for four to five minutes until golden brown.
- When cooked, place into rectangles for the traffic light shape.
- Ball out eight melon balls, two of each colour. Place one of each colour on the rectangle of waffle.

- For the fruit salad, cut the fruit into triangles and place each differing colour on top of each other.

### OATY FRUIT CRUMBLE WITH YOGHURT

**Nikki Batt, centre manager, Kidzone Cranwell, Lincolnshire**

We try to cut the sugar and salt to a minimum wherever we can. Our rice puddings are made without sugar, but the children can add honey themselves (with supervision). To an adult, it doesn't sound very appetising, but it is surprising how quickly you become accustomed to it. This year we trialled a semi-freddo – frozen yoghurt/whipped cream with seasonal fruit running through, made in a loaf tin and served in slices. It is a great healthier alternative to conventional ice cream.

For yoghurts and fromage frais, we use natural unsweetened versions and serve them with pureed fruit. As a finalist for the *Nursery World Nursery Food* award, we asked Dr Patricia Mucavele, head nutritionist at the Children's Food Trust, about puddings because some parents have asked us not to give their children puddings at all. She advised us that puddings, especially when made with flour, provide an essential source of micronutrients often lacking in a child's diet, so yes, puddings should be provided, as long as they are in small portions and reduced in sugar.

**Ingredients** ✓ 4 cooking (Bramley) apples ✓ 25g caster sugar ✓ 100g butter ✓ 100g oats ✓ 300g plain flour ✓ 1 small bag sultanas ✓ cinnamon ✓ 1 pot of natural yoghurt

#### Method

- Peel, core and cook the apples until softened.
- Add a sprinkle of cinnamon, sultanas and a little sugar to sweeten. Place in an ovenproof pudding dish.
- Make the crumble by rubbing the flour, sugar and butter until the butter is all broken down. Mix in the oats. Cover the apple mix with the crumble.
- Bake in the oven at 180°C for approximately 20-30 minutes.
- Can be served with a dollop of sweetened natural yoghurt (sugar or honey).



**Stationhouse's organic yoghurt, berries and granola mix (above) uses natural sugars such as honey; Abbeywood's waffles and fruit salad dish (left) introduces fruit with creative presentation**

### ORGANIC YOGHURT, SUMMER BERRIES AND HONEY GRANOLA

**James Blackmore, chef, Stationhouse Nursery, Bristol**

At Stationhouse, we use the finest seasonal produce, which allows us to drastically reduce the amount of sugar we add to our food.

In this case we also have used natural sugars such as honey to bring that element of sweet, caramel flavours to the dish.

#### Ingredients (makes 40 portions)

*Berry compote* ✓ 1 punnet blueberries  
 ✓ 1 punnet blackberries ✓ 2 punnet raspberries ✓ 1 punnet strawberries  
 ✓ 1 punnet redcurrants ✓ 25g of sugar (0.6g per portion) ✓ 3 litres organic yoghurt

*Honey granola* ✓ 500g oats ✓ 150ml of organic honey ✓ 50g raisins  
 ✓ 50g dried pineapple

#### Method

- Add half the berries and sugar to the pan and bring to the boil, gently simmer for ten minutes until thickened.
- Leave to cool for a few minutes.
- Add the remaining berries to the pan, keeping a few berries for garnish, and leave to cool.
- For the granola, mix all the ingredients together and place onto a baking tray covered in greaseproof paper.
- Cook in the oven at 160°C for 20 minutes until golden brown.

#### To assemble

- Mix the chilled compote through the yoghurt to make a ripple effect.
- Sprinkle the honey granola on the top and garnish with berries. ■