# Cooking Corner: Can't shake Jell-O salads

*by Saimi Rote Bergmann*

If you think molded gelatin salads have gone the way of "Laugh-In" and "The Monkees," think again. These colorful rings, towers and crowns are still a staple on many holiday tables.

MERRY CHERRY HOLIDAY DESSERT - Merry Cherry Holiday Dessert, from the Jell-O test kitchen, incorporates angel food cake into the Jell-O. CNS Photo courtesy of Kraft Foods. CRANBERRY-ORANGE DREAM - Cranberry-Orange Dream calls for a graham cracker crust topped with sweetened cream cheese, then Jell-O mixed with cranberry sauce and mandarin oranges. CNS Photo courtesy of Kraft Foods. Jean Nist of Canton, Ohio, has been serving the same Jell-O salad for 45 years, and her family wouldn't have it any other way.

"I make my cranberry salad for Thanksgiving and Christmas," she said. "Even the ones who don't like cranberries like this one."

Nist grinds fresh cranberries, an orange (rind and all), apples and pineapple together with sugar then stirs it into cherry Jell-O.

"The original recipe called for lemon Jell-O, but we like the cherry better," Nist said. "It's really pretty."

The convoluted and confusing development of flavored gelatin is explained in "Jell-O, A Biography: The History and Mystery of American's Most Famous Dessert" (Harvest, $15) by Carolyn Wyman. She begins by explaining how gelatin was made before Jell-O.

"First you had to get two calves feet, scald them, take off the hair, slit them in two and extract the fat from between the claws. Then you had to boil them, remove the scum, boil again for six or seven hours ... strain, skim the fat, boiling once more, adding the shells and whites of five eggs, skimming again, and straining twice

through a jelly bag. Then you would add flavoring, sugar and spices ..."

Well, it's no wonder the only folks eating gelatin before Knox and Jell-O were the very rich with many, many servants.

Wyman's book is a fascinating read, and includes obscure information such as Jell-O slogans from 1902 to today and step-by-step instructions on making a Jell-O wrestling mat. She offers many recipes, including an early one for chicken mousse made with lemon Jell-O, chicken broth, whipped topping, mayonnaise, cooked chicken, vinegar, celery and pimento.

Today we might not be making jellied chicken, tomato aspic or Perfection Salad (a 1930s creation of lemon gelatin with carrots, celery and cabbage) but Jell-O salads live on. A Midwest favorite is strawberry Jell-O with sliced strawberries on a pretzel crust with a sour cream filling.

A recipe from Jell-O, Cranberry-Orange Dream, calls for a graham cracker crust topped with sweetened cream cheese then Jell-O mixed with cranberry sauce and mandarin oranges.

Instead of crumbs, Betty Minor of Canton Township, Ohio, uses graham crackers for her gelatin salad called Ribbon Icebox Dessert.

"You just use the whole crackers in the bottom of the pan," Minor said. "The kids just loved it."

CRANBERRY SALAD

1 (10- to 12-ounce) bag of cranberries

2 red apples, cored

1 orange with peel, cut up and seeded

1 (20-ounce) can crushed pineapple

1 1/2 cups sugar

1 (4-serving size) box cherry Jell-O

Pinch salt

1 cup boiling water

1/2 cup English walnuts, finely chopped (optional)

Yields 4 servings.

Grind cranberries, apples and oranges. Mix in pineapple and sugar. Let sit until sugar is dissolved, about 2 to 3 hours.

Mix Jell-O, salt and boiling water. Chill until it starts to gel and is consistency of egg whites. Mix with fruit. Chill.

- From Jean Nist, Canton, Ohio

CRANBERRY-ORANGE DREAM

1 1/2 cups boiling water

1 (8-serving size) box, or 2 (4-serving) box cranberry Jell-O

1 (16 ounce) can whole berry cranberry sauce

11/2 cups cold water

1 (11- or 15.5-ounce) can mandarin oranges, drained

1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, melted

1/2 cup sugar (divided use)

1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened

2 (8-ounce) tubs frozen whipped topping, thawed (divided use)

Yields 16 servings.

Stir boiling water into gelatin in large bowl at least 2 minutes until completely dissolved. Stir in cranberry sauce until melted. Stir in cold water. Refrigerate about 1 1/4 hours or until slightly thickened (consistency of unbeaten egg whites).

Gently stir in mandarin oranges.

In bowl, stir together graham cracker crumbs, butter and 1/4 cup sugar in 13x9-inch dish. Press firmly onto bottom. Refrigerate until ready to fill.

In large bowl with wire whisk, beat together cream cheese and remaining 1/4 cup sugar until smooth. Gently stir in 1 tub of whipped topping. Spread evenly over crust. Spoon gelatin mixture over cream cheese layer. Refrigerate 3 hours or until firm. Just before serving, garnish with remaining tub whipped topping.

MERRY CHERRY HOLIDAY DESSERT

1 1/2 cups boiling water

1 (8-serving) box or 2 (4-serving) boxes cherry Jell-O, or any red flavor

1 1/2 cups cold water

1 (21-ounce) can cherry pie filling

4 cups angel food cake cubes

3 cups cold milk

2 (4-serving) packages Jello-O Vanilla Instant Pudding

1 (8-ounce) tub frozen whipped topping, thawed

Yields 16 servings.

In large bowl, add boiling water to gelatin and stir until completely dissolved. Stir in cold water and cherry pie filling. Refrigerate about 1 hour or until slightly thickened (consistency of unbeaten egg whites).

Place cake cubes in 3-quart serving bowl. Spoon gelatin mixture over cake. Refrigerate about 45 minutes or until set but not firm (gelatin should stick to finger when touched and should mound).

Pour milk into large bowl. Add pudding mixes. Beat with a wire whisk for 1 minute. Gently stir in 2 cups of the whipped topping. Spoon over gelatin mixture in bowl. Refrigerate 2 hours or until set. Top with remaining whipped topping.

RIBBON ICEBOX DESSERT

9 (2 1/2-inch) square graham crackers

1/4 cup (1 stick) butter, softened

1 cup powdered sugar

2 tablespoons evaporated milk

1 (16- to 20-ounce) can fruit cocktail

1 (4-serving) package Jell-O

1/2 cup evaporated milk

Yields 6 servings.

Line bottom of medium loaf pan or small square pan (no bigger that 8x8 inches) with graham crackers.

Place butter in bowl. Add 2 tablespoons powdered sugar at a time, mixing until smooth after each addition. Beat in 2 tablespoons evaporated milk. Spread on crackers in pan and top with rest of crackers. Chill.

Drain juice from fruit cocktail into saucepan and add water to make 1 cup. Heat juice to boiling, add Jell-O, stirring until dissolved. Cool to room temperature and divide into 2 equal portions. Into 1 portion, stir in 1/2 cup evaporated milk. Chill until slightly thicker than egg white. Beat with mixer until fluffy and pour over crackers. Chill until firm.

In remaining portion of gelatin, add 1/2 cup water and 1 cup fruit cocktail (drained). Pour over chilled gelatin layer in pan. Chill until firm and serve with whipped cream.

- Betty Minor, Canton Township, Ohio.

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