COOKING *with Kerry Dunnington*

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A light, naturally sweet treat

By Kerry Dunnington
Special to The Examiner

Recently I was invited to do a cooking demonstration for fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade students at Hampstead Hill Academy, a public charter school in Baltimore. The school's curriculum includes the Food for Life program; a hands-on nutrition education program.

The curriculum was created by the Food Studies Institute, a nonprofit organization that works to improve the health and education of students through research studies that document improvements in health, behavior and academic performance through food-based solutions. Food for Life is based on the award-winning Food is Elementary curriculum, designed by Dr. Antonia Demas, founder of the Food Studies Institute. The program educates children about nutrition, cooking and gardening by providing positive, sensory-based experiences through cooking and growing healthy foods.

I was asked to create a healthy snack the kids could prepare themselves over their summer vacation. In keeping with my philosophy that parallels the Food for Life philosophy, I developed a simple, nutritious cherry pudding using nontraditional ingredients that doesn't require cooking. The basis of the pudding is prepared using silken tofu (high in vegetable protein, gluten-free and nearly fat-free), and cactus syrup (a natural sweetener) replaces white granulated sugar.

Kids loved watching the combination come together in the blender. They were amazed that in just a few minutes they were eating spoonfuls of creamy pudding. The ultimate reward came when one student said, "Mrs. Dunnington, I never knew something could taste so delicious without using white sugar." Mission accomplished!

Catch Kerry's column biweekly in Body & Soul. She can be reached at thisbookcooks@verizon.net.

Vegan cherry pudding (not just for kids)

The basis for this recipe is tofu, natural sweeteners and vanilla. If you're not a fan of cherries, just about any fruit works well in this recipe; change the fruit according to what's in season. You can also turn the basis of this into a chocolate pudding by replacing the fruit with a 1/2 cup of cocoa powder, 1 teaspoon of cinnamon and 1 tablespoon vanilla extract. Preparation tip: Refrigerate the tofu before preparing. For optimum flavor, the pudding is best made in advance. Serve very cold.

- **Two 12.3-ounce packages extra-firm Silken Lite Tofu, drained of any excess water**
- **2 cups fresh or frozen pitted cherries**
- **1/4 cup maple syrup**
- **1/4 cup cactus syrup (agave nectar)**
- **2 teaspoons vanilla extract**

In a blender, combine, tofu, cherries, maple syrup, cactus syrup and vanilla. Process until smooth and creamy. Chill for several hours before serving. Yields 10 1/2-cup servings.

Nutritional analysis: 73 calories, 1 gram total fat, 0 grams saturated fat, 0 grams trans fat, 0 mgs cholesterol, 58 mgs sodium, 13 grams total carbohydrate, 1 gram dietary fiber, 5 grams protein, 11 grams sugar

NOT JUST FOR CHERRIES
Try other fruits as well for the pudding.

Serving suggestions:

- Spoon pudding into parfait glasses and top with granola
- Fill a baked pie shell with pudding
- Mini Fillo shells (available in the frozen food section of most grocery stores) are delicious bite-size "containers" for pudding; garnish with chopped nuts
- Fill crepes with pudding
- Top pancakes, waffles and oatmeal with dollops of pudding
- Add to fruit smoothies
- Eat pudding as you would yogurt

Cactus syrup (agave nectar) and silken tofu (Mori-Nu brand) are available in most grocery stores and major health-oriented grocery stores nationwide.

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