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Where do you stand in cake vs. pie debate?

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First Course



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Today is National Pie Day, a fact that you probably don't care about unless a) you work for the American Pie Council, which promotes the day, or b) you have a piece of your favorite flavor sitting in front of you right now.

Yeah, me, neither.

But you're welcome to drop off a wedge of lemon sponge or rhubarb custard pie to 333 W. State St. any time today (just kidding).

Generally speaking, dessert lovers fall into one of two camps: cake or pie. Even those who reside contentedly in both sugary worlds usually have a preference.

On the first Saturday in January, the pie-cake square-off resulted in a draw.

Forgoing the traditional many-tiered white wedding cake, my daughter and new son-in-law served their wedding guests assorted cakes and pies at their reception on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. The spread in the Great Hall of Memorial Union tempted dessert lovers with chocolate, white and carrot cakes and lemon meringue, caramel apple and French silk pies.

So when it came time for the ceremonial feed-each-other photo op, she fed him a forkful of lemon meringue pie, while he offered her a bite of chocolate cake.

For Dave, the real draw of his choice was the meringue. For Gwen, cake in general is supreme because it offers that combination of cake and frosting textures, and, well, pie can be a bit heavy.

I like to think these divergent tastes in desserts are a happy metaphor for the couple's complementary personalities.

According to Georgia Finnerty, bakery manager for Hubbard Avenue Confections in Middleton, which catered the couple's cakes and pies, lemon meringue is "a popular favorite with the gentlemen," though she couldn't explain why.

The Hubbard Avenue Diner, where the bakery is located, is known for its pies - in dozens of flavors.

"But we also do quite a few traditional wedding cakes," Finnerty said. "I've been decorating cakes for over 20 years and I've seen lots of changes. It pretty much runs the gamut."

Wedding dessert buffets and "pie weddings," she said, are increasingly popular. In the latter case, many brides and grooms "still want a cake to cut for the photographs," but others are content to feed each other pie. Besides lemon meringue, French silk is another common bridal couple choice.

"I encourage brides and grooms to have whatever flavors of pie they love," Finnerty said. "Usually it involves some type of compromise. . . ."

Considering the occasion, this is just as well.

Search the Internet under "pie vs. cake," and you'll find forums where no one is of a mind to compromise on this matter.

"Eating cake is like eating a flavored sponge with a sickly too-sweet layer of slime on top of it," wrote a decidedly pro-pie individual at one such forum (scalzi.com/whatever/003664).

Other pithy postings on behalf of cake or pie included these:

Cake: "Cake is wonderful. It is light and sweet. It melts on your tongue. As soon as you serve it, everyone knows you have something to celebrate."

Pie: "Marie Antoinette would have been spared if she had only said 'Let them eat PIE.' "

Cake: "Pie has an unnerving tendency of taking on blob-like characteristics and glooping all over everything."

Pie: "It's baseball, mom and apple PIE, not soccer, dad and carrot CAKE."

Cake: "When's the last time you saw a hot stripper pop out of a giant pie?"

Pie: "Pie has 3.14159 . . . What does cake have?"

All worthy points - except for, perhaps, the one about the stripper.

As for me, I'll take either dessert, depending on the flavor, but I probably lean toward cake.

In fact, I was reaching for a piece of white cake at the wedding reception when I was tapped on the shoulder and presented by my daughters with a personal cake of my own: German chocolate.

In a happy convergence of dates, this was also my birthday, and German chocolate had been my childhood favorite.

So forgive me if on this day set aside for pie, I am compelled to wonder:

When is National Cake Day?

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