



Sweet on molasses

A natural sweetener, molasses is an abiding part of our past that endures in both sweet and savoury dishes

Newfoundland folklorist Diane Tye thinks a lot about molasses. She grew up with it, bakes with it and has even written an academic paper on it.

“My grandmother had molasses on the table in a glass; it was always present,” says the Nova Scotia native. “A lot of molasses and biscuits were served at her place. My mother would make baked beans with molasses and brown bread on Saturday nights. And I use it for mincemeat and fruitcake.”

While interviewing older women in Newfoundland communities, Tye would often enjoy their gingersnaps made with molasses. “They are so tasty but skillful to do, so thin and crispy and the right amount of ginger,” she says. “That’s something I have a strong affinity for.” Her mother also made fabulous gingersnaps (see recipe on page 58) included in Tye’s book, *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*.

In the 17th century, England, France and Spain controlled the Caribbean islands with slaves working the sugar-cane fields. They traded sugar and molasses with the present-day Atlantic Provinces for lumber, salt fish and salt beef. They also distilled it into rum and shipped it here.

Even as people moved on to sugar in the late 1800s, molasses remained popular as a sweetener in tea or baking, especially in Newfoundland. It was an essential part of the

BY: VALERIE MANSOUR

PHOTOS BY: DENNIS EVANS

diet of working-class people. "If you didn't have enough to eat, you'd fill up on bread and molasses," says Tye. People considered it nutritious, as it contains calcium, potassium and other minerals. They used the barrels for storage and shipping.

It's a "generational connection," says Bridget Oland, marketing manager and recipe developer for Crosby Molasses of Saint John, New Brunswick. This fifth-generation family business began in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia in 1897. "There are still lots of excellent old recipes around that people make on a regular basis," Oland says. "I used to make those with my grandmother, and my daughter likes to make them with my mom."

Molasses is a pure product. The thick, dark brown syrup comes from the juice extracted from mature sugar cane. "It's simple and natural," says Oland. "It has wholesomeness and adds flavour, sweet or savoury. It has a distinctive taste and can enhance other flavours depending on how you pair it: with coffee or with chocolate. It adds a bit of oomph."

Oland has the enviable task of inventing new molasses recipes. She has created a different take on caramelized onions, Molasses Roasted Onions (see recipe on page 59) and Ginger Pear Apple Crisp that weds autumn fruit with an alluring combination of lemon, ginger and molasses (see recipe on page 58). It also works magic in Teriyaki Salmon (see recipe at www.eastcoastliving.ca.) As she puts it, "Molasses can stand up to soy."

She recommends using it as a sweetener in salad dressings, and in any tomato-based soup, stew or sauce to balance the acidity of tomatoes. "Molasses is a little tangy, almost a little spicy on the tongue, and there's a bit of a zing," she says.

Crosby makes four varieties. Fancy is the highest grade, condensed from pure cane juice; black strap is more intense and less sweet; cooking molasses is a blend of the two; and light molasses is a low-sugar alternative.

Geir Simensen, owner and executive chef of Halifax's Scanway Catering, says molasses is a staple for families such as his with a Scandinavian background, especially for gingerbread hearts at Christmas. "We'd affiliate Christmas cookies and things like that with molasses, and we'd use it in other kinds of cooking, beans with maple and a base of molasses," he says. "It provides that great depth of flavour."

Simensen uses molasses in Spice Cookies (see recipe on right) and in a rub and barbecue sauce for his intensely flavoured Pulled Pork (see recipe on page 61).

He also makes Molasses Glazed Doughnuts (see recipe on page 58). "Doughnuts make people feel good, totally a comfort food," he says. "You're not going to eat a dozen." Because it feels less refined than sugar, Simensen finds that molasses works well as a sugar substitute, much like maple syrup and honey. He finds black strap molasses bitter, even in rum.

Whether it was molasses and bacon on toast, molasses spread on Cheez Whiz or molasses in a favourite cookie, East Coast home cooks and professional chefs fondly recall its sticky goodness and continue to enjoy eating and cooking with it today. "There's a sweetness and a richness to it," says Tye. "It's a homey taste. I'll always have warm and strong memories of molasses." ❄️

Molasses Spice Cookies

Delicious cookies are part of what has earned Scanway Catering its status for delectable desserts. The blend of spices along with molasses gives these cookies a flavourful kick. *Recipe courtesy Geir Simensen, Scanway Catering.*

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, cream together butter and sugar, add eggs and molasses.
2. In another bowl, mix dry ingredients together and then stir in with creamed ingredients.
3. Divide into cookie-sized portions, roll in a bit of sugar, press down with palm of your hand on greased baking sheet.
4. Bake at 350°F (175°C) for 10 minutes or until done.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/8 cups (280 ml) butter
- 1 1/2 cups (375 ml) sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/4 cups (310 ml) molasses
- 4 cups (1 L) flour
- 6 tsp (90 ml) baking soda
- 2 tsp (10 ml) ground ginger
- 1 1/4 tsp (6 ml) cinnamon
- 1 1/4 tsp (6 ml) cloves
- 1 1/4 tsp (6 ml) cardamom





Molasses doughnuts

When it's time for a real treat, what can be better than doughnuts? And these ones are something special with a splash of molasses in the glaze. *Recipe courtesy Geir Simensen, Scanway Catering.*

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix dry ingredients together, incorporate wet ingredients. Mix until blended, do not over mix.
2. Heat deep fryer oil to 375°F (190°C).
3. Fry in oil until golden brown using doughnut hopper.
4. Slowly heat fondant over pot of simmering water, until slightly warm. Stir in molasses to taste.
5. Dip doughnuts in glaze after they've cooled.
6. Let dry on wire rack. Yields about 30.

INGREDIENTS

For dough:

- 8 cups (2 L) pastry flour
- 2 tsp (10 ml) baking powder
- 3 tsp (15 ml) salt
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) ground cinnamon
- 2 tsp (10 ml) ground ginger
- 1 tsp (5 ml) ground nutmeg
- 1 1/2 cups (375 ml) sugar
- 3 eggs
- 3 egg yolks
- 2 cups (500 ml) whole milk
- 6 Tbsp (90 ml) lard

For molasses glaze:

Your favourite fondant recipe with molasses to taste.

Laurene's Ginger Snaps

Diane Tye's mother baked a lot of cookies, as discussed in Diane's book, *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*. The trick to these ginger snaps is to slice them as thin as possible to ensure they have the requisite snap. *Recipe courtesy Diane Tye.*

DIRECTIONS

1. Cream shortening, sugar, molasses and egg in large bowl.
2. Mix dry ingredients together in another bowl, add to egg mixture.
3. Shape into a log and chill in refrigerator for at least one hour.
4. Slice as thin as possible and place on greased baking sheet.
5. Bake in 375°F (190°C) oven for just a few minutes. Yields 4 dozen.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup (125 ml) shortening
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) brown sugar
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) molasses
- 1 egg
- 3 cups (750 ml) flour
- 2 tsp (10 ml) soda in
- 1/3 cup (75 ml) hot water
- 1/2 tsp (2 ml) salt
- 1 tsp (5 ml) ginger
- 1 tsp (5 ml) cinnamon
- 1 tsp (5 ml) allspice

Ginger Pear Apple Crisp

Molasses provides a great sugar substitute for the fruit filling in this yummy crisp with its crunchy topping. *Recipe courtesy Bridget Oland, Crosby Molasses.*

DIRECTIONS

1. In large bowl, toss the pears and apples with flour, then add molasses, lemon juice and ginger.
2. In another bowl, whisk oats, flour, ginger and brown sugar.
3. Pour melted butter over and stir until well blended.
4. Scrape pear mixture into good-sized casserole dish (high-sided for a deeper crisp) and top with flour mixture. Bake at 350°F (175°C) for 50 to 60 minutes or until filling bubbles and fruit is soft.

INGREDIENTS

For filling:

- 4 pears, peeled and chopped
- 2 apples, (not too crisp) peeled and chopped
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) flour
- 1/3 cup (75 ml) Crosby's Fancy Molasses
- 2 tsp (10 ml) lemon juice
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) ginger

For topping:

- 1 cup (250 ml) rolled oats
- 1 cup (250 ml) flour
- 1/2 tsp (2 ml) ginger
- 1/3-1/2 cup (75-125ml) brown sugar
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) butter, melted



Molasses Baked Beans with Apples

Nothing celebrates molasses quite like baked beans. *Recipe courtesy Geir Simensen, Scanway Catering.*

DIRECTIONS

1. Soak beans several hours, drain, add water to cover, bring to a boil, simmer about an hour.
2. Drain beans and place in baking dish with tight lid.
3. Fry bacon, add it and remaining ingredients to beans and stir well.
4. Add water.
5. Bake at 275°F (135°C) until beans are tender and have absorbed liquid.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups (250 ml) dried white beans
8 strips smoked local bacon
1 onion, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
2 apples, peeled and cut in chunks
1/2 cup (125 ml) molasses
1/2 cup (125 ml) maple syrup
1 Tbsp (15 ml) Coles mustard
3 sprigs parsley, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
 salt, pepper to taste
1 1/2 cups (375 ml) water

Molasses Roasted Onions

The addition of molasses creates a rich, savoury sweetness that takes these onions to a whole new level. Great with burgers and tasty over fresh goat cheese. *Recipe courtesy Bridget Oland, Crosby Molasses.*

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine all ingredients in bowl and mix well.
2. Make packet with tin foil and pour ingredients in foil. Wrap well twice so you have a double layer.
3. Bake in oven at 350°F (175°C) or BBQ over medium, for about 40 minutes. Can store in fridge for up to a week.

INGREDIENTS

2 large onions, peeled and sliced thickly
3-4 Tbsp (45-60 ml) Crosby's Fancy Molasses
pinch salt
few grinds black pepper
1 Tbsp (15 ml) balsamic or cider vinegar
one sprig fresh thyme (optional)



Photo: Bridget Oland

Pulled Pork with Molasses Barbecue Sauce

This irresistible pulled pork recipe oozes with flavour and celebrates molasses by using it in both the rub and the barbecue sauce. *Recipe courtesy Geir Simensen, Scanway Catering.*

DIRECTIONS

1. For the rub, mix dry ingredients together, add molasses. Massage into meat, covering evenly.
2. Place pork in slow cooker on bed of carrots, onions, celery and garlic.
3. Cover in water and beer with bay leaf and peppercorns.
4. Slow cook for 8 hours on medium heat.
5. While pork is slow cooking, prepare BBQ sauce by sautéing vegetables and garlic in butter.
6. Add remaining ingredients. Cook on very low for an hour.
7. Transfer to blender. Blend until smooth, return to pot, reduce until desired consistency is reached.
8. Allow pulled pork to cool in stock. Remove and strain. Pull pork apart.
9. Add pulled pork to BBQ sauce over low heat.
10. Pile high on burger bun, top with shredded aged white cheddar and crispy fried onions. Enjoy with a red beer.

Executive chef Geir Simensen says molasses is a popular ingredient in Scandinavian treats. But he appreciates its versatility and also uses it in savoury recipes like pulled pork.



INGREDIENTS

For the rub:

- 2 Tbsp (30 ml) each:** onion powder, garlic powder, cayenne powder, dried ancho chiles, dried chipotle, ground black pepper
- 1 cup (250 ml)** molasses

For the pork:

- 1 10-lb (4.5 kg)** pork shoulder from your local butcher
- 3** carrots, sliced
- 2** onions, sliced
- 2** celery sticks, diced
- 2 cloves** garlic, minced
- 1 bottle** beer, Garrison Irish red preferred
- 1** bay leaf
- 1 Tbsp (15 ml)** peppercorns

For the molasses BBQ sauce:

- 1/2 cup (125 ml)** carrots, chopped
- 1 cup (250 ml)** onions, chopped
- 1/2 cup (125 ml)** celery, chopped
- 4 cloves** garlic
- 1/3 cup (75 ml)** butter
- 2** liquid Espresso shots
- 1 cup (250 ml)** molasses
- 2 small cans** tomatoes
- 1** ancho pepper, dried
- 1** chipotle pepper in adobo sauce (*from a can*)
- 1 tsp (5 ml)** mustard powder
- 2 Tbsp (30 ml)** fresh parsley, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste

For garnish:

- shredded aged cheddar, and
- crispy fried onions, to taste



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