

Nomad Editions

Real Eats

January 27, 2012



*Not Your
Mom's Jell-O*

PLUS Eating in Dubai, Return of the Cosmo, 5 Fail-Proof Recipes

Portfolio

JIGGLY WIGGLY

A Jell-O Mold Maven Plays with Her Food

Photographs by Angie Cao

Photographs and recipes reprinted with permission from *Hello, Jell-O!: 50+ Inventive Recipes for Gelatin Treats and Jiggly Sweets*. Copyright © 2012 by Victoria Belanger. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, Berkeley, CA.



Raspberry Cosmo



Chocolate Raspberry
Mousse Cups



Classic Rainbow Mold



Petite Watermelons

For 34-year-old Victoria Belanger, just about anything can be gelatinized, "including your favorite cocktail!" she reminds us. But Belanger's not talking about those cheap vodka-filled gel shots you slurped in college. Instead, the self-proclaimed Jello Mold Mistress of Brooklyn mixes sweetened condensed milk, a little coffee, and coffee liqueur to form an elegant Kahlua drink-dessert. "It's really simple to make, but really rich and decadent."

As one scans her blog, JelloMoldMistress.com, or her forthcoming book — *Hello, Jell-O!*, with photographs by Angie Cao and text by Raquel D'Apice — it's easy to see that Belanger's got an eye for color. (No surprise there: When not Jell-O-ing or biking around her borough, the Roanoke, Virg. native works as a photographer.) But she hasn't always been such a gelatin guru.

"It wasn't until a couple of years ago, when I was looking for a new hobby and creative outlet, that I got into Jell-O mold-making," she says. Besides Jell-O being both a hands-on and a little offbeat way of contributing to friends' dinner parties — "I wanted to show up at social events with something attention grabbing" — she found that Jell-O is also wonderfully...cheap. "The economy was not doing too great, and my

friends and I were starting to host social gatherings at each other's homes rather than going out." Inexpensive Jell-O was the perfect present for a potluck.

From that she started blogging as the Jello [sic] Mold Mistress of Brooklyn, one of very few people documenting gelatin efforts in the kitchen. "Over the past few years, as Jell-O's popularity has been making a comeback, several other Jell-O blogs have popped up, but everyone's doing something a little different," she says. "I really like one called *My Jello Americans*," a blog written by two young women in Philadelphia focusing largely on booze-fueled gelatin creations. "They make tiny little Jell-O shot molds with pop-culture themes and even infuse their own liquor. Very creative!"

Belanger also confesses a fondness for British food artists Bompas and Parr, who are known for their Jell-O renditions of famous buildings. "I am in awe of their skills! I especially love their glow-in-the-dark Jell-O," she says. "Not to give away too many trade secrets, but add a little tonic water to a Jell-O mold and the quinine in it will glow under a UV light."

Hello, Jell-O also provides a few vegetarian recipes, which rely on seaweed-derived agar in order to gel. (For those unfamiliar with gelatin's provenance, PETA

puts it best: "It's probably no coincidence that gelatin rhymes with skeleton — because that's exactly what it is.") But she generally sticks with the powdered stuff Bill Cosby rhapsodized about throughout many of our childhoods, if not for nostalgia then for ease. "For the book I wanted to make sure all the recipes were as simple and accessible as possible, while still creating tasty treats with artistic presentations."

And she did. The book has artistry in spades: Her recipes suspend fruits in both clear and creamy gels, or layer different flavors into rainbow molds, and even fashion hollowed-out lime halves into petite watermelon wedges. But first-time Jell-O-ers needn't worry, because most Jell-O recipes don't require flawless technique. "Thankfully," Belanger says, "even the worst Jell-O experiment won't result in your kitchen going up in flames."

Her biggest Jell-O disaster? A cheese concoction that contained unflavored gelatin, cottage cheese, chive cream cheese, sour cream, and Worcestershire sauce — and it tasted just fine to her. "I thought it was delicious. My friends did not agree." But even that one only took some tweaking. "About a year later I made a pimento cheese Jell-O mold," a spreadable medley of "shredded cheddar, pimentos, cream cheese,

and a dollop of mayo," she says. The verdict? "It was a hit! Go figure."

—Matthew Zuras

PETITE WATERMELONS

If the response you're looking for when you unveil your gelatin is, "ohhhhh, it's so cute!" this recipe will do it. After seeing these little creations on various foodie blogs around the Web, I was inspired to make my own version of these treats. A sweet strawberry puree encased in a lime rind and sprinkled with tiny black seeds, these tiny watermelon slices will have people fawning over their inherent adorableness (the hard part is getting people to stop gushing and eat them). Note: this recipe is best served within a day of preparation, as the lime rinds will make the gelatin bitter if stored for too long.

Makes 20 fruit slices.

- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 (3-ounce) package strawberry-flavored gelatin
- 1 cup chopped fresh or frozen and thawed strawberries
- 1/2 cup cold water or vodka
- 5 limes, halved, pulp scooped out and discarded, and rind halves reserved

- 1 teaspoon black sesame seeds, poppy seeds, or basil seeds

In a bowl, add the boiling water to the gelatin and stir until the gelatin is fully dissolved. Transfer the gelatin to a blender. Add the strawberries and cold water and blend until liquefied. Refrigerate until thickened. Skim off any foam that has risen to the top of the gelatin mixture and stir to evenly distribute the strawberry puree. Spoon into the lime rind halves. Refrigerate until firm.

Carefully halve the gelatin-filled lime rinds again. Sprinkle with the seeds and serve.

CLASSIC RAINBOW MOLD

"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."

—Dolly Parton

No quote embodies more clearly the experience of creating the ten-layer rainbow mold. The quintessential classic Jell-O recipe, the rainbow mold pops up in nearly every gelatin cookbook. My version uses sweetened condensed milk rather than sour cream or yogurt because it tastes better and dissolves more smoothly. The rainbow mold is visually stunning, but requires so much

patience that it would cause Tibetan monks to tear out their hair—if they had any. Undertaking it is no easy feat, but if you succeed, the end result is undeniably beautiful. Note: Timing is key with this mold, so get organized before you begin. I've also included time estimates for each stage to help keep you on track.

Makes one 7-cup gelatin mold.

- 6 1/4 cups boiling water
- 5 (3-ounce) packages flavored gelatin in 5 different colors
- 1 1/4 cups (14-ounce can) sweetened condensed milk

In a small bowl, add 1 1/4 cups of the boiling water to 1 package of the gelatin and stir until the gelatin is fully dissolved. Let the mixture cool to room temperature, then pour 3/4 cup of the dissolved gelatin mixture into a 7-cup mold. Refrigerate until set but not firm (about 15 minutes). Add 3 tablespoons of the sweetened condensed milk to the remaining gelatin and stir until the mixture is smooth. Let the mixture cool to room temperature, then pour over the clear gelatin layer in the mold. Refrigerate until set but not firm (about 15 minutes).

Repeat the process for each flavor to create

10 layers, 1 clear and 1 opaque layer of all 5 Jell-O colors. Remember that the gelatin must cool to room temperature or cooler before spooning it over the layer already in the mold. It may be best to use 2 small bowls for each flavor, one for the clear and one for the opaque gelatin to cool in before pouring each into the mold. Have 2 additional small bowls on hand so you can begin to prepare the next flavor layers while the preceding layer is cooling.

Refrigerate the finished mold until firm. Unmold and serve.

CHOCOLATE RASPBERRY MOUSSE CUPS

As soon as a dessert involves something served in a chocolate cup, it has my undivided attention. This fabulous dessert crosses indulgent chocolate with a filling of light, fruity raspberry mousse. Individual servings are perfect for sharing. (Or, if you're so inclined, not sharing.) You can garnish these little gems with whipped cream and chocolate shavings, or a couple of jaunty raspberries, if you like.

Refrigerate any extra mousse in a separate container to snack on later.

Makes 6.

- 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 tablespoons solid vegetable shortening
- 1 tablespoon (1 envelope) unflavored gelatin powder
- 1/4 cup cold water
- 1/2 cup boiling water
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cups fresh raspberries
- 2 cups whipped cream (1 cup heavy cream, whipped)

To make the chocolate cups, in a small saucepan, heat the chocolate chips and shortening over high heat, stirring continuously until melted. Using the back of a metal spoon, spread the chocolate evenly inside six 3 1/2-inch foil muffin liners. Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes.

To make the mousse, in a bowl, sprinkle the gelatin evenly over the cold water and allow the gelatin to absorb the water for 2 minutes. Add the boiling water and stir until the gelatin is fully dissolved. Add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Transfer the gelatin mixture to a blender. Add the berries and blend until liquefied. Set a fine-mesh strainer over a bowl and pour the mixture through the strainer to strain out the seeds.

Refrigerate until thickened.

Rinse the blender of any remaining

raspberry seeds and return the thickened raspberry gelatin mixture to the blender. Add the whipped cream and blend until smooth. Refrigerate until thickened.

Carefully peel away the foil from the chocolate cups. Spoon the mousse into the cups and serve.

RASPBERRY COSMO

The sophistication of a cosmopolitan with the sweet, fruity taste of raspberry. Perfect for anyone who values the immense health benefits of berries, as well as people like myself, who value the immense health benefits of vodka.

Makes one 4-cup gelatin mold or 5 to 8 individual glasses.

- 2 tablespoons (2 envelopes) unflavored gelatin powder
- 1/2 cup cold water
- 1 1/4 cups cranberry juice
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup cold triple sec
- 1/2 cup cold vodka
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 cup fresh raspberries

In a large bowl, sprinkle the gelatin evenly

over the cold water and allow the gelatin to absorb the water for 2 minutes. In a saucepan, bring the cranberry juice and sugar just to a boil over medium heat. Remove from the heat. Pour the boiling mixture into the gelatin and stir until the gelatin is fully dissolved. Let the mixture cool; stir in the triple sec, vodka, and lime juice. Refrigerate until thickened. Fold in the raspberries. Spoon into a 4-cup mold or 5 to 8 martini glasses. Refrigerate until firm. Unmold and serve, or serve in the martini glasses. 🍷