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The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

Fall 2023 Supplement



About this Newsletter

The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter will change in appearance starting with the winter issue in January. We have been using a layout that is easier to read as a paper copy, but more labor-intensive and costly than the electronic version we are moving to. The electronic newsletter will be easier to read online and can still be printed out. For those who need them, paper copies will be available at the Co-op.

The Supplement you are receiving here is a trial of that new format so we can get feedback and resolve problems before publishing a full issue. Feedback can be sent to the editor, Glenda Bissex, at songboat@vtlink.net.

This Supplement includes seasonal recipes from past issues, a favorite Newsletter feature. It also contains a few articles—a little nostalgia tour—from past issues, starting with a snippet from the very first Plainfield Co-op Newsletter in 1972.

We thank Julia Wilk and Leah Tedesco for working with us to make this change possible; and Elizabeth Mathai, our layout and design editor, for the many hours she has devoted to this project.

The Newsletter Committee

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Blasts from the Past

From the first Plainfield Co-op Newsletter (Winter 1972-73):

Every Saturday afternoon, 1 pm. Children's film series. Free, adults not admitted without a child along.

The first film was shown to about 100 little and big people [*the film series, which lasted for many years, was produced by Rick Winston and Chris Wood. Rick went on to open the Savoy Theater many years later – Eds*]. . . . Last night we held our third community supper. We made about \$160 to help pay the building maintenance expenses. Special thanks to the Midnight Plowboys and the Whitehearts for the sounds that shook the building.

[Board Report](#)

by Brian Tokar (2009)

Well it just keeps getting better! Major improvements in the store have begun, our dedicated and thoroughly community-minded staff is thriving, and our Co-op is looking and feeling better all the time. ... [Read more](#)

[Growth Spurts Are Such A Pain; Plainfield Co-op's Early Years](#)

by Jim Higgins (2010)

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[The Mystery and Challenges of Department Purchasing or . . . Why We Carry One Damn Thing Instead of Another](#)

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[Remembering John Wires \(1922-2013\)](#)

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[Cooperatives and the Environment](#)

by Joseph Gainza, Co-op Board member (2015)

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[On Being A Working Member](#)

by Jacqueline Soule (2018)

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[Read more](#)



Recipes

Seasonal Recipes from Past Issues —

- [Stuffed Mushrooms \(appetizer\)](#)
- [Carrot and Orange Soup](#)
- [Cranberry-Pear Sauce with Ginger](#)
- [Kaddu \(Sweet and Sour Butternut Squash\)](#)
- [Andrea Serota's Apple Cake](#)
- [Adele Dawson's Baked Custard](#)



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Board Report From 2009

by Brain Tokar

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2009

Well it just keeps getting better! Major improvements in the store have begun, our dedicated and thoroughly community-minded staff is thriving, and our Co-op is looking and feeling better all the time. Over the past few months, I can't recall how many long-time members have stopped to tell me that the Co-op is better than ever!

Major improvements to our building are underway: the new furnace is installed in the basement, lots of space is freed up out back, and plans are in full gear for a major overhaul of our retail space toward the end of September. Look out for notices of major Co-op work-days coming up in just a few weeks. We'll repaint and rearrange the store to make room for our new produce coolers and an expanded bulk section. The next phase will be in the back, where we'll be getting a new, efficient walk-in cooler and remodeling our packing and storage areas.

As you already know, fundraising for these ambitious plans is also underway. As of August 6th (less than 3 weeks after the letters went out, and before we started meeting with potential larger donors), members had pledged over \$6000 toward our fundraising goal. These funds will supplement our Cooperative Fund of New England loan and a phenomenal anonymous \$10,000 donation, making the entire renovation plan possible. The staff is finding all manner of useful cost-cutting measures as they plan the details of the renovations, helping assure that we'll stay on budget. Some of these changes were

first proposed by Sam Clark and other Building Committee members the last time I was on the board, back in the mid-1990s. It's truly wonderful to see it all coming together now! If you haven't yet made a donation to this process, please contribute what you can today.

We're also starting to plan our Annual Membership Meeting, which is scheduled for Sunday, November 8th. The membership will be asked to review several proposed bylaw changes at this meeting, most of which are aimed to facilitate the transition to equity ownership of our Co-op. You may recall that a general plan for member equity was approved at last November's meeting. Since then, board members and others have been working hard to develop a plan that will meet the Co-op's medium term capital needs without raising the amount of money that members contribute each year—until now in the form of annual dues. Introducing equity will mean that we are not only members, but fully empowered owners of the Co-op, and discounts at the register will be replaced by patronage refunds, significantly improving our financial planning. Almost all co-ops operate this way, and member equity has proved an important tool to help many co-ops, across the country and around the world, keep developing in ways that truly meet the needs and wishes of their community.

We will also have elections to fill several board seats this fall. We are thrilled that Rebecca Armell, who is doing an outstanding job as Secretary and as chair of the Fundraising Committee, will be on the slate of candidates for the three open 3-year terms, as will Mike Peabody, who stepped in to finish out Chris Riddell's term earlier this year. Ian Maas' 3-year term is ending as well, however he will not be seeking a second term. George Longenecker will be on the slate of candidates running for the one open 1-year term (the remainder of Chris' term, which will be up for election this time, pending a long-needed bylaw change). We need at least one additional candidate (nominally for the seat currently held by Ian), and would love to see several additional energetic and enthusiastic folks running for these seats on the board. The board continues to meet the first Tuesday of every month, and plays a key role in helping guide our Co-op toward the future. Please consider joining us! Contact me, or one of the staff members, if you are interested.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone over the next few months as we work together to make these exciting improvements happen! ❖

Growth spurts are such a pain

The Plainfield Co-Op's Early Years

by Jim Higgins

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2010

The tempest created this summer by Hunger Mountain Co-op's proposed expansion into Waterbury reminds me of a number of similarly-themed dust-ups during the Plainfield Co-op's first five years, 1971-1975.

As I have written previously in this history column, the Co-op, during its first year or so, was viewed as something of a gangly toddler, mostly given a free pass over its foibles. But once the Co-op embedded itself into the Grange Hall late in 1972 we entered a lively adolescent period where vigorous debate amongst the most activist members was the norm. The debates emerged at the monthly meetings and later spilled out to ad hoc sessions for deeper discussion.

The three most contentious topics on Co-op agendas in those early years were:

- Product line: organic vs. non-organic;
- Political line: general political activism vs. exclusively food politics;
- Growth: centralized model vs. decentralized.

Organic vs. non-organic

To paraphrase Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican candidate for President, "Extremism in the defense of organic food is no vice," or, at least, that's what many of us projected to the world. The perception of natural foods elitism at the Co-op was, of course, an alienating force in the mainstream community. Our hard line friends were also quick to remind us that as long as we were mostly perceived as arrogant "food fascists," we were doomed (in the 1970's) to political irrelevance.

Despite the reality that most Co-op folks were a pretty down-to-earth group, as likely to enjoy an omelet made with caged eggs at the Wayside as one made with backyard eggs, tofu and sprouts, the unavoidable reality was that our monthly food ordering list was heavily skewed to the natural (slow) foods lifestyle. As my old buddy, Lee Webb, an activist (distinctly non-organic) teacher at Goddard College used to joke: "Hey Jim, I love the Co-op. but the only thing I can order from it is cheese."

Our short-term fix to this dilemma was to dramatically increase the special projects. These were the famed 10%-above-cost truckload deals where anybody could participate in a community buy of items such as Stihl chain saws, canning jars, snowshoes, Florida oranges, maple syrup, and dozens of other "cross-over" items.

Later, once the walk-in retail operation kicked in, we were able to offer a few more "mainstream" items, especially cheeses, while maintaining our primary focus on the organic food movement and pipedreams of radical social change through the cooperative movement and organic takeover of the food system. It was the best we could manage to appease the anti-elitists. The Grand Union breathed a sigh of relief and we got slightly more serious about broadening the movement beyond the already converted.

General political activism vs. exclusively food politics

The first time we inserted anti-war flyers into the outgoing monthly food boxes, along with the newsletter and other food education items, we got slammed. Neighborhood coordinators were especially livid. These folks on the back roads labored hard to entice their mainstream neighbors to participate in the Co-op, then Whaap!, their neighbors got turned off by partisan politics with their food. The furor was such that we never again mixed our messages. Henceforth, all messages — if they were overtly political — were focused on the politics of food.

One non-food item on the monthly list — our first ever book — was a particularly effective medium for the Co-op's view of things. "Diet for a Small Planet" by Frances Moore Lappé sold 1000 copies and was probably our most successful consciousness-raising venture.

Additionally the Co-op building itself was also a hotbed of news and workshops on the destructive practices of corporate agriculture, the prevalence and dangers of poisons in our food, plus visits from Helen and Scott Nearing and similar radicals, various community organizing ventures, and other interesting projects, such as a canning co-op spearheaded by Larry Gordon, which later blossomed into the Cherry Hill Cooperative Cannery.

Yes, many of our friends thought we could be doing more to advance various Movement causes, but the core Co-op organizers opted to do that on their own time.

Growth: centralized model vs. decentralized

The early Co-op seemed to grow exponentially. It didn't, of course, but within three years we had about 300 separate orders coming in through the friendly, de-centralized neighborhood system, and the system was breaking down.

What to do? The obvious answer was to end the neighborhood ordering and distribution system and centralize operations at the Co-op building. Simultaneously, the massive Montpelier contingent was forming a breakaway republic, organizing a free-standing retail operation of its own. These were heady and contentious times, but one thing was for certain" the 'good old days' were over. Our numbers were simply too large to sustain a neighborly system.

Fast-forward to the present and we see the former breakaway republic of Montpelier, the now 5000-member Hunger Mountain Coop poised to spin-off a little Waterbury operation. Or not, depending on an upcoming membership vote.

Lo and behold, some of the same issues are being argued by members: Should we broaden our product line in Waterbury to include such items as Coke and chips to serve a greater cross-section of the populace? Are we going to weaken the arguably shaky Mother Ship by decentralizing operations to another town? Oh yeah, where's the original political mission in all this? Didn't we want to transform society into a cooperative-based, organic-only republic?

Sigh.

This is Jim Higgins' seventh – and concluding – Plainfield Co-op history column for the newsletter. Higgins, a community organizer in 1971, was one of the founders of the Co-op, along with Liz Sokol, Marty Levin, Larry Gordon, Anne Temple, and Larry Lindgren.

[Co-op Blog \(https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/\)](https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/)

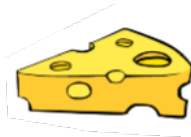
Mystery And Challenges Of Purchasing

The Mystery And Challenges Of Department Purchasing Or . . . Why We Carry One Damn Thing Instead Of Another

by Co-op Staff

An excerpt reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2012

Members and shoppers often wonder out loud why the Co-op carries one product instead of another. “Why don’t we carry more Cabot products?” or “Why do we carry Cabot products at all?” “Why isn’t everything organic?” or “How can I afford to shop here when everything is organic?” “Why don’t we have bulk nut butters?” As a small co-op which serves as the town’s only grocery store, buying decisions become complex for department heads. It’s hard to please everyone, but we really take a serious shot at it!



Navigating the food system in this day of global markets and grocery chains is no small feat for any of us. Decades ago, when tofu was bean curd and few knew what the heck to do with it, there was little competition from mainstream markets. Now “natural food” is a big

market that corporate chains position themselves to profit from. As a small store we don’t have access to the price breaks extended to larger outlets, yet we still struggle to be competitive.

The Co-op’s buying practices are also affected by our mission. The membership charges the staff to support producers in the local and regional economy, serve as a market for healthy food and other goods, foster a sense of community in the village and surrounding area, and encourage awareness of the quality and origins of our food. These are ambitious goals which also affect buying decisions in a variety of ways.



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Full article on pp.8-15 in *Newsletter Fall 2012 issue*  
(<https://plainfieldcoop.com/newsletter/2012-fall.pdf>).

*Newsletter archives page* (<https://plainfieldcoop.com/newsletter-archive/>).

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*Co-op Blog* (<https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/>).

# Remembering John Wires

**(1922-2013)**

Excerpts reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2013

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John Wires

John Wires, a long-time supporter of the Co-op, moved to Plainfield in the 1960's. "As best I understand John," reflects George Springston, "he was always trying to have the big conversation about how we should live, and the Plainfield area is where much of this conversation took place." For many years Plainfield was also where he practiced his belief in living simply and in harmony with nature. After his cabin burned down in the late 1980s, the community gathered around him in a large circle in the Community Center, helping John think through his recovery. Eventually he rebuilt.

Even after he moved to Montpelier, the Plainfield Co-op and Community Center remained important enough to him that he wanted memorial contributions made to it.

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John at the Co-op: Remembrances from Ellen Bressler

At one time in the Co-op's history when working members were the rule (and mostly younger) rather than the exception, an exemption was made for members over perhaps 65. John would sit at the then horseshoe counter protesting that elders should still have to work, including him.

When John went to Arizona in the winter, he wrote postcards back to the Co-op, one urging that we have a packaging table in the middle of the store, as was the arrangement at the co-op he went to in Arizona. Instead of putting work on the sidelines, it put work in the center of things—where we happened to have a woodstove.

[Co-op Blog \(https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/\)](https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/)

Cooperatives And The Environment

by Joseph Gainza, Co-op Board member

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2015

How are the Global Ends of the Plainfield Co-op beneficial for the environment? In the policy governance model under which the Co-op operates “global ends” are what the rest of the world calls goals. These goals aim to achieve benefits for the Co-op as a business, for the member/owners, for all shoppers, for the community, local producers and the regional economy, as well as for the environment.

The end most explicitly pro-environment says our community will have: “A store that sustains the environment through its operations and through the products it offers.” But what does that mean specifically?

Here, some of the other ends help clarify. One says our community will have “An outlet that actively seeks local producers and growers, which supports the local and regional economy.” By purchasing from local producers and growers we avoid the costs to the environment of shipping these commodities hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles to the final consumer. We are told that in the U.S. the average food calorie travels nearly 1,500 miles before someone consumes it. The enormous amount of energy and carbon release from this business model is thus avoided when we buy carrots grown at Littlewood Farm in Plainfield, our milk from Strafford Organic Creamery in Strafford, VT,

or our eggs from one of many local producers. Of course, supporting the local economy means that other products, such as furniture, artistic creations, clothing, etc., are made and available to be consumed locally.

Two other ends: “A market for the distribution of healthy, affordable food and other goods,” and “More awareness of the quality and source of our food,” enable shoppers at the Co-op to purchase locally produced organic vegetables, baked goods, wines, beer, and a host of other commodities, the production of which do not deplete the soil or inject toxins into the environment. No insects, birds or amphibians are poisoned at Cate Farm or any of the other organic producers which the Co-op buys from.

The final two ends of our Co-op are less direct in defending the natural environment but have an influence on people associated with cooperatives and enable them to become more aware about how their purchases express their values and have a moral dimension. Those ends: “More awareness of cooperative principles and of other cooperative businesses,” and “A place to build the connections that are essential for a vibrant community,” speak to building an alternative economy which has more than one “bottom line.” The Plainfield Co-op, like co-ops in general, include as bottom lines benefits to its members, customers, and community. Our food co-op includes the natural world in our community, and seeks to enable humans to prosper in a manner that protects and nurtures all other-than-human members.

[Co-op Blog \(https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/\)](https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/)

On Being A Working Member

by Jacqueline Soule

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2018

There are many different reasons you can become a working member at the Co-op, but here my top ten reasons:

1. Thrift is good. Working members get seven percent off purchases. It's not tons of money, but who doesn't like to save money? Think of it as somewhere near a dollar back for every ten dollars you spend at the Co-op.
2. While working your hands can be busy, but your mind is free to roam, and ponder all manner of things, like *'Is a pint really a pound the world around?'* The milk delivery guy just said that as he huffed in with a stack of full milk crates.
3. Imagination play time! You might get to spray the produce. Making thunderstorm sounds in your mind as you do so is fun.
4. Organization training. If organizing your garage seems too large a task, bulk repack is perfect training. You can organize a giant bag of chocolate covered pretzels into 30 smaller, tidy bags.
5. For bulk repack, you get to wear spiffy blue latex gloves while handling food. Quoting River Tam* as you wear them is optional.



6. On a hot day, stocking the drinks cooler is a refreshing way to chill out.
7. On a cool day, you can enjoy some of the best coffee in Plainfield while you work. There is a world of fascinating mugs to use in the back kitchen.
8. Your work doesn't need to be inside the walls of the Co-op! There are a number of routine tasks that can be done for your work hours, like taking the plastic bags to a site for recycling.
9. Stocking shelves is a delightful way to discover the vast array of products that fill our small but densely and richly packed shelf space. Agave nectar, almonds, anchovies, artichoke hearts, and on through the alphabet.
10. But best of all – the nicest people shop and work at the Co-op and you get to see them!

* Character in *Firefly*.

[Co-op Blog \(https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/\)](https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/)

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Stuffed Mushrooms (Appetizer)

Collected by Debra Stoleroff from Melissa Gosselin

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Winter 2021

Melissa always brings good food to potlucks. She recently brought this yummy, warm, winter appetizer to an event. I liked them so much I asked if I could share the recipe with Co-op members. I was surprised how simple the recipe was. — *Debra Stoleroff*

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 20 white or crimini mushrooms
- 8 oz package of cream cheese at room temperature
- 1 or more cloves of garlic
- 1/4 c. parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper



Preparation:

1. Wash and dry the mushrooms.
2. Destem the mushrooms, cutting off any imperfections from the stems.
3. Mince the stems very fine.

4. Heat 1 Tbsp. of oil in pan.
 5. Mince 1 clove of garlic (or more if you're a garlic lover).
 6. Add minced stems and garlic to pan and cook until water is released. Don't overcook.
 7. Let cool for a few minutes and then add the cream cheese, 1/4 cup parmesan cheese, some salt and pepper. Mix well.
 8. Top each mushroom with mixture.
 9. Bake at 400° for 20 minutes.
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Co-op Blog (<https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/>).

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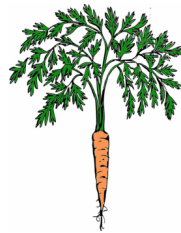
Carrot And Orange Soup

Collected by Debra Stoleroff; Adapted from *The Silver Palate Cookbook* by Julee Rosso and Sheila Lukins

Reprinted from *Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2021*

Ingredients:

- 4 TBL butter
- 3 cups chopped onions
- 1-2 lbs chopped carrots (peel if you prefer)
- 4 cups chicken stock (alternative veggie stock)
- 1 cup orange juice
- salt and ground pepper to taste
- grated orange zest



Preparation:

1. Melt the butter in a pot. Add the onions and sautee until tender.
2. Add carrots and chicken stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer until carrots are very tender.
3. Pour the soup through a strainer. Put the solids into a blender or food processor. Add a cup or so of the soup stock and blend until smooth.
4. Return puree to the soup pot . Add the orange juice and additional stock (2- 3 cups)

until soup is of desired consistency.

5. Add salt, pepper and orange zest to taste. Simmer until heated through.



[Co-op Blog \(https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/\)](https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/)

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Kaddu Made With Squash

(Sweet And Sour Butternut Squash)

NY Times recipe from Priya Krishna and Ritu Krishna, adapted by Debra Stoleroff

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Winter 2021

I love winter squash and am always looking for ways to cook it. I found this recipe in the *NY Times*. As always, I use the recipe as a guide. I play around with amounts to serve my taste preferences. Kaddu is an Indian dish which is traditionally made with stronger tasting pumpkin. I prefer to use butternut, buttercup or acorn squash, which is why I like this recipe. — *Debra Stoleroff*

Ingredients

- olive oil
- 1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 medium to large yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon red chile powder, such as cayenne
- 1/4 teaspoon asafetida (optional)
- 1 medium butternut squash (about 2 pounds), peeled, seeded and cut into 1/2-inch cubes



- kosher salt to taste
- 4 medium Roma tomatoes, cut into 1/2-inch cubes OR a 14 oz can of diced tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons lime juice (from about 1 lime), plus more as needed 2 tablespoons light brown sugar
- chopped fresh cilantro (stems and leaves), for garnish

Preparation

1. In a pan, over medium heat, warm the oil. Once the oil begins to shimmer, add the fenugreek seeds and cook until they start to make noise (happens quickly). Reduce the heat to medium-low and swirl in the turmeric. Add the onion and sauté until the onion starts to soften. Add the ginger, chile powder and asafetida (if using), and cook for a minute. Add the butternut squash and salt, cover and cook until the squash is tender, 10-15 minutes.
2. Stir in the tomatoes, lime juice and brown sugar. Reduce the heat to low, cover and cook until the tomatoes are soft but still retain their shape. Remove from the heat. Add more lime juice and salt according to taste. Garnish with the cilantro and serve warm.

I serve the Kaddu over quinoa but it is traditionally scooped onto a piece of naan.



Co-op Blog (<https://plainfieldcoop.com/blog/>).

Cranberry-Pear Sauce With Ginger

Collected by Debra Stoleroff from Andrea Serota

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2010

Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 12 oz fresh cranberries
- 2 medium firm, ripe pears cut into 1/2 inch cubes
- 1 TBL grated fresh ginger
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon



Preparation:

1. Bring water, sugar, salt, ginger and cinnamon to a boil in a medium sauce pan. Stir until sugar is dissolved.
2. Stir in the cranberries and pears; return to boil.
3. Reduce the heat to medium; simmer until slightly thickened and about 2/3 of the berries have popped open (about 5 min.)
4. Transfer to a bowl, cool to room temperature. Makes about 2 3/4 cups.



Baked Custard

Collected by Pat Mayhew; from *A Dollop of This and a Smidgeon of That*, a cookbook by Adele Dawson, Co-op member 1973-1992

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Winter 2010

Custards correspond to “basic” clothing. Because they are so simple they give the widest scope for imaginatively chosen accessories. Sauces or toppings are like belts and scarves — they make possible an infinite variety of color and occasion.

- 2 cups milk
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup sugar or 1/3 cup honey or maple syrup
- 1/8 tsp sea salt
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- smidgeon freshly grated nutmeg

Blend milk, sugar, salt and eggs and beat enthusiastically. Add the vanilla extract and a smidgeon of freshly grated nutmeg. Beat all ingredients again and pour them into a baking dish or individual molds. Place the dish or molds in a pan of water and bake about 1 hour in a preheated 325 oven. To test for doneness, insert a knife. If it comes out clean, that’s it. Quickly take the custard out of the oven. Chill and serve plain or with any sauce or topping you may want to invent.



Adele Dawson

Apple Cake

Collected by Debra Stoleroff from Andrea Serota

Reprinted from Plainfield Co-op Newsletter: Fall 2010

Combine

- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup buttermilk or 1/2 cup yogurt/milk combo
- 4 TBL melted butter
- 1 tsp. vanilla

Combine

- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1/2 tsp. baking soda
- 3/4 cups sugar
- 1/2 tsp. salt

Preparation:

1. Add egg/milk mixture to the flour mixture
2. Mix the mixtures
3. Add 1 1/2 cups apples (cut up into 1/4 - 1" pieces)
4. Can also add raisins, walnuts, cinnamon, cloves or nutmeg as desired.
5. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.
6. Topping: mix walnuts, brown sugar, cinnamon

