

EGGNOG

Starting in mid-November, you can start seeing cartons or bottles of eggnog for sale in the dairy case of the supermarkets. There are all sorts of brands, from the adequate (Crystal or Lucerne) to the delicious, (Bud's or Berkeley Farms.) But what is eggnog and where did it come from?

The first mention of eggnog came in the 19th century, at a time when it was already popular both in England and in America. The word "eggnog" may come from the old English word "noggin", which means a wooden mug. The original drink may have been a mixture of eggs, milk and sweet sherry, called a posset, which was served at the table in a wooden cup, or noggin, rather than in tankards as beer and ale were served. Hence the drink "eggs in a noggin", or eggnog. Or as the word "nog" is an old English slang word for strong ale, hence a drink made with milk, eggs and strong ale was called "eggnog".

Yet another version is that eggnog got its name here in America. In America, rum, which was called grog, was more plentiful and cheaper than brandy or Madeira, so rum or grog was used instead—giving rise to the name "egg-grog", or eggnog. Whatever the origins of the name, the drink itself is believed to have started in England as the special drink of the upper classes.

Remember, there was no refrigeration back then, so fresh milk and fresh eggs were pretty much reserved to the large landowners, who mixed it with sugar, also rare and expensive, plus some brandy, Madeira or even sherry. George Washington was reputed to be quite a fan of eggnog, and made his own version which contained rye whiskey, rum AND sherry. Not a drink for the fainthearted! In the American South, bourbon became the liquor of choice for eggnog and it's particularly popular in New Orleans, where rich and strong, it graces many a holiday table, for both Christmas and New Years.

In Puerto Rico, they call eggnog "coquito", and make it with rum and even add some coconut milk to give it a particularly Caribbean twist. In Mexico, the drink is called "rompope", and is flavored with lots of cinnamon and rum. In Peru, it's made with the local Peruvian liquor, pisco. The Germans make a type of eggnog with beer, which they call "biersuppe".

By the way, the Tom and Jerry, a fortified version of eggnog with brandy added to the mix, was invented in London in 1820 by an author named Pierce Egan, who created it to publicize his book *Life of London; or Days and Nights of Jerry Hawthorne and His Elegant Friend Corinthina Tom.* The book has long since been forgotten, but the drink (and the cartoon characters) have become part of our American culture.

One year I decided to make my own eggnog. It's not hard, although in these days of health issues there may be some concern about using raw eggs. In a large bowl, beat twelve large egg yolks until light in color. (Save the eggwhites in a covered dish in the refrigerator.) Gradually beat in 1 box (1 pound) of powdered sugar. Add very slowly, beating constantly, one cup each of brandy and bourbon.

Let this stand, covered, for a couple of hours to get rid of the "eggy" taste. Then add, beating constantly, two cups of dark rum, and two quarts (8 cups) of heavy cream. Refrigerate, covered, for three hours. Shortly before serving, beat the egg whites until stiff peaks are formed. Fold the egg whites gently into the mixture, and serve, sprinkled with some freshly grated nutmeg. Or you can just go down to the supermarket and buy some Bud's eggnog, which is delicious even without being spiked with booze. I like a little in my coffee during this time of year, and it's great on sliced bananas. Remember, New Years Eve is amateur night, so be safe on Sunday night.

Thank you to all of my sponsors and to Jim and Maureen and everyone here at Hometown Radio for making the Hometown Kitchen a reality this past year. Wishing you and yours all the best for a wonderful 2007, this is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.