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Summer Pudding with Juicy Berries

When berries are plump, sweet, and ripe, the time is right to make this simple but dramatic pudding. No cooking is involved and it is almost like building a sand castle; this is a great dessert to make with children. The pudding must be made a day ahead of time or at least 12 hours before serving. Use a non-crusty bread that is dense and buttery, such as brioche-type bread, or thin-sliced white bread such as Pepperidge Farm – do not use a fluffy white loaf. The amount of sugar you will need depends upon the sweetness of the berries, but keep in mind the bread soaks up the juices of the berries and mellows out the sweetness of the fruit. So even if you use 3 cups of sugar, it won't be too sweet.

2 loaves good-quality sliced white bread (about 36 slices)
3 pints strawberries
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 to 3 cups sugar
3 pints raspberries
3 pints blueberries
3 pints blackberries
1 cup heavy whipping cream
3 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

Trim the crusts off the bread and slice the loaf in half lengthwise.

Wash and hull the strawberries. Puree them in a food processor with the lemon juice and sugar. Place the puree in a large bowl with the rest of the berries and mash them together with your hands. You want the mixture to be somewhat chunky; some of the blueberries can be left whole for the good texture.

Line a 2-quart bowl with plastic wrap so that the wrap extends over the edges of the bowl by about 4 inches. Working with your fingers, immerse a piece of the bread in the berry mixture so that it gets saturated with the juice and picks up bits of berries. Lay the bread across the bottom of the bowl. Continue the process, lining the whole bowl with saturated pieces of bread, being careful that the slices on the outside are whole and uniform. Then fill in the inside (it doesn't matter if those pieces break up) until the whole bowl is filled, pressing down in between slices. Wrap the top up very well with the extended overlapping pieces of plastic.

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Summer Pudding with Juicy Berries, (continued)

Put a plate on top of the plastic wrap and weigh that down with a heavy weight—a can of tomato sauce or a brick works well. Put the bowl on a baking sheet to catch any juices, and then refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours.

Whip the cream and sugar together to form soft peaks. Just before serving unfold the plastic. Invert the pudding onto a platter slightly larger than the top of the bowl, and remove the plastic. Cut into pie-shaped wedges and serve with whipped cream (or with the Vanilla Ice Cream).

Serves 6 to 10.