Cleo Coyle's (Lighter) Sweet Potato Casserole with Pecan Topping

Text & photos (c) by Alice Alfonsi, who writes the Coffeehouse Mysteries as Cleo Coyle with her husband, Marc Cerasini

My take on this classic casserole has less butter and sugar, but loses none of the flavor or richness. You'll find versatility here, as well. You can make the casserole with brown sugar alone or with maple syrup. You can make the dish with dairy or non-dairy. Finally, I have a tip for making the process a snap on Thanksgiving day. Instead of following the traditional recipe of peeling, dicing, boiling, and mashing the sweet potatoes, try simply baking them alongside your turkey. If you follow my method for baking the sweet potatoes, they'll be just as moist as the boiled version, but with less fuss and cleanup. Baking the potatoes will also help them retain more nutrition and flavor. May you eat with Thanksgiving joy!

~ Cleo Coyle, author of
The Coffeehouse Mysteries

For the casserole:

3 - 4 medium to large sweet potatoes *(You will use these to make 3-1/2 cups cooked and mashed sweet potatoes)*

1/4 cup light brown sugar*

1/4 cup pure maple syrup*

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/4 teaspoon table salt

1/4 cup milk (cow's low-fat milk or dairy-free almond)

4 tablespoons butter melted (or dairy-free margarine, melted)

*Note: To make this recipe without maple syrup, increase brown sugar to 1/2 cup & reduce amount of cooked, mashed sweet potatoes by 1/4 cup.

For the topping:

4 Tablespoons butter, melted (or dairy-free margarine, melted)

1/4 cup flour

1/2 cup light brown sugar

Generous pinch of table salt

1 cup pecans, roughly chopped

Step 1 – Easy-bake sweet potatoes *(you can either bake these with your turkey or the night before your Thanksgiving meal)*: Wash the sweet potatoes and leave skins wet. Tap your inner serial killer and stab the taters a few times with a knife to prevent them from exploding in the oven. Wrap the sweet potatoes tightly in aluminum foil and bake them in a well-preheated 350° F. oven for 90 minutes. Remove from oven, **but do not unwrap!** Allow them to cool in their foil cocoons for 30 minutes. This will keep them nice and moist. Now open and slice each potato in half. As shown in my photo, scoop out the still-warm flesh, which is now very close to pre-mashed for you. A fork will make quick work of the mashing. You want a nice, even consistency.

Step 2 – Assemble the casserole: Measure out 3-1/2 cups of the cooked and mashed sweet potatoes and combine them with the rest of the casserole ingredients. Stir well. Pour into a well-buttered casserole dish (1-1/2 to 2 quarts in size). The dish you see in my photos is 1-1/2 quarts.

Step 3 – Make the casserole topping:
Melt the butter (or margarine) in a saucepan. Remove pan from heat, add topping ingredients, stir well. The mixture should be damp and crumbly. Distribute it evenly over the casserole top. **Bake at 350° F. for about 40 minutes.** Casserole will be bubbling when finished and some liquid will appear to be pooling in the topping. Don't worry. As the casserole cools the liquid will sink back into the casserole and the top will become crusty, crunchy, and delicious. May you…

Eat with joy! ~ Cleo

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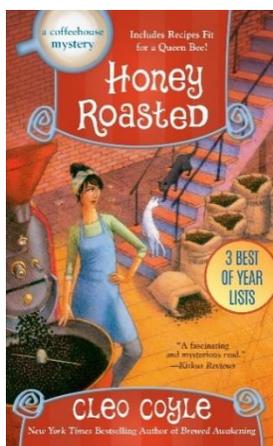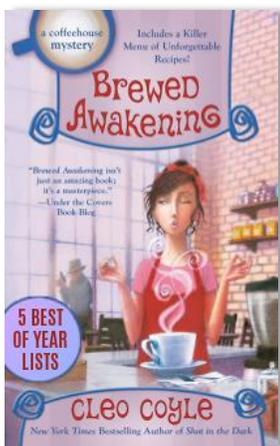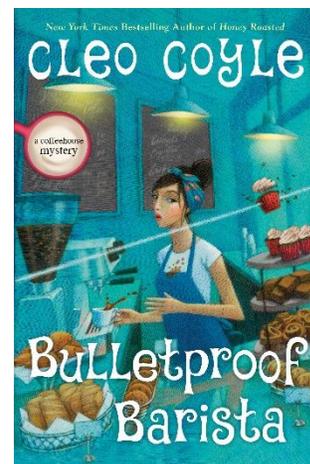
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