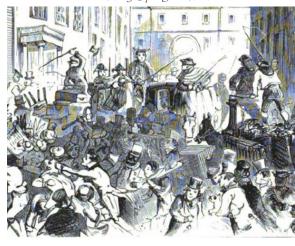


## April Foolish & Maple Crème Brûlée

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**Sandwiched between Saint Patrick's Day on one side and Tax Day on the other**, April Fools' Day doesn't come off too badly. On the one hand, you won't find any green beer. On the other, there are no confusing forms to fill out. That said, I doubt that April Fools' Day has the draw of Halloween or even Cinco de Mayo.

**Unlike Halloween,** April first is celebrated throughout most of the western world. Some historians speculate that it started back to 1582. That is when France switched calendars and moved the new year from the first of April to the first of January. I tend to think that January is a pretty foolish time to start anything, let alone a new year. Without the internet, it took a while for everyone to get the news. Celebrants of the passé new year became the butt of jokes and pranks.



**With all its silliness,** it is a fun day for kids. I will always think of April Fools' as the day my sister woke up early to switch the salt and sugar. We would then laugh uproariously when Dad deftly sprinkled a teaspoon of salt on his cereal. Consider yourself warned if there are kids or grandkids in your kitchen on Saturday morning.

Now, not everyone has an eight year old in the house. Please, don't let that stop you! You can still find ways to celebrate.

**For bordering-on-evil mischief,** you could perpetrate a Berners Street hoax. Back in 1810, a rakish Londoner created havoc by sending hundreds of tradespeople and even a dignitary or two to the home of a Mrs. Tottenham at 54 Berners Street. However, beware! In an age when credit cards and prepayment rule, you will need to drop a pretty penny to deliver a mountainous pile of packaged pandemonium.

**For those that aren't afraid of a little jail time,** you could write the autobiography of an infamous recluse. That's what Clifford Irving did back in the 1970's. He wrongly assumed that Howard Hughes would maintain his low profile when the fraudulent autobiography hit the shelves. HH didn't and Irving went to jail. Irving then wrote a book about the caper, aptly named *The Hoax*.

With all the snow on the ground, it is too early for crop circles but you can keep this idea in mind if you'd like to pull a mid-summer prank. These fantastic designs of flattened wheat and barley have popped up in the US and Europe. While some point to aliens and legend gives credit to fairies, the actual perpetrators are mere mortals, artistic and with a sense of humor, but definitely mortal.

If it weren't for the pesky ice and snow, you might be able to pull off a Loch Ness Monster-type ruse. I know Lake Champlain claims to have a monster. The locals call it Champ or Champy. He, or maybe she, is a bit of a tourist draw. I think it will be at least a couple of weeks before a monster can break through the ice on Pleasant Lake. Anyway, keep that thought. It could make for a little intrigue at ice out.

However, neither ice nor snow will get in the way of pulling off a Big Foot stunt. Find your tallest friend, throw him into a hairy suit and let him wander around in the woods. A few grunts will add a nice touch. Make sure he stays off the path. Close up, that costume you find online isn't going to fool anyone. And by the way, be careful – the bears will be waking soon and they'll be hungry!

Wishing you a mischievous April Fools' and bon appétit!

Shan

 ${\it Image: The Berners Street Hoax. Lithography by Alfred Concanen~(1883). Public domain~via~Wikimedia~Commons.}$ 



## Maple Crème Brûlée

It's sugaring season and there is nothing foolish about this creamy and delicious dessert. Enjoy! Serves 6-8

3 cups heavy cream

1 large egg

5 large egg yolks

3/4 cup maple syrup (grade B if you can find it)

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract

1 tablespoon dark rum

1-2 teaspoons sugar for each serving

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Stirring occasionally, bring the cream to steaming in a heavy saucepan over low heat.

While the cream heats, combine the egg, egg yolks, maple syrup, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg with an electric mixer on medium speed.

With the mixer on low, very slowly add the warm cream to the eggs. (If you add it too quickly or in one go, the warm cream could scramble the eggs.) Stir in the vanilla and rum. Strain the custard through a fine-mesh sieve into a large measuring cup. Pour the custard into 4- or 6-ounce ramekins until almost full.

Arrange the ramekins in a baking or roasting pan. Carefully pour boiling water into the pan until it comes about halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake for about 40 minutes or until the custards are set. Add more water to the pan if needed.



Carefully remove the ramekins from the water bath, cool to room temperature and refrigerate for at least two hours.

To serve, sprinkle 1-2 teaspoons sugar evenly over the top of each custard and heat with a kitchen blowtorch until the sugar caramelizes. Let the crème brûlées sit for a minute or two until the caramelized sugar hardens and serve.