

# Orange alert!

## Plain ol' pumpkin pie just isn't going to cut it this holiday season

By Fred Schlatter

Arriving at holiday parties with the same old pumpkin pie is about as taboo as showing up empty-handed—possibly worse. But that doesn't mean you have to get all Betty Crocker and whip something up from scratch. These spots are re-imagining that classic holiday dessert, swapping dowdy standards for inventive pumpkin preparations.

### Pumpkin Creme Brulee Cake

Sure, you can buy one of Sarah Levy's more traditional pumpkin or pecan pies at her Gold Coast sweetery, **Sarah's Pastries & Candies** (70 E. Oak St. 312-664-6223), but why not upgrade to something unexpected? Try the luscious Pumpkin Creme Brulee cake (\$18-\$100, depending on size), with layers of pumpkin-spiced cake and a custard-like caramel-creme brulee layer (made with caramelized sugar), finished with orange-vanilla buttercream icing.



**PUMPKIN BREAD PUDDING**

### Mini-Pie Flights

You know those trendy friends who always seem to nail everything, from outfits to art? Here's how to keep up when you show up for their holiday parties: Mini-Pie Flights (\$18) from River North's **Pie** (615 N. State St. 312-642-4192). Each four-inch dessert comes with a perfectly formed, buttery crust and packs as much authentic harvest flavor as its full-sized counterpart. For Thanksgiving, the flight includes pumpkin, apple and mocha-pecan. Look for new options come Christmas—you're guaranteed another invite after you tote these stylish little pastries to a party.

### Pumpkin Pie Milkshake

If you've got rowdy friends unlikely to behave at a civilized holiday party, save yourself the headache and eat out. The massive burgers and serious salad bar at **R.J. Grunts** (2056 Lincoln Park West, 773-929-5363) can handle any appetite, but it's the Pumpkin Pie Milkshake (\$4.50) that has us looking forward to dessert. This seasonal specialty starts as homemade pumpkin pie filling that gets whizzed up with vanilla ice cream and topped with whipped cream.

### Pumpkin bread pudding

Though the holidays are the season of sharing, sometimes you need to keep a good thing all to yourself. That's why the pumpkin bread pudding (\$9) at **Mundial Cocina Mestiza** (1640 W. 18th St. 312-491-9908) in Pilsen makes our list of favorite holiday desserts. Studded with plump golden raisins and the occasional *pepito* (pumpkin seed) and dusted generously with cinnamon, it's crowned with a big scoop of vanilla ice cream. It sits in a pool of caramel and cream, which—shucks!—makes it difficult to lug to a holiday party. You'll just have to enjoy it at the restaurant.

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**TAKE THE CAKE** Bringing holiday dessert to a party? The Pumpkin Creme Brulee cake from Sarah's Pastries is the perfect way to wow your friends. [ BARRY BRECHEISEN PHOTOS FOR METROMIX ]

### We love fruitcake

Got a friend who can't stand pumpkin? No problem! Bring fruitcake. Before you think we've gone nuts, try the Christmas Jam (\$6.50) at **Lovely** (1130 N. Milwaukee Ave. 773-572-4766). This West Town bakery packs an eight-ounce mason jar with all the classic makings of the dread-

ed holiday loaf: quince, prunes, pears, orange peel, walnuts, pecans, sugar and spice. The spread works with toast and dessert breads, but try it with savory items, like cheese plates or even roasts, too. Think about packing it for a party with your arty friends—they'll appreciate the irony, but love the taste. [ F.S. ]