

A close-up photograph of a hand pouring a golden-brown liquid, likely maple syrup, over a slice of cake. The cake is on a white plate and has a dark, moist interior with a lighter, possibly cream or frosting, layer. The background is blurred, showing another plate of similar food. The text 'CELEBRATE IRISH BREAKFAST' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

CELEBRATE IRISH BREAKFAST

We join in the craic with a group of Irish friends and acquaintances in Sydney's Centennial Park as they tuck in to some traditional breakfast fare, which just happens to include pudding and ice-cream. It's easy to see why the Irish coined the phrase, 'top of the morning'.

'Laughter is brightest where food is best'

goes the Irish proverb, and Sinéad McDevitt heartily agrees. The Dubliner had been living in Sydney for five years and adored her new home and mates, but she missed proper soda bread, pined for white pudding, and was greeted with blank stares every time she raved about Barry's Irish tea. "I was drowning in a sea of Earl Grey and Bushells!" she laughs. Sinéad was also well and truly over saying goodbye, as one by one, her travelling companions returned home.

"I'd formed some fantastic new friendships, but I also didn't want to lose my Irish ties just because I was settling here," says Sinéad, who has now been living in Australia for eight years and became a citizen in 2010. Her good friend Dee felt the same way, and they set upon a delicious plan of action. "We did a shout-out on live radio and email, looking for other Irish people in Australia for the long haul, and keen for a regular dose of good grub and craic," explains Sinéad. "And that was the start of our Irish Brekkie Club."

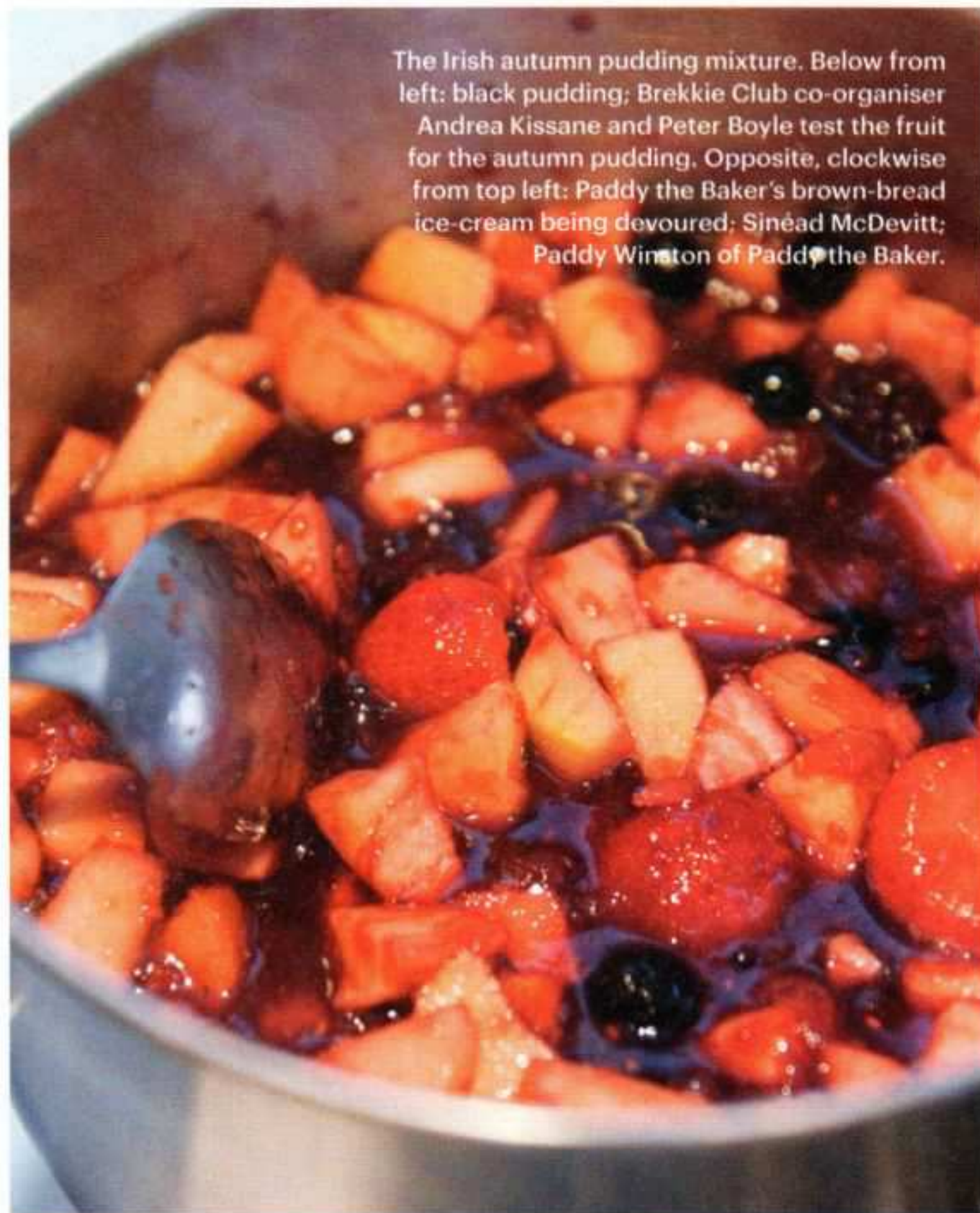
Meeting up regularly in Sydney's Centennial Park for breakfasts over the past two years, the affable get-together has yet to encounter a rainy day. Today's 'brekkie' again takes place under clear blue skies, and with a live guitarist playing everything from folk music to Snow Patrol, the mood is laidback and joyful.

"Dining alfresco isn't really an Irish thing," says Andrea Kissane, who took over new-mum Dee's duties as Brekkie Club co-organiser at the end of 2010. "After years of eating and socialising inside, or huddled under a canopy, we just love it!"

As informal membership has grown from two to more than 200, the Irish Brekkie Club's shared table has also evolved to an enviable spread. Traditional Irish cakes, puddings and soda bread jostle for space, alongside potato farls (fried potato cakes), just-barbecued black and white pudding, Irish sausages and rashers of bacon.

"We love our pork, it's not an Irish breakfast without it," says James 'Shay' Stanley. Bequeathed with hush-hush family recipes from two generations, Shay runs a butchery in Sydney's west, and is regarded as one of Australia's most authentic Irish butchers. "It's no surprise that he's such hot property here!" says Andrea with a smile.

The Irish autumn pudding mixture. Below from left: black pudding; Brekkie Club co-organiser Andrea Kissane and Peter Boyle test the fruit for the autumn pudding. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Paddy the Baker's brown-bread ice-cream being devoured; Sinéad McDevitt; Paddy Winston of Paddy the Baker.



Another prized Irish Brekkie Clubber is Paddy Winston, who, after arriving in Sydney from Ireland two years ago, set up his own traditional bakery. "It's just brilliant being able to get proper soda breads here now," says Sinéad. "Not to mention Paddy's potato farls which are to die for," she adds, popping another on her plate. Paddy is also famous in this crowd for his signature brown-bread ice-cream, which causes a mini-stampede.

Born of a culture legendary for warm-as-toast hospitality, and a love of celebrations, it makes perfect sense that Sinéad, Andrea and the rest of the crew are in the midst of creating this, their own new tradition, in a new homeland.

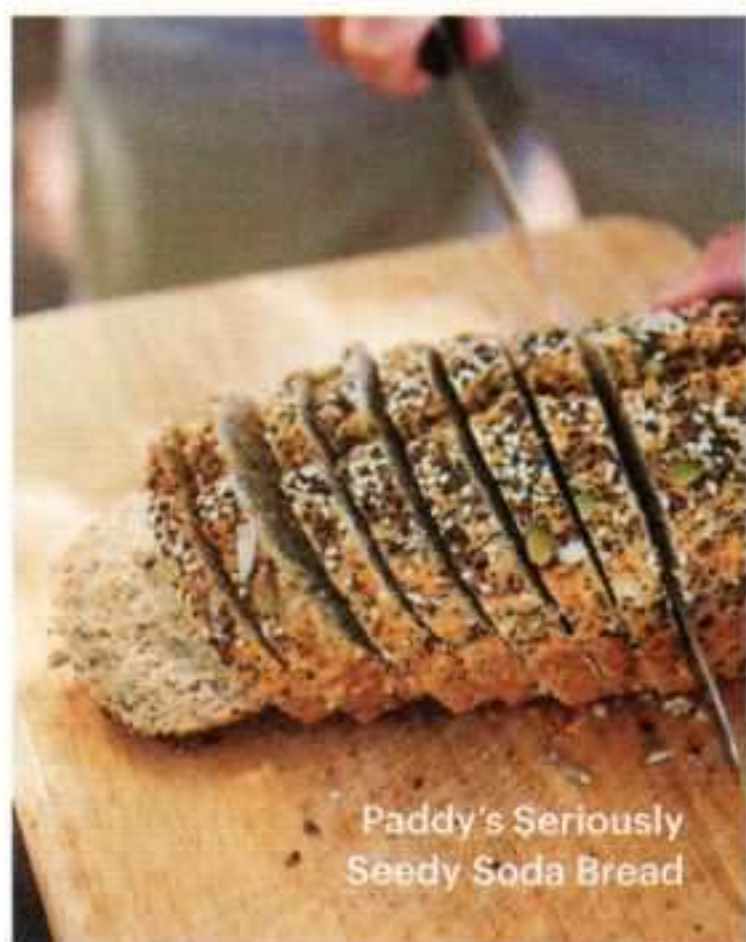
Away from their extended families, but relishing in new friendships, their favourite aspects of Irish and Aussie life are combined in the Irish Brekkie Club.



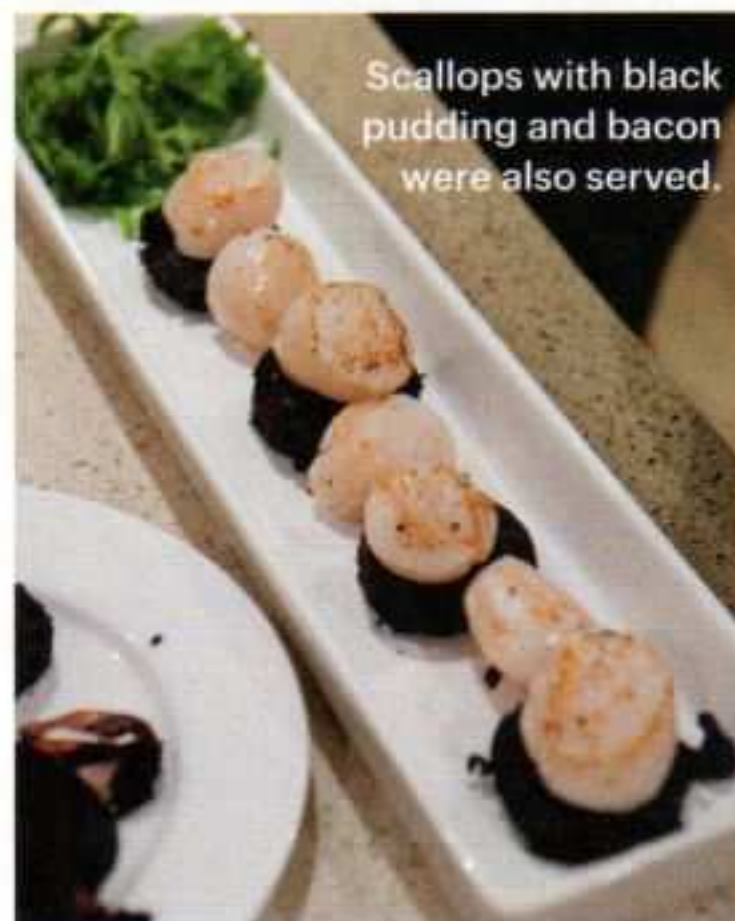
Irish soda bread

Dense, moist and hearty, Irish soda bread is renowned for being yeast-free. Made from plain flour, buttermilk, bicarbonate of soda and salt, the soda acts as a leavening agent when combined with the buttermilk. When bicarbonate of soda was first introduced to Ireland in the mid-1800s, it created a windfall for local bakers.

The country had not produced much of the hard-wheat flour necessary for making good yeast breads, but the soda worked perfectly with the softer Irish flour, producing a reliable and tasty rise in the oven, which became popular worldwide. To try Paddy's soda bread, visit paddythebaker.com.



Paddy's Seriously Seedy Soda Bread



Scallops with black pudding and bacon were also served.



Andrea Kissane and Aoife O'Brien



A typical Ulster fry with the works, including potato farls, recipe page 48.



Irish spotted dick, recipe page 49



the menu

Paddy's potato farls

Paddy's Irish soda bread

Chicken and tarragon open sandwiches

Irish spotted dick

Irish autumn pudding

Mary McDevitt's apple cake

Paddy's brown-bread ice-cream



Paddy's brown-bread ice-cream, recipe page 50.



PADDY'S POTATO FARLS★

MAKES 8 SLICES

'Farl' is an abbreviation of the Old English word 'fardel', meaning a fourth, and refers to how these cakes are cut into quarters. You can make these up to 2 days ahead and store them in an airtight container. Serve with fried eggs, bacon, sausage, tomato and black pudding.

600g (about 2) sebago potatoes
60g butter, chopped, at room temperature
150g (1 cup) plain flour, sifted

- 1 Bring potatoes to the boil in a saucepan of salted water. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 50 minutes or until tender. Drain and mash. Stir in butter and ½ tsp salt.
- 2 Gradually stir in flour until a soft dough forms. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and shape into 2 balls. Flatten to 1cm-thick discs, cut into quarters and place on a tray.
- 3 Heat a large, heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Cook each farl for 2 minutes each side, or until golden. Serve hot.

PADDY'S IRISH SODA BREAD★

MAKES 2 X 22CM X 11CM LOAVES

200g (1½ cups) plain flour, sifted
600g (3¾ cups) stone-milled wholemeal flour*
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
600ml buttermilk
2 tbs rolled oats

- 1 Preheat oven to 180C. Place flours, bicarbonate of soda and ½ tsp salt in a bowl. Make a well in the centre, pour in 400ml buttermilk and stir until combined. Add enough of the remaining 200ml buttermilk until mixture resembles thick porridge.
- 2 Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead for 2 minutes to bring dough together. Form into 2 x 20cm logs and place in 2 greased 22cm x 11cm loaf pans. Using a small knife, make a 3cm-deep cut down the centre of each loaf and scatter with oats.
- 3 Bake for 35 minutes or until light golden and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Stand for 30 minutes before serving.

* Wholemeal flour is available stone-milled (also called stone-ground) or plain. Stone-milled will give a better, denser result with this soda bread. It is available from selected supermarkets and health food shops.

CHICKEN AND TARRAGON OPEN SANDWICHES★

SERVES 6

1 (about 200g) chicken breast fillet, sliced horizontally
3 spring onions
5 black peppercorns
½ lemon, juiced
2 tbs good-quality egg mayonnaise
1 tbs chopped tarragon leaves
½ granny smith apple, cored, chopped
¼ tsp caraway seeds
6 slices Paddy the Baker's Seriously Seedy Soda Bread*, buttered

- 1 Place chicken in a heavy-based frying pan with spring onions, peppercorns, lemon juice



Irish autumn pudding.
Left: Simon Prendiville.

Black & white pudding

In Ireland, the traditional Irish Breakfast (or Ulster Fry as it's known in the North) is made up of pork sausages, bacon, fried eggs, tomatoes, potato farls, black and white pudding, and, often mushrooms. White pudding, put in simple terms, is black pudding without the blood – a sausage traditionally made of pork, suet, oats and spices. "We make our white pudding much leaner here than in Ireland though," says Shay Stanley of Penrith's Irish Butcher, who also specialises in Irish pork sausages. "In the warmer climate, we don't need the extra fat, and prefer a non-greasy texture."

Visit theirishbutcher.com.au.

and 250ml water. Cover with a piece of baking paper and bring to the boil. Reduce heat to medium and cook chicken for 4 minutes each side or until cooked through. Transfer chicken to a plate. Set aside to cool.

2 Chop chicken and place in a bowl with mayonnaise, tarragon, apple and caraway seeds. Stir to combine and season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate for 2 hours to allow flavours to develop. Top bread with chicken mixture and cut in half to serve.

* Available online from paddythebaker.com. Substitute any bread of your choice.

IRISH SPOTTED DICK★

MAKES 2 LOAVES

750g (5 cups) plain flour, sifted, plus extra, to dust
3 tsp bicarbonate of soda
3 tsp caster sugar
160g (1 cup) sultanas
600ml buttermilk
Butter, to serve

1 Preheat oven to 180C. Combine flour, bicarbonate of soda, sugar, sultanas and ½ tsp salt in a large bowl. Make a well and gradually add buttermilk. Using your hands, gently mix until mixture just comes together; do not knead dough or the bread won't rise.

2 Form dough into 2 x 18cm logs, place into two greased 22cm x 11cm loaf pans and, using a small knife, make a 3cm-deep cut down the centre of each loaf. Scatter with extra flour.

3 Bake for 45 minutes or until golden and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Cover with a tea towel and stand for 20 minutes. Serve warm or toasted, with butter. Store leftovers in a brown paper bag for up to 2 days.

IRISH AUTUMN PUDDING

SERVES 6

In Ireland, bramley apples are traditionally used for this recipe. Start this a day ahead.

2 small (about 200g) granny smith apples, peeled, cored, roughly chopped

3 (about 200g) plums*, halved, stoned, roughly chopped
300g frozen blackberries
110g (½ cup firmly packed) dark brown sugar
185ml (¾ cup) dry red wine (such as merlot)
80ml (⅓ cup) crème de cassis*
12 slices white bread, crusts removed
Mint sprigs (optional) and cream or crème fraîche, to serve

Berry sauce

300g frozen blackberries or mixed berries
1 large lemon, juiced
75g (⅓ cup) white sugar

1 To make the sauce, process all ingredients in a food processor until smooth. Strain through a fine sieve and discard the solids. Set aside.

2 Bring fruits, sugar and wine to the boil over medium heat. Reduce heat to low and cook for 15 minutes or until apples are very soft. Remove from heat, stir in liqueur and cool.

3 Line a 1L, 18cm bowl or mould with 10 slices of bread, overlapping slightly to ensure filling



Mary McDevitt's apple cake. Left: Barry's Tea, an Irish favourite.

Irish spotted dick

Spotted dick is well known as a British steamed suet pudding, but in Ireland, the amusingly named dish is actually a loaf of soda bread, dotted with raisins and currants. As for the origins of the name, 'spotted' points to the fruit, whereas mystery still surrounds the 'dick'. Just one theory is based on the word 'pudding', which was once pronounced 'puddink', then 'puddick', which perhaps over time, became just 'dick'. As to be expected, there are also other, more colourful theories, and, in 2001, a major supermarket chain in the UK caused an uproar when they attempted to rename their spotted dick 'spotted Richard'.

will not leak through. Spoon cooled fruits into the bowl, pressing down firmly, then top with remaining 2 slices of bread. Cover with baking paper and place a heavy weight on top. Refrigerate overnight.

4 Turn bowl upside down and turn out onto a plate. Brush any unsoaked bread with berry sauce. Top with mint, if using, and serve with remaining berry sauce and cream. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 days.

- ★ Use drained, stoned canned plums if fresh ones are no longer in season.
- ★ Crème de cassis is a sweet blackcurrant liqueur. Substitute blackcurrant syrup or juice.

MARY MCDEVITT'S APPLE CAKE★

SERVES 8

- 200g (1½ cups) plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon or ground cloves
- 75g cold unsalted butter, chopped
- 55g (¼ cup) caster sugar
- 1 egg, lightly beaten

- 3 (about 600g) large granny smith apples, peeled, cored, finely chopped
- 60ml (¼ cup) milk
- 2 tbs white sugar

1 Preheat oven to 190C. Process flour, baking powder, cinnamon, butter and 1 tsp salt in a food processor until mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs.

2 Transfer to a bowl and stir in caster sugar, egg and apples until mixture comes together. Stir in enough of the milk until mixture forms a soft dough.

3 Place dough in a greased 19cm round cake pan and scatter with sugar. Bake for 40 minutes or until golden. Store in an airtight container for up to 1 day.

PADDY'S BROWN-BREAD ICE-CREAM

MAKES 750ML

- 1 large slice (about 130g) Irish soda bread
- 55g (¼ cup firmly packed) brown sugar

- 4 eggs, separated
- 110g (½ cup) caster sugar
- 150ml thickened cream
- 300ml buttermilk

1 Preheat oven to 200C. Process soda bread and brown sugar in a food processor to fine crumbs. Scatter breadcrumb mixture over an oven tray lined with baking paper. Bake for 10 minutes or until sugar caramelises and crumbs are golden. Set aside to cool.

2 Using an electric mixer, whisk egg yolks and caster sugar on high speed for 6 minutes or until pale and fluffy. Whisk cream to soft peaks, then fold in buttermilk. Slowly fold into the egg yolk mixture, then, using your fingers, crumble in breadcrumbs.

3 Using an electric mixer, whisk egg whites to soft peaks, then fold into the mixture. Pour into a shallow 1.25L dish and freeze for 3 hours. Scrape with a fork to break up ice, cover with baking paper then return to freezer for 6 hours or until frozen. Transfer to fridge for 30 minutes before serving, to soften. ●