

Eggnog the hard way

By Rosie Schaap, New York Times

Around this time last year, I advocated forgoing eggnog in favor of glogg, the Scandinavian mulled wine. I'm not here to issue a mea culpa, but I'm also not proud when it comes to holiday drinks and certainly not above a little backpedaling.

I have nothing against eggnog. What kind of heartless character could resist its creamy, eggy, decadent charms? But I have an all-or-nothing attitude about it. To my mind, there are two approaches. The first is to buy the best prefab nog available at your grocery store, doctor it with a generous grating of nutmeg, lace it with liquor and be done with it. (I like Ronnybrook Farm Dairy's offering, in those sturdy glass bottles.) But keeping ready-made eggnog close at hand is a peril for me. It's just too easy to pour one little glass after another, and I'm the sort of person who can resist temptation only when it's not sitting in my fridge.

So I'm more likely to go with the second approach, which produces even more spectacular results: eggnog the hard way. I've tried simplified recipes that demand little more than mixing egg yolks, sugar, cream, milk and spirits, folding in some beaten egg whites and chilling the lot of it. This is inevitably a turnoff for people who just can't stomach the idea of eating raw eggs, but for me it's more a matter of flavor and texture than of food safety. I find the taste of raw egg overbearing, and the consistency can't compete with the lush silkiness that a patiently executed custard base assures. So I go all in, which essentially entails making a custard, letting it rest in an ice bath, stirring vigorously, straining and waiting. This requires time and effort, but it's absolutely worth it.

Once you've signed on, the only controversy is how to liquor

it up. Bourbon and brandy have their champions, but rum gets my vote. Its darkly sugared, inherently spicy nature contributes what is, to my taste, the most complementary layer of additional flavor, along with the requisite alcohol. My choice is Rhum Barbancourt 5-star, aged 8 years, from Haiti, a delicious bargain at about \$25 a bottle.

By now, it's obvious that I'm not antinog. But I'll cop to an occasional resistance. Sometimes in the dead of winter, I just don't want to drink anything so frosty. In such cases, I prefer a Tom & Jerry, a warmed-up variation of eggnog most especially beloved in the upper Midwest. The ingredients are similar, though it skips the cream, ups the spices and takes the chill off. It's a homey, old-fashioned surprise, and few holiday sights are more alluring to me than a vintage Tom & Jerry serving bowl – rendered in milk glass and illustrated with holly and ivy – with matching cups. Just make sure there's a ladle nearby; everyone will want to dip right in. You can save the glogg for another cold winter's night.