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Cinnamon toast is the comfort food that everyone can make.

Comfort with a dash of cinnamon

BY BONNIE S. BENWICK
 THE WASHINGTON POST

A smart friend once pulled up next to me at a homemade breakfast buffet. Together we surveyed the spread, then looked down at his plate, which was packed quite efficiently.

He grinned, shrugged and said, "You know, I could have just had toast."

While that bulletin was immediately deflating — it was my table — I agreed. And we both added simultaneously: CINNAMON toast.

It's the comfort food everybody can make. It conjures memories of grandmas and glasses of whole milk and that time the larder wasn't really bare, after all. If you're in bed with the flu, you want it on that tray. (You need it on that tray.) Fathers Who Don't Cook get points for producing slice after slice.

It's why you keep the really good butter around.

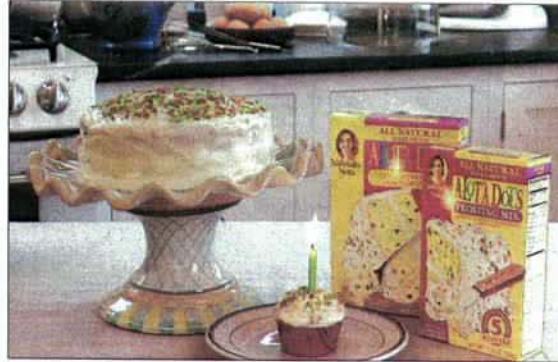
General Mills understands the power of cinnamon toast. It is still reaping the rewards of market research that identified the flavor as powerfully seductive to breakfast eaters. Sales of its Cinnamon Toast Crunch, a whole-wheat and rice cereal introduced in the mid-'80s, were up 12 percent in the past year.

John Mendesh, vice president of research and development for the company's Big G cereals, helped develop the winning formula. (That made him famous among his children and their friends, he has told us via e-mail.) Research started with his team members making their own favorite versions of cinnamon toast to "get a clear idea of exactly what we were trying to create," he said.

Mixing cinnamon with sugar and sprinkling it on bread might have been a 17th-century flash of culinary brilliance, as mentioned in a rare tome kept at the Library of Congress. But long before that, Egyptians used cinnamon to embalm their pharaohs, and spice traders returning from Sri Lanka introduced "true cinnamon," *Cinnamomum verum* or *zeylanicum*, to Rome and Greece, and later, the Netherlands and Mexico.

Mexicans retained their taste for the real thing; in 2006, their country imported about 8.4 million of its 8.6 million pounds of whole cinnamon from Sri Lanka. Nearty [See TOAST, Page B2]

With names like Cheery Chocolate, Extraordinary Vanilla, Sunny Yellow, Surprising Stars and A Lot'a Dots, the preservative-free cake and frosting mixes are designed with children in mind.



Cake mixes and frostings designed to appeal to children include Lot'a Dots.



Nora Schultz of Princeton Township created the Naturally Nora line of cake and frosting mixes so parents could bake a quick cake with no preservatives.

Almost from scratch

Enterprising mom creates cake mixes with no preservatives

By SUSAN SPRAGUE YESKE
 FOOD EDITOR

Nora Schultz was a traditional mom, baking a cake from a supermarket mix for her daughter's birthday, when she took time to read the list of ingredients on the box.

She didn't like what she saw.

Flour and sugar were OK, but what were these other ingredients she had never heard of? There were artificial colors and flavors, preservatives and hydrogenated oils, and she was pretty sure she

didn't want to serve them to her children.

That's when the Princeton Borough mother of two daughters decided there had to be a better way, and that she was the one to find it.

More than a year later, Naturally Nora was born (naturallynora.com), with five varieties of cake mixes and four frosting mixes. They have names like Cheery Chocolate, Extraordinary Vanilla, Sunny Yellow, Surprising Stars and A Lot'a Dots. Mixes with colorful dots or tiny chocolate stars are designed to satisfy her potential youthful audience.

"It took me a year to develop the recipes," said Schultz, who formerly worked in the marketing department at Campbell's Soup Co.

Her children were happy to act as taste testers during that time, she said. "They provided plenty of input along with way."

The recipes are relatively simple, she said, and the mixes contain no preservatives. Despite that, they have a shelf life of a year, she said. "It's all chemistry," she added.

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CAKES

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Along with taking time to develop recipes, she went looking for the best ingredients she could find; foods she would want to feed her own daughters. The cake mixes included unbleached whole wheat flour, non-alkalized cocoa and real egg whites, she said. The mixes contain no dairy or soy.

"These are designed for the scratch baker who wants to save time, but also wants a cake that tastes homemade," she said.

The mixes were designed to be as easy as possible.

While she wanted to offer a ready-to-spread frosting like those made by large manufacturers, she said it can't be done without the preservatives she is trying to avoid.

"To make the frosting mix, you just add milk and butter and within two minutes it's

ready to spread," she said.

Each cake mix makes a two-layer cake or 24 cupcakes, and each frosting mix provides enough to frost either a cake or the cupcakes. They retail for between \$2.99-\$3.99, which she realizes is a premium price for a cake mix. But she says they are worth it for the quality.

The mixes are sold from Connecticut to Washington, D.C., although she's working to expand her sales territory. Locally they can be found at Acme stores in Bordentown, Yardville and Morrisville, Pa.; at all three McCafrey's Supermarkets in Princeton Township, East Windsor and Yardley, Pa.; Pennington Quality Market in Pennington, Whole Earth in Princeton Borough and Whole Foods in West Windsor. They also can be found sold in six-packs at amazon.com.

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