

E. Jean's Birthday Cake with Vanilla Frosting

From Marissa Rothkopf

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please note: all the ingredients should be room temperature, so plan ahead!

This can be made in a 9x9, 8x8, 13x9 or cupcake tins. Adjust baking times accordingly.

What You'll Need:

1 cup milk (don't use skim; I used 2 percent)

6 large egg whites (you can freeze the yolks for another use)

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon coconut extract (or extract of your choice; alternatively add more vanilla)

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1 Tablespoon + 1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

1 3/4 cups granulated sugar

12 tablespoons butter (6 ounces) softened, cut into 12 pieces

What You'll Need for the Frosting

8 ounces butter

4 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1/4 cup heavy cream (plus more if necessary)

What You'll Do:

1. Maternal-like nag: Make sure you've read all the instructions and your ingredients are all at room temperature.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

3. Prepare your cake pans: Either butter and flour them, or use a time-saver like Baker's Joy. Line the bottoms of the pans with parchment.
4. Whisk the milk, egg whites and extracts in a small bowl. I use the same Pyrex measuring cup that I measured the milk in, because: one less dish.
5. With a hand or stand mixer, mix together the flour, baking soda, salt and sugar on low speed until just blended, about 30 seconds. Drape a clean dish towel over the stand mixer leaving a little gap at the front of the mixer (see photo) to keep the flour from flying everywhere. With the mixer on medium-low speed, add the butter one piece at a time. Continue mixing after all the butter has been added until the mixture looks like wet sand. If some pea-sized pieces of butter remain, that's fine.
6. Add half the milk mixture and blend on medium speed until it looks like a thick batter. Beat for 30 more seconds on medium speed, to help build structure. Scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the remaining milk and mix until just blended, scraping down the sides of the bowl once or twice. (You know you should start on low speed so you don't splash milk all over the place, right?) If you look closely, the batter may look a wee bit curdled. Don't worry.
7. Evenly distribute the batter between the two pans. Give the pan a sharp drop on the counter to pop any air bubbles and settle the batter.
8. Bake for 20 to 30 minutes, or until golden on top. A toothpick inserted in the middle will come out dry, perhaps with a crumb or two. Touch your finger to the middle of the cake and it should bounce back. (Why the range for timing? Your oven is different than mine. Your pans are different, too: Maybe they're made of dark, thick metal or light, reflective aluminum. Cupcakes will bake faster.
9. Let the cakes cool in the pan for 10 minutes. Turn the cakes out of their pans and let cool completely before you ice them. You can make these cakes a few days in advance and wrap them completely in plastic wrap and refrigerate or freeze. Defrost before icing.

How to make the frosting:

1. Using a hand or stand mixture, beat the butter, confectioners' sugar and extract/ flavorings(s) first on low, then medium speed, until well-blended. Add the heavy cream and mix on medium-high speed until the mixture is light, fluffy and frosting-y. If the frosting is too thick, beat in a tablespoon or three of cream until you and Goldilocks agree it's just right.
2. Ice the cake before you eat all the icing just standing there. Lick the beater, however.

This cake is very adaptable to moods and tastes. Consider:

1. Adding the citrus zest(s) of your choice to the cake or the frosting. Or both.
2. Fold mini chocolate chips into the batter. Then decorate the frosting with chips to give people a clue what's inside.
3. Instead of frosting (or in addition to frosting, if you're daring like that) put a layer of citrus or passion fruit curd in between the cakes.
4. Brush the cakes with a little Gran Marnier or elderflower liqueur (such as St. Germain). Match the flavors in the frosting, such as orange zest or lemon zest for the elderflower.
5. Shave curls of semi-sweet chocolate on top of the cake.

6. Pile fresh fruits on top of the cake, or decorate with edible flowers, such as nasturtiums, for a simple wedding or anniversary cake.

If you make other interesting amendments, please let me know.