

Christmas Cake

Contributed by Northern_Lad

This recipe is for a very rich fruit cake, and has served my family since the early seventies when my mum typed it up as part of a typing exam. For best results, make the cake as far before Christmas as possible, checking every couple of weeks and 'feeding' with brandy if it starts getting dry.

8" Round, 7" square

10oz Currants
 7oz Sultanas
 4oz Raisins
 2.5oz Glace Cherries
 2.5oz Flaked Almonds
 2.5oz Mixed Peel
 1 Grated Lemon Peel
 2tbsp Brandy

7oz Plain Flour
 1tsp Mixed Spice
 1tsp Grated Nutmeg
 2oz Ground Almonds
 6oz Margarine
 6oz Soft Brown Sugar
 1tbsp Black Treacle
 4 eggs

To start with, you need to prepare the dried fruit. To do this, place all the fruit, along with the lemon rind and chopped almonds, in a bowl, and add the brandy. Cover with clingfilm and put out of the way. It's best to do this at least a day in advance.

Before you mix the cake, it's good to get the tin prepared. No matter how reliable your cake-tin is, this is the one cake in the year you don't want to have to hack out. Line the inside with baking parchment, and, to act as a climate control, the outside with brown-paper and string.

In a large bowl (and it should be large enough to easily hold all the ingredients) cream the margarine and sugar. Then mix in the treacle. Once that's done, beat in the eggs one at a time, with a little sieved flour.

You'll then have the fruit and some flour (spices and almonds) left. Mix half the flour and half the fruit to the cake mix and mix well using a wooden spoon. Finish off with all that remains.

Put the mix into the tin. I do this in two goes, making sure that the mix is pushed into all the edges before adding the rest. Make a small hollow in the top to limit the rising. Line the top with a piece of baking parchment with a hole cut in the middle.

Place in a pre-heated oven for 2.5 hours @ 150C/290F

To test the cake, insert a metal skewer and leave for a couple of second. The cake is done when it comes out clean and hot.

Remove the cake from the tin and place on a cooling rack when it is comfortable to handle. When quite cold, wrap in foil the clingfilm and store.

A week before Christmas, you'll need to marzipan the cake. This requires about 500g of marzipan or white almond paste.

Your cake will have a top and a bottom to it. For effect you want the top of the cake to be as flat as possible. To do this, use the bottom. The problem with this is that it won't side flat with a curved top.

With a bread knife, trim it flat. This is the time to taste the cake!

For the edges; take a piece of string and wrap it around the cake. You now have the length you require.

Roll out a long thin shape the length of your string, and a little higher than your cake.

For the top; roll out the paste into a circle that overlaps the base of the tin used to cook the cake. It should be about a centimeter bigger all the way around.

To attach the paste to the cake you'll need some 'glue'; warm apricot jam. Using a pastry brush, coat the cake liberally. Then place the sides on first. Trim the paste so that it is a little longer than you require so that you can firm the two ends together. Then place the top on and crimp to the edges. It is very important that none of the cake shows through, as any fruit will stain the icing.

Depending on how hard you want your icing, you'll want to do this either a day, or five before Christmas - roughly speaking, the earlier you do it, the harder it gets.

Mix up your icing until it is quite firm, but you can still work it. Using a metal pallet knife dipped in hot water is very effective for smoothing. Let your creative juices flow and do your own thing.