

Traditional Christmas Cake - Moist & full of fruit

It is important to prepare the cake tin well and cook the cake very slowly: watch that the cake doesn't burn. Mix and match if you don't have the exact quantities of fruit available, for example, by using mixed fruit to help make up quantities if that is what is on hand. Some people don't like dates but even just a few add to the texture.

Macerated fruit:

- 250 gm seedless raisins
- 500 gm sultanas
- 125 gm currants
- 100 gm mixed peel
- 125 gm dried pears (and/or dried figs)
- 25 gm dried apricots
- 125 gm pitted prunes
- 125 gm glace cherries
- 50-125 gm dates (optional)
- grated rind of 1 lemon
- grated rind of 1 orange
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/3 cup orange juice
- 1 Granny Smith apple
- 1/3 cup brandy



Cake mixture:

- 250 gm butter, softened
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 1 & 3/4 cups plain flour

- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- blanched almonds

To moisten cake

- additional 1/3 cup brandy

Method:

Cut the raisins, figs, apricots, prunes, peeled apple and dates (if used) into small dice or pieces and the cherries in half. Place in a large non-corrosive bowl together with the remaining fruit, rind, juice and brandy. Toss, cover and macerate for 24 - 48 hours, stirring occasionally.

Prepare the cake tin well. Use at least a round tin 21 cm in diameter and 6.5 cm high, or equivalent; 23 or 25 cm is OK; a 20 cm tin might be just too small. With the 21 cm tin the mixture will come right to the top.

Spray or butter the inside of the cake tin. Line with one or two thicknesses of non-stick baking paper that extends 5 to 7 cm above the top of the tin. Spray or butter the inside of the paper if desired. Set oven to 150°C.

Using a beater, cream the butter with the sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time.

In a separate bowl sift together the flour and spices. Add half of this dry mixture to the macerated fruit and, using your hands if necessary, combine well to separate the pieces. Add the remaining flour mixture to the creamed mixture, combine then pour over the fruit and mix thoroughly.



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The final cake mixture will be thick and heavy. Spoon into prepared tin and bang several times to settle; decorate with blanched almonds if desired.

Bake at 150°C for 1 hour then at 130°C for two hours or until cooked. (If using a fan-forced oven, you may consider using slightly lower temperatures.) The cake will rise a little during baking. If the top or edges start to brown too much, lower the oven temperature slightly or cover with some foil or baking paper. Test with a skewer to check if it's cooked but remember it will be a moist cake; cook longer for a drier version.

When cooled, remove from the tin but leave the baking paper on. Brush top with remaining brandy. Wrap the cake in its paper, some plastic wrap and/or foil and store. Brush with a second (or third) lot of brandy if desired.

Serve:

Serve as is or with lovely cream or ice cream. If frozen, it can also be sliced straight from the freezer and eaten straight away - it will be delicious, not icy and with a chewy texture.

Equipment:

Cake tin 21 cm in diameter and 6.5 cm high. Electric beater.

Difficulty and Time:

Reasonably difficult (4/5). 30-45 minutes preparation of fruit a day ahead. 30 minutes preparation of cake mixture. Three hours cooking, possibly another half hour or so depending on the oven.

Notes and variations:

- If you vary the fruit, depending on what you have on hand, don't significantly change the integrity of the cake. For example, don't add fresh fruit that would make the mixture too wet.
- To help the brandy seep through, use a fork to make holes in the top of the cooled cake.