

LEMON CAKE WITH STRAWBERRY SAUCE

This is one of my favorite desserts of all time. It's takes forever to make, but it's oh, so good. And each time I make it, I do a little something different with the presentation. The recipe is written to be a jelly roll cake, but I layer it for a trifle or make small mini-rounds with it or put it in a mold . . .

This recipe is outlined as 28-steps from start to finish. Read through it before starting as there are parts that have to be prepared ahead of time and prep is time-consuming.

LEMON FILLING

(Makes about 2-1/2 cups)

It's important to make the lemon filling first, before preparing the cake. The filling must be chilled completely before folding in the whipped cream. Otherwise, the warm filling will melt the cream. It's also good to chill the completed filling for 1 hour before spreading on the cake. Or, make it a day ahead.

3/4 cup fresh lemon juice (use only fresh, not from concentrate or other substitutes)

1/4 cup unsalted butter, cubed

1 tablespoon lemon zest, minced

1 cup sugar

1/4 cup cornstarch

pinch of salt

2 egg yolks (reserve the whites for use in the lemon cake)

2 whole eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

3/4 cup heavy cream, whipped to soft peaks

1. Combine the lemon juice, butter, and zest in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat until the butter melts.

2. Meanwhile, combine sugar, cornstarch, and salt in small bowl. Stir yolks and eggs in another bowl. Then, whisk in dry sugar mixture into eggs until smooth.

3. Slowly drizzle melted butter mixture into egg mixture, whisking constantly. (You need to pour slowly or the eggs will scramble).

4. Return mixture to saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently. Cook until very thick, 8-10 minutes. Off heat, add vanilla.

5. Place filling in bowl and press plastic wrap on surface to prevent a skin from forming. Chill completely before folding in the whipped cream. (Instructions for folding in the whipped cream after the lemon filling is chilled are included below as part of the cake instructions that describe how to put the jellyroll altogether).

LEMON CAKE

(serves 8 to 10)

1 cup sugar

3/4 cup all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 teaspoon salt
4 egg yolks (reserve whites)
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/4 cup water
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice, strained (must be fresh, not a substitute)
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
6 egg whites (use reserved egg whites from lemon filling and from cake)
1/4 cup sugar

6. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a sheet pan with nonstick spray and line bottom with parchment. Spray the parchment; set pan aside.

7. In a large bowl, sift together the dry ingredients and set aside. In another bowl, whisk together egg yolks, oil, water, juice, and vanilla.

8. Gradually add wet ingredients to the dry. Whisk the mixture, scraping the sides, just until smooth and free of lumps. Set batter aside.

9. In a clean bowl, beat 6 egg whites until foamy. Gradually add 1/4 cup sugar and beat until soft peaks form. (This step is crucial to the loft of your cake. Always use clean bowls and beaters as fat, oil, or yolk prevents them from whipping fully. Egg whites start to deflate as soon as they're whipped, so fold them into the batter right away. And be sure to bake the cake as soon as the batter is in the pan. Every second counts.)

10. With a whisk, stir 1/3 of the beaten whites into cake batter to lighten it. Then gently fold in remaining whites so volume isn't lost.

11. Pour batter into prepared pan. With an offset spatulas or knife, gently spread batter evenly, making sure it reaches the corners of the pan.

12. Immediately bake cake on the middle rack of oven, 15-20 minutes. Watch it carefully. To tell if the cake is done, gently touch the center--it should spring back lightly. The top will be evenly golden, and the sides will have pulled away from the pan.

13. While the cake bakes, place towel on large cooling rack and sprinkle heavily with powdered sugar. This helps keep it from sticking.

14. When cake is done, remove from oven and loosen edges with a knife. Turn cake onto prepared towel and remove sheet pan.

15. Loosen a corner of the parchment paper and gently peel it off. Now generously sprinkle this side of cake with more powdered sugar.

16. Cover the cake with another towel. Place a cooking rack (or sheet pan) upside down on top of the cake. Now, grasp all the layers . . .

17. . . and invert the cake. You just turned it over. Remove top cooling rack or baking pan and towel; sprinkle brown side of cake with more sugar.

18. While cake is still warm, roll it up, starting at one of the short sides. Roll owl up inside cake (keep it fairly tight). This is pre-rolling the cake without the filling. You do this while the cake is still hot and flexible to 'train' the cake to bed to reduce splitting and cracking. Cool on rack for 30 minutes. If you let it cool longer than that, it cracks.

19. Prepare the strawberry sauce and set aside.

STRAWBERRY SAUCE

(Makes 2-1/2 cups)

4 cups fresh strawberries, washed and hulled

1/4 cup sugar

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, strained

1 tablespoon dark rum (optional)

Combine the whole strawberries, sugar, lemon juice, and rum in the bowl of a food processor. Process until mixture is smooth.

20. To finish lemon filling, whip 3/4 cup heavy cream to soft peaks. Add cold lemon base and whisk together. Be patient and keep mixing--the filling will become smooth after a few minutes. But don't sweat if there are a few small lumps.

21. Now, gently unroll the cooled cake onto a work surface (leave it on the towel). There may be a few cracks--don't stress. This is normal and the cracks can be covered up when you dust the jellyroll with powdered sugar at the end.

22. With a pastry brush, paint thin layer of strawberry sauce over the surface of the cake. You won't use it all (the remainder can be used as a garnish for the finished cake).

23. Dollop filling in blobs on the cake. Spread carefully, leaving 1/2-inch border on the long sides of the cake. Get it as even as you can.

24. Using the towel to get you started, re-roll the cake. Keep that first turn fairly tight. And be sure the cake is rolling, not sliding. Obviously, you will not be rolling the towel up inside the cake this time as you did when you pre-rolled it.

25. After a couple of turns, use your hands to roll the cake to the end, finishing seam-side down. Wrap loosely in towel, then chill.

26. The filling must be set before slicing, so the rolled cake should be chilled for at least 4 hours before serving.

27. When ready to serve, dust cake with powdered sugar and trim off ends using serrated knife. Cut into 1-1/2-inch slices.

28. To plate the cake slices, pool or drizzle some reserved strawberry sauce onto serving plates. Fresh strawberries, mint springs or lemon slices may be used as additional garnish.