

THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES



Lemon Cake with Lemon Curd Filling and Cream Cheese Frosting (adapted from Cook's Illustrated's Classic White Cake)

Makes a double-layer 8-inch or 9-inch cake, serving 12 to 16

1 cup whole milk, at room temperature
6 large egg whites ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup), at room temperature
2 teaspoons almond extract
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
zest of 1 small lemon
 $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups granulated sugar (12 $\frac{1}{4}$ ounces)
 $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups cake flour (9 ounces)
4 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon table salt
12 tablespoons unsalted butter (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ sticks), softened but still cool

1. Adjust an oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 8- or 9-inch-wide by 2-inch-high round cake pans and line with parchment paper. In a 4-cup liquid measure or medium bowl, whisk together milk, egg whites, and vanilla.
2. In bowl of standing mixer fitted with paddle attachment, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt at low speed. With the mixer running at low speed, add the butter one piece at a time; continue beating until the mixture resembles moist crumbs with no visible butter chunks. Add all but $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk mixture to crumbs and beat at medium speed until mixture is pale and fluffy, about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ minutes. With mixer running at low speed, add remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk mixture; increase speed to medium and beat 30 seconds more. Stop mixer and scrape sides of bowl. Return mixer to medium speed and beat 20 seconds longer. Divide batter evenly between cake pans; using rubber spatula, spread batter to pan walls and smooth tops.
3. Bake until toothpick inserted in center of cakes comes out clean, about 20 minutes for 6-inch pans, 22 minutes for 8-inch pans, and 26 minutes for 10-inch pans. Loosen cakes from the sides of the pans with a small knife, cool in pan 10 minutes, then invert onto greased wire racks; peel off parchment. Invert the cakes again; cool completely on rack, about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

Lemon Curd Filling (from Cook's Illustrated)

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup lemon juice, from 2 lemons
2 large eggs
1 egg yolk
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces)
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes and chilled
1 tablespoon heavy cream
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon vanilla extract
pinch table salt

1. Heat lemon juice in small nonreactive saucepan over medium heat until hot but not boiling. Whisk eggs and yolk in medium nonreactive bowl; gradually whisk in sugar. Whisking constantly, slowly pour hot lemon juice into eggs, then return mixture to saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with wooden spoon, until mixture registers 170 degrees on instant-read thermometer and is thick enough to cling to spoon, about 3 minutes.

2. Immediately remove pan from heat and stir in cold butter until incorporated; stir in cream, vanilla, and salt, then pour curd through fine-mesh strainer into small nonreactive bowl. Cover surface of curd directly with plastic wrap; refrigerate until needed.

Cream Cheese Frosting (adapted from Smitten Kitchen)

Makes 6 cups

You can use 12 ounces powdered sugar instead of 16 if you're going to make pretty swirls with the icing instead of decorating. It'll taste less sweet and more cream cheesy.

8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter room temperature
4 cups (16 ounces) powdered sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Place cream cheese and butter in a medium bowl. With a handheld electric mixer, beat until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add sugar and vanilla. Beat on low speed to combine.