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mary berry christmas cake recipe

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Mary Berry Christmas Cake Recipe – A Holiday Classic Reimagined

When you think of the quintessential Christmas dessert, a warm, fragrant cake crowned with buttercream and adorned with festive decorations often comes to mind. This beloved treat has been a staple in countless kitchens for generations, and one name that has become synonymous with holiday baking is **Mary Berry**. Her Christmas cake recipe is celebrated for its rich flavor profile, time-honored technique, and the comforting sense of tradition it brings to the holiday table.

In this guide, we'll explore the story behind Mary Berry's iconic cake, break down every ingredient and step, share insider tips, and offer variations that let you personalize the recipe while keeping the classic essence intact. Whether you're a seasoned baker or a holiday novice, this article will equip you with everything you need to create a memorable, mouth watering Christmas cake that will impress family and friends alike.

Why Mary Berry's Christmas Cake Recipe Stands Out

Mary Berry, a beloved British chef and author, has made baking approachable for millions. Her Christmas cake recipe has earned a reputation for balancing depth of flavor with a straightforward method that even beginners can master.

- Heritage and Authenticity: The recipe follows traditional British methods, honoring the centuries old craft of fruit cake making.
- Rich, Layered Flavor: The use of dried fruit, spices, and a well aged alcohol base creates a complex, velvety taste.
- Versatile Presentation: From classic buttercream to modern ganache, the cake can be decorated to suit any style.
- Time Honed Technique: Mary Berry's meticulous instructions reduce the risk of common pitfalls, such as uneven rise or dry crumb.

Ingredient Overview

Below is a detailed list of ingredients you'll need to craft Mary Berry's Christmas cake. The quantities are scaled for a 9 inch round cake, but you can adjust proportions for larger or smaller sizes.

1. Dry Ingredients

225 /g plain flour (all purpose)
2. 1 /tsp baking soda
3. ½ /tsp salt
4. 2 /tsp ground mixed spice (cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice)
5. 1 /tsp ground cloves

- 225 /g unsalted butter, softened
- 225 /g dark brown sugar
- 4 /large eggs, room temperature

- 1 /tsp vanilla extract
- 2 /tsp almond extract (optional for added depth)

- 225 /g mixed dried fruit (apples, raisins, currants, sultanas)
- 225 /g chopped candied peel (orange and lemon)
- 100 /g chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds, pistachios)
- 50 /g chopped dried apricots or figs (optional)

- 150 /ml dark rum or brandy (or a combination)
- 100 /ml orange liqueur (e.g., Grand Marnier)
- 50 /ml water or fruit juice (to moisten fruit)

- Buttercream frosting or royal icing
- Edible gold leaf, sprinkles, or candied citrus
- Fresh berries or citrus zest for garnish

Step by Step Instructions

1. Prepare the Fruit Mixture

Combine all dried fruit, candied peel, nuts, and optional dried apricots in a large bowl. Pour the alcohol, orange liqueur, and water over the fruit, stirring gently. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the mixture steep in a cool, dark place for at least 24 /hours. The longer you allow the fruit to marinate, the deeper the flavors will develop.

2. Preheat Oven & Prepare Pan

Heat your oven to 150 °C (300 °F). Grease a 9 inch round cake tin with butter and line the bottom with parchment paper. This ensures an even bake and easy removal.

3. Cream Butter & Sugar

In a stand mixer or with a hand whisk, cream the softened butter and dark brown sugar together until the mixture is light, fluffy, and pale in color. This process incorporates air, which is vital for a tender crumb.

4. Add Eggs & Extracts

Beat in the eggs one at a time, ensuring each is fully incorporated before adding the next. Stir in vanilla and almond extracts. The extracts enhance the aromatic profile of the cake.

5. Sift & Fold Dry Ingredients

Sift the flour, baking soda, salt, mixed spice, and cloves together. Gradually fold the dry mixture into the wet batter using a spatula or the mixer on low speed. Mix just until combined to avoid over mixing, which can make the cake tough.

6. Incorporate Marinated Fruit

Drain the fruit mixture, reserving the alcohol for later use. Gently fold the fruit, nuts, and peel into the batter until evenly distributed. The fruit adds moisture and a burst of flavor.

7. Bake the Cake

Pour the batter into the prepared tin. Tap the tin gently on the counter to release any air bubbles. Bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes, then reduce the oven temperature to 120 °C (250 °F). Continue baking for another 45 minutes to 1 /hour, checking with a skewer or toothpick inserted into the center; it should come out clean or with just a few moist crumbs.

8. Cool & Store

Remove the cake from the oven and let it cool in the tin for 30 minutes. Then transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely. Once cooled, wrap the cake tightly in parchment paper, followed by foil, and store in an airtight container. Let it rest for at least 48 /hours before frosting; this allows the flavors to meld and the cake to firm up.

9. Apply Alcohol (Optional)

For a more pronounced alcoholic aroma, lightly brush the cooled cake with a mixture of the reserved alcohol and water (1:1 ratio). This step is optional but traditional in many family recipes.

10. Decorate & Serve

When you're ready to serve, cover the cake with buttercream frosting or royal icing. Decorate with gold leaf, sprinkles, or candied citrus. Slice and serve with a cup of hot cocoa or mulled wine for a truly festive experience.

Tips & Tricks for the Perfect Mary Berry Christmas Cake

- Use Room Temperature Ingredients: Ensure butter, eggs, and any dairy are at room temperature to achieve a smooth batter.
- Don't Over Mix: Over mixing can develop gluten, resulting in a dense, chewy cake. Mix just until combined.
- Let the Cake Rest: Resting the cake for 2–3 days before frosting allows the flavors to deepen and the crumb to firm up.
- Keep it Moist: If the cake seems dry after baking, drizzle a little extra alcohol over the top before frosting.
- Use Quality Alcohol: A good brandy or rum adds depth; avoid cheap or overly sweet liqueurs.
- Test the Bake: Oven temperatures can vary. Use a thermometer to confirm accuracy, and adjust baking time if needed.

Variations to Personalize the Classic

Mary Berry's recipe is a solid foundation, but you can tweak it to suit your taste or dietary needs:

- Gluten Free: Substitute the plain flour with a gluten free all purpose blend and add 1 /tsp xanthan gum.
- Vegan: Replace butter with vegan margarine or coconut oil, use flaxseed eggs (1 /tbsp ground flaxseed + 3 /tbsp water per egg), and choose a plant based sugar.
- Nut Free: Omit nuts or replace them with seeds such as pumpkin or sunflower.
- Extra Citrus: Add zest from an orange or lemon to the batter for a bright, fresh note.
- Chocolate Twist: Fold in 100 /g dark chocolate chips or swirl melted dark chocolate through the batter.

Serving & Storage Recommendations

Mary Berry's Christmas cake is meant to be savored over time. Here are some practical guidelines for serving and preserving:

- Serving Size: Cut into thin slices to allow each bite to release the cake's complex flavors.
- Storage: Store in a cool, dry place, wrapped tightly to protect against drying out. For longer storage, keep the cake in the refrigerator (wrapped in foil) for up to a month.
- Reheating: If the cake feels too cold, warm slices in a 120 /°C oven for 5 /minutes before serving.
- Presentation: Arrange slices on a festive platter, garnish with fresh berries or citrus zest, and drizzle a light dusting of powdered sugar.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I bake the cake at a higher temperature?

Higher temperatures can cause the cake to rise quickly and then collapse. Stick to the recommended 150 /°C for the initial bake, then lower it to finish.

2. What if I don't have all the dried fruit?

Use a mix of what you have. The key is a balance of sweet and tart flavors. If you're short on candied peel, add extra zest or a splash of orange juice to compensate.

3. How long does the cake keep?

When properly stored, the cake can last up to 3 /months. For best flavor, consume within 1 /month.

4. Is the alcohol necessary?

Alcohol adds flavor and helps preserve the cake. If you prefer a non alcoholic version, use a mixture of fruit juice and a small amount of vanilla extract.

5. Can I frost the cake immediately after baking?

It's best to let the cake cool completely and rest for at least 48 /hours before frosting. This prevents the frosting from melting and ensures a smooth finish.

Conclusion

Mary Berry's Christmas cake recipe is more than just a dessert; it's a cherished holiday tradition that brings families together around the kitchen and the table. By following the steps outlined above, you'll create a cake that's moist, flavorful, and visually stunning. Whether you stick to the classic version or experiment with modern twists, this recipe will become a staple in your holiday celebrations for years to come.

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