

Carrot Cake

Ingredients

Cake:

- 1 1/2 cups packed light or dark brown sugar
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil or canola oil (or melted coconut oil)
- 4 large eggs
- 3/4 cup smooth unsweetened applesauce
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 and 1/2 cups all-purpose flour (spoon & leveled)
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 and 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 cups grated carrots (about 4 large)
- 2 cups chopped pecans (1 cup for cake, 1 cup for garnish), optional

Cream Cheese Frosting:

- 16 ounces full-fat block cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 4 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 tablespoon heavy cream or milk
- 1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- pinch of salt, to taste

Directions

Make the cake:

Step 1

Preheat oven to 300 degrees F (149 degrees C). Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Spread the chopped pecans on the sheet and toast for 7-8 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 10-15 minutes.

Step 2

Turn the oven up to 350 degrees F (177 degrees C). Grease two or three 9-inch cake pans, line with parchment paper, then grease the parchment paper. Parchment paper helps the cakes seamlessly release from the pans.

Step 3

Whisk the brown sugar, granulated sugar, oil, eggs, applesauce, and vanilla together in a large bowl until combined and no brown sugar lumps remain. In another large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves together. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and, using a rubber spatula or wooden spoon, fold the ingredients together until just combined. Fold in the carrots and 1 cup of the toasted pecans. (The rest of the pecans are for garnish.)

Step 4

Pour/spoon the batter evenly into the cake pans. If using three cake pans, bake for 20-24 minutes. If using two cake pans, bake for 30-35 minutes. Test the center with a toothpick. If it comes out clean, the cakes are done. If not, continue to bake until cooked through. Do not over-bake. Allow the cakes to cool completely in the pans set on a wire rack. The cakes must be completely cool before frosting and assembling.

Make the frosting:

Step 1

In a large bowl using a handheld or stand mixer fitted with a whisk or paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese and butter together on medium-high speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the confectioners' sugar, cream/milk, vanilla extract, and a pinch of salt. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds, then increase to high speed and beat for 3 minutes until completely combined and creamy. Add more confectioners' sugar if frosting is too thin, more milk if frosting is too thick, or an extra pinch of salt if frosting is too sweet. Frosting should be soft, but not runny.

Assemble the cake:

Step 1

First, using a large serrated knife or cake leveler, layer off the tops of the cakes to create a flat surface. Place 1 cake layer on your cake stand or serving plate. Evenly cover the top with frosting. Top with 2nd layer, more frosting, and then top with the 3rd layer. Spread remaining frosting all over the top and sides. Decorate the sides and top of the cake with the remaining toasted pecans. Refrigerate the cake for at least 15-20 minutes before slicing. This helps the cake hold its shape when cutting.

Step 2

Cover leftover frosted cake tightly and store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.