

FRUIT

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"I thought if I was writing a book where fruit is the focus, I wanted it to be aspirational and educational on some level," he says. "I wanted to introduce people to fruits that they might have had before but not made anything with it. Or it might be a fruit they stumbled on or sought out."

He offers substitutions for the unusual and harder to find fruits. For instance, he suggests doubling the blueberries in the crumb cake recipe if gooseberries cannot be found. His make-do suggestion is even easier for a kiwi and goldenberry torte. "If fresh goldenberries are unavailable, substitute with a smattering of your favorite fruit," he writes in the book.

If a fruit is out of season, he works with ones that are available. His buttermilk ricotta cake with peaches, he says, works just as well with mangoes, pineapple and even banana. He avoids fruits that will break down too much in the oven and also oranges, as they will add too much liquid.

In a phone interview, Schreiber spoke about how to handle fruits in cakes and offered baking tips. The Q&A has been edited for clarity.

Q: How do we keep fruits from sinking to the bottom of the cake?

A: A dense piece of fruit will be more likely to sink in a soft, light batter. Coating the fruit in flour before mixing it into the batter will help it float a bit. So will adding the fruit to the top of the batter so it has a longer distance to travel before reaching the bottom of the pan.

Q: What about getting fruits to hold their shape when they are baked?

A: One of the things that helps a fruit to hold its shape is pectin. Different fruits have different levels. For instance, quince is very high in pectin. Acidic apples like Honeycrisp and Granny Smith will hold their shapes when baked, but ones like Red Delicious will turn to complete mush in the oven. Similarly Bosc pears, which are firmer, are more likely to hold their shape than, say, Anjou pears.

Q: Is there something that can be done to make fruits look pretty and not washed out in an upside-down cake?

A: You have to take the time at the beginning, in the first few steps, when you are layering the fruits. You want to arrange the fruits properly so they look just as neat when the pan is flipped after the cake is baked.

Q: When styling a cake with fruits, what are some key aspects to keep in mind?

A: Save the prettiest fruit for the top or whatever part of the cake will be the most visible. Use a mix of whole and sliced fruits to add interesting shapes and a variety of sizes. If the leaves or blossoms of the fruit are available, and are edible, throw a few in for good measure.

Q: What is the best way of storing a cake topped with fruits?

A: A cake with fresh fruit on top will probably need to be refrigerated after assembling. If possible, add the fruit just before serving so it looks its best. Leftovers can be loosely covered with plastic or a cake dome and refrigerated.

Q: How do you prevent a fluffy frosting from crusting up?

A: Frostings that are made



Andrew Rush/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

Coconut apricot macaroon cake, with a double dose of shredded coconut. Unsweetened coconut is used in the batter and topping, making the cake delightfully chewy.

with powdered sugar will form a crust when exposed to the air. I see this as a feature rather than a defect as it is largely unavoidable, though refrigeration may slow the process. If you prefer a silky smooth frosting, look for a recipe like Swiss meringue buttercream.

Q: Does it matter whether a rubber spatula or wooden spoon is used to fold in wet and dry ingredients?

A: A rubber spatula will do a better job than a wooden spoon because its flexible design allows it to scrape the sides of the bowl. As a result, you'll be able to mix the ingredients together more efficiently with fewer strokes.

Q: How do you prevent a cheesecake from cracking on top?

A: A cheesecake cracks when it cools too quickly. Take the cake out of the oven at the point when it is just setting. If you shake the pan, the outside of the cake will be firm, but the very center will still have a wobble to it.

Let the pan sit in the water bath for about 30 minutes after it is taken out of the oven. Then transfer the pan to a cooling rack and let it come down to room temperature slowly. Finally, refrigerate it.

Q: Not everybody owns cake pans of different sizes. What is the one must-have pan size?

A: For most people, an 8-inch pan will be sufficient. That being said, if a recipe calls for a certain size pan, go with that, because that's what it was tested in. If you use another size pan, the cake may take a longer or shorter time to bake or the batter could overflow.

Q: How important is it to prepare a cake pan with grease and flour?

A: Greasing the pan is one of the most important steps you can take. There is no point in making a cake if you cannot get it out of the pan, right? You can lubricate the pan with softened butter or oil. I personally don't like spray-on products. Flour offers a layer of protection and helps to prevent the cake from sticking to the pan and the butter from melting into the batter.

I have a Pan Goo recipe that calls for 1/4 cup neutral oil and 1/3 cup all-purpose flour. It is easy to use as you need to brush the pan with just one thing. You can refrigerate it for a month or even longer.

Q: As a recipe developer, you obviously encourage substitutions. But when do you say, "Stop the madness"?

A: I don't think I would change too many things at once. If you have a good sense of what each component of the recipe is there to do, then go for it. Use your

judgment and understand what and why you are doing it. But if you are missing half the ingredients, maybe you should look for a different recipe that features ingredients you have on hand.

PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY CAKE

If you like a PB&J sandwich, you would love this PB&J cake. It has a pronounced peanut butter flavor that is complemented well by jams like strawberry or lingonberry. Avoid natural peanut butter as it will toughen the batter and weigh down the cake.

The mound of fresh strawberries is like the icing on the cake, and a feast for the eyes and palate. Leave the stem on some of the berries for a touch of color.

For preparing the pan, make Pan Goo by whisking together 1/4 cup neutral oil and 1/3 cup all-purpose flour. Then brush it onto the pan.

3/4 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt
1/2 cup smooth peanut butter (not natural)
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 large egg plus 1 large egg yolk
1/3 cup whole milk
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1/3 cup any berry jam
1 pound strawberries, the largest ones cut into halves or quarters

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees with a rack in the center position. Brush a 9-inch round cake pan with Pan Goo.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with paddle attachment, combine peanut butter, butter and light brown sugar. Beat together on medium speed until the mixture is smooth and very creamy, about 3 minutes. Stop the mixer, scrape down the sides of the bowl, and add the egg and yolk.

Continue beating on medium speed until the egg has been completely incorporated into the batter, about 1 minute longer.

With the mixer running on low speed, add half the flour mixture, beating until just combined. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and continue mixing on low speed while slowly adding the milk and vanilla.

Add the remaining flour mixture and stir by hand until smooth. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top with a small offset spatula.

Bake until the cake is just firm to the touch and a cake tester inserted into the center comes out with moist crumbs, about 25 minutes.

Transfer the pan to a wire rack. Allow the cake to rest in the pan for 10 minutes before inverting it onto the rack to cool completely.

Transfer the cake to a serving platter. Be careful, because the underside may stick to the cooling rack. Spread the jam over the top of the cake and pile high with strawberries. Makes 12 servings.

Note: Prepare the pan with pan goo (1/4 cup neutral oil and 1/3 cup all-purpose flour).

— "Fruit Cake: Recipes for the Curious Baker" by Jason Schreiber (William Morrow; November 2020)

COCONUT APRICOT MACAROON CAKE

This is one of those cakes with a bold and beautiful flavor that will be instantly consumed. It has the chew of a coconut macaroon and a flash of tartness from the apricots. The cake will keep at room temperature, covered for 3 or 4 days.

For preparing the pan, make Pan Goo by whisking together 1/4 cup neutral oil and 1/3 cup all-purpose flour. Then brush it onto the pan.

For the cake

1 cup dried apricots, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
1/4 cup apricot preserves
1/2 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon coarse salt
6 tablespoons coconut oil, melted
1 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1/3 cup whole milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the topping

1 large egg white
2 tablespoons

granulated sugar
1 pinch coarse salt
1 cup unsweetened flaked coconut
Sanding sugar for sprinkling

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees with a rack in the center position. Grease a 9-inch round cake pan with Pan Goo.

In a small saucepan, stir together the apricots, apricot preserves and 1/4 cup water.

Set over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until a syrup forms that is thick enough to hold a line, about 5 minutes.

Remove from the heat and toss with shredded coconut. Set aside to cool slightly.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk the coconut oil, sugar and eggs until smooth and creamy. Whisk in the milk and vanilla. Using a rubber spatula, stir the flour mixture into the wet ingredients.

Gently fold the apricot-coconut mixture into the batter, distributing it evenly throughout. Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan.

Make the topping. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg white, granulated sugar and salt until just foamy, about 30 seconds.

Stir in the coconut flakes and scatter on top of the cake batter. Sprinkle with sanding sugar.

Bake until the cake is firm to the touch and golden brown and a cake tester inserted into the center comes out with moist crumbs, about 1 hour.

Transfer the pan to a wire rack. Rest the cake in the pan for about 10 minutes. Then unmold onto the rack to cool completely.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

— "Fruit Cake: Recipes for the Curious Baker" by Jason Schreiber (William Morrow; November 2020)

BUTTERMILK RICOTTA AND PEACH CAKE

Frozen firm-ripe peaches work beautifully here in an off-season time like now. Vanilla beans are more flavorful than vanilla extract, and also more expensive. So if you are watching your budget, you could use 1 tablespoon of pure vanilla extract in place of the bean.

After about 40 minutes, I moved the rack to the middle of the oven and baked the cake for about 8 minutes. The cake set perfectly and showed off a golden brown crumb.

For preparing the pan, make Pan Goo by whisking together 1/4 cup neutral oil and 1/3 cup all-purpose flour. Then brush it onto the pan.

For the buttermilk ricotta

2 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
3/4 cup buttermilk
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice (from 1 lemon)
1 teaspoon coarse salt

For the cake

1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon coarse salt
3/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons granulated sugar, divided
2 large eggs
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped out
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest (from 1 lemon)
1 cup sliced firm-ripe peaches, 1/2-inch thick

In a small saucepan, combine milk, cream and buttermilk over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until it reaches 200 degrees on a candy thermometer and curds begin to form, about 15 minutes.

Add lemon juice and give it one last stir. Then remove the pan from the heat and let it sit undisturbed for 30 minutes.

Stir in the salt. Drain the curds in the refrigerator overnight through a triple layer of cheesecloth set in a colander over a bowl. The cheese should be firm enough to just hold its shape and measure a little over 1 cup when it's ready.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees with a rack in the upper-third position. Brush a 9-inch springform pan with Pan Goo.

In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt.

In a large bowl, whisk the ricotta, 3/4 cup sugar, eggs, butter, vanilla seeds and lemon zest until the mixture is rich and creamy.

Stir the dry ingredients into the ricotta mixture until just combined. Then scrape the batter into the pan.

Scatter the sliced peaches on top of the batter and sprinkle with the remaining 3 tablespoons of sugar.

Bake the cake until the edges are golden brown and a cake tester inserted into the center comes out with moist crumbs, about 45 minutes.

Transfer the pan to a wire rack. Allow the cake to cool for a few minutes before removing the collar from the pan. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Makes 10 to 12 servings.

— "Fruit Cake: Recipes for the Curious Baker" by Jason Schreiber (William Morrow; November 2020)



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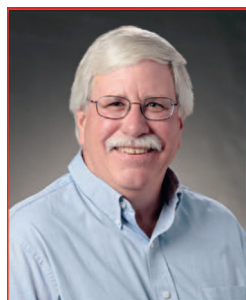
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