

HOME COOKING CHRONICLES: NOTHING FANCY BIRTHDAY CAKE

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

My brother Craig and I have always had two things in common, the same mom and dad. We lived in the same house, ate the same food, used the same brand of toothpaste and still drove each other insane. It's what brothers do: fight and bicker, and pretend to be hurt when they're not. Essentially, brothers are professional male soccer players.

Craig and I have birthdays just a few days apart. Growing up we had a combined birthday party in our backyard. I barely remember the celebration but I remember the cake.

Our mother is not an "I love baking" kind of person but she produced two birthday cakes every year. They were nothing fancy; no multiple layers or inventive fillings. They were sheet cakes with simple frosting. I distinctly remember them still in the 9 by 13 inch pans.

These were not boring cakes though; they were personalized theme cakes. I once had a cake decorated with chocolate covered cherries (with the liquid center, thank you). Craig's cake was decorated with plastic brontosaurus and a T-rex.

These birthday cakes are another thing

that unites Craig and me: thoughts of younger days, playing with our friends, blowing out our candles and celebrating with our brother. This is the true splendor of home cooking. We don't care if the cakes were four layers or if each component was made from scratch. We care that we can relive, for a brief moment, that childhood celebration.

One day when we're old, Craig and I will reminisce of our birthday cakes made by mom. It's something we'll always share. It's a common memory with the longest friend I'll ever have.

Nothing fancy birthday cake

A homemade cake isn't fussy or complex. The butter, eggs and dairy should be at room temperature to incorporate easily in the batter. Dinosaur decorations are optional.

Yellow cake ingredients

- 2 ¼ cups cake flour
- 2 ½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, plus 2 tablespoons for the pan, room temperature
- 1 ¾ cups granulated sugar
- Two large eggs, room temperature



Brian Medford

Brian Medford's 'Nothing fancy birthday cake' is inspired by his mother and brother.

- Two large egg yolks, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ¼ cup sour cream, room temperature
- ¾ cup whole milk, room temperature

Chocolate frosting ingredients

- 1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- ¾ cup cocoa powder, sifted
- ½ cup whole milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Butter a 9 by 13 inch baking pan. Set aside.

Make the cake: Whisk the cake flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt together in a large bowl. Set aside.

In stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter and sugar together on high speed for 4 to 5 minutes, until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time and mix each until combined. Add the vanilla and the sour cream and mix until combined. Scrape down the bowl as needed.

Add one-third of the flour mixture into the butter mixture and mix until com-

combined. Mix in half of the milk. Add the next one-third of the flour mixture, then the second half of the milk. Finally, mix in the last one-third of the flour mixture until just combined and smooth. Remove the bowl from the mixer and use a spatula to ensure there is no dry flour at the bottom.

Evenly spread the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 36 to 40 minutes or until the top is golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Let the cake cool completely.

Make the frosting: In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter on medium speed until pale and creamy. Gently add the sifted powdered sugar and sifted cocoa powder to the butter. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds. Add the milk, vanilla and salt. Beat on medium-high speed for 4 to 5 minutes until the frosting is smooth and velvety. If the frosting is too thick, add a splash of milk and beat.

Frost the cooled cake and serve.

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