

Home Cooking Chronicles: Summer icebox cake

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

I'm in the middle of a home kitchen remodel. Translation: I'm in the middle of drinking coffee that's been brewed on my bathroom counter with no half and half. It's about as glamorous as it sounds. It feels like all I've done the past few months is shop for appliances. All appliances look glorious when you don't have any.

The refrigerator has been the most troublesome to select. Refrigerators have more configurations than all the Autobots and Decepticons combined, plus refrigerator technology has accelerated more than I can conceive. The latest refrigerators are essentially Teslas without wheels. I saw one that keeps a current refrigerator inventory by itself. I've asked myself, "Will I have to call my 11-year-old nephew to be able to operate my own refrigerator?" As much as I enjoy talking to Gus, I don't want him to think his Uncle Brian is fridge incompetent.

All I really want from a refrigerator is space for my plethora of condiments (mostly A.1. Sauce) and space for cake.

Icebox cakes were all the rage in the 1920s when Nabisco introduced packaged chocolate wafer cookies. You could layer pre-made cookies with whipped cream, store them in the refrigerator (ahem, the icebox) overnight — and presto-chango, dessert is done. It's a splendid transformation. It's like going from Kansas to Oz.

Layering homemade cookies with whipped cream, puddings and curds, then letting the refrigerator do the work delights me. These simple, heat-free (unless you're baking the cookies) cakes rival my favorite dessert, a trifle, with little accompanying fanfare or fuss. It's why Southerners love icebox cakes — we don't even have to turn on our ovens in the blazing summer to make dessert (although, Southerners also love fanfare and fuss).

When my new refrigerator is finally installed, I'm whipping up a seasonal icebox cake (who knows what season it will actually be then) as my inaugural new kitchen project. It will cool overnight in pride of place right beside my A.1. Sauce.

Summer icebox cake (serves 12)

Let's keep things simple this summer and use store bought cookies. No judgment from me, plus you should never apologize for dessert.

Ingredients

- 10 ounces shortbread cookies (I like Walkers)
- 8 ounces chopped rhubarb



This summer icebox cake features rhubarb and strawberries.

Brian Medford

- 8 ounces sliced strawberries
- 3 ½ ounces granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon, 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, separated
- 16 ounces heavy cream
- 2 ounces confectioners sugar

Preparation

Combine the rhubarb, strawberries and sugar in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir occasionally until the fruit begins to break down. Turn the heat off

and add 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract. Cool to room temperature.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whisk the cream on medium-high speed until it begins to thicken. Add the confectioners sugar and 1 tablespoon of vanilla extract. Whisk until medium-stiff peaks form.

Gently fold in the room-temperature fruit mixture into the cream.

Roughly cut or crumble the shortbread.

Spread half of the cream in an 8 by 8 inch pan (glass is preferred, so you can see the layers). Cover the cream with the crumbled shortbread. Repeat one more time. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate the cake overnight.

Remove the cake from the refrigerator and serve.

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