

# HOME COOKING CHRONICLES: POUND CAKE

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

I could talk for days about baking leavening agents: chemical leavening, biological leavening, mechanical leavening. It thrills me — which is perhaps why I'm not invited to parties all that frequently. The other guests think, "What in the world is he babbling about?" as they slowly slink away.

When I teach baking, I observe a student's biggest barrier to baking excellence is fear. I believe the best way to reduce baking fear is to increase baking knowledge. Understanding leavening can help. Think of it as preparation for the "Technical Challenge" to impress Paul Hollywood.

Leavening is air or gas that causes a baked item to rise in the oven. Chemical leaveners are baking soda and baking powder.

Baking soda is a base and requires an acidic ingredient like buttermilk or cocoa powder to activate. This reaction happens quickly — think of your 4th grade volcano science project.

Baking powder is composed of baking soda plus an acidic component in powder form. It's a less immediate reaction than baking soda and is usually double acting. It activates both when moistened and again when it's heated.

Don't exchange baking powder for baking soda, or vice versa — it won't work out. You'll be sad and hungry.

Yeast is a biological single-celled organism that ferments by eating sugar to produce carbon dioxide gas, which creates leavening (and beer and wine ... well done, yeast).

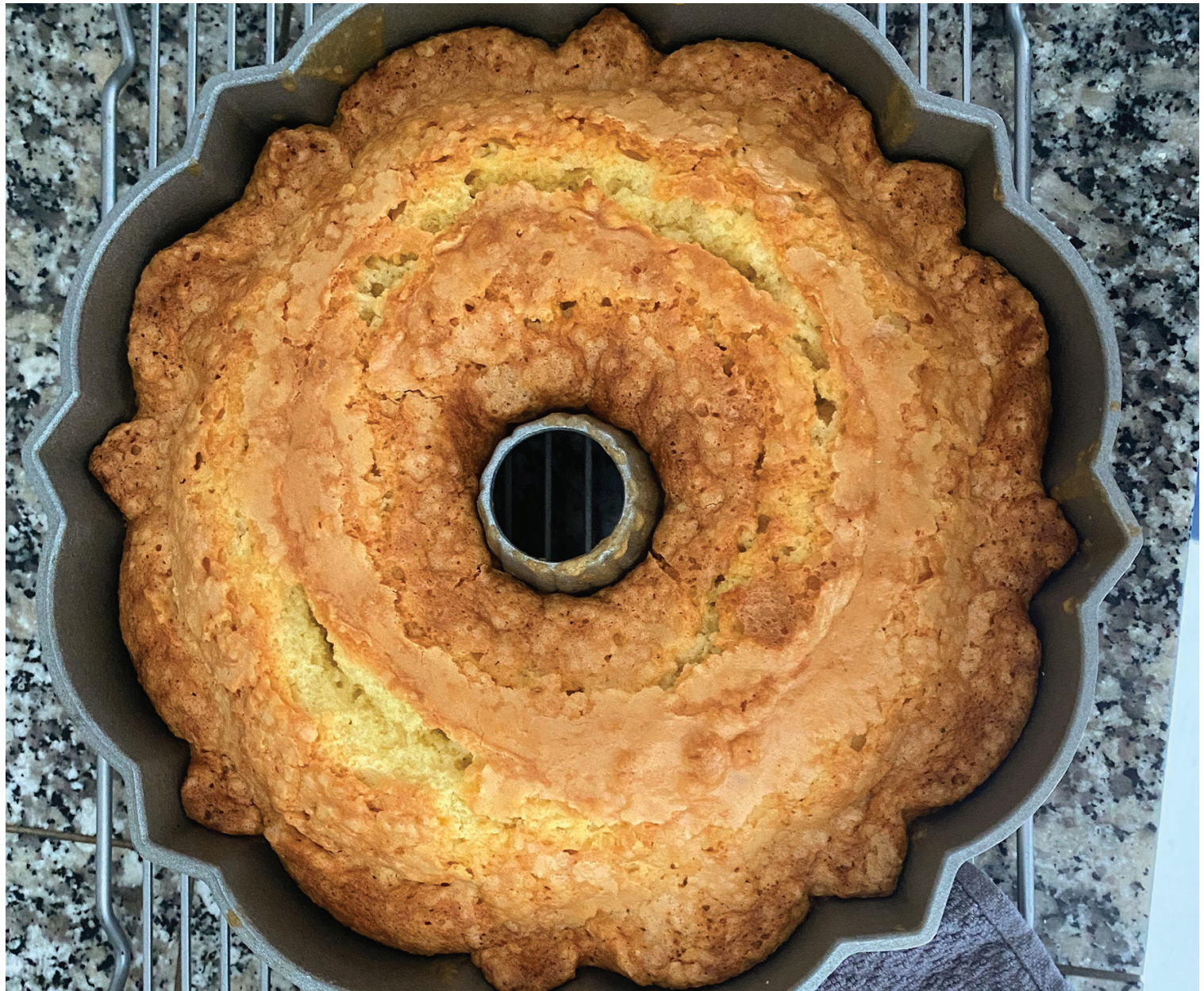
Mechanical leavening is my favorite because I sound like an engineer, which I am not. The only thing I can build is a layer cake. Mechanical leavening is air or water that is trapped in a dough that expands or turns to steam when in a hot oven.

Leaveners can also be responsible for the color and texture of a baked good. Invite me to a party and we can talk about it in person ... for hours.

The real reason I want to write about leavening? It's an excuse to make a pound cake — not that I ever need an excuse.

## Cream Cheese Pound Cake (Slightly adapted from Grandbaby Cakes)

This pound cake is leavened by creaming butter and sugar. Creaming works by sugar granules ripping through butter to create air pockets. These air pockets expand in a hot oven giving lift to the pound cake. Don't skimp on the creaming process. This Grandbaby Cakes pound cake is a favorite.



Brian Medford

This Grandbaby Cakes pound cake is a favorite of author Brian Medford.

### Ingredients

- 12 ounces unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 8 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
- 3 cups granulated sugar
- Six large eggs, at room temperature
- 3 cups sifted cake flour (measure after sifting)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

### Preparation

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Liberally spray a 12-cup bundt pan with baking spray or grease well with butter

and add a light dusting of flour. Be meticulous so your cake will come out of the pan.

In a stand mixer bowl using the paddle attachment mix the butter and cream cheese at medium-high speed for 1 to 2 minutes until they are combined.

Slowly add in the sugar and beat on high speed for 5 to 6 minutes until the mixture is pale yellow and fluffy.

Add the eggs, one at a time, combining well after each addition. Scrape down the sides as needed.

Slowly add the flour and the salt to the batter. Mix until just combined. Scrape the sides of the bowl. Add the vanilla extract

and mix until just combined.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 75 to 80 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean.

Cool in the pan on a wire rack for 20 minutes, then invert the cake on a serving plate. Cool before cutting and serving.

This pound cake is mechanically leavened and is perfect plain or served with seasonal berries.

*Brian Medford is the owner of Idlewild Biscuits and Bakes in Astoria. He teaches cooking classes at The Pantry in Seattle. Contact him at [blmedford@gmail.com](mailto:blmedford@gmail.com).*