

STREUSEL COFFEE CAKE

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

I divide my work life into two distinct periods: the dress shirt and tie sitting at a computer period, and the flour dusted apron standing at an oven period.

I worked for twenty years as a human resources and strategic planning professional. I learned numerous life lessons that led to my career as a baker and culinary instructor.

The most important lesson? If you're headed to a meeting with a high likelihood of conflict, bring along a baked treat to share. Nobody can get mad at you when you arrive with baked goods in hand. That's the power of baking.

Also, nobody genuinely knows what makes a coffee cake a coffee cake. My analytical minded colleague, Johnny, was flummoxed by this rustic treat.

Does it have coffee in it? Not usually. Do you eat it while drinking coffee? Sometimes. Then why is it called a coffee cake? I don't know, Johnny, but I do know I could eat it every day. Unfortunately, my recent cholesterol test results have dashed that dream.

What we now call coffee cake evolved from Austrian sweet cakes. Those were usually yeasted, unlike modern coffee cakes with butter and sour cream. (Yes, use both, because dry coffee cake tastes like sadness.)

Coffee cake is quaintly charming. When I moved to Astoria, my friend Deb brought a homemade coffee cake as a welcome gift. It's among the best coffee cakes I've had and made me feel at home. Bake a coffee cake for brunch, for your new neighbor, or for that meeting you're dreading.

Streusel Coffee Cake

Adapted from Cheryl Day, Serves 12

Streusel

- 1/4 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 tablespoons room temperature unsalted butter

- 1 cup chopped pecans or slivered almonds

Cake

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salts
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 pound (2 sticks) room temperature unsalted butter
- 1 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/4 cups sour cream, room temperature
- Confectioner's sugar for dusting (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 and generously butter a 9x13 inch baking pan.

Make the streusel. In a bowl, combine the sugars, flour, cinnamon, and salt. Add the butter and pecans and smash between your fingers until the mixture resembles cookie dough. Place the bowl into the refrigerator.

Make the cake. Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment cream the butter and sugar on medium-high speed for 5 minutes, until light and fluffy.

Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Add the vanilla and sour cream and mix until just combined.

With the mixer on low, add the flour mixture in thirds and mix just until no streaks of flour are visible. Scrape down the sides as necessary.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Break the streusel into large crumbs and sprinkle over cake. Bake for 45 to 55 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Let cool before serving and, if you'd like, dust with confectioner's sugar.

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.



Brian Medford

Austrian-style Streusel Coffee Cake.



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