



A BAKER'S GUIDE TO  
*Perfectly  
Baked Cakes*  
AND CHEESECAKES

PRETTY. SIMPLE. SWEET.



Baking a cake is a delightful blend of art and science. Each ingredient, from flour and eggs to sugar and butter, plays a pivotal role in creating the perfect bake.

Heat causes chemical reactions: proteins coagulate, starches gelatinize, and sugars caramelize, contributing to both the structure and flavor of the cake.

Measuring ingredients precisely and following the recipe closely are crucial because even small deviations can significantly affect the texture and doneness of your cake.

Proper mixing techniques ensure that all elements come together harmoniously when exposed to the right temperature for the correct amount of time.

*Stephanie*



UNDERBAKED



PERFECTLY BAKED!



OVERBAKED



PERFECTLY BAKED!



## 3 TIPS FOR A PERFECTLY Baked Cake

1

### USE A DIGITAL THERMOMETER

Use a digital thermometer to accurately measure the internal temperature of your cake. A fully baked cake typically reaches an internal temperature of 200°F to 210°F (93°C to 99°C). Aim for about 205°F (96°C) and your cake will be perfect.

Make notes on your favorite recipes for the internal cake temperature that works best for each cake you make. This will take some experimenting but will lead to consistently great results.

Different types of cakes might need slight adjustments, for example, for **sponge and angel cakes**, aim closer to 200°F (93°C) for a lighter structure.

**Dense cakes or pound cakes** may need to reach up to 210°F (99°C) due to their heavier ingredients and moisture content.

Don't have a quick-read digital thermometer? [Here's what I use.](#)

2

### USE VISUAL INDICATORS

Visual indicators like the look and smell will help you determine when a cake is done, but this takes experience. Here are two quick tests to use if you don't have a thermometer:

#### Spring Back Test

Press the cake's center lightly with your finger. If the cake is done, it will spring back completely.

#### Skewer Test

Insert a skewer or toothpick into the center of the cake. A perfect bake will have the skewer come out clean or with just a few moist crumbs attached, but no wet batter.

3

### COOL COMPLETELY

Allow the cake to cool completely to room temperature before slicing it.

Cakes continue to bake until they have reached room temperature. And cold, refrigerated cakes slice best because they are fully set.

# Troubleshooting

## TIPS



Improperly mixed cakes often take much longer to bake than properly mixed cakes. If your cakes always take much longer to bake fully than a recipe states, there's either an issue with your oven OR your mixing technique.

Ingredients like butter, eggs, and dairy should be at room temperature unless otherwise specified. Room temperature ingredients blend more seamlessly into a proper cake batter.

Overmixing will create more gluten, making your cake more dense and tough. To avoid this, use a rubber spatula to mix the batter gently, just until combined.

### UNDERBAKED CAKES

- **Quick Fix:** If the center is still raw, return the cake to the oven for a few more minutes.
- **Repurpose:** Transform a significantly underbaked cake by cutting out the raw parts and using the baked cake bites in a dessert like a trifle or parfait, which can be layered with cream and fruit.

### OVERBAKED CAKES

- **Moisten with Syrup:** Apply a warm simple syrup to a cooled cake or vice versa (cold syrup to a warm cake) to help reintroduce moisture or help your cake stay moist for days.
- **Repurpose:** Overbaked and dry cakes are perfect for making cake pops or can be crumbled into crumbs for use in other dessert recipes.

### OVEN TIPS

#### Calibration and Temperature:

Many ovens are off by a noticeable degree, which can affect baking results.

Use an oven thermometer to verify actual temperatures inside your oven.

Check out my [Oven Calibration Guide](#)

#### Rack Position:

Bake on the middle rack unless the recipe specifies otherwise. This position allows for the most even heat distribution.

#### Oven Management:

Resist the temptation to open the oven door frequently as it can cause temperatures to fluctuate and affect the cake's rise and doneness.

# BAKED Cheesecake



Cheesecakes require a different approach when compared to traditional cakes due to their custard-like texture. Here's how to ensure your cheesecake is perfectly done:

**What's a fully baked cheesecake?** The ideal internal temperature for a cheesecake when it's done is around 150°F to 155°F (65°C to 68°C). This temperature ensures that the cheesecake has set properly but remains creamy. Going above this temperature range can lead to overcooking, causing the texture to become dry and crumbly.

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## VISUAL INDICATORS OF DONENESS

### Slight Jiggle:

The center of the cheesecake should still wobble slightly when you gently shake the pan. This area will typically be about 2 to 3 inches in diameter. The residual heat will continue to cook the center as the cheesecake cools, setting it to the perfect consistency.

### Edges Set:

The edges of the cheesecake should appear well set and more firm than the center. If the edges start browning too much, it's a sign that the cheesecake is overcooking.

## ADDITIONAL TIPS

### Cooling:

Allow the cheesecake to cool slowly in the turned-off oven with the door slightly ajar for about an hour to prevent sudden temperature changes that can cause cracks.

### Chill Before Serving:

Cheesecake typically needs several hours, usually overnight, in the refrigerator to fully set and develop the best texture and flavor.

PRETTY. SIMPLE. SWEET.



# Climate

## CONSIDERATIONS

### HIGH ALTITUDES



At high altitudes, the decreased air pressure can affect the rise of cakes and the setting of cheesecakes. Here's a few adjustments to try:

- **Decrease Sugar:** Reduce sugar by 1 to 2 tablespoons per cup to prevent over-rising and falling.
- **Increase Liquid:** Add 2 to 4 tablespoons more liquid per cup to counteract the drier air.
- **Increase Oven Temperature:** Increase the baking temperature by 15°F to 25°F (4°F) to set the structure of cakes more quickly.
- **Adjust Baking Time:** Baking times may be shorter with cakes, so start checking for doneness earlier than the recipe suggests. Baking times may be longer with cheesecakes, so keep baking longer if the center is too raw.

### DRY AIR



Dry air can cause moisture to evaporate from the batter more quickly, potentially drying out cakes:

- **Increase Liquid:** Add more water, milk, or other liquids to the batter to compensate for increased evaporation.
- **Cover While Cooling:** Cover cakes with a clean cloth while they cool to prevent further moisture loss.

### HIGH HUMIDITY



High Humidity can make it difficult for cakes to set and might leave them too moist or dense:

- **Decrease Liquid:** Reduce the amount of liquid slightly to counterbalance the high moisture content in the air.
- **Try 'Convection' Oven Setting:** If possible, use a convection setting to help dry out the atmosphere inside the oven.

# MOM'S EASY Orange Cake



A soft and tender orange cake that's bursting with fresh orange flavor. This recipe is easy to make and only gets better over time. It's a simple recipe with no creaming of butter or sugar needed, so it's great for beginners too!

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F / 180°C. Grease a 12-cup (10-inch) Bundt pan or two standard loaf pans (either 9 x 13 inch pans or 8½ x 4½ inch pans for taller cakes) and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl whisk together flour and baking powder. Set aside.
3. Using an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment or a handheld mixer, whisk together eggs and sugar on high speed until pale and fluffy, about 5 minutes.
4. On low speed and with the mixer running, add oil slowly until combined. Add orange juice, zest, and vanilla extract and keep whisking slowly until combined.
5. Add flour mixture and whisk just until combined. Don't overmix.
6. Pour batter into prepared pan/pans. Bake for 50-60 minutes for the bundt pan or 40-50 minutes for the loaf pans or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Note: If the top is browning quickly while baking, cover loosely with aluminum foil.
7. Allow cake/cakes to cool completely on a wire rack before slicing and serving.

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 ⅞ cups (350g) all-purpose flour, sifted
- 2 ½ teaspoons baking powder
- 4 large eggs
- 1 ½ cups (300g) granulated sugar
- 1 cup (240 ml) canola or vegetable oil
- 1 ¼ cups (300 ml) freshly squeezed orange juice
- Orange zest from 3-4 oranges (same amount of oranges used for the juice)
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract



# ULTIMATE Chocolate Cupcakes

## INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups (185 g/6.5 oz) all-purpose flour  
½ cup (50 g/1.7 oz) cocoa powder  
¾ teaspoon baking soda  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ cup (1 stick/113 g) butter, softened to room temperature  
1 cup (200 g/7 oz) granulated sugar  
2 large eggs  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract  
½ cup (120 ml) whole milk  
½ cup (120 ml) hot water

## FROSTING

¾ cup (1 ½ sticks/150 g) unsalted butter  
1 ½ cups (160 g/5.5 oz) powdered sugar, sifted (plus more as necessary)  
¼ cup (25 g/1 oz) cocoa powder, sifted  
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract  
115 g/4 oz. dark chocolate, melted and slightly cooled  
2 tablespoons (30 ml) heavy cream

This is the ultimate chocolate cupcake recipe. They are perfectly moist and insanely chocolaty, topped with a supreme fudge chocolate frosting. During the mixing process, you'll cream together butter and sugar. It also requires the addition of hot water to create a cake texture you must taste to believe!

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F /180° C. Line a muffin tin with cupcake liners and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, sift together flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, and salt. Set aside.
3. In a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat together butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2-3 minutes. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as necessary. On medium speed, beat in eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add vanilla extract and beat until combined.
4. With the mixer on low speed, add half of the dry ingredients and beat just until combined. Then beat in milk, followed by the other half of the dry ingredients, beating slowly until combined.
5. Add hot water and beat just until combined. Do not overmix—the less you mix, the lighter the cake will be. The batter should be liquid.
6. Divide batter evenly between cups, filling them about ¾ full. Bake for 15-20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean or with just a few moist crumbs. Allow cupcakes to sit for 10 minutes, then remove from pan and allow to cool completely on a wire rack.
7. **Make the frosting:** In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter at medium speed until pale and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add powdered sugar in 2 additions and beat until smooth. Add cocoa powder and beat until completely creamy and smooth. Beat in vanilla extract, melted chocolate, and heavy cream, mixing until combined. Add powdered sugar as necessary until frosting is spreadable. Use frosting immediately to frost cupcakes, or store in the fridge, covered, for up to 3 days. Before using, bring to room temperature and whisk until smooth.



# VANILLA Cupcakes



This is my favorite recipe for moist and fluffy vanilla cupcakes. These cupcakes are perfect for any occasion and you can customize them to your liking by choosing your own frosting. I've included my three favorites in the recipe!

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F/180°C. Line muffin tin with cupcake liners. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
3. In a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat together butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as necessary. On medium speed, beat in eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add vanilla extract and beat until combined. With the mixer on low speed, add half of the dry ingredients and beat just until combined. Add milk (and sour cream, if using) and beat until combined. Add the other half of the dry ingredients and beat slowly or fold by hand only until combined. Do not over mix—the less you mix, the lighter the cake will be.
4. Divide batter evenly between the cups, filling them about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full. Bake for 15-20 minutes (or 8-10 minutes if making mini cupcakes) until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean or with just a few moist crumbs. Allow cupcakes to sit for 10 minutes, then remove from pan and allow to cool completely on a wire rack.
5. Unfrosted cupcakes can be kept tightly covered at room temperature for up to 3 days, or in the freezer for up to 2 months. Thaw, still covered, on the counter or overnight in the fridge.

## INGREDIENTS

2  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups (180g) all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (1 stick/115g) butter, softened  
1 cup (200g) granulated sugar  
2 large eggs, room temperature  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (120 ml) whole milk  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (50g) sour cream (optional for dense cake)  
Frosting of choice

## FROSTING CHOICES

- [Classic Vanilla Buttercream](#): This classic American buttercream is made on a base of butter and powdered sugar. It's sweet, creamy, and easy to make.
- [Cream Cheese Frosting](#): Cream cheese adds richness and creaminess to any cake. This frosting is slightly less sweet but just as creamy and velvety-smooth.
- [Swiss Meringue Buttercream](#): Swiss meringue buttercream takes a bit of technique to make, but is completely worth it. This frosting is made from a base of meringue made from cooked egg whites and sugar, with butter whipped in to create light, fluffy, and downright dreamy vanilla frosting.

# Tiramisu

## CUPCAKES

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups (180g) all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon espresso powder or instant coffee powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (115g) butter, softened
- ½ cup (100g) granulated sugar
- ½ cup (100g) brown sugar (or granulated sugar)
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ½ cup (120 ml) whole milk

### COFFEE SOAKING SYRUP

- 1 teaspoon espresso powder or instant coffee powder
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- ¼ cup (60 ml) hot water
- 1 tablespoon marsala or coffee liqueur such as Kahlua, optional

### FROSTING

- ¾ cup (170g) mascarpone cheese
- ⅓ cup confectioner's sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon espresso powder or instant coffee powder
- 1 ½ tablespoons coffee liqueur
- ¾ cup (180 ml) heavy cream
- cocoa powder, for dusting

All the flavors of classic tiramisu but in cupcake form! These tiramisu cupcakes are soaked in coffee syrup and topped with soft and dreamy mascarpone cream and a sprinkle of cocoa powder. They taste absolutely incredible and are so easy to make!

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Make the coffee soaking syrup:** Mix the coffee/espresso powder and sugar in hot water and mix until dissolved, then add liqueur. Set aside to cool.
- 2. Make the cupcakes:** Preheat oven to 350°F/180°C. Line muffin tin with cupcake liners and set aside.
- In a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, coffee/espresso powder, and salt.
- In a standing mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat together butter and sugars on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as necessary. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla extract. Reduce mixer speed to low and add half of the dry ingredients, beating just until combined. Add milk and beat until combined. Add the other half of the dry ingredients and beat slowly only until combined. Do not over mix—the less you mix, the lighter the cupcakes will be.
- Divide batter evenly between cups, filling about ¾ full. Bake for 15-20 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Allow muffins to cool in pan for 10 minutes, then remove cupcakes from pan and place on a wire rack.
- While cupcakes are still warm, poke the tops with a fork or toothpick a few times. Brush with coffee syrup, allowing it to soak in. Use all the syrup evenly over cupcakes.
- 7. Make the frosting:** In a large bowl whisk together mascarpone, sugar, espresso powder, and liqueur. In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, whisk heavy cream until stiff peaks form. Fold whipped cream into the mascarpone mixture in 2 additions. Allow cupcakes to cool completely then frost them. Chill cupcakes until ready to serve. Just before serving, dust frosting with cocoa powder.



# New York

## CHEESECAKE



This classic New York cheesecake is the ultimate cheesecake. It's dense, rich and creamy and incredibly easy to make. Instead of using a water bath, it relies on a low and slow method of cooking. It's truly one of the best cheesecakes I've ever had!

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F/180°C. Grease the bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan.
2. In a medium bowl, mix together crumbs, sugar, and melted butter and mix until combined and moistened. Press mixture into the bottom of prepared pan to form an even layer of crumbs. Bake for 8-9 minutes until golden brown. Allow to cool completely on a wire rack. Meanwhile, prepare the filling.
3. Increase oven temperature to 425°F/220°C.
4. In an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment or using a handheld mixer, beat cream cheese on medium-low speed until smooth and lump-free, 1-2 minutes. Add sugar and beat until blended. Scrape down the sides and bottom of the bowl as necessary using a rubber spatula. Add cornstarch and mix until blended. Add the eggs and beat until fully combined. Add cream, vanilla extract, and lemon zest and beat just until combined and smooth. Pour batter over cooled crust and spread evenly.
5. Bake cake for 10 minutes, then lower temperature to 225°F/110°C and continue to bake for 60 minutes until the sides are set but the center is still slightly wobbly (some comments suggested this was not enough baking time. I baked this so many times and it works. If you're not sure if your oven temperature is accurate or if your baking time is usually longer than those called for in a recipe, you can add an additional 10-20 minutes, and avoid opening the oven door too many times). My cheesecake always gets golden brown around the edges but if yours doesn't, that's ok, just trust the recipe.
6. Turn off oven, open the oven door slightly or halfway to let in cold air, and leave the cake in the oven for 60 minutes. This will help prevent the cake from cracking and the cake will remain creamy. Transfer the cake to a wire rack and allow it to cool to room temperature. Cover the cake with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight or for at least 12 hours.
7. Cheesecake will keep in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

### CRUST

1 ½ cups (150g) graham cracker, digestive biscuits, or vanilla wafer crumbs (pulse in a food processor until finely ground)

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

4 ½ tablespoons (65g) unsalted butter, melted

### FILLING

4 cups (900g) full-fat cream cheese, at room temperature

1 ⅛ cups (225g) granulated sugar

2 tablespoons cornstarch

4 large eggs plus 1 egg yolk, at room temperature

½ cup (120 ml) heavy cream

1 ½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

# CHOCOLATE Cheesecake

## CRUST

1 ½ cups (150g) chocolate wafer crumbs

¼ cup (55g) unsalted butter, melted

## FILLING

340 g (12 oz.) bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped

¾ cup (180 ml) heavy cream

3 tablespoons natural (not Dutch-processed) cocoa powder, optional

24 oz (680g) full-fat cream cheese, at room temperature

1 cup (200g) granulated sugar

4 large eggs, at room temperature

1 ½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract

2 tablespoons chocolate or coffee liqueur, optional

## GANACHE TOPPING

240 g (8 oz.) bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped

1 cup (240 ml) heavy cream

This triple chocolate cheesecake is a chocolate-lover's dream. With chocolate in every layer, this rich and creamy cheesecake is what I crave. It does require a water bath which can be a little tricky if you've never done that before. This cheesecake is best for more experienced bakers.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 325°F/160°. Wrap the bottom and sides of a 9-inch springform pan with one large piece of foil, then repeat with another piece. This will ensure that water from the bath doesn't seep into the cake.
2. **Make the crust:** In a medium bowl combine crumbs and melted butter and mix until crumbs are evenly moistened. Press mixture into the bottom of the pan to form an even layer. Bake crust for 8 minutes. Set the pan on a wire rack and allow to cool completely.
3. **Make the cheesecake:** In a medium heatproof bowl, combine chocolate, heavy cream, and cocoa powder if using. Microwave in 20- to 30-second increments, mixing in between, until chocolate is melted and smooth. Set aside to cool. In a mixer bowl fitted with the paddle attachment, beat cream cheese on medium-low speed until smooth and lump-free, about 1-2 minutes. Add sugar and beat until blended. Add eggs and beat until batter is smooth. Mix in chocolate mixture. Add vanilla extract and liqueur if using, and beat until combined. Pour batter over the baked crust.
4. Place the pan inside a large roasting pan, then pour enough boiling water into the roasting pan halfway up the sides of the cake pan. Place gently in the oven (you can also first place the roasting pan in the oven, and then pour the water). Bake for 60-70 minutes, until the sides are set but the center is still slightly wobbly. Let cake cool to room temperature before adding the topping.
5. **Make the topping:** In a medium heatproof bowl, combine chocolate and heavy cream. Microwave in 20- to 30-second increments, mixing in between, until chocolate is melted and smooth. Let cool slightly, then pour over the cake.
6. Cover cheesecake with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 8 hours, until completely set.





## MEET *Stephanie*

In 2011, I was like so many home bakers—frustrated, confused, and often overwhelmed by recipes that I followed to a T but they didn't always turn out the way I had hoped. I loved baking, but no matter how many cookbooks I read or recipes I tried, I couldn't seem to get consistent results. Cakes would sometimes be underbaked and raw, bread would be dry, and cookies would spread too thin.

I knew there had to be a better way to bake, so I dove deep into the science behind baking. I started studying what really makes recipes work—beyond just following instructions. I stuck my nose in a 500-page baking science textbook and came up for air weeks later. The more I learned, the more my baking transformed. I was finally creating picture-perfect bakes that tasted just as good as they looked.

Since then, I've helped hundreds of bakers just like you master the basics, troubleshoot common problems, and take their baking skills to the next level. Through my Mastering Baking Basics course, you'll learn the exact methods and science that will help you consistently bake beautiful, delicious treats every time.

No more guessing. No more failed recipes. This course will give you the tools and confidence you need to become the baker you've always wanted to be. Join me, and let's turn your baking into the joyful, rewarding experience it's meant to be.

# If your baked goods don't always turn out great, you need a better skillset.

With the **Mastering Baking Basics®** course, you'll start baking better desserts, treats, and breads the next time you step into your kitchen. Our 7-module course is designed to provide you with the skillset you need to bake like a pro quickly!

learn more



## Mastering Baking Basics

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