

Dad's Fruit Cake

My dear dad was a very special man. He was born of a time where the simple things were always important. I thank him for passing on some of those feelings that made us kids realize that the simple things are always priceless. Even now I still remember those wonderful smells coming from the kitchen from that old wood stove and the anticipation of some event that was about to happen and dad saying "don't touch the stove"!

We have all grown now and gone our different ways, but we all still talk about "Dad's Fruit Cake" whenever we get together at some family occasion. I thought that I would finally write down the recipe to the famous fruit cake as some sort of tribute to a man that I will always miss.

The method is to my best interpretation of how I remember, and the quantities are what I find closely resemble his finished cake.

Ingredients:

- 8 Large fresh eggs
- 1 1/2 cups Dark Brown Sugar
- 2 cups Plain Flour (Wholemeal)
- 1 1/2 cup Self Raising Flour (Wholemeal if available)
- 125 g Butter (gently melted)
- 1 kg Mixed Fruit
- 1 Tea Spoon of Mixed Spice
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 1/2 cups of Cherry Brandy (or port, sherry any other spirit)
- 1 Large spoon of Jam (half a cup)

Step 1 "The Fruit"

As this is a ritualistic fruit cake, the method is very un-orthodox, so bear with me, it is well worth it!

Place the all the Fruit in a large mixing bowl (approx. 2 Lt or larger). To this add the Cherry Brandy and a good scoop of any old jam you may have (dark plum is best). Cover with a damp tea towel and leave for at least 24 hours. It may need to be turned over every so often to sense the mood of preparation.

Step 2 "Prepare the oven"

The oven is the hardest thing to get right. I have used many ovens over the years and it takes me two or three cakes before I seem to get it right. The main thing to remember is that High Humidity is needed and gentle even cooking. So here goes!

Adjust all the shelves in the oven so that there is one shelf at the very bottom most shelf of the oven. Place one other shelf above this shelf so that it is at approx. the center of the oven. Place a large baking tray (approx. 2 Lt or larger) on the bottom shelf of the oven. FILL this tray with water so that the level is just below the top (do not overfill or it will boil over everywhere). Now, set the oven to approx. 180 degrees C and leave it while we do the mixing (needs approx. 20 minutes to warm up evenly)!

Note that some ovens may need to be as high as 220 degrees C but most good modern ovens (including fan forced) only need approx. 180 degrees C as the first temperature step. A good sealed oven may not need the tray of water – but I have not found one since the old wood stove. Gas Ovens are usually very Drying – so be prepared to experiment – that is the ritual here...

Step 3 "The Cake Tin"

The cake cooking tin will need to be a 3 to 4 Lt cake tin for this size mixture. I have used all shapes from round to even a dog shape, any will do! The Cake Tin needs to be greased and lined with paper! It seems that nothing is as good as the old "brown Paper"! – OvenBake works OK

Rub all the inside edges of the tin with butter (I don't like the sprays). Cut a piece of paper to the shape of the base of the tin and place it into the tin to completely cover the inside base (if you have put enough butter it will stick well). Make a strip of paper that is twice as wide as the sides of the tin and long enough to completely go around the sides of the tin. Now place this strip of paper inside the tin so that it covers all the inside of the tin and goes completely around the whole inside of the tin (it is a good idea to have a little overlap).

Your tin now should look a bit like a chef's hat upside-down. All parts of the inside of the tin should now be covered by paper. The paper should come out of the tin's sides to make it look a bit like a half-finished rapped box (except the paper is on the inside of the tin)!

Now put the tin aside for the next stage - check the oven and see if it is up-to-temperature!

Step 4 "The Mixture"

Place the eggs and the brown sugar in a large mixing bowl (approx. 5 Lt). Mix well until all the sugar is dissolved into the now mixed eggs. Place all the flour and spice and pinch salt into the bowl and mix well until it is a thick sticky paste. Pore in the melted butter and blend into the mixture until it is a very smooth mixture.

Now pore the complete contents of the fruit mixture (that was soaking) into the cake mixture. Mix it very well, taking care not to crush any of the fruit. When the mixture is completely mixed, scoop into the prepared cake tin and evenly spread it to all edges. Don't work the mixture too much at this point as you will bring too much dough to the top and this will cause the cake to crack on top (when you cut the cake – fruit will not be even throughout the cake... I always "drop" the tin a few times to settle the mixture

I sometimes at this time may place some nuts or glazed fruit on top of the mixture as decorations. DO NOT use wall-nuts as they make the cake bitter if it is stored for any length of time.

Step 5 "The Baking"

This cake will take approx. 5 hours to bake so be prepared for a long wait!

Place the cake into the pre-heated oven as close to center as possible. Let bake for approx. 1 1/2 hours at 180 degrees C and then turn the oven down to 125 degrees C for an additional 3 hours (plus or minus 30 minutes or so).

Check the cake from time to time to determine the progress and make note of any unusual happenings. It may mean that next time you will need to make some adjustments to your temperatures. If the cake center rises up too fast (in the first 1 1/2 hours) and starts to crack - you are too hot (or too much self-raising flour)! Top-up the water in the baking tray from time to time - if needed.

Towards the end of the last three hours (or earlier if you notice the top starting to brown) you will need to check the progress of the cooking. I still like to use a straw or small thin stick to check if the cake is cooked all through. To do this - poke a straw into the center of the cake while it is still in the oven (do not remove the cake from the oven), pull out the straw and wipe it between your fingers. The mixture on your fingers should be very warm and very claggy! If it

still seems a little cold or sticky (like original mixture) then it may need longer to cook! I never like to over-cook my fruit cakes!

When cake is cooked you may remove from oven and cover with damp cloth until cool (approx. 3 hours or leave in Oven overnight!) – I often leave in the oven to cool over night

Modifications

Some modifications that can be tried are:-

I now use a Mixer to blend this cake with a “Dough” fitting on Slow with a 4 Lt Mixing bowl

I now use one (1) cup of Ribena instead of the Plum Jam and 2 cups of alcohol of any sort (one cup of cherry brandy and one cup of a good Port)

I now use one (1) Kilo packet of good quality Mixed Fruit and one (1) 200 gram of dried Cranberries as my fruit mix

I now use a temperature stick (but still like the straw) cake should be cooked when internal temp is 92 to 96 degrees – (but don't take this as gospel as I have only been doing this for a few years)

Wipe down cake when first removed from oven and again when cool with additional cherry brandy. Gives a very glazed finish to top and is a good way of rescuing a slightly burnt top.

Nuts and other glazed or dried fruit may be added as desired, but be aware that this may change the over-all mixture proportions. NEVER use wall nuts unless the cake is to be eaten immediately, as they make the cake very bitter after a few weeks of storage.

Storage

When the cake is completely cool (next day), remove all the brown paper. The cake is ready to cut and eat now if you want, but is best left for a few weeks in a sealed container. It does not need to be refrigerated (even in the tropics)! It should last for years if you want!

My preference is to cook the cake approx. 4 weeks before needed and store with one slice of bread and one large piece of orange peel in a sealed container. Don't worry if the piece of bread and orange peel looks a little sad after a while, the cake will be wonderful and moist.

Thank you

To Earnest Geoffrey Garland thank you and to the rest of my family for allowing me to publish this family recipe. This recipe was passed on to my dad from his mum and adapted to suit the ingredients of the time and now as you can see – I have done the same – I think the flavor still

closely resembles the original – the smell while cooking does and it makes the house feel warm and loved.

Thank you for reading this recipe, it is really very easy to make and is a very healthy moist fruit cake. If you would like any further information, please e-mail me! I hope you enjoy this cake as much as we have over the years

I make between 10 and 50 of these cakes every year – and have done since I first left home in the early 1970's and I have never yet felt I have perfected the same finish as dad could get in the old Carmichael Wood Stove – the closest I ever got was with a “Clay” pot I once used – so maybe I should try this method again some time.

This was first written down by me on 23-Oct-1976.

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