

— AMERICA'S —
TEST KITCHEN

THE *perfect* CAKE



YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO CLASSIC, MODERN,
AND WHIMSICAL CAKES

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

The experts at America's Test Kitchen have gathered together years of baking knowledge in their first-ever cake book, *The Perfect Cake*. This comprehensive collection of recipes includes any cake you can imagine—from better-than-the-rest yellow layer cake for birthday parties to fanciful creations and elegant holiday desserts. In addition to more than 200 fool-proof recipes, there are tips and tricks throughout so home bakers can become cake pros, learning everything from the different batter-mixing methods to how to slice cakes into multiple even layers.

- *The Perfect Cake* is the new authoritative source, featuring essentials like perfectly domed Pound Cake and superlatively chocolaty Ultimate Chocolate Cupcakes, but also modern flavor profiles and techniques with a simple but impressive Tahini Banana Snack Cake and a naked-sided multilayer Blackberry-Lemon Mascarpone Cake.
- The book opens with a valuable chapter of mix-and-match layer cakes, frostings, and fillings, allowing anyone to find just the combination they're looking for. Chapters that follow all draw on similar techniques, and each chapter includes an All About spread with common steps broken down.
- When helpful, sidebars with step photography show you just how you should be mixing your batter or how to roll up a jelly roll cake without it tearing.
- An introductory section outlines each major step of the cake-baking process along with the equipment you'll want, ingredients for your pantry, and how to avoid making common mistakes.
- There's a beautiful photo of every cake recipe.



white layer cake

makes two 9-inch or three 8-inch cake layers

1 cup whole milk, room temperature

6 large egg whites, room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2¼ cups (9 ounces) cake flour

1¾ cups (12¼ ounces) sugar

4 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

12 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 12 pieces and softened

why this recipe works White layer cake is an elegant choice for special occasions. White cake is simply a butter cake made with egg whites instead of whole eggs (using the latter would make it a—you guessed it—yellow cake). The whites are supposed to make the cake soft and fine-grained. Unfortunately, most white cakes fall short, coming out dry and cottony and riddled with tunnels and small holes. We suspected that it was the stiffly beaten whites that were forming the large air pockets and holes in the baked cakes. We solved the problem first by mixing the cake with the reverse creaming method: adding the butter to the dry ingredients so that it coats the flour particles for an ultratender crumb. (For more information on cake mixing methods, see page 000.) Then, instead of folding in whipped whites, we simply mix the whites with the milk before beating them into the flour-butter mixture. This cake was fine-grained and free from holes, and delightfully tall and light. And this foolproof method couldn't be easier. This cake is pictured with Vanilla Frosting (page 000); for frosting ideas, see page 000-000.

1 Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease two 9-inch or three 8-inch round cake pans, line with parchment paper, grease parchment, and flour pans. Whisk milk, egg whites, and vanilla together in bowl.

2 Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, mix flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt on low speed until combined. Add butter, 1 piece at a time, until only pea-size pieces remain, about 1 minute. Add all but ½ cup milk mixture, increase speed to medium-high, and beat until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Reduce speed to medium-low, add remaining ½ cup milk mixture, and beat until incorporated, about 30 seconds (batter may look curdled). Give batter final stir by hand.

4 Divide batter evenly among prepared pans and smooth tops with rubber spatula. Gently tap pans on counter to settle batter. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out with few crumbs attached, 23 to 25 minutes, switching and rotating pans halfway through baking.

5 Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove cakes from pans, discarding parchment, and let cool completely on rack, about 2 hours. (Cake layers can be stored at room temperature for up to 24 hours or frozen for up to 1 month; defrost cakes at room temperature.)

chocolate cream cupcakes

makes 12 cupcakes

Cupcakes

- 1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup boiling water
- ⅓ cup (1 ounce) unsweetened cocoa powder
- ⅓ cup (2 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 tablespoon instant espresso powder
- ¾ cup (5¼ ounces) sugar
- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Filling

- ¾ teaspoon unflavored gelatin
- 3 tablespoons water
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch salt
- 1¼ cups marshmallow crème

Glaze

- ½ cup (3 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter

why this recipe works Hostess CupCakes conjure memories of envied lunchbox meals and beloved after-school snacks. But America’s most iconic cupcake could stand improving—namely, replacing that plasticity packaged flavor of the filling with a buttery filling that wouldn’t dribble out. First, we tried simply plopping a marshmallow into the chocolate cupcake batter, but this created craters in our cupcakes. Combining marshmallow crème and the right amount of gelatin gave us a perfectly creamy filling that stayed put. Injecting the filling into the cupcakes caused them to crumble and tear, so we used a paring knife to cut inverted cones from the tops of the cupcakes instead. We prefer a stiffer marshmallow crème in this filling, such as Jet-Puffed or Fluff. Do not use marshmallow sauce. For an accurate measure of boiling water, bring a full kettle of water to a boil

1 For the cupcakes Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease and flour 12-cup muffin tin.

2 Whisk flour, baking soda, and salt together in bowl. Whisk boiling water, cocoa, chocolate chips, and espresso powder in large bowl until smooth. Whisk sugar, sour cream, oil, eggs, and vanilla into cocoa mixture until combined. Whisk in flour mixture until just incorporated. Divide batter evenly among prepared muffin cups. Bake until toothpick inserted into center comes out with few dry crumbs attached, 18 to 22 minutes, rotating muffin tin halfway through baking. Let cupcakes cool in muffin tin on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove cupcakes from muffin tin and let cool completely on rack, about 1 hour.

3 For the Filling Sprinkle gelatin over water in bowl and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Microwave until mixture is bubbling around edges and gelatin dissolves, about 30 seconds. Whisk in butter, vanilla, and salt until combined. Let mixture cool until just warm to touch, about 5 minutes, then whisk in marshmallow crème until smooth. Refrigerate filling until set, about 30 minutes. Transfer ⅓ cup filling to pastry bag fitted with small plain tip; set aside remaining mixture for filling cupcakes.

4 For the Glaze Microwave chocolate chips and butter in small bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted and smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Let glaze cool completely, about 10 minutes.

5 Insert tip of paring knife at 45-degree angle ¼ inch from edge of each cupcake and cut cone from top of cupcake. Slice off bottom ½ inch from each cone and discard. Place 1 tablespoon filling inside each cupcake and place tops on filling, pressing to adhere. Frost each cupcake with 2 teaspoons cooled glaze and let sit for 10 minutes. Using pastry bag, pipe curlicues across tops of glazed cupcakes. Serve. (Cupcakes can be stored at room temperature for up to 2 days.)



party cake pops

makes about 36 cake pops

1½ cups (7½ ounces) all-purpose flour

1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

½ cup sour cream

1 large egg plus 2 large yolks, room temperature

1½ teaspoons vanilla extract

¼ cup milk

2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

2½ cups (15 ounces) white baking chips or semisweet chocolate chips

Lollipop sticks

Multicolored nonpareil sprinkles

why this recipe works Everyone loves food on a stick, and the same goes for dessert. It's hard to beat the cute factor of cake pops. Most recipes call for baking a box-mix cake, breaking it into crumbs, and combining it with canned frosting to make a base to roll into balls. We knew we could do better. Making a from-scratch easy yellow cake in an 8-inch square pan gave us a delicious base and just enough cake for about three dozen pops. While the traditional frosting worked as a binder, tasters thought it was too sweet. Moistening the crumbs with milk worked just as well, and a couple of tablespoons of confectioners' sugar provided a balanced but not overwhelming sweetness. Freezing the cookie dough–like cake balls briefly made them firm enough to stay put on their sticks, and helped set the coating of melted chocolate chips (chips were better than bar chocolate because their stabilizers created a smooth, snappy coating). We like to use a 2-cup liquid measuring cup to melt the chocolate; its tall, narrow sides allow for easier coating of the cake balls. You'll need a floral foam block (available at craft stores and online) to stand the cake pops upright as the coating sets. If you're unable to find one, stand the dipped cake pops upside down on a parchment paper–lined baking sheet (note that this will give the tops a flat appearance). To make different colors for the coating, add drops of food coloring to melted white chocolate chips.

1 Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 8-inch square baking pan, line with parchment paper, grease parchment, and flour pan.

2 Whisk flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt together in bowl of stand mixer. Fit stand mixer with paddle, add butter, sour cream, egg and yolks, and vanilla and beat on medium speed until smooth and satiny, about 30 seconds. Scrape down bowl with rubber spatula, then mix by hand until smooth and no flour pockets remain.

3 Transfer batter to prepared pan and smooth top with rubber spatula. Gently tap pan on counter to release air bubbles. Bake until light golden and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove cake from pan, discarding parchment, and let cool completely on rack, about 2 hours. (Cake can be wrapped in plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 24 hours.)

4 In clean, dry bowl of stand mixer, break cake into rough 1-inch pieces. Add milk and confectioners' sugar and beat on medium-low speed until broken into fine, evenly moistened crumbs and cohesive dough begins to form, about 1 minute, scraping down bowl as needed.



5 Line baking sheet with parchment paper. Working with 1 packed tablespoon cake mixture at a time, roll into balls and place in single layer on prepared sheet. Cover with plastic wrap and freeze until firm but still pliable, 45 minutes to 1 hour.

6 Microwave 2 cups chocolate chips in 2-cup liquid measuring cup at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, 1 to 2 minutes. Working with 1 cake ball at a time, insert lollipop stick into cake ball, stopping at center. Dip entire cake ball into melted chocolate and turn until completely coated (tipping measuring cup to the side as needed). Lift up from chocolate (do not turn upright) and gently shake side

to side to allow excess coating to drip off evenly. Turn cake pop upright, gently twist back and forth to even out coating, and insert stick into foam block. Sprinkle with nonpareils. Stir and rewarm chocolate in microwave as needed to stay fluid; add remaining ½ cup chocolate chips and melt when chocolate level becomes too low to dip easily. (If cake balls become too soft, refreeze until firm.)

7 Let cake pops sit at room temperature until coating is set, about 30 minutes. Serve. (Assembled cake pops can be kept at room temperature for up to 4 hours or refrigerated for up to 3 days; bring to room temperature before serving.)

tres leches cake

serves 12 to 15

Milk Mixture

1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk

1 (12-ounce) can evaporated milk

1 cup heavy cream

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Cake

2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

8 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 cup whole milk

4 large eggs, room temperature

2 cups (14 ounces) sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Topping

1 cup heavy cream

3 tablespoons corn syrup

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

why this recipe works Making a great tres leches cake—a light, lovely, sweet sponge cake soaked with a mixture of “three milks” (heavy cream, evaporated milk, and sweetened condensed milk)—requires walking a fine line: The cake should be moist, redolent with the clean dairy flavor of the milks that soak it—but not mushy. It should be sweet, but not sickeningly so. For our ideal cake that stayed on the right side of the line, we needed to make our sponge cake sturdy enough to handle the milk mixture, so we used whipped whole eggs instead of the usual egg whites. Although some tres leches recipes use equal amounts of evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk, and cream in the soak, we found that cutting back on the cream produced a thicker mixture that didn’t oversaturate the cake. Finally, to add more depth to our cake’s sweetness, we cooked down the sweetened condensed milk from our soak in the microwave until it thickened and became straw-colored before mixing it with the other milks. Taking this quick step gave each dairy-soaked bite a hint of caramel flavor. The cake is best frosted with its fluffy whipped topping just before serving.

1 For the milk mixture Pour condensed milk into large bowl and cover bowl tightly with plastic wrap. Microwave at 10 percent power, stirring and replacing plastic every 3 to 5 minutes, until milk is slightly darkened and thickened, 9 to 15 minutes. Slowly whisk in evaporated milk, cream, and vanilla until incorporated. Let mixture cool completely.

2 For the cake Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease and flour 13 by 9-inch baking pan. Whisk flour, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon together in bowl. Heat butter and milk in small saucepan over low heat until butter is melted; remove from heat and set aside.

3 Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip eggs on medium speed until foamy, about 30 seconds. Slowly add sugar and continue to whip until fully incorporated, 5 to 10 seconds. Increase speed to medium-high and whip until mixture is thick and glossy, 5 to 7 minutes. Reduce speed to low, add milk mixture and vanilla, and mix until combined, about 15 seconds. Add flour mixture in 3 additions, mixing on medium speed after each addition and scraping down bowl as needed, until flour is fully incorporated, about 30 seconds. Transfer batter to prepared pan and bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Transfer cake to wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes.



4 Using skewer, poke holes at ½-inch intervals in top of cake. Slowly pour milk mixture over cake. Let sit at room temperature for 15 minutes, then refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 3 hours or up to 24 hours.

5 For the topping Thirty minutes before serving, remove cake from refrigerator. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip cream, corn syrup, and vanilla on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 3 minutes. Spread frosting evenly over top of cake and serve.

Oven Method for Dulce de Leche

Instead of cooking sweetened condensed milk to the pudding-like texture of classic dulce de leche for this recipe, we microwaved the milk until it was only slightly thickened and honey-colored. This allowed for a fluid texture that was readily absorbed into the cake. But if you don’t have a microwave, simply pour the sweetened condensed milk into a 9-inch pie plate, cover the plate with foil, and set it in a roasting pan. Carefully add enough boiling water to the roasting pan to reach halfway up the side of the pie plate and bake in a 425-degree oven. In just 35 to 40 minutes, the milk mixture will be the right texture for our Tres Leches Cake (and after about 1 hour and 20 minutes, you’ll have a dark, thick dulce de leche that’s perfect for pouring over ice cream).

strawberry stack cake

serves 12

Filling

2½ pounds strawberries, hulled and halved (8 cups)

½ cup (3½ ounces) granulated sugar

2 tablespoons lemon juice

Pinch salt

Cake

5 cups (25 ounces) all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

¼ cup buttermilk

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

4 ounces cream cheese, softened

2½ cups (17½ ounces) granulated sugar

2 large eggs

2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

why this recipe works Appalachian stack cakes were born of necessity.

During tough times, resourceful Appalachian cooks unable to spare eggs and butter for conventional cake, baked up thin, crisp, spiced rounds, filled them with various fruit mixtures, and left them to “ripen.” After a couple of days, the filling moistened the sturdy layers, yielding a soft, fruity, robustly flavored cakes. We thought this interesting cake was worth eating whether times were hard or not. While stewed apple fillings were common, we decided to swap strawberries for the apples in an attempt to update this cake. Using cream cheese in the dough added a gentle tang and helped the layers hold up to the moister strawberry filling. Forming the cake rounds in a cake pan instead of rolling them out individually drastically cut down on prep time. We found that cooking the strawberries to a jam-like consistency helped keep the cake moist without it becoming a soggy mess. You can substitute frozen berries for the fresh. Let the sheet cool completely between baking layers.

1 For the filling Bring strawberries, sugar, lemon juice, and salt to simmer in large saucepan over medium heat. Mash strawberries with potato masher and cook until thick and jam-like, about 30 minutes (mixture should measure 2¾ cups). Transfer to shallow dish and refrigerate until cool, about 30 minutes.

2 For the cake Adjust oven racks to upper-middle and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 350 degrees. Whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in bowl. Combine buttermilk and vanilla in measuring cup. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter, cream cheese, and granulated sugar on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, and beat until combined. Reduce speed to low and add flour mixture in 3 additions, alternating with buttermilk mixture in 2 additions, scraping down bowl as needed. Give batter final stir by hand.

3 Divide dough into 6 equal pieces. Form each piece into 5-inch disk, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes.

4 Meanwhile, cut six 9-inch parchment paper rounds. Line 8-inch round cake pan with parchment round and press chilled dough disk into bottom of lined pan with your lightly floured hands. Using parchment, transfer dough round to rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with second dough disk (2 rounds should be about ½ inch apart). Repeat with 2 additional dough disks on second sheet. Bake until just golden around edges, 16 to 20 minutes, switching and rotating sheets halfway through baking. Let cake rounds cool on sheets for 10 minutes, then transfer to counter and let cool completely. Repeat with remaining dough disks.



5 Place 1 cake round on platter. Spread ½ cup berry mixture evenly over top, leaving ½-inch border around edge of cake. Top with second cake round. Repeat with remaining berry mixture and cake rounds, finishing with cake round. Cover cake with plastic and refrigerate until cake has softened, at least 8 hours or up to 3 days. Dust cake with confectioners' sugar and serve.

To Make Ahead Cooled berry mixture and cake rounds can be wrapped separately in plastic wrap, then in aluminum foil, and frozen for up to 1 month. Bring both components to room temperature before assembling cake.

Creating the Cake Rounds



1 Using your lightly floured hands, press dough disk evenly into bottom of pan.

2 Lift parchment to transfer rounds to baking sheet. Two rounds should fit on large baking sheet.



flourless chocolate cake

serves 10 to 12

Cake

12 ounces bittersweet chocolate, broken into 1-inch pieces

16 tablespoons unsalted butter

6 large eggs

1 cup (7 ounces) sugar

½ cup water

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon instant espresso powder

½ teaspoon salt

whipped cream

why this recipe works Rich with deep, intense chocolate flavor, flourless chocolate cake makes for a decadent conclusion to any meal, but most recipes require complicated techniques to get it on the table. Our take on this indulgent dessert minimizes fuss without sacrificing flavor or texture. We began by gently melting chocolate and butter in the microwave before incorporating the remaining ingredients. In the absence of flour, we called on eggs for structure, cornstarch for body, and water for a moist, smooth texture. Vanilla and espresso powder profoundly deepened the chocolate's impact. Ensuring a crack-free surface was as easy as straining and resting the batter, and then tapping out bubbles that rose to the surface. Baking in a low oven produced a perfectly smooth surface. This cake needs to chill for at least 6 hours, so we recommend making it the day before serving. An accurate oven thermometer is essential here. We prefer this cake made with 60 percent bittersweet chocolate. Our favorite brands are Ghirardelli and Callebaut. Before making whipped cream, chill the mixer bowl and whisk in the freezer for 20 minutes. Top the cake with chocolate shavings, if desired; to make shavings, shave bittersweet bar chocolate with a vegetable peeler.

1 *For the cake* Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 275 degrees. Spray 9-inch springform pan with vegetable oil spray. Microwave chocolate and butter in bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally with rubber spatula, until melted, about 4 minutes. Let chocolate mixture cool for 5 minutes.

2 Whisk eggs, sugar, water, cornstarch, vanilla, espresso powder, and salt in large bowl until thoroughly combined, about 30 seconds. Whisk in chocolate mixture until smooth and slightly thickened, about 45 seconds. Strain batter through fine-mesh strainer into prepared pan, pressing against strainer with rubber spatula or back of ladle to help batter pass through.

3 Gently tap pan on counter to release air bubbles; then let sit on counter for 10 minutes to allow air bubbles to rise to top. Use tines of fork to gently pop any air bubbles that have risen to surface. Bake until edges are set and center jiggles slightly when cake is shaken gently, 45 to 50 minutes. Let cake cool for 5 minutes, then run paring knife between cake and sides of pan.

4 Let cake cool on wire rack until barely warm, about 30 minutes. Cover cake tightly with plastic wrap, poke small hole in top, and refrigerate until cold and firmly set, at least 6 hours.

5 To unmold cake, remove sides of pan and slide thin metal spatula between cake bottom and pan bottom to loosen, then slide cake onto serving platter. Let cake stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. Slice with warm, dry knife. Dollop slices with whipped cream and serve.

swiss hazelnut cake

serves 12 to 16

Cake

½ cup (2 ounces) skin-on hazelnuts, toasted and cooled

1¼ cups (5 ounces) cake flour

1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

3 large eggs, separated, plus 2 large whites

½ cup vegetable oil

¼ cup water

2½ teaspoons vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

Frosting

24 tablespoons (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened

¼ teaspoon salt

1¾ cups (7 ounces) confectioners' sugar

12 ounces (2⅔ cups) marshmallow crème

2 tablespoons hazelnut liqueur

6 ounces bittersweet chocolate

why this recipe works This sweet, nutty has been made at the Swiss Haus bakery in Philadelphia since 1923. It features light, airy hazelnut cake; delicate and sweet vanilla icing; and a covering of chocolate shavings. The Swiss Haus pastry chef wouldn't disclose its recipe, so we played detective. For full hazelnut flavor, we ground the nuts, with their skins, in a food processor, then substituted this hazelnut "flour" for a portion of the cake flour in our chiffon base. Since meringue buttercream frosting is a project, we found an excellent shortcut using marshmallow crème. To prevent the chocolate for our cake's coat from melting as we handled it, we froze it before and after shaving and used parchment paper to gently press the curls into the frosting. When working with the marshmallow crème, grease the inside of your measuring cup and spatula with vegetable oil spray to prevent sticking. Note that the shredding disk should be placed in the freezer for 15 minutes before shaving the chocolate. You may also use a vegetable peeler or the large holes of a box grater to shave the chocolate.

1 For the cake Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line two 9-inch round cake pans with parchment paper; grease parchment but not pan sides.

2 Process hazelnuts in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and ground hazelnuts together in large bowl. Whisk egg yolks, oil, water, and vanilla together in second bowl. Whisk egg yolk mixture into flour-nut mixture until smooth batter forms.

3 Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip egg whites and cream of tartar on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip until soft peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Gently whisk one-third of whites into batter. Using rubber spatula, gently fold remaining whites into batter until incorporated.

4 Divide batter evenly between prepared pans. Gently tap pans on counter to release air bubbles. Bake until tops are light golden brown and cakes spring back when pressed lightly in center, 25 to 28 minutes, rotating pans halfway through baking.

5 Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 15 minutes. Run thin knife around edges of pans. Remove cakes from pan, discarding parchment, and let cool completely on wire rack, at least 1 hour (To prepare to make chocolate shavings, place food processor shredding disk in freezer.)

6 For the frosting Using clean stand mixer fitted with whisk, mix butter and salt on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Reduce speed to low and slowly add sugar. Increase speed to medium



and whip until smooth, about 2 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add marshmallow crème, increase speed to medium-high, and whip until light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Reduce speed to low, add hazelnut liqueur, return speed to medium-high, and whip to incorporate, about 30 seconds.

7 Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Fit food processor with chilled shredding disk. Turn on processor and feed chocolate bar through hopper. Transfer shaved chocolate to prepared baking sheet and spread into even layer. Place in freezer to harden, about 10 minutes.

8 Line edges of cake platter with 4 strips of parchment to keep platter clean. Place 1 cake layer on platter. Spread 2 cups frosting evenly over top, right to edge of cake. Top with second cake layer, press lightly to adhere, then spread remaining 2 cups frosting evenly over top and sides of cake.

9 Fold 16 by 12-inch sheet of parchment into 6 by 4-inch rectangle. Using parchment rectangle, scoop up half of chocolate shavings and sprinkle over top of cake. Once top of cake is coated, scoop up remaining chocolate shavings and press gently against sides of cake to adhere, scooping and reapplying as needed. Carefully remove parchment strips. Serve.

hot cocoa cake

serves 12 to 16

Filling

- 1 teaspoon unflavored gelatin
- ¼ cup water
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch salt
- 2 cups marshmallow crème

Frosting

- 1½ cups heavy cream
 - 3 tablespoons Dutch-processed cocoa powder, plus extra for dusting
 - ½ cup white chocolate chips
- 3 (8-inch) Chocolate Cake Layers (page 000)
- 24–36 large marshmallows

why this recipe works Reminiscent of a steaming-hot mug of cocoa on a cold winter morning, this rich layer cake gets its name from the combination of chocolate cake and marshmallow filling. Making a marshmallow filling could be a challenge: Meringues and other marshmallow-y confections involve cooking and closely monitoring a sugar mixture on the stove. To make the filling—and easy—we stabilized marshmallow crème with gelatin. On its own this mixture—while tasting purely of marshmallow—was too sticky and cloying. Stirring in butter and vanilla added creaminess, richness, and flavor. This would be a rich cake and we thought a whipped cream frosting would be a great cloak—not to mention that we like a dollop of whipped cream on our mug of cocoa. We added cocoa powder and melted white chocolate to fresh whipped cream. Then we topped the cake off just like the drink, with a garnish of marshmallows and a dusting of cocoa.

1 For the filling Sprinkle gelatin over water in large bowl and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Microwave until mixture is bubbling around edges and gelatin dissolves, about 15 seconds. Stir in butter, vanilla, and salt until combined. Let mixture cool until just warm to touch, about 5 minutes. Whisk in marshmallow crème until smooth; refrigerate filling until firm enough to spread, about 30 minutes.

2 For the frosting Bring ½ cup cream and cocoa to simmer in small saucepan over medium-high heat, whisking until smooth. Pour cream mixture over chocolate chips in small bowl and whisk until melted and smooth. Let chocolate mixture cool completely, about 30 minutes. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip remaining 1 cup cream with cooled chocolate mixture on medium-high speed until soft peaks form, 1 to 1½ minutes.

3 Place 1 cake round on plate or pedestal. Spread half of filling evenly over top. Top with second cake round and spread remaining filling evenly over top. Top with third cake round and spread frosting evenly over top and sides of cake. Arrange marshmallows on top of cake in large mound; dust with extra cocoa. Serve.



pear-walnut upside-down cake

Serves 8 to 10

Topping

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

½ cup packed (3½ ounces) dark brown sugar

2 teaspoons cornstarch

⅛ teaspoon salt

3 ripe but firm Bosc pears (8 ounces each)

Cake

1 cup walnuts, toasted

½ cup (2½ ounces) all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon baking powder

⅛ teaspoon baking soda

3 large eggs

1 cup (7 ounces) sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

¼ cup vegetable oil

Why this recipe works Despite being referred to as the queen of fruit, the pear doesn't get enough attention in desserts. We thought it was time to explore pear upside-down cake, which requires a fair amount of fruit and would be a perfect way to showcase pears' subtle floral flavor and graceful shape. We tried every variety of pear at the store: Bosc pears, with their dense flesh, held their shape best after baking, and cutting the pears into wedges allowed them to be baked from raw but remain manageable to eat with the cake. Instead of a sweet, somewhat-dense yellow cake base, typical of upside-down cakes, we made a walnut-based cake, which was light but sturdy, earthy-tasting and less sweet, and visually attractive. Lining the cake pan (a light-colored pan helps the cake cook more evenly) with parchment and removing the cake from the pan after 15 minutes—good practice for any upside-down cake—allowed the top to set while preventing the bottom of the cake from steaming and turning soggy. We strongly recommend baking this cake in a light-colored cake pan with sides that are at least 2 inches tall. If using a dark-colored pan, start checking for doneness at 1 hour, and note that the cake may dome in the center and the topping may become too sticky. Serve with crème fraîche, lightly sweetened whipped cream, or our Yogurt Whipped Topping (recipe follows).

1 For The Topping Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Grease 9-inch round cake pan and line bottom with parchment paper. Pour melted butter over bottom of pan and swirl to evenly coat. Combine sugar, cornstarch, and salt in small bowl and sprinkle evenly over melted butter.

2 Peel, halve, and core pears. Set aside 1 pear half and reserve for other use. Cut remaining 5 pear halves into 4 wedges each. Arrange pears in circular pattern around cake pan with tapered ends pointing inward. Arrange two smallest pear wedges in center.

3 For The Cake Pulse walnuts, flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda in food processor until walnuts are finely ground, 8 to 10 pulses. Transfer walnut mixture to bowl.

4 Process eggs and sugar in now-empty processor until very pale yellow, about 2 minutes. With processor running, add melted butter and oil in steady stream until incorporated. Add walnut mixture and pulse to combine, 4 to 5 pulses. Pour batter evenly over pears (some pear may show through; cake will bake up over fruit).



5 Bake until center of cake is set and bounces back when gently pressed and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 1 hour 10 minutes to 1¼ hours, rotating pan after 40 minutes. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 15 minutes. Carefully run paring knife or offset spatula around sides of pan. Invert cake onto wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet; discard parchment. Let cake cool for about 2 hours. Transfer to serving platter, cut into wedges, and serve.

yogurt whipped topping

Makes 1½ cups

You can sweeten this tangy whipped topping with sugar to taste, if desired.

¾ cup heavy cream, chilled

½ cup plain Greek yogurt

Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip cream and yogurt on medium speed until combined, about 10 seconds. Increase speed to high and whip to soft peaks, about 1 minute. If stiff peaks are desired, continue to whip 30 to 60 seconds longer.



olive oil yogurt bundt cake

serves 12

Cake

3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

1¼ cups (8¾ ounces) granulated sugar

4 large eggs

1¼ cups extra-virgin olive oil

1 cup plain whole-milk yogurt

Lemon Glaze

2–3 tablespoons lemon juice

1 tablespoon plain whole-milk yogurt

2 cups (8 ounces) confectioners' sugar

why this recipe works Popular throughout Spain and France, this simple cake exists in many forms, but the basic recipe is the same: Extra-virgin olive oil and yogurt are combined with eggs, sugar, flour, and leavener (usually baking powder and sometimes baking soda) to create a moist, delicate cake with a slightly coarse crumb and a subtly tangy, mildly fruity aroma. We tested our way through numerous versions and found we preferred our cake without citrus in the batter to enable the subtle aroma of the olive oil to shine through. We tested a range of yogurt types and found that the most traditional—plain wholemilk yogurt—yielded the best results; the crusts and crumbs of cakes made with Greek yogurt were too thick and dense, and cakes made with low-fat yogurts were too dry and crumbly. We preferred the graceful form of the Bundt pan and found that an easy-to-make lemon glaze (with a touch of tangy yogurt) was enough to transform this modest everyday cake into an elegant dessert. For the best flavor, be sure to use high-quality extra-virgin olive oil.

1 For the cake: Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 12-cup nonstick Bundt pan. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt together in bowl. Whisk sugar and eggs in large bowl until sugar is mostly dissolved and mixture is pale and frothy, about 1 minute. Whisk in oil and yogurt until combined. Using rubber spatula, stir in flour mixture until combined and no dry flour remains.

2 Pour batter into prepared pan and smooth top with rubber spatula. Gently tap pan on counter to settle batter. Bake until golden brown and skewer inserted into center comes out clean, 40 to 45 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

3 For the lemon glaze Whisk 2 tablespoons lemon juice, yogurt, and confectioners' sugar together in bowl until smooth, adding more lemon juice gradually as needed until glaze is thick but still pourable (mixture should leave faint trail across bottom of mixing bowl when drizzled from whisk). Let cake cool in pan for 10 minutes, then gently turn cake out onto wire rack. Drizzle half of glaze over warm cake and let cool for 1 hour. Drizzle remaining glaze over cake and let cool completely, about 2 hours. Serve.



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