

Make your cheesecake and eat it, too

Cheesecake... rich, creamy and sometimes even sinful. Yet it's very common, found in the finest restaurant in town to the local diner down the street.

Anybody who really loves cheesecake will tell you that all cheesecakes are not equal. I have one friend who travels to Traverse City and picks up several cheesecakes from a local bakery, takes the cakes home to freeze, and uses them for easy desserts when entertaining or when unexpected guests stop by. I know another family that lives in Michigan and orders cheesecake by the case from New York. Don't tell these people that cheesecake is just cheesecake.

Since I was about 7 years old, every birthday dinner consisted of spaghetti and cheesecake. And my mother would always save an extra piece for me to have the next day. Coming from a big family, this was a big treat.

There are many different styles and flavors of cheesecake. There is the famous New York-style cheesecake which is baked; the easy gelatin-style cheesecake, which is great with fresh fruit; and a European style cheesecake, which is made with farmers or cottage cheese instead of traditional cream cheese.

Cheesecakes can be made in countless flavors, by using liquors, fresh fruit, nuts and chocolates. Just take a recipe and add your favorite flavoring.

CHEF DAN RAWLSON, culinary arts instructor at Oakland Community College, gives a few hints on how to make a perfect cheesecake:

• When using a kitchen aid or similar product, use the paddle instead of the whip because the whip will cause the fats to separate — causing the cheesecake to taste gritty.

• Strain the cheesecake after you mix the batter, because the small lumps will cause the cheesecake to crack while baking.

• Bake cheesecake in a water bath to equalize temperatures. This will keep the cheesecake from rising too fast and then falling. When using a spring-form pan, place in a slightly larger pan, then place in the water bath to prevent leaking.

• When cheesecake is almost done, turn off the oven. Leave the cake in the oven for 20-30 minutes, letting it cool slowly so it won't fall or crack.

I ASKED several of my friends to share with us their favorite cheesecake recipes.

This is Neil Atkins' New York-style cheesecake. Whenever people have it, they beg Neil for the recipe so he usually has several copies on hand.

NEW YORK CHEESECAKE

Filling

2 1/2 lbs. cream cheese (room temp.)
1 1/4 cups sugar
7 Tbsp. flour
1 1/2 tsp. orange extract
1 tsp. lemon extract
1/2 tsp. vanilla
5 eggs
3 egg yolks
1/2 cup heavy whipping cream



Andrea Harrison

Blend, cheese, sugar, flour, extract, vanilla until smooth. Add eggs and yolks one at a time, then blend in cream. Mix thoroughly.

Crust
1 1/4 cup sifted flour
1/4 cup sugar
1 tsp. lemon extract
1 egg yolk
1/2 cup butter (room temp.)
1/4 tsp. vanilla
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil

Cream sugar, extract, egg, butter, vanilla and oil. Add flour, work together until well blended.

1. Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Roll out 1/2 of crust 1/4-inch thick. Fit over bottom of buttered 9-inch spring form pan. Trim and save extra dough. Bake circle of dough 8-10 minutes until golden brown.

3. Cool.
4. Butter sides of pan and place sides over bottom.

5. Turn oven up to 500 degrees.
6. Roll out remaining dough and line sides of spring-form pan.
7. Pour filling into spring-form pan.
8. Bake 10 minutes at 500.
9. Turn oven down to 200 and bake 1 1/2-1 3/4 hours.

This is Dan Rawlson's recipe for cheesecake. While working at the Meeting Place, he used this recipe and it always sold out.

It's a good idea to make this early in the morning or one or two days ahead of time, or it may be frozen (cheesecakes freeze wonderfully) and thaw before serving.

3-LAYER CHEESECAKE

3/4 oz. blanched and peeled hazelnuts or almonds, walnuts or pecans
2 lbs. cream cheese (room temp.)
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
4 large eggs
1/4 tsp. almond extract
8 oz. heavy cream
2 oz. unsweetened chocolate
1/2 cup graham crackers (to be used after the cake is baked)

Use an 8-inch round one-piece cheesecake pan 3 inches deep. Butter it lightly all over the bottom, up to the rim, and around the inside of the rim or the cake will stick and will not rise evenly. Any unbuttered spots will prevent the finished cake from sliding out of the pan easily. Set the buttered pan aside.

The nuts must be finely chopped or ground. This may be done in a nut grinder, a food processor or a blender. If there are a few uneven or larger

pieces, it is all right. Set the ground nuts aside.

In the large bowl of an electric mixer, beat the cream cheese until it is very smooth. Beat in the vanilla and the sugar very well, and then add eggs one at a time, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula until it is very smooth after each addition. After adding the eggs, do not beat any more than necessary — this cheesecake should not be airy.

Remove 2 cups of the mixture and transfer it to a mixing bowl. (The remaining batter should be left at room temperature while the layers are being frozen.) Add the ground nuts and the almond extract to the two cups and stir to mix.

This will be the first layer. Pour it carefully into the middle of the pan. Very gently shake the pan to make the cheese mixture as smooth and level as possible. Keep the edges clean and straight.

Place the pan in the freezer for at least one hour, until the layer is firm enough to be covered with the next layer without losing shape.

Remove two more cups of the basic batter for the top layer.

Place the chocolate in the top of a small double boiler over hot water and moderate heat. Cover until melted. Then uncover and remove the top of the double boiler.

Mix the chocolate into the batter that is remaining in the mixing bowl.

Place the chocolate batter carefully by rounded teaspoons all over the cold nut layer and very gently shake the pan to level the chocolate mixture. Keep the edges straight and clean.

Return the cake to the freezer. The chocolate layer will need only 15-20 minutes to become firm.

Adjust rack to the lowest position in the oven and preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

When the chocolate layer is firm enough, spoon the mixture or pour the nuts layer carefully and evenly over it. Level the top by briskly rotating the pan a bit first in one direction and then in another.

Place the cheesecake in a larger pan. The larger pan must not be deeper than the cake pan or touch the sides. Pour hot water into the larger pan to a little more than halfway up the side of

the pan.

Bake for one hour and 50 minutes.

The top of the cake will be a rich golden brown and feel dry to the touch, but the cake will still be soft inside. (The cake will rise to or above the rim of the pan while baking but it will sink below the rim as it cools.)

Lift the cake pan out of the water and place it on a rack for about two hours until it is completely cooled. Do not chill the cake in the refrigerator or the butter will harden and the cake will stick to the pan.

When the bottom of the cake pan has reached room temperature, place a flat plate or board over the top of the pan and invert. Remove the cake pan.

Sprinkle the bottom of the cake evenly with the graham cracker crumbs. Carefully and quickly, invert to turn the cake right side up. Do this without pressing too hard or you will squash the cake, which is still soft.

Refrigerate for at least 5-6 hours or overnight, or freeze it. Wrap after freezing and unwrap after thawing. Serve at room temperature.

GERMAN CHEESECAKE

2 1/4 cups crushed graham crackers
6 Tbsp. melted butter
1/4 cup sugar

1 tsp. ground cinnamon
2 eggs lightly beaten
1/4 tsp. salt

1/4 cup lemon juice and grated rind

1/4 cup light cream

1 cup cottage cheese

3/4 cup mixed chopped nuts

Mix together the cracker crumbs, melted butter, 2 tablespoons of the sugar and the cinnamon. Press into the bottom and side of a greased 8-inch round cake pan, reserving 2 tablespoons of the crumb mixture.

Beat the eggs, salt, lemon juice and rind together until well-mixed. Stir in the cream, cottage cheese and half the nuts. Spoon into the crumb mixture and remaining nuts.

Bake in a moderate oven for 35-45 minutes or until the filling is set. Turn off the oven and leave the cake inside, with the door open, for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely.

Serve cold. Serves 6-8.

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