

For the Love of CHEESECAKE

What would you do for a piece of cheesecake?

True cheesecake lovers might scale Mount Everest or parachute from 1,500 feet in pursuit of a bit of this dessert of desserts.

But luckily, most cheesecake lovers will never be put to the cheesecake loyalty test — It's as readily available as your kitchen. The only test most of us face is the willpower test; at more than 300 calories per narrow slice, moderation is the rule for weight watchers.

THOUGHTS DRIFT skyward when describing the creamy delights of cheesecake — food of the gods, heaven on earth, manna from above. Somehow, only superlatives apply.

The devotion to cheesecake dates back to ancient Greece between 800 and 700 B.C. Legend has it that cheesecake was popular with the first Olympic athletes, who ate it for quick energy.

The world's oldest cookbook, written by a Greek and published in 228 A.D., included the earliest written cheesecake recipe. The Romans acquired a love of cheesecake after the conquest of Greece, and as the Roman Empire spread through Europe, so, too, did the love and pursuit of the perfect cheesecake.

AND THE cheesecake craze continues today — It is tied for first place with apple pie as America's favorite dessert, according to a recent Gallup Poll.

Still considered a specialty dessert, cheesecake can be perceived as complicated and time-consuming to prepare. Surprisingly, it can be one of the easiest desserts to make. Requiring few steps and the choicest of ingredients, it can be prepared ahead of time with little last-minute attention.

Page prepared by Diana Frea

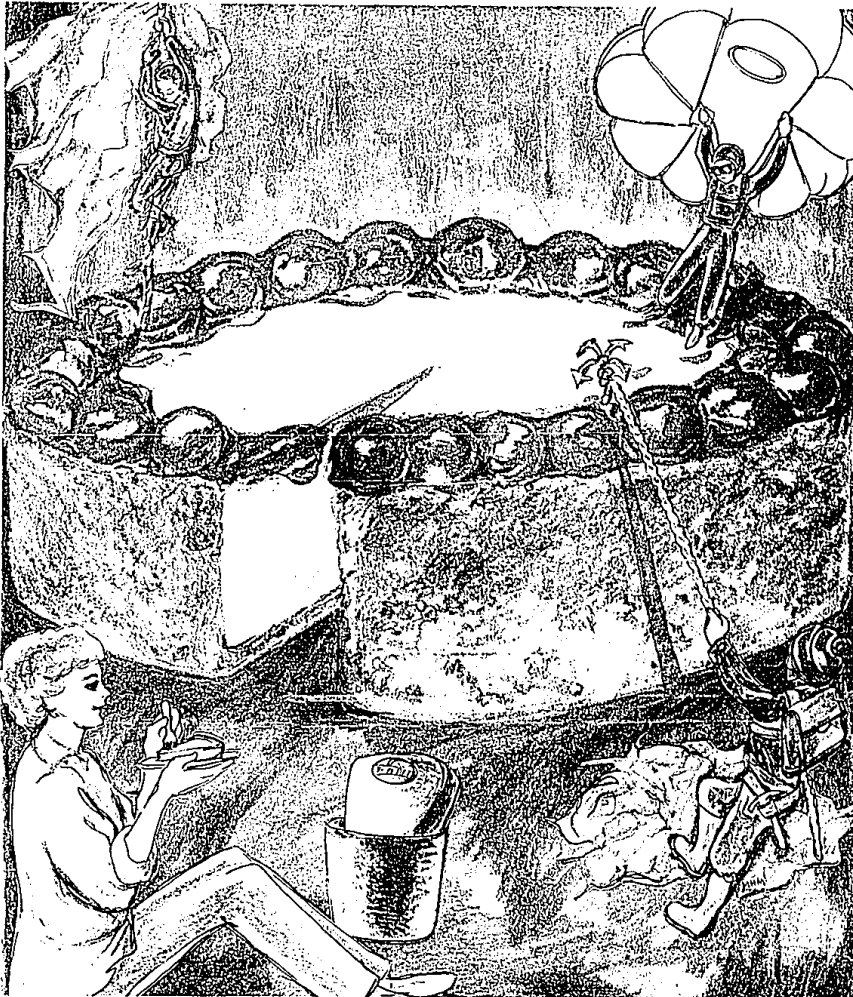


Illustration by MARY MERZ

Many recipes for The Best Cheesecake exist as the varieties of cheesecake themselves.

For those who prefer the pure, unadorned flavor of plain cheesecake, there's the Classic Cheesecake below, which can be accompanied with any of the multitude of fresh or canned fruit toppings available.

CLASSIC CHEESECAKE

- 2 Tbsp. graham cracker crumbs
- 4 8-oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- ½ tsp. vanilla
- ¼ tsp. lemon rind
- ½ cup apricot preserves
- 2 Tbsp. water
- 1 qt. whole strawberries

Sprinkle bottom of lightly greased 9-inch springform pan with crumbs. Combine cream cheese and sugar, mixing at medium speed on electric mixer until well-blended. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Blend in juice, vanilla and rind, pour into pan. Bake at 350°, 50 minutes. Loosen cake from rim of pan; cool before removing rim. Combine preserves and water; heat thoroughly, stirring occasionally. Arrange strawberries on top of cheesecake; spoon preserves mixture over strawberries. Chill. Makes 10-12 servings.

FOR THE more adventure-some, there are recipes to tempt the most discriminating and varied tastebuds. Some of the finest are listed below.

Hawaiian flavors are featured in the Aloha Cheesecake, topped with a crushed pineapple and kiwi fruit garnish. Black Forest Cheesecake features the flavors of a favorite German specialty dessert.

Pumpkin Spice Cheesecake is a creamy, lightly spiced concoction of cream cheese and pumpkin baked in a gingersnap crust laced with just a hint of orange. Lovers of rum raisin ice cream will go for Rum Raisin Cheesecake, accented with brown sugar, rum, raisins and an unusual and crunchy oat crust and topping.

ALOHA CHEESECAKE

- 1 cup vanilla wafer crumbs
- ¼ cup margarine, melted
- 2 8-oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 Tbsp. milk
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup chopped macadamia nuts, toasted
- 1 8½-oz. can crushed pineapple, drained
- 1 kiwi, peeled, sliced

Combine crumbs and margarine; press onto bottom of 9-inch springform pan. Bake at 350°, 10 minutes. Combine cream cheese, sugar and milk, mixing at medium speed on electric mixer until well-blended. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Stir in nuts; pour over crust. Bake at 350°, 45 minutes. Loosen cake from rim of pan; cool before removing rim of pan. Chill. Before serving, top with fruit. Makes 10-12 servings.

BLACK FOREST CHEESECAKE

- 1 cup chocolate wafer crumbs
- 3 Tbsp. margarine, melted
- 2 8-oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 6-oz. pkg. semi-sweet chocolate pieces, melted
- ¼ tsp. almond extract
- 1 2½-oz. can cherry pie filling
- whipped topping

Combine crumbs and margarine; press onto bottom of 9-inch springform pan. Bake at 350°, 10 minutes.

Combine cream cheese and sugar, mixing at medium speed on electric mixer until well-blended. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Blend in chocolate and extract; pour over crust. Bake at 350°, 45 minutes. Loosen cake from rim of pan; cool before removing rim. Chill overnight.

CHOCOLATE CHEESECAKE

- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 2 Tbsp. sugar
- 3 Tbsp. butter, melted
- 3 medium bananas, peeled
- 2 tsp. unflavored gelatin
- 2 Tbsp. golden rum
- 2 eggs, separated
- ¼ cup chocolate syrup
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened

Combine crumbs and sugar. Mix in butter until blended. Pat in bottom and sides of 7-inch tart pan with removable bottom. Bake in 400° oven 6 minutes until set and slightly browned. Cool.

Puree one banana in blender. Soften gelatin in rum. Combine pureed banana, egg yolks, syrup and sugar in top of double boiler. Cook over boiling water 10-15 minutes, stirring, until mixture thickens. Stir in gelatin mixture until dissolved. Remove from heat. Stir in vanilla and cinnamon. Beat cream cheese. Beat in banana mixture. Cool until it mounds on a spoon. Beat egg whites until stiff. Fold into chocolate filling. Pour into prepared crust. Refrigerate 2-3 hours or overnight. Slice remaining bananas. Arrange over top.

Garnish with shaved semi-sweet chocolate, if desired. Make 4-6 servings.

PUMPKIN SPICE CHEESECAKE

- Ginger Snap Crust (below)
- 3 8-oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 6 eggs
- 1 16-oz. can or 2 cups mashed cooked fresh pumpkin

Prepare Ginger Snap Crust. Chill. In large mixing bowl, beat together cream cheese, sugars, spice and vanilla at high speed until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in pumpkin until blended. Pour into chilled crust. Bake in preheated 350° oven until knife inserted near center comes out clean, about 1 hour 15 minutes. Turn off oven. Allow cheesecake to cool in oven with door ajar 30 minutes. Continue to cool on wire rack. Refrigerate until firm, at least 8 hours or overnight. To serve, remove rim of pan and cut into wedges. Garnish with orange peel spiral, if desired.

- Ginger Snap Crust:
- 1 egg
- 1 Tbsp. butter, melted
- 2 cups crush ginger snaps (about 30-35 2-inch cookies)
- 1 Tbsp. grated orange peel

Beat together egg and butter until well-blended. Stir in crushed ginger snaps and orange peel until thor-

oughly combined. Press firmly onto bottom and up sides of lightly greased 9-inch springform pan.

RUM RAISIN CHEESECAKE

- 1 cup oats, uncooked
- ¼ cup chopped nuts
- 3 Tbsp. margarine, melted
- 3 Tbsp. packed brown sugar
- 2 8-oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup flour
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup sour cream
- 3 Tbsp. rum
- 2 Tbsp. margarine
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- ¼ cup raisins
- ¼ cup chopped nuts
- 2 Tbsp. oats, uncooked

Combine oats, nuts, margarine and sugar; press onto bottom of 9-inch springform pan. Bake at 350°, 15 minutes.

Combine cream cheese, granulated sugar and 2 tablespoons flour, mixing at medium speed on electric mixer until well-blended. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Blend in sour cream and rum; mix well. Pour over crust. Cut margarine into combined remaining flour and brown sugar until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in raisins, nuts and oats. Sprinkle over cream cheese mixture. Bake at 350°, 50 minutes. Loosen cake from rim of pan; cool before removing rim. Makes 10-12 servings.

