

Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe You'll Love

Mandarin orange cake recipe is a nostalgic dessert that brings me back to my abuela's kitchen in the Bronx. We would mix boxed cake with canned fruit and call it magic. No fancy techniques, just flavor, family, and a warm oven. Now in Brooklyn, I share those same soulful recipes through pop ups and virtual classes.

This cake, with its citrusy sponge and cool pineapple topping, is always a crowd pleaser. It is easy, refreshing, and perfect for any occasion. If you enjoy classic comfort with a fresh twist, this mandarin orange cake delivers a story in every bite.

Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe – How to Make It ?

To make a mandarin orange cake, mix yellow cake mix with eggs, oil, and canned mandarin oranges. Bake until golden, then top with a fluffy frosting made from whipped topping, crushed pineapple, and vanilla pudding. Chill before serving for the best flavor.

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The Story Behind This Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

A Sweet Tradition That Started with My Abuela

This mandarin orange cake recipe is not something I learned in culinary school. I never went. I learned it in my abuela's tiny Bronx kitchen, standing on a milk crate beside the stove. We did not have much, but we had flavor.

One summer, after visiting family in the South, I told her about a cake I had tasted, Soft, citrusy, and topped with a whipped frosting unlike anything we made at home. We grabbed a box of cake mix, a can of mandarin oranges, and got to work.

That is the beauty of this recipe. It does not require perfection. All you need is yellow cake mix, oil, eggs, and juicy mandarin slices. You do not even drain the fruit. The syrup goes right into the batter, adding that signature moisture. Over time, this mandarin orange cake recipe became a staple at my pop up dinners and in my classes. It tells a story, just like every recipe should.

Why It Is Still a Crowd Favorite

This cake is not just easy. It is irresistible. The frosting alone has people asking for seconds. You fold together crushed pineapple, instant vanilla pudding, and Cool Whip to create a light tropical topping that complements the citrus base beautifully. No piping. No layers. Just pure joy in every bite.

It is the kind of dessert that works for any occasion. When I serve it alongside something like this [magic custard cake recipe](#), the contrast is perfect, Bright and zesty beside smooth and creamy. Southern comfort meets European charm.

And that is what makes a great dessert table. It does not need to be elaborate. It just needs heart.

This mandarin orange cake recipe is exactly that. Simple, nostalgic, and packed with flavor that brings people back every time.

Slice of Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe topped with whipped cream and fresh orange

Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe – 3 Moist Citrus Layers to Love

No reviews

- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)
- Total Time: [45 minutes](#)
- Yield: [12 servings 1x](#)
- Diet: [Vegetarian](#)

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Description

This mandarin orange cake recipe is a Southern classic made with canned mandarin oranges and a creamy pineapple frosting. Moist, citrusy, and easy to make—perfect for potlucks, picnics, or a comforting weeknight treat.

Ingredients

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Scale 1x 2x 3x

- ☐ 1 box yellow cake mix
 - ☐ 1/2 cup oil
 - ☐ 4 eggs
 - ☐ 1 can (15 oz) mandarin oranges (undrained)
 - ☐ 1 can (20 oz) crushed pineapple (undrained)
 - ☐ 1 pkg instant vanilla pudding (5.25 oz)
 - ☐ 1 (8 oz) container Cool Whip
 - ☐ Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark
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Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease a 9×13-inch baking pan.
2. In a large bowl, combine yellow cake mix, oil, eggs, and undrained mandarin oranges. Beat until well blended.

Mixing bowl with batter and mandarin oranges for cake
3. Pour batter into prepared pan and bake for 30–35 minutes until golden and a toothpick comes out clean.
4. Let the cake cool completely before frosting.
5. In a separate bowl, fold together crushed pineapple, vanilla pudding mix, and Cool Whip until fluffy.

6. Spread the frosting evenly over the cooled cake.

7. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving.

Notes

Don't drain the oranges—the syrup adds key moisture.

Refrigerate the frosted cake to set the flavors.

Make a day ahead for even better flavor.

You can freeze the cake before frosting for up to 3 months.

- Prep Time: 15 minutes
- Cook Time: 30 minutes
- Category: Cakes
- Method: Baking
- Cuisine: Southern American

Nutrition

- **Serving Size:** 1 slice
- **Calories:** 310
- **Sugar:** 28g
- **Sodium:** 220mg
- **Fat:** 14g
- **Saturated Fat:** 5g
- **Unsaturated Fat:** 7g
- **Trans Fat:** 0g
- **Carbohydrates:** 38g
- **Fiber:** 1g
- **Protein:** 3g
- **Cholesterol:** 55mg

Did you make this recipe?

Share a photo and tag us—we can't wait to see what you've made!

Secrets to a Moist Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

The Role of Canned Fruit in Texture

If there is one thing that defines a great mandarin orange cake recipe, it is texture. The key is canned mandarin oranges, undrained. The syrup adds moisture, and the pulp blends into the batter

to transform a boxed cake mix into something truly special. When baked, those little orange segments melt into the sponge, leaving behind a soft, juicy crumb you will not find in most cakes.

This is not just convenient, it is smart. Canned fruit delivers built in moisture and natural sweetness, removing the need for extra sugar or dairy. You will taste the difference in every slice. It is the same kind of thoughtful layering I use in my [biscoff cookie butter pound cake](#), simple ingredients used with intention to create something unforgettable. Whether served warm or chilled, this cake keeps its flavor and texture for days.

Many of my students are surprised by how much flavor comes from canned fruit. But that is the beauty of comfort baking. It is about using what you have and turning it into something worth sharing.

Oil vs. Butter Why It Matters

When it comes to choosing between oil and butter in a mandarin orange cake recipe, oil is the clear winner. Butter adds flavor, but oil brings unbeatable tenderness and consistent results. It coats the flour more evenly, which reduces gluten formation and results in a softer crumb. That is especially important when fruit is involved.

Mandarin Orange Cake slice garnished with mint and citrus

I use the same approach in my [banana pudding poke cake](#), and it always delivers. These desserts are not about fancy techniques. They are about working smart, staying flexible, and making something that tastes like home. For a soft, sliceable, fruit filled cake, oil is your best bet every time.

Building Flavor in Every Layer of This Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

The Frosting That Makes It Legendary

This mandarin orange cake recipe begins with bold flavor, but it's the frosting that truly stands out. Made with Cool Whip, crushed pineapple, and instant vanilla pudding, it brings fluff, tang, and that perfect silky finish. It is airy and perfectly sweet to complement the citrus flavor. The pineapple adds brightness, the pudding gives it body, and the Cool Whip ties it all together without making it heavy.

It is the kind of frosting people remember. At events, this is always what gets the most compliments. That creamy layer also helps seal in moisture and builds flavor as it sets. It reminds me of the tropical feel in my [pineapple juice cake](#), same vibe, same crowd pleasing energy.

There is no need to cook or whip anything from scratch. Just fold, spread, and chill.

Chilling for the Best Flavor

Chilling is one of the easiest ways to make this mandarin orange cake recipe even better. It is not just about helping the frosting set. It also enhances the overall flavor. A few hours in the fridge allows the citrus base to soak in the sweetness from the topping, while the pudding firms up into a mousse like layer.

I always suggest making this cake a few hours ahead or even the day before. Let it sit, and everything comes together beautifully. You will get neat slices, full aroma, and that first cool bite that practically melts in your mouth.

This make ahead step is why the cake is ideal for potlucks, events, and gatherings. You can prep, chill, and serve with no last minute stress.

Coming up next: fun ways to upgrade this classic with mix ins, creative toppings, and new spins that still keep the spirit of the original alive.

Creative Twists on the Classic Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

Add Ins That Elevate the Base

Once you master the basic mandarin orange cake recipe, it becomes your playground. The base is forgiving and flavorful, which makes it perfect for creative add ins. Want extra texture? Mix in a handful of shredded coconut or chopped pecans directly into the batter. They bake up beautifully alongside the citrus. For a bolder kick, try orange zest or a splash of orange extract to amplify the mandarin flavor.

I have even folded in mini white chocolate chips for a surprising bite that contrasts the fruit. That is the beauty of a mandarin orange cake recipe, It is flexible enough to handle personal touches without compromising texture. It is the same philosophy I apply when making my [angel food cake shortcake](#): take a base that works and make it your own.

This recipe invites experimentation. Swap vanilla pudding for coconut or cheesecake flavor. Use flavored Cool Whip for added dimension. Each change gives you a new way to reimagine a classic.

Toppings That Make It Stand Out

One more reason this mandarin orange cake recipe stands out? The toppings. Take it a step further by topping with mandarin slices, a touch of toasted coconut, or a light citrus glaze. Even crushed shortbread cookies work as a crunchy topping layered over the chilled frosting.

I love pairing this cake with bright flavors, which is why I often serve it alongside my [carrot bundt cake](#) for contrast. The bright, juicy texture of the mandarin orange cake always gets compliments and has everyone asking for the recipe. When it comes to potlucks or holiday spreads, it is a guaranteed favorite that looks good and tastes even better. Just chill, slice, and let the citrus magic do the talking.

Fork slicing into a fluffy Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe piece

When and Where to Serve a Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

Perfect for Every Occasion

What makes this mandarin orange cake recipe so timeless is its versatility. It works for almost any occasion from casual dinners to baby showers, summer cookouts to Easter brunch. You do not need a special event to make it. Sometimes, I will bake it on a weeknight just because I am craving

something bright and nostalgic.

This is the cake I turn to when I want to bring joy without stress. It is quick to assemble, easy to frost, and travels well. I have brought this mandarin orange cake recipe to park picnics, beach barbecues, and even a pop up dinner where it competed with layered showstoppers and still stole the spotlight.

Just like my [strawberries and cream cheesecake cake](#), it is a make ahead dessert that delivers every time. Its bold citrus flavor cuts through heavier dishes and keeps guests coming back for seconds.

Making It a Go To Dessert

The best part about this mandarin orange cake recipe is how easily it fits into your regular rotation. Keep a box of cake mix and canned fruit in your pantry, and you are never more than 45 minutes away from dessert. The ingredients are accessible, and the steps are so simple that even beginners feel confident tackling it.

I encourage new bakers in my classes to start with this mandarin orange cake recipe because it always leads to success and smiles. Much like the [cloud cake](#), this cake proves that light, joyful flavors are often the most memorable. And when the frosting hits that citrus base just right, you will understand why this recipe deserves a permanent place in your kitchen.

Storage Tips for the Perfect Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

How to Store and Keep It Fresh

One reason I love this mandarin orange cake recipe so much is that it stores like a dream. Because the frosting contains Cool Whip and fruit, the cake stays moist even after a couple of days in the fridge. Once the cake is frosted, cover it loosely with plastic wrap or store it in an airtight container. This helps the frosting firm up while sealing in freshness, flavor, and texture.

I always tell my students to refrigerate the mandarin orange cake recipe rather than leaving it at room temperature. Not only does it help the pudding based frosting stay firm, but it also lets the citrus notes develop more depth. After a day in the fridge, it tastes even better.

Like my [jaffa cakes cake](#), this cake thrives in a chilled environment. You can even make it a day ahead of your event, and it will still slice perfectly and taste fresh.

Can You Freeze a Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

Yes, you can freeze this mandarin orange cake recipe with some care. If freezing the cake before adding frosting, make sure it has fully cooled first. Wrap it securely in plastic wrap and foil, then freeze for up to three months. When you are ready, thaw in the fridge overnight and frost before serving.

If the cake is already frosted, freeze individual slices on a baking sheet. Once solid, wrap them and store in a freezer safe container. This method keeps your mandarin orange cake recipe tasting close to fresh.

I have used this trick for leftovers after teaching virtual classes or hosting events. Just like my frozen friendly limoncello tiramisu, this cake bounces back beautifully when stored right.

Troubleshooting Your Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

Common Mistakes and How to Fix Them

Even though this mandarin orange cake recipe is incredibly easy, a few things can go wrong if you are not careful. The most common mistake? Draining the mandarins. That syrup is essential to keeping the cake moist and flavorful. Always add the entire can, liquid and all.

Another issue I have seen is overmixing. This cake needs a gentle hand. Combine the ingredients until just blended. If you overdo it, the crumb gets tough instead of light. It is a forgiving cake, but like any good bake, it benefits from care. When teaching this mandarin orange cake recipe, I remind students to treat it like a fruit forward quick bread, minimal handling, maximum flavor.

I've had great success walking students through these fixes, especially when working with similar textures in recipes like my [cake with reese's](#). It all comes down to balance and patience.

Making It Your Own

The best part about a mandarin orange cake recipe is how easy it is to personalize. You can add your favorite extracts, toss in zest, or even change the pudding flavor in the frosting. Coconut, lemon, or white chocolate? Totally fair game. These small tweaks turn your cake into something unique, while the core flavors still shine.

When people ask how I keep this mandarin orange cake recipe exciting after so many years, I always say make it yours. Much like the base of a pineapple upside down cake, this one is strong enough to handle a little creative flair.

Conclusion: Why This Mandarin Orange Cake Deserves a Spot in Your Recipe Box

I've been baking this mandarin orange cake for years, and it never loses its charm. It's simple, dependable, and tastes like something you spent hours perfecting. Even though it comes together with pantry staples and a laid-back spirit. It carries that Southern comfort and welcomes your own twist every time you make it. I like to serve it next to something richer, like my [Biscoff cake](#), just to balance the brightness with a little indulgence.

This is the kind of dessert that fits wherever you need it to. At a summer potluck, after Sunday dinner, or as part of a holiday table. That cool pineapple topping, the super moist crumb, and the burst of citrus make it unforgettable. It's the kind of cake that feels like home.

So tuck this recipe into your go-to folder. It's not just a sweet treat, It's one of those bakes that turns into tradition. One that people ask for again, especially when you serve it alongside a slice of [peanut butter jelly poke cake](#).

ove soulful, flavor packed recipes that are easy to pull off

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and enjoy every bite together

Frequently Asked Questions About Mandarin Orange Cake Recipe

Where does orange cake originate ?

Orange cake has roots in Mediterranean and European baking, but the mandarin orange cake recipe became a Southern favorite in the United States. Often called Pig Pickin' Cake, it rose to fame at barbecues and church potlucks thanks to its light texture and sunny citrus flavor.

What is the secret ingredient to a moist cake ?

For this mandarin orange cake, it's all about using undrained canned mandarin oranges. The syrup adds extra moisture, and the fruit blends right into the batter. Paired with oil, this combo guarantees a soft and tender crumb that stays fresh for days.

What is mandarin cake ?

A mandarin cake is any cake made with mandarin oranges. In this recipe, the fruit is blended into the batter to create a fluffy citrus sponge. It's usually topped with whipped pineapple frosting, turning it into a chilled, nostalgic dessert that feels light and refreshing.

What can you do with mandarin oranges ?

Mandarin oranges are super versatile. You can bake them into cakes, toss them into salads, mix them into smoothies, or layer them over yogurt and oatmeal. Their syrupy sweetness brings a pop of brightness to both sweet and savory recipes.