

Old-Fashioned Butter Pecan Cake

An old-fashioned butter pecan cake is a nostalgic dessert that combines buttery richness, nutty pecans, tangy cream cheese frosting, and a drizzle of homemade caramel. This recipe has a timeless charm, reminiscent of cakes baked in warm family kitchens for birthdays, holidays, and Sunday gatherings. Unlike many modern cakes that focus on flashy decorations, this one celebrates flavor and tradition.

Toasted pecans bring depth, butter adds indulgence, and caramel ties everything together with glossy sweetness. In this article, you'll learn about the ingredients, step-by-step methods, preparation tips, serving ideas, and variations that make this cake a standout.

Why Butter and Pecans Define the Cake

Butter as the Foundation

Butter is the soul of this dessert. The cake layers rely on **1 cup (226 g) unsalted butter, softened**, creamed with sugar to create a fluffy structure. Butter lends moisture, richness, and a warm flavor that defines the sponge. It also appears in the frosting and caramel, unifying the entire cake. Without butter, the dessert would lack its luxurious texture and golden taste.

Pecans as the Star Ingredient

Pecans deliver nutty flavor and crunchy texture. You'll use **1 cup (120 g) chopped pecans, toasted** in the batter, and more as garnish. Toasting them intensifies their natural sweetness and enhances aroma. The combination of pecans with butter and caramel is classic, rooted in Southern baking traditions where pecans shine in pies, pralines, and cakes.

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- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)
- Total Time: [1 hour 20 minutes](#)
- Yield: [12 servings 1x](#)
- Diet: [Vegetarian](#)

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Description

An old-fashioned butter pecan cake with moist layers, cream cheese frosting, and salted caramel drizzle. Perfect for holidays and family gatherings.

Ingredients

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Scale

Cake:

- ☐ 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ☐ 2 cups granulated sugar
- ☐ 4 eggs
- ☐ 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ☐ 2 tbsp dark rum, optional
- ☐ 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ☐ 1 tbsp baking powder
- ☐ 1/2 tsp salt
- ☐ 1 cup whole milk
- ☐ 1 cup toasted pecans, chopped

Frosting:

- ☐ 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ☐ 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- ☐ 4 cups powdered sugar
- ☐ 2 tsp vanilla extract

Caramel Sauce:

- ☐ 1 cup granulated sugar

- ☐ 6 tbsp unsalted butter
 - ☐ 1/2 cup whipping cream
 - ☐ 1 tsp sea salt
 - ☐ Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark
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Instructions

1. Prepare caramel first: melt sugar until amber. Add butter and cream carefully. Stir in sea salt. Cool.
2. Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour two 9-inch pans.
3. Cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time. Stir in vanilla and rum.
4. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt. Add alternately with milk. Fold in pecans.
5. Divide batter into pans. Bake 35–40 minutes. Cool completely.
6. Beat butter and cream cheese until smooth. Add powdered sugar and vanilla to make frosting.
7. Slice cakes into four layers. Frost, drizzle caramel, and sprinkle pecans between layers.
8. Frost outside, garnish with pecan halves, and drizzle more caramel.

Notes

Toast pecans before use for best flavor.

Chill layers before slicing for neat cuts.

Store cake in fridge up to 5 days or freeze unfrosted layers for 2 months.

- Prep Time: 40 minutes
- Cook Time: 40 minutes
- Category: Dessert
- Method: Baking
- Cuisine: American

Nutrition

- **Serving Size:** 1 slice
- **Calories:** 480
- **Sugar:** 38g

- **Sodium:** 190mg
- **Fat:** 28g
- **Saturated Fat:** 14g
- **Unsaturated Fat:** 12g
- **Trans Fat:** 0g
- **Carbohydrates:** 52g
- **Fiber:** 2g
- **Protein:** 6g
- **Cholesterol:** 95mg

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Essential Ingredients

For the Cake Layers

To create the sponge, you'll need:

- 1 cup (226 g) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cups (400 g) granulated sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons dark rum, optional
- 3 cups (360 g) all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup (240 ml) whole milk
- 1 cup (120 g) chopped pecans, toasted

These ingredients produce moist layers that are sturdy enough to hold frosting while staying light and flavorful.

For Frosting and Caramel

For the frosting:

- 1 cup (226 g) unsalted butter, softened
- 8 oz (225 g) cream cheese, softened
- 4 cups (480 g) powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

For the caramel sauce:

- 1 cup (200 g) granulated sugar
- 6 tablespoons (85 g) unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) whipping cream

- 1 teaspoon sea salt

These additions bring tangy creaminess and glossy richness that turn a simple nut cake into a centerpiece.

Preparing the Cake Batter

Creaming Butter and Sugar

Begin by creaming **1 cup butter** with **2 cups sugar** until light and fluffy. This step incorporates air, helping the cake rise. Beat in **4 eggs**, one at a time, mixing thoroughly. Stir in **1 teaspoon vanilla** and **2 tablespoons rum** if using.

Adding Dry Ingredients

In a separate bowl, whisk **3 cups flour**, **1 tablespoon baking powder**, and **1/2 teaspoon salt**. Add this mixture to the butter base in three parts, alternating with **1 cup milk**. Always start and end with dry ingredients. Finally, fold in **1 cup toasted pecans**.

Baking and Cooling

Baking the Layers

Grease and flour two 9-inch round cake pans. Divide the batter evenly and bake at 350°F (175°C) for 35–40 minutes. The cakes are ready when golden brown and a toothpick comes out clean.

Cooling Before Slicing

Cool the cakes in pans for 10 minutes, then transfer to racks. Allow them to cool completely. For a taller presentation, slice each cake horizontally with a serrated knife to create four even layers. Chilling the cakes for 30 minutes before slicing helps prevent crumbling.

Frosting and Caramel Sauce

Making Cream Cheese Frosting

Beat **1 cup butter** and **8 oz cream cheese** until smooth. Gradually add **4 cups powdered sugar**, mixing until light and fluffy. Stir in **2 teaspoons vanilla**. This frosting balances tanginess with sweetness and spreads evenly.

Cooking the Salted Caramel

Melt **1 cup sugar** in a saucepan until amber. Whisk in **6 tablespoons butter**, then carefully add **1/2 cup cream**. Stir in **1 teaspoon sea salt**. Cool completely before using. The sauce thickens as it cools, becoming glossy and rich.

Assembling and Decorating

Building the Layers

Place the first cake layer on a plate. Spread frosting evenly, drizzle caramel, and sprinkle pecans if desired. Repeat with the second and third layers. Place the final layer on top and frost the entire cake.

Garnishing for a Classic Look

Press pecan halves along the frosted sides. Drizzle caramel on top, letting it drip down naturally. Garnish with more pecans. The rustic drip and nut garnish give the cake its old-fashioned charm.

Serving and Storage

How to Serve

Slice with a sharp knife, wiping between cuts for neat presentation. Serve at room temperature with black coffee, strong tea, or milk. The nutty richness pairs perfectly with bold beverages.

How to Store

Store the cake in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. Allow slices to come to room temperature before serving. Freeze unfrosted layers for up to 2 months. Wrap tightly to prevent freezer burn.

Tips and Variations

Flavor Options

Swap pecans for walnuts, hazelnuts, or almonds. Add cinnamon or nutmeg to the batter for warmth. For a festive twist, stir orange zest into the caramel. Each option adds a fresh dimension to the classic.

Dietary Adjustments

Use gluten-free flour for an allergy-friendly version. Plant-based cream cheese and butter can make the cake dairy-free. Reducing sugar slightly keeps it lighter while maintaining indulgence.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I make the cake ahead?

Yes, this cake is perfect for making ahead. You can bake the cake layers up to 24 hours before assembly. After baking, let them cool completely, then wrap tightly in plastic wrap and store at room temperature if assembling the next day, or refrigerate them if storing longer. The caramel sauce can also be prepared ahead and stored in a sealed jar in the refrigerator for up to five days. On the day you plan to serve, simply make the frosting, stack the layers with caramel and pecans, and decorate. In fact, making the cake a day in advance often enhances the flavor, as the layers have time to settle and the pecans infuse more depth.

Do I need to toast pecans?

Yes, toasting pecans is highly recommended. Raw pecans are soft and mildly flavored, but a quick toast in a dry skillet or oven transforms them. Toasting releases the natural oils in the nuts, which deepens their nutty sweetness and adds a subtle smokiness. The process also gives them a crunchier texture, making the cake more interesting to eat. It only takes 5–7 minutes in a dry skillet over medium heat or 8–10 minutes in the oven at 350°F (175°C). Stir them occasionally until they're golden and fragrant, then cool before adding to the batter. Skipping this step won't ruin the cake, but it will make the flavor less pronounced.

Can I skip the rum?

Absolutely. The rum is optional and mainly adds a gentle warmth that complements the caramel and pecans. If you prefer to keep the cake alcohol-free, simply omit it. Vanilla extract alone gives plenty of depth and sweetness. If you'd like to experiment, you can replace the rum with a teaspoon of maple extract or almond extract for a different twist. Maple brings cozy richness, while almond adds a delicate floral note. Both work beautifully without overpowering the buttery base. This flexibility means you can adjust the flavor profile of the cake depending on your audience and preferences.

Why is my cake dense?

A dense cake is often caused by overmixing the batter once the flour is added. Overmixing activates gluten, which makes the cake heavy instead of light. To avoid this, always mix the dry ingredients into the wet batter gently, just until combined. Another common reason is inaccurate measuring. Scooping flour directly from the bag can pack it tightly, adding too much to the batter. Instead, spoon the flour into your measuring cup and level it off with a knife. Finally, check that your baking powder is fresh. Expired leavening agents won't give the cake the rise it needs, leaving it flat and dense.

Conclusion

An old-fashioned butter pecan cake is more than dessert, it's a reminder of tradition and comfort. With buttery layers, toasted pecans, cream cheese frosting, and salted caramel, every bite offers indulgence and balance. Perfect for birthdays, family gatherings, or holidays, it's a cake that always impresses. Just like the layered flavors in a [moist flavorful citrus olive oil cake](#), this butter pecan cake proves that simple ingredients and thoughtful preparation create timeless results.