

Old-Fashioned Caramel Cake

Old-Fashioned Caramel Cake is more than a dessert; it's a tradition wrapped in golden sweetness. This cake is famous for its buttery, tender crumb paired with thick, rich caramel frosting that clings to each layer like velvet. Originating from Southern kitchens, it represents comfort food at its best. Families often reserved it for Sunday dinners, birthdays, or festive gatherings, but over time it has become a beloved recipe for all occasions. The star of the show is the frosting, which requires a slow cooking process to coax deep caramel flavors out of brown sugar and butter.

Unlike simple buttercream frostings, caramel frosting has a distinctive chewiness and complexity that feels indulgent with every bite. Paired with a moist sponge cake, it creates a balance that's both nostalgic and satisfying. What makes this cake stand out is its versatility. You can bake it as a two-layer masterpiece or divide it into three smaller pans for a towering centerpiece.

Add a sprinkle of flaky sea salt, and you've turned it into a modern salted caramel cake. No matter how you present it, this recipe captures the essence of homemade baking: simple ingredients, careful technique, and results that taste like tradition passed through generations.

Why Caramel Cake Stands Out

A Slice of History

Caramel cake traces its roots back to the American South, where caramel frosting became a signature of celebratory baking. In a time before store-bought frostings, cooks perfected caramel by cooking sugar slowly with butter and milk. This process produced a rich, golden frosting that set slightly as it cooled, giving cakes a unique look and texture. Families proudly baked it for church socials, holiday gatherings, and birthdays, cementing its place in Southern culinary culture.

The Flavor Factor

Unlike sugary frostings that taste flat, caramel frosting offers layers of flavor. The cooked sugar develops nutty undertones, while butter adds richness. Milk or cream smooths everything out, creating a luscious consistency. When spread over buttery cake layers, the result is irresistible. Every bite brings sweet, salty, and slightly tangy notes that linger. This combination explains why caramel cake has remained popular for generations. It's not just sweet—it's flavorful, complex, and comforting.

Southern Caramel Cake

Old-Fashioned Caramel Cake

No reviews

- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)

- Total Time: 52 minutes
- Yield: 12 servings 1x
- Diet: Vegetarian

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Description

Old-Fashioned Caramel Cake is a Southern classic with buttery cake layers and rich, golden caramel frosting. A timeless dessert for any occasion.

Ingredients

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Scale

For the Cake Layers:

- ☐ 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ☐ 2 cups granulated sugar
- ☐ 4 large eggs
- ☐ 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ☐ 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ☐ 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ☐ ½ teaspoon salt
- ☐ 1 cup whole milk

For the Caramel Frosting:

- ☐ 1 cup unsalted butter
- ☐ 2 cups packed light brown sugar
- ☐ ½ cup whole milk or heavy cream
- ☐ 4 cups powdered sugar

- ☐ 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - ☐ Pinch of salt
 - ☐ Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark
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Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease and flour two 9-inch round cake pans.
2. Cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating well. Stir in vanilla extract.
3. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt. Add to wet mixture alternately with milk, starting and ending with flour. Mix until just combined.
4. Divide batter evenly into pans. Bake for 28–32 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean.
5. Cool in pans 10 minutes, then transfer to wire racks to cool completely.
6. Make frosting: Melt butter in a saucepan. Stir in brown sugar and cook 2–3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add milk and bring to a gentle boil. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Beat in powdered sugar, vanilla, and salt until smooth.
7. Assemble: Place one cake layer on a plate. Spread frosting on top. Add second layer, then frost top and sides with remaining frosting.
8. Serve: Slice and enjoy at room temperature.

Notes

If frosting thickens, add a splash of milk and re-whip until smooth.

Sprinkle flaky sea salt on top for a salted caramel version.

Store covered at room temperature for 2 days or refrigerate up to 5 days.

Freeze unfrosted layers up to 2 months; thaw before frosting.

- Prep Time: 20 minutes
- Cook Time: 32 minutes
- Category: Dessert
- Method: Baking
- Cuisine: Southern American

Nutrition

- **Serving Size:** 1 slice
- **Calories:** 520
- **Sugar:** 55g
- **Sodium:** 310mg
- **Fat:** 25g
- **Saturated Fat:** 15g
- **Unsaturated Fat:** 9g
- **Trans Fat:** 0g
- **Carbohydrates:** 70g
- **Fiber:** 1g
- **Protein:** 5g
- **Cholesterol:** 120mg

Did you make this recipe?

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

Key Ingredients

For the Cake Layers

The cake starts with simple pantry staples: flour, butter, sugar, eggs, and milk. Baking powder gives rise, while salt sharpens the flavors. Vanilla adds warmth and depth, ensuring the sponge complements the frosting. Using whole milk instead of reduced fat ensures a tender, moist crumb that feels rich without being heavy. Each ingredient has a role, coming together to form a sturdy yet soft canvas for the caramel topping.

For the Caramel Frosting

The frosting calls for butter, brown sugar, milk or cream, powdered sugar, and vanilla. Cooking butter and brown sugar together unlocks the caramel flavor, while milk helps blend everything into a smooth base. Powdered sugar thickens the frosting and gives it a spreadable texture. Vanilla enhances sweetness, and a pinch of salt rounds out the flavor. The result is a frosting that's silky yet firm enough to coat cake layers evenly.

Step-by-Step Process

Preparing the Batter

Start by creaming butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating thoroughly between each addition. Stir in vanilla. In a separate bowl, whisk flour, baking powder, and salt. Alternate adding dry ingredients and milk to the butter mixture, starting and ending with flour. This method prevents curdling and ensures the batter stays smooth. Mix gently until just combined,

overmixing can make the cake dense.

Baking and Cooling

Grease and flour two round pans, then divide the batter evenly. Bake at 350°F for about 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Allow the cakes to cool in their pans for 10 minutes before transferring to wire racks. Cooling fully before frosting is essential; otherwise, the frosting may melt. Proper cooling ensures neat layers and a professional presentation once the cake is assembled.

Frosting the Cake

Making the Caramel Frosting

In a saucepan over medium heat, melt butter with brown sugar, stirring constantly until the sugar dissolves. Add milk and bring to a gentle boil, cooking until the mixture thickens slightly. Remove from heat and cool for a few minutes. Beat in powdered sugar, vanilla, and salt until the frosting is smooth and spreadable. Work quickly, as caramel frosting sets faster than traditional buttercream. If it stiffens, add a splash of milk and re-whip until spreadable again.

Assembling the Cake

Place the first cake layer on a serving plate and spread a generous layer of caramel frosting over the top. Place the second cake layer on top, pressing gently to secure. Coat the top and sides with the remaining frosting, smoothing with a spatula. For a three-layer variation, divide the batter into three smaller pans and adjust baking time accordingly. The extra layer creates a dramatic, tall cake that looks stunning on special occasions.

Variations

Flavor Additions

This recipe is endlessly adaptable. Add espresso powder to the frosting for a subtle coffee flavor that complements caramel beautifully. Incorporate a splash of bourbon or rum for a grown-up twist. Toasted pecans or walnuts between layers add crunch and earthy flavor. Each variation keeps the essence of caramel cake intact while offering unique depth.

Different Formats

Beyond layer cakes, this recipe works as cupcakes, sheet cakes, or mini cakes. Cupcakes bake in about 18 minutes and make for easy serving at parties. A sheet cake is perfect for casual gatherings, allowing you to frost the top without worrying about layers. Mini cakes offer individual servings, making them ideal for elegant events. Regardless of format, the caramel frosting remains the highlight.

Serving Suggestions

Everyday Enjoyment

Caramel cake is indulgent enough to make everyday moments feel special. Serve slices at room temperature for the best flavor. Pair with coffee or tea to balance the sweetness, or enjoy with a glass of cold milk. Even small slices feel satisfying, making it an ideal dessert to share at family dinners or casual get-togethers.

Celebration-Worthy

For special occasions, dress up the cake with extra touches. Drizzle additional caramel sauce over the top for shine and richness. Garnish with flaky sea salt to create a salted caramel version that feels modern and sophisticated. Pair with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream to make it even more decadent. This cake always earns compliments and photographs beautifully for holiday tables or birthday spreads.

Storage and Freezing

Storing the Cake

Keep the cake covered at room temperature for up to two days. For longer storage, refrigerate it for up to five days. Always let refrigerated cake come back to room temperature before serving so the frosting softens to its ideal texture. Storing properly ensures the cake stays moist and flavorful.

Freezer Tips

Caramel cake also freezes well. Wrap cooled, unfrosted cake layers tightly in plastic wrap and foil, then freeze for up to two months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator before frosting. Frosted slices can also be frozen individually, making it easy to enjoy later. Freezing is a practical option if you're planning for busy holidays or want to prepare ahead for special events.

Troubleshooting and Tips

Avoiding Dry Cake

Overbaking is the most common mistake. Always test a few minutes before the recommended time with a toothpick. If it comes out clean with a few crumbs, the cake is ready. Creaming butter and sugar thoroughly at the start also ensures a lighter, fluffier sponge.

Frosting Fixes

If the frosting thickens too much while cooling, add a splash of warm milk and re-whip until smooth. If it turns grainy, you may not have dissolved the sugar fully—next time, cook the butter and brown sugar a bit longer before adding milk. Always frost cooled cakes, as warm cakes will cause the frosting to melt and slide.

FAQ

Can I make this cake ahead of time?

Yes. Bake the layers a day in advance, wrap them tightly, and frost the next day. The flavors deepen as the cake rests, making it even more delicious.

What makes caramel frosting unique compared to buttercream?

Caramel frosting is cooked on the stove, which develops deep, complex flavors and creates a slightly chewy texture. Buttercream is lighter and sweeter, but lacks the richness of caramel.

Can I make cupcakes with this recipe?

Absolutely. Divide the batter into cupcake liners and bake for 18–20 minutes. Frost with caramel for perfect party desserts.

Does the cake need to be refrigerated?

It can stay at room temperature for two days. For longer storage, refrigerate, but always bring to room temperature before serving.

Can I add nuts or toppings?

Yes. Pecans, walnuts, or even toasted coconut make excellent additions. Sprinkle them on top of the frosting or layer them between cakes for added texture.

Old-Fashioned Caramel Cake is a dessert that proves tradition never goes out of style. With its buttery crumb and rich caramel frosting, it delivers comfort and indulgence in every bite. The process may require patience, but the results are worth every step. This cake embodies the heritage of Southern baking, offering flavors that connect generations. Whether served at a casual family dinner or as the star of a holiday table, it never fails to impress.

Alongside classics like vanilla or chocolate cake, it holds a permanent place in every baker's collection. Once you make it, you'll understand why it remains a favorite. Old-Fashioned Caramel Cake isn't just food, it's history, celebration, and comfort all baked into one unforgettable dessert.