

Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting: Perfect Thanksgiving Dessert

When you seek a dessert that truly embodies the warmth and richness of the holiday season, this **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting** stands out as the perfect choice for Thanksgiving. The cake itself is a beautifully moist, tender crumb infused with the classic medley of fall spices—cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger—creating an inviting aroma that fills your kitchen. However, the true star is the decadent brown butter frosting, which introduces a nutty, caramelized depth that elevates the entire experience. This elegant yet simple **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting** offers a sophisticated alternative to traditional pies, making it an instant holiday centerpiece.

Why You'll Love This Recipe

Perfect for Thanksgiving

The comforting spices within this **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting**—cinnamon, ginger, and allspice—align perfectly with the traditional flavors of the Thanksgiving meal. It serves as an excellent counterpoint to the savory main courses, providing a rich, warmly spiced finish. Moreover, its impressive height and elegant frosting make it a stunning visual centerpiece, easily competing with any classic holiday pie.

Brown Butter Frosting Highlights

The brown butter frosting is the transformative element of this recipe. Browning the butter involves slowly heating it until the milk solids caramelize, infusing the butter with an intensely nutty, toasted aroma. This process results in a frosting that is far more complex and interesting than a standard buttercream. The rich, caramelized notes of the brown butter perfectly complement the warm spices of the cake, creating an unforgettable flavor profile.

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Aaron recipes

An elegant and moist Spiced Cake infused with classic fall flavors like cinnamon and ginger, beautifully topped with a rich, nutty, and caramelized Brown Butter Frosting. This cake is the ideal sophisticated centerpiece for your Thanksgiving or holiday dessert spread.

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Prep Time 30 minutes mins

Cook Time 35 minutes mins

Total Time 1 hour hr 5 minutes mins

Course Dessert
Cuisine American

Servings 10 servings
Calories 450 kcal

Equipment

- Two 8-inch round cake pans
- Electric mixer
- Saucepan

Ingredients

- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 3/4 cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, for frosting
- 4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 1/4 cup heavy cream or milk

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease and flour two 8-inch round cake pans. Whisk together flour, baking soda, baking powder, spices, and salt.
2. In a large bowl, cream 1/2 cup butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs one at a time, then vanilla.
3. Alternately add the flour mixture and buttermilk to the creamed mixture, beginning and ending with the flour. Mix until just combined.

4. Pour batter into prepared pans and bake for 30-35 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool in pans for 10 minutes, then invert onto a wire rack to cool completely.
5. For the frosting, melt 1/2 cup butter in a saucepan over medium heat, swirling until milk solids turn golden brown and it smells nutty. Immediately pour into a bowl and let cool until just above room temperature.
6. Beat the cooled brown butter with the sifted powdered sugar and heavy cream until smooth and fluffy. Add more cream or sugar as needed for desired consistency.
7. Frost the cooled cake layers and serve. Garnish with a sprinkle of nutmeg or pecans if desired.

Notes

Ensure all ingredients are at room temperature. For the frosting, brown the butter slowly and let it cool slightly before whipping. Do not overmix the cake batter.

Keyword brown butter frosting, Fall Baking, holiday dessert, spiced cake, thanksgiving cake

Ingredient Highlights & Substitutions

Essential Ingredients

For a truly exceptional **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting**, the key is using fresh, potent spices. Check the dates on your ground cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves, as old spices lose their aroma and flavor intensity. Furthermore, the frosting relies heavily on high-quality, unsalted butter for the browning process; using a better quality butter enhances the final nutty flavor significantly. Using buttermilk in the cake batter ensures a wonderfully tender and moist crumb.

Smart Substitutions

If buttermilk is unavailable for the cake, you can create a simple substitute by combining one cup of milk (whole milk works best) with one tablespoon of white vinegar or lemon juice. Let the mixture sit for five minutes before incorporating it into the recipe. For the spices, if you lack individual components, you can use an equal amount of pre-mixed pumpkin pie spice or apple pie spice in the cake, which offers a similar, balanced flavor profile.

Step-by-Step Instructions

Prep Phase

Start by ensuring all your dairy ingredients, particularly the butter and buttermilk, are brought to **room temperature**. This is vital for creating a well-emulsified batter that results in a light, even crumb. You also need to take the time to prepare your cake pans—grease and flour them thoroughly or use parchment paper liners to prevent sticking. Lastly, sift your dry ingredients together; this crucial step prevents lumps and ensures the spices are evenly distributed.

Cooking Phase

The most important step in making the cake is the proper creaming of butter and sugar. Beat them until they are significantly lighter in color and fluffy, which incorporates air for leavening. Once you introduce the dry ingredients, mix the batter on a **low speed** only until everything is just combined. For the frosting, watch the butter carefully as it browns; swirl the pan frequently until the milk solids turn golden-brown and it emits a distinct, nutty aroma. Immediately pour it into a separate bowl to stop the cooking process.

Pro Tips for Perfect Results

Technique Secrets

To achieve a perfectly domed cake that doesn't collapse, fill your cake pans evenly and avoid opening the oven door during the first two-thirds of the baking time. A critical trick for the brown butter frosting is to let the butter cool to **just above room temperature** before whipping it with the powdered sugar. If the butter is too warm, the frosting will be runny; if it's too cold, it will become grainy and too hard to spread.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

A frequent mistake is not sifting the powdered sugar for the frosting, which can result in a lumpy texture. Always sift the sugar before incorporating it into the brown butter. Another common error is using too much spice; measure your spices accurately, as an overload can make the cake taste bitter or medicinal. For more inspiration on holiday baking, check out our guide on [Maple Best Cake Recipes: Viral Fall Maple Cakes](#) for other decadent options.

Serving Ideas & Pairings

Presentation & Plating

This **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting** looks its best when frosted with a generous, swirling layer. For an extra touch of elegance, sprinkle the top with a pinch of freshly grated nutmeg or a dusting of cinnamon sugar. You can also press small, toasted walnut or pecan pieces around the base of the cake. Presenting the cake on a simple, elevated cake stand showcases its height and beautiful texture, making it a spectacular centerpiece.

Pairing Suggestions

The warm spices and nutty butter flavor pair beautifully with a variety of after-dinner beverages. A classic pairing is a hot cup of black tea, such as Earl Grey, which cuts through the richness of the frosting. Alternatively, a mug of warm, spiced rum punch or a glass of rich, dark stout beer complements the caramelized notes wonderfully. A dessert wine like a Sauternes or a sweet Madeira also offers a luxurious accompaniment to this sophisticated dessert.

Ingredient	Original Amount	Substitute	Notes
Buttermilk	1 cup	Milk + 1 tbsp vinegar	Ensures moisture and tenderness
Cinnamon	2 tsp	2 tsp Pumpkin Pie Spice	Offers similar warm flavor profile

Ingredient	Original Amount	Substitute	Notes
Unsalted Butter	1 cup	High-quality European Butter	Improves brown butter depth and flavor

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I make this cake into cupcakes?

Yes, this recipe works beautifully for cupcakes. Reduce the baking time significantly to about 18-22 minutes. The yield will be approximately 24 standard-sized cupcakes. Ensure you check for doneness using the toothpick test.

Why did my brown butter burn instead of browning?

Brown butter burns when it's left unattended or cooked on too high a heat. Always cook it over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Once the milk solids start to form on the bottom and turn golden brown, and you smell a nutty aroma, remove it immediately from the heat to stop the cooking process.

How should I store the leftover Spiced Cake?

The best way to store the frosted **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting** is in an airtight container at cool room temperature for up to 3 days. If your kitchen is warm, you can store it in the refrigerator for up to 5 days, but allow it to sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving for the best texture.

Conclusion

This **Spiced Cake with Brown Butter Frosting** is a remarkable and satisfying dessert that brings sophisticated flavor to your holiday table. It perfectly captures the spirit of autumn and Thanksgiving with its warm spices and rich, nutty frosting. The ease of preparation, combined with the professional-quality results, ensures that this recipe will become a cherished tradition. It offers a truly delightful conclusion to any festive meal, leaving a lasting impression on your guests.