

Christmas cake recipe



Method

You need to begin this cake the night before you want to bake it. All you do is weigh out the dried fruit and mixed peel, place it in a mixing bowl and mix in the brandy as evenly and thoroughly as possible. Cover the bowl with a clean tea cloth and leave the fruit aside to absorb the brandy for 12 hours.

Next day pre-heat the oven to gas mark 140°C. Then measure out all the rest of the ingredients, ticking them off to make quite sure they're all there. The treacle will be easier to measure if you remove the lid and place the tin in a small pan of barely simmering water. Now begin the cake by sifting the flour, salt and spices into a large mixing bowl, lifting the sieve up high to give the flour a good airing. Next, in a separate large mixing bowl, whisk the butter and sugar together until it's light, pale and fluffy. Now beat the eggs in a separate bowl and add them to the creamed mixture a tablespoonful at a time; keep the whisk running until all the egg is incorporated. If you add the eggs slowly by degrees like this the mixture won't curdle. If it does, don't worry, any cake full of such beautiful things can't fail to taste good!

When all the egg has been added, fold in the flour and spices, using gentle, folding movements and not beating at all (this is to keep all that precious air in). Now fold in the fruit, peel, chopped nuts and treacle and finally the grated lemon and orange zests. Next, using a large kitchen spoon, transfer the cake mixture into the prepared tin spread it out evenly with the back of a spoon and, if you don't intend to ice the cake, lightly drop the whole blanched almonds in circles or squares all over the surface. Finally cover the top of the cake with a double square of silicone paper with a 50p-size hole in the centre (this gives extra protection during the long slow cooking).

Bake the cake on the lowest shelf of the oven for 4½-4¾ hours. Sometimes it can take up to ½-¾ hour longer than this, but in any case don't look till at least 4 hours have passed. Cool the cake for 30 minutes in the tin, and then remove it to a wire rack to finish cooling. When it's cold 'feed' it – make small holes in the top and base of the cake with a cocktail stick or small skewer, then spoon over a few teaspoons of brandy, wrap it in double silicone paper secured with an elastic band and either wrap again in foil or store in an airtight container. You can now feed it at odd intervals until you need to ice or eat it.

Ingredients

1. 1 lb (450 g) currants
2. 6 oz (175 g) sultanas
3. 6 oz (175 g) raisins
4. 2 oz (50 g) glacé cherries, rinsed, dried and finely chopped
5. 2 oz (50 g) mixed candied peel, finely chopped
6. 3 tablespoons brandy, plus extra for 'feeding'
7. 8 oz (225 g) plain flour
8. ½ level teaspoon salt
9. ¼ level teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
10. ½ level teaspoon ground mixed spice
11. 8 oz (225 g) unsalted butter
12. 8 oz (225 g) soft brown sugar
13. 4 large eggs 2 oz (50 g) almonds, chopped (the skins can be left on)
14. 1 level dessertspoon black treacle
15. grated zest 1 lemon
16. grated zest 1 orange
17. 4 oz (110 g) whole blanched almonds (only if you don't intend to ice the cake)

Equipment

You will also need an 8 inch (20 cm) round cake tin or a 7 inch (18 cm) square tin, greased and lined with silicone paper (baking parchment). Tie a band of brown paper round the outside of the tin for extra protection.