

Simnel Cake

Serves: 20+

Preparation and Making time: 45 - 60 minutes + extra time for cooling

Cooking time: 50 - 60 minutes

Ingredients

750g ready-made golden marzipan

4 tablespoons apricot jam

1 beaten egg to glaze

For the Cake

280g butter, softened

280g light muscovado sugar

5 large eggs

750g mixed dried fruit

115g glace cherries, whole

85g ground almonds

Zest of 1 lemon and 1 large orange

Juice of 1 large orange

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1 teaspoon almond extract

280g plain flour

1 teaspoon mixed spice

1½ teaspoons cinnamon

Baking paper to line the tin

Method

Pre-heat the oven 170°C/150°C fan/Gas Mark 3

Reducing to 140°C/120°C fan/Gas Mark 1 after 30 minutes cooking

1. Line the base and sides of a Le Creuset 24cm Springform Cake Tin with baking paper and set to one side.
2. Cut a 150g piece from the marzipan, divide into 11 pieces and roll into balls. Divide the remaining marzipan into 2 equal pieces and roll out into 22cm rounds. Set to one side whilst you make the cake.
3. Cream the butter and sugar together in a large bowl; beat in the eggs one at a time. To prevent curdling add 1-2 tablespoons of the flour after the addition of the first 2 eggs.
4. Stir in the mixed fruit, cherries, ground almonds, vanilla extract and almond extract, orange juice, orange, and lemon zest.
5. Sift in the flour with the spices and mix well to combine all the ingredients.
6. Pour half the cake mixture into the lined tin, smooth over the top and cover with one of the marzipan rounds. Add the remaining cake mixture and smooth over the top once more. Make a small well in the centre with the back of a spoon, this will ensure a flat top to the cake.
7. Bake for 30 minutes then reduce the oven temperature to 140°C/120°C fan/Gas Mark 1 and continue cooking for 2½ - 3 hours covering the cake lightly with a piece of foil for the last hour of cooking to prevent over-browning. Turn the cake tin two- or three-times during cooking to ensure even baking. To see if the cake is done insert a skewer into the centre, it should come away cleanly.
8. Leave the cake to cool in the tin. When cooled release the springform clip and remove the cake from the tin but leaving it sitting on the base with the collar section removed. Then remove the baking paper from the sides.

9. To finish, brush the top of the cooked cake with the apricot jam and cover with the second round of marzipan. Arrange the eleven marzipan balls around the outer edge of the cake and brush the entire top with the beaten egg.
10. Place the cake under a medium heat grill at least 10cm away from the heat source and toast the top until lightly browned. Alternatively, you can brown the top using a chef's blow torch.
11. To serve, slide the cake from the base on to a plate, removing the baking paper.
12. To keep, replace the springform collar around the finished cake and cover, alternatively wrap in foil and store in an airtight container. The cake will keep for up to a month.

Cook's notes

Do not leave the cake in the tin when toasting the marzipan under the grill as this may damage the silicone-covered clip or the non-stick coating.

For an extra special gift present the cake inside the cake tin.

