

FRENCH ICE CREAM CAKES

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Basic Design: These ice cream cakes typically have a light thin lower cake layer followed vertically by two successive layers of ice cream. The top layer is usually decorated with fruit, chips of chocolate, or other patisserie decorations. The ice creams are either parfaits or sorbets (the former based on egg yolks and cream, and the latter on Italian meringues). The combination of flavors for the two layers should be complementary, with the heavier flavor on the bottom. The cake layer can be skipped for some combinations. Since parfaits use egg yolks and sorbets use egg whites, one parfait layer and one sorbet layer make an economical combination.

MOLD

You will need a snap-sided cake pan or flan ring with bottom to assemble your cake in. The best one is 9 inches in diameter with a 2.5-inch high straight-sided snap ring for sides. Once the cake is assembled and frozen, you can un-snap the side ring and remove to serve. If the ring makes a tight seal, you can bake the cake layer in this mold, and then put it in the freezer until the ice creams are ready.



CAKE LAYER

General: You should prepare the cake layer first. Either bake it in the final mold or cut it to fit in the mold after baking in another pan. Cake layer should be ½ to ¾ inch thick. Put the cooled cake layer in the final mold and freeze while you prepare the ice creams. Options:

1. **Almond Pastry:** This recipe is designed to yield one cake disk 9 inches in diameter and ½ inch thick. However, the final volume will vary with the size of the eggs used and the degree of stiffness once the egg whites are beaten.

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp butter
- 3 egg whites
- 1 rounded tbsp sugar (for egg whites)
- 1 ½ tbsp sifted flour
- 3 tbsp powdered almonds
- 6 tbsp sugar (for batter)

Method:

- Prepare the almond powder ahead of time. Blanch ½ cup of almonds and chop into small pieces. Then grind in a blender or spice grinder to a fine powder. Do not let it render its oil; stop before this happens. Spread on a cookie sheet and dry in a low heat oven for several hours. Save extra in freezer.
- Preheat oven to 350° F.

- Butter 9-inch cake pan or tight-sealing flan ring. If using pan other than final assembly pan, dust lightly with flour.
- Melt butter over low heat.
- Beat egg whites in round bowl. Halfway through add half of sugar for whites.
- When whites are good and stiff, beat in remaining sugar for whites.
- Mix flour, batter sugar, and powdered almonds in small bowl.
- Sprinkle a little of this mixture over egg whites and cut and fold this gently into whites. Repeat with rest of dry ingredients, being careful to cut and fold without knocking down whites.
- Take 2-3 tbsp of whites-flour mixture and mix thoroughly into melted butter. Then pour this mixture over rest of white and cut and fold into whites.
- Immediately pour batter into pan to depth of ½ inch and bake for 30-40 minutes (cake will be golden brown and just pulling away from sides when done). Note that the cake does not rise much.
- Cool cake and transfer to assembly pan if another pan was used. Freeze cake in assembly pan while you prepare ice creams.

2. **Citrus pastry:** Use above recipe but substitute freshly grated lemon or orange zest instead of almonds.

3. **Genoise (Genoa Sponge Cake):** As with prior recipes, batter volume will differ with egg size. You may have some left over if you make a single 9-inch x ½-inch layer. You could also make an 8-inch by 1-inch cake and cut into two ½-inch thick disks.

Ingredients:

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 3 whole eggs
- 1 ½ tbsp melted butter
- ½ cup flour
- Up to 1/4 cup powdered almonds (as in almond pastry)
- Optional: 1 tsp vanilla sugar or dollop of liqueur such as Curacao or rum

Method:

- Preheat oven to 350°.
- Butter cake pan and if using separate one, dust with flour.
- Put eggs and sugar in mixing bowl and set over boiling water in a bain-marie.
- Beat the eggs and sugar with a wire whisk over low heat for 1 minute. Be careful not to overcook.
- Then off heat, beat with mixer at high speed for 2 minutes, and finally 2 minutes at low speed. This should produce a fine smooth ribbon when tested.
- Fold and cut the flour into the egg mixture.
- Then fold butter into mixture.
- Bake immediately for 30 minutes.
- Cool and once in assembly pan, freeze.

PARFAITS

General: Parfaits are based on a flavored liquid that is thickened with egg yolks and cream. Chocolate parfaits use milk as the base liquid. For others you will need 28° syrup. Results are also better if you use creme fraiche:

To make 28° syrup: Heat 3 cups sugar and 2.5 cups water until sugar melts; then bring to boil and cool.

To make creme fraiche: Warm US heavy cream to 82-86° and add 2 tbsp buttermilk for each cup of cream. Let sit at room temperature for 6-10 hours. Then refrigerate.

1. Alcohol-Flavored Parfait: These parfaits use a liqueur to flavor the mixture. Poire William, Mirabelle, Cointreau, kirsch, cognac, Armagnac, Grand Marnier, etc. are all suitable. This is good for the top layer over a fruit sorbet. Note that alcohol parfaits take longer to freeze and start to melt earlier than ones without alcohol.

Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup 28° sugar syrup
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 tbsp alcohol flavoring
- 1 cup heavy cream or creme fraiche (precooled in refrigerator)

Method:

- Heat syrup to between 86-104°.
- In separate bowl, beat egg yolks well with whisk.
- Then very slowly mix warm syrup into eggs. Try to keep froth down; too much froth interferes with proper custard formation.
- Put egg-syrup mixture into top of double boiler. Set bottom water to just simmering.
- Cook for 20 minutes stirring continuously. Make sure nothing sticks to sides of pan; smooth out any lumps. Mixture should begin to thicken in last 4-5 minutes.
- Pour egg-syrup mixture into round bottomed bowl and beat with electric mixture at high speed for 1 minute medium speed for 3 minutes, and low speed for 5 minutes.
- Mixture should turn white, thick, and creamy and at end show a thick ribbon. Do not overbeat it.
- Cool this custard mixture in the refrigerator for 1 hour (work on other layer during this time).
- Then remove cream from refrigerator and whip with mixer for 2-4 minutes until doubled in bulk and with soft peaks. This is the custard.
- Fold and cut half of whipped cream into custard.
- Add alcohol flavoring and gently mix into mixture.
- Cut remaining cream into custard mixture.
- Gently mix and fold until uniform in color and consistency.

- Put in flan ring, on top of cake if present, and put into freezer.

2. Chocolate, Vanilla, or Coffee Parfait: This recipe can be used to make a vanilla parfait by using a vanilla bean instead of chocolate and steeping the bean in the milk for 10 minutes before mixing with egg yolks. For coffee parfait, steep 1.5 tsp freshly ground coffee in hot sugared milk for 10 minutes and strain before adding to egg yolks. You can add up to 3 tbsp instant coffee as well for more flavor. You can also use both vanilla and coffee extracts for an additional flavor.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup sugar
- 6 egg yolks
- 8-10 ounces unsweetened chocolate shaved into tiny bits
- 1 cup heavy cream or creme fraiche with 1 tbsp sugar added and mixed in

Method:

- Place the egg yolks and half of the sugar in a round bowl and beat with the mixer at decreasing speeds until it is white and has a ribbon.
- Mix remaining sugar with milk, heat to dissolve sugar, and bring to a boil.
- Remove from heat and if using vanilla bean, add now and let steep 10 minutes. Reheat to 82-86° if necessary after removing vanilla bean.
- Add a small amount of hot milk to the egg mixture, whisking carefully.
- Then add the egg mixture to hot milk and stir constantly off heat.
- Place back on very low heat and heat to 189° F stirring constantly (about 12-14 minutes on Warm of electric stove). Mixture should thicken towards end of heating.
- Remove this custard from heat and stir an additional 2 minutes.
- Add chocolate to hot custard and stir until melted and well blended.
- Put custard in round bottomed bowl and beat with mixer at medium for 4-6 minutes and slowest speed for 10-15 minutes. Custard will cool, grow in volume, and thicken. Chocolate custards tend to get very thick during this step; be warned.
- If making chocolate parfait, immediately whip cream to double in bulk and soft peaks and fold whipped cream into custard.
- If making coffee or vanilla parfait, refrigerate custard 1 hour and then fold in whipped cream.
- After mixing cream and custard, add to flan ring and freeze.

3. Fruit Parfaits: These can be made by replacing the pure syrup used in the alcohol-flavored recipe with puree made from strawberries, raspberries, melons, pears, apricots, passion fruit, peaches, etc. Most fruit parfaits taste better if a small amount of complementary liqueur is added. Adding a small amount of lemon juice will also bring out a stronger flavor. Be sure to sieve out any seeds from pureed fruit before proceeding. I have found that 1-1.5 cups of pureed fruit plus enough water to bring this to 2.5 cups total fluid and then 3 cups sugar produces a fruit syrup that freezes well. Too much fluid makes the parfait crystalline, so do not just add syrup to fruit puree. Otherwise, recipe is same as for alcohol-flavored parfaits.

4. **Pistachio Parfait:** this is similar to chocolate parfait but uses an infusion of ground nuts instead of chocolate.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup sugar
- 6 egg yolks
- 1 cup shelled unsalted pistachios
- 3 tbsp blanched almonds
- 1 cup heavy cream or creme fraiche with 1 tbsp sugar added and mixed in
- Almond extract to taste
- Optional: green food coloring

Method:

- Place 3/4 cup of the pistachios and the almonds in a blender and grind to a fine powder. Roughly chop remaining 1/4 cup pistachios and set aside.
- Place the egg yolks and half of the sugar in a round bowl and beat with the mixer at decreasing speeds until it is white and has a ribbon.
- Mix nut powder and remaining sugar with milk, heat to dissolve sugar, and bring to a boil. Cover and let sit 30 minutes to infuse nut flavor. Then strain liquid to remove seed material and reheat to 82-86°.
- Add small amount of hot milk to egg mixture, whisking carefully.
- Then add egg mixture to hot milk and stir constantly off heat.
- Place back on very low heat and heat to 189° F stirring constantly (about 12-14 minutes on Warm of electric stove). Mixture should thicken towards end of heating.
- Remove from heat and stir an additional 2 minutes.
- Put custard in round bottomed bowl and beat with mixer at medium for 4-6 minutes and slowest speed for 10-15 minutes. Custard will cool, grow in volume, and thicken.
- Add in almond extract to taste and optional green food coloring.
- Refrigerate custard 1 hour and then fold in whipped cream and remaining chopped pistachios.
- After mixing cream and custard, add to flan ring and freeze.

SORBETS

General: These are usually fruit-based syrups, thickened with Italian meringues (egg whites), a bit of fruit pectin, and whipped cream. The methods for making the syrups vary and are listed below. Once mixed, the assembled ingredients as listed below are poured into a flan ring and frozen for 20 minutes before adding another layer on top. Assuming the syrup is ready, the basic recipe is as follows:

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1/3 cup apricot preserves (heated and puréed)

- 1 cup fruit puree already chilled (see details below on preparation for different fruits)
- 3/4 cup heavy cream or creme fraiche, chilled
- 4 egg whites
- 3 tsp fruit pectin dissolved in 1 cup water heated to 175° F and then cooled

Method:

- Put sugar in a cleanable pan, add the pureed preserves, and slowly heat the mixture until it reaches a temperature of 248° F. Try not to create bubbles which will get trapped in the mix.
- Beat the egg whites into stiff peaks.
- Slowly trickle the hot syrup mixture into the egg whites while beating with an electric mixer. You must do this fairly quickly as the syrup hardens when it cools. Once well mixed, put this meringue mixture into the refrigerator for one hour.
- Using a mixer, whip the cold cream into soft peaks.
- Assemble the ingredients in a chilled bowl in the following order:
 - Gently fold whipped cream and meringue together
 - Gently fold in the fruit purée
 - Gently fold in the fruit pectin
- Pour into a flan ring and freeze.

Making Fruit Purées: You may want to buy a syrup densitometer from a pastry chef website to ensure you have the right densities. Add water to reduce density, or dissolve and heat with more sugar to raise it. Or just try the ratios of ingredients listed below and see how they turn out. You will want to sieve the purée to get rid of any seeds or large chunks.

Note that the intensity of flavor in these sorbets can vary with the quality and freshness of the fruit. You can enhance the fruit flavor by adding an appropriate liqueur, or depending on the fruit, a small amount of fresh lemon juice.

- **General Fruit Purée:** Poach 500 g (18 oz) fruit in a mixture of barely 1 cup sugar and 2/3 cup water until soft. Then purée finely in a blender. Density should be about 1.15.
- **Citrus Fruit Purée:** Mix the grated zest and juice of 3-4 citrus fruits with 1/2 cup sugar and 2/3 cup water and blend. Then heat to a boil. Density should be 1.17. Can add Cointreau.
- **Peach Purée:** Heat 1/2 cup water and 1 1/2 cups sugar to boil and let cool. Blanch 2 1/4 pounds of peaches (put in boiling water for several minutes and then put in ice water) and then peel and stone them. Blend the fruit finely, add juice of one lemon, and mix with syrup. Peach extract can enhance flavor.
- **Pear Purée:** Peel 4 juicy pears, remove the seeds, and sprinkle with lemon juice. Then purée in a blender with 1 1/2 cups sugar.
- **Raspberry Purée:** Boil scant cup sugar with 1 3/4 cup water and cool. Add 3 cups fresh raspberries and juice of 1/2 lemon. Purée and sieve to remove all seeds. Try adding some creme de cassis.
- **Tropical Fruit Mix Purée:** Purée 1 cored and skinned pineapple, 2 skinned and stoned mangos, 1 skinned banana, and juice of one lemon. Add 6 tbsp sugar per cup of purée,

add cinnamon and vanilla extract to taste.

- **Strawberry Purée:** Purée 7 cups of strawberries. Add 1 1/2 cups sugar and mix. Add juice of half a lemon and an equivalent amount of orange juice.
- **Passion Fruit Purée:** Purée passion fruit and add equal volume of 28° syrup. Add lemon juice to taste. Density should be about 1.08.
- **Guanabana (soursop):** Delicious if you can find it. Try using the mixed tropical fruit ratios to start. Water content can vary with size and age of fruit.

ASSEMBLING AND SERVING ICE CREAM CAKES

Assembly: If making a multi-layer cake, prepare the two liquid layers first and keep them cold in the refrigerator while you prepare the lower level cake. When the cake has cooled, put it in the flan ring and freeze for 20 minutes. Then add the next layer and freeze it for 20 minutes. Then add the third layer, smoothing the top so it will look nice when finished. Then the cake should be frozen for at least three hours before serving. Be sure to tap the flan ring on the sides after each layer is added to make sure the liquid goes all the way to the edges and covers the layer below. If either of the two liquid layers have leftover material, put this in a plastic container and freeze separately. Feel free to decorate the top of the cake with fresh fruit, such as raspberries, blueberries, or whatever will freeze nicely and catches your fancy.

Note that if you wait too long to assemble the cake after making the liquids, whipped ingredients may flatten. So do not take too long. If you have all the ingredients ready, you can easily do all three layers of the cake in less than one day.

Serving: to serve, run warm water on the sides of the flan ring being careful not to splash water on top of the cake. Then unsnap the ring and gently lift it off. Let the cake sit 16–20 minutes to soften before cutting. Note that layers with any alcohol in them will soften faster. Cut into wedges with a very sharp knife. Leftover cake may be stored in the freezer without the ring but should be covered with a box or other cover to keep fresh.

Most of the above is based on my own experience, but you may find the following reference useful for the ice creams:

Lenôtre, Gaston. 1979. *Lenôtre's Ice Cream and Candies*. Woodbury, NY: Barron's Education I Series, Inc