

Christmas Cake

Jacey Bedford

Can be made well in advance. I can't claim to be the originator of this recipe, though altered it a bit because I dislike candied peel... but it was handed down to Jacey by a lady called Evelyn, in Barnsley Library, whose mum cut it out of a magazine in the 1950s and adapted it. It was originally the recipe for Prince Charles' christening cake! Wherever it came from, it has done good service as a recipe for special occasions.

Ingredients

8oz butter or soft margarine
10oz dark brown sugar
5 eggs, (size 3)
8oz plain flour
4oz ground almonds
2lb dried fruit (a mix of sultanas, currants and a few raisins)
4oz glacé cherries
4 tablespoons of brandy - at least. I use more! (Pour on after cooking)
For anyone with nut allergies this works well without the ground almonds, too. Just add a little extra flour to compensate.

Use a loose-bottomed square tin. There's enough mix here to make a fairly shallow 10" cake, a chunkier 9" one or two shallow 8" cakes, (but reduce the cooking time for these or they'll be too dry).

Method

1) Cream the butter (or margarine) and brown sugar. 2) Add the eggs one at a time and mix in thoroughly. To prevent the mix from curdling add a spoonful of flour from the measured quantity with each egg. 3) Fold in the rest of the flour and the ground almonds. 4) Add the fruit and glacé cherries. 5) Mix well. 6) Place the mixture in a prepared, lined, loose-bottomed cake tin (or tins). Shape a slight hollow in the centre so you get a level finish when the cake rises. **Fight the kids to see who gets to lick out the bowl! Decide to share it equally.** 8) Bake at 275°F - Approx. 140°C/ Gas Mark 1 - for about three to four hours depending on the size of tin you use and how "fast" your oven is. 9) When cool, pierce the cake all over with a skewer and dribble the brandy into the holes to let it soak in. Use cheap brandy, the cake isn't fussy... and you'll be able to be more liberal with it. I always use lots more than the recipe says. Leave the paper round the cake until after this process, otherwise some of the brandy dribbles over the edge. 10) Remove the paper, add marzipan and icing as required. Yum!

Marzipan and Icing: What can I say? I have made my own with ground almonds, egg yolks and icing sugar, but these days I buy it ready to roll. I make the icing from icing sugar and whipped egg whites. I tend not to add glycerine because I like the icing hard and crunchy but add glycerine if you want to be able to cut this cake easily once the icing has set. Use apricot jam to stick the rolled out marzipan to the cake.

Jacey's Bacon and Onion Stuffing.

This is a recipe I did originate. A lot of people go to great trouble to make stuffings and sauces for Christmas. With being out on tour right until the last minute I always look for quick and easy things to perk up the Christmas dinner. I confess to buying packet bread-sauce mix and the classic box of Paxo but one thing I do make is a special "stuffing". I don't actually stuff it into the cavity of the turkey, though, I cook it in a glass casserole dish and serve it separately, by the spoonful. Since I don't treat cooking as a very exact science, I always guess the amounts but this is a very forgiving recipe and it's never let me down yet.

You'll need a food processor or a blender.

Bacon - unsmoked streaky or middle cut rashers, de-rinded, about half a pound.

(More if you like it meaty.)

Onions - one large or a couple of medium

Soft white or wholemeal breadcrumbs - make your own in the blender. I use up crusts.
equivalent of approximately half a sliced loaf.

Egg - one large.

Butter (or margarine), a blob.

Use the blender/food processor to turn your bread into breadcrumbs, reserve in a bowl. Cut up the onion, fry it in the butter until soft but not caramelised. Put it in the food processor and "mince" it - don't leave it in long enough to puree it. Tip it into a big mixing bowl. Cut up the bacon into smallish pieces, fry it in the pan that you've used for the onions. Don't crisp it, but cook it through properly. Again. "mince" it in your blender and tip it into the mixing bowl with the onions. Beat your egg, add it to the bacon and onion mix with a good double handful of breadcrumbs. Mix, adding more breadcrumbs until the mixture hangs together without being too wet. Pack into a buttered glass casserole dish and top with a few small knobs of butter, bake in a moderate oven until the top is beginning to brown. About an hour should do the trick.

This is great hot or can be served afterwards with the cold turkey too. You could even use a higher proportion of bacon and make it into a bacon-loaf for a mid-week meal. You can add pureed garlic or fresh garlic as you are frying the onions for a bit of extra zing.