



Claire Saffitz made the Apple Cake of our Dreams

And it's far from the sad, soggy number you (and your great aunt) might be familiar with.

PHOTO BY CHELSE CRAFT FOOD STYLING BY REBECCA JURKEVICH



Tender, nutty, and studded with caramel-glazed apple halves, Claire Saffitz's apple cake is the best apple cake. (Yeah, we said it.) Use a cast-iron skillet to caramelize the apples and bake the cake all in one vessel, a win-win. Ground nuts give the cake a toasty, deep flavor and tenderize the crumb by adding fat and countering flour's glutinous toughness.

the apple cake of our dreams...

Within approximately thirty seconds of asking Claire Saffitz to develop an apple cake for the October issue, it became apparent that she had some thoughts on the subject. There was one type of apple cake in particular that Claire just would not get behind: the kind where uncooked apple pieces are suspended in the batter. (Maybe you know it? tall, sometimes baked in a bundt, maybe served at brunch at your great aunt's house?).

And the more Claire articulated her mulled-over opinions—that those squishy, not-quite-tender apple pieces make the batter strangely damp while simultaneously interrupting the eating experience—the louder we applauded when she went in a different direction. Instead of dicing the apples, Claire went with halves. Using larger pieces meant that (a) she could caramelize the fruit on the stove beforehand, which would give the fruit the head start it needs to completely cook through, and (b) every serving would have the ideal ratio of caramelized apple to buttery cake.

That's not all! Claire thought through each step to guarantee success. Here's how to make your new favorite apple dessert:

the apples

Pick them right. There is a time for plucking one apple from every bin at the market and discovering your favorite, and then there is a time for choosing apples guaranteed to withstand baking. Guess which time this is? To ensure that your apples will be spoonable but not mushy, Claire strongly suggests using baking apples whose flavor and texture will not suffer. Pink Ladies are Claire's pick, but Jonagolds, Honeycrisps, and Braeburns will also do the trick.

Peel and halve. Whichever apples you choose, you do want to take the time to peel them—otherwise, they won't nestle as nicely into the batter later on. But you'll make up all the time you spent peeling the apples because you don't have to chop. Simply halve the apples, then scoop out their cores (use your melon baller from 1985 or a sturdy teaspoon to get the job done).

Start them on the stove. Once you've prepped the apples, the next step is to caramelize them in a skillet. The advantages here are three-fold: You'll remove excess moisture, you'll get gorgeous color, and you'll give the apples an opportunity to start cooking before they're insulated by cake batter.

the caramel

Your apples are tender and out of the pan, and now you're left with a skillet full of buttery, apple-y juices that definitely should be put to use. Claire adds brown sugar and a little bit of water, then simmers the sauce until it's thick and bubbling—that's caramel! That will be the sauce that glazes the apples once you flip the cake out of the pan.

the batter

You've given so much attention to the apples, but what about that cake? Since the batter comes together in a food processor, it's (nearly) as hands-off as they come. You do need to take the extra step of roasting and grinding the walnuts, but it's worth it: Not only do they give the cake a warm, toasty richness, but they also tenderize the crumb by replacing some of the flour, which is prone to toughness.

Once you've whipped together the batter, all that's left to do is arrange the apples in the pan (with some thought, perhaps, since they'll be front-and-center when you serve) and spread the mixture over the top. You might have to nudge it to the sides of the pan, but don't worry if it's thin in some places: The eggs, baking powder, and baking soda will ensure that the cake rises and expands in the oven.

the finale

A.k.a. The Big Flip. Don't be scared. After the cake has cooled for 10 minutes, run a knife or a mini-offset spatula around the edges, then invert onto a plate. The easiest way to do this is to place a plate, upside down, on top of the skillet. Then get a good grip on both the pan and the plate using mitts or towels and flip the whole set-up away from you.

Pull the pan away, then gawk at your creation. If any apple or cake sticks to the skillet, just scrape them off and gently press them back into place. Quick cover up your errors with whipped cream—that's what it's for. —SARAH JAMPEL

SARAH JAMPEL is a writer, recipe developer, food stylist, and chronic wee-hours baker in New York. She spent the past four years on the editorial and creative teams at Food52. Now, you'll find me her free-lancing, most recently at Bon Appétit.

Apple-Walnut Upside-Down Cake

8 SERVINGS Use a cast-iron skillet to caramelize the apples and bake the cake all in one vessel.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup raw walnuts or pecans

10 Tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature, divided

4 small or 3 large apples, peeled, halved, cored

½ cup (packed) light brown sugar, divided

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 tsp. kosher salt

1 tsp. baking soda

½ tsp. baking powder

¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg

1 ½ tsp. ground cinnamon, plus more for serving

½ cup granulated sugar

2 large eggs, room temperature

1 tsp. vanilla extract

½ cup plain whole-milk Greek yogurt, room temperature

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Spread walnuts in a single layer and toast 10-12 minutes until golden brown. Let cool.

2. Meanwhile, heat a 10" ovenproof skillet over medium. Add 2 Tbsp. butter and swirl to coat; add apple halves cut side down in a single layer. Cook apples, undisturbed, until golden brown, 5-10 minutes. Turn over and cook about 5 minutes, until a knife tip slides through with only slight resistance. Set aside to cool.

3. Add ¼ cup brown sugar and 1 Tbsp. water to skillet and set over medium heat. Stir until sugar dissolves, then cook until thick and bubbling, about 1 minute. Let cool in skillet.

4. Meanwhile, pulse toasted walnuts, flour, salt, baking soda, baking powder, nutmeg, and 1 ½ tsp. cinnamon in a food processor until combined and finely ground. Remove mixture to a medium bowl.

5. No need to wash the food processor, simply add the sugar, remaining ¼ cup brown sugar, and remaining 8 Tbsp. butter and process until mixture is light and smooth. Add eggs and vanilla and pulse until smooth. Add half of walnut mixture and yogurt and pulse until just incorporated. Add remaining walnut mixture and pulse to combine.

6. Arrange apple halves cut sides down over cooled caramel in skillet. Fold batter a few times with spatula then scrape batter over apples and smooth the surface.

7. Bake cake until evenly browned and the center springs back when gently pressed, 30-40 minutes. Let cake cool in skillet 10 minutes, then run a knife around the sides of the pan to loosen. Upend on a wire rack and carefully remove skillet.

Cake can be baked 2 days ahead. Let cool completely. Store tightly wrapped at room temperature.

Want to make this recipe ahead?