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Summer Peach Cake

From Season 12: Sweet Summer Endings

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: This dessert, which marries cake with fresh summer peaches, is a bakery favorite, but most versions are plagued by soggy cake and barely noticeable peach flavor. We wanted a buttery cake that was moist yet not at all soggy, with a golden-brown exterior and plenty of peach flavor. Roasting chunks of peaches, tossed in sugar and a little lemon juice, helped concentrate their flavor and expel moisture before we combined them with our cake batter. However, during roasting, the peach chunks became swathed in a flavorful but unpleasantly gooey film. Coating our roasted peaches in panko bread crumbs before combining them with the batter ensured the film was absorbed by the crumbs, which then dissolved into the cake during baking. To amplify the peach flavor we tossed the fruit with peach schnapps before roasting, and a little almond extract added to the batter lent a subtle complementary note. Fanning peach slices (macerated with a little more of the schnapps) over the top, then sprinkling some almond extract-enhanced sugar for a light glaze, ensured our cake looked as good as it tasted.

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Serves 8 to 10

To crush the panko bread crumbs, place them in a zipper-lock bag and smash them with a rolling pin. If you can't find panko, 1/4 cup of plain, unseasoned bread crumbs can be substituted. Orange liqueur can be substituted for the peach schnapps. If using peak-of-season, farm-fresh peaches, omit the peach schnapps.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 1/2** pounds peaches , pitted and cut into 1/2 inch-thick wedges
- 5** tablespoons peach schnapps
- 4** teaspoons lemon juice
- 6** tablespoons plus 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1** cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1 1/4** teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4** teaspoon salt
- 1/2** cup packed (3 1/2 ounces) light brown sugar
- 2** large eggs
- 8** tablespoons unsalted butter , melted and cooled
- 1/4** cup sour cream
- 1 1/2** teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/4** teaspoon plus 1/8 teaspoon almond extract
- 1/3** cup panko bread crumbs , finely crushed

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and spray

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teaspoons lemon juice, and 2 tablespoons granulated sugar in bowl. Spread peach chunks in single layer on prepared sheet and bake until excluded juices begin to thicken and caramelize at edges of sheet, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer sheet to wire rack and let peaches cool.

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3. Spray 9-inch springform pan with vegetable oil spray. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt together in bowl. Whisk brown sugar, 1/3 cup granulated sugar, and eggs together in second bowl until thick and homogeneous, about 45 seconds. Slowly

SERIES FUNDED BY Add sour cream, vanilla, and 1/4 teaspoon almond extract; whisk until combined. Add flour mixture and whisk until just combined.

4. Transfer half of batter to prepared pan; using offset spatula, spread batter evenly to pan edges and smooth surface. Sprinkle crushed bread crumbs evenly over cooled peach chunks and gently toss to coat. Arrange peach chunks on batter in even layer, gently pressing peaches into batter. Gently spread remaining batter over peach chunks and smooth top. Arrange reserved peach wedges, slightly overlapped, in ring over surface of cake, placing smaller wedges in center. Stir together remaining 3 tablespoons granulated sugar and remaining 1/8 teaspoon almond extract in small bowl until sugar is moistened. Sprinkle sugar mixture evenly over top of cake.

5. Bake until center of cake is set and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 50 to 60 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack; cool 5 minutes. Run paring knife around sides of cake to loosen. Remove cake from pan and let cool completely, 2 to 3 hours. Cut into wedges and serve.

TECHNIQUE

PEACH CAKE RUN AMUCK

Things aren't always that peachy with most peach cakes.

PROBLEM: Fruit that isn't fruity

HOW TO SOLVE IT: Macerate peaches Unless you're working with the best farm-stand fruit, peaches are notoriously bland. To boost fruity taste, we macerate the peach wedges we've reserved for shingling on top of the cake in peach schnapps and a little sugar and lemon juice.

PROBLEM: Soggy fruit sinks to bottom

HOW TO SOLVE IT: Roast peaches Roasting the peach chunks destined for the batter concentrates their flavor and drives off moisture, so there's not as much to weigh them down or to flood the cake.

PROBLEM: Wet, gummy crumb

HOW TO SOLVE IT: Toss peaches with panko Tossing the roasted peach chunks with bread crumbs helps absorb any remaining sticky juices, ensuring a cake that's moist, not soggy.

TECHNIQUE

KEEP YOUR PEACHES OUT OF THE COLD

Keeping peaches in the fridge might seem like a good way to prolong their shelf life, but unless the fruit is ripe, the cold temperatures can turn their flesh mealy. Storing the fruit at or below 40 degrees deactivates an enzyme that breaks down its pectin during ripening. If this happens before the flesh is ripe, the pectin will remain intact and the flesh texture will be mealy. The lesson: Store peaches on the counter.

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