

Strawberry Cream Cake

Serves 8 to 10

You will need a cake pan with straight sides that are at least 2 inches high.

CAKE

1 1/4 cups (5 ounces) cake flour, plus extra for the pan
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon table salt
1 cup (7 ounces) sugar
5 large eggs (2 whole and 3 separated), at room temperature
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
2 tablespoons water
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

STRAWBERRY FILLING

2 lbs fresh strawberries (medium or large, about 2 quarts), washed, dried, and stemmed
4-6 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons kirsch
Pinch table salt

WHIPPED CREAM

8 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
1/2 cup (3 1/2 ounces) sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon table salt
2 cups heavy cream

1. FOR THE CAKE: Adjust an oven rack to the lower middle position and heat the oven to 325 degrees. Grease and flour a 9 inch wide by 2 inch high round cake pan or 9 inch spring form pan and line it with parchment paper. Whisk the flour, baking powder, salt, and all but 3 tablespoons of the sugar in a mixing bowl. Whisk in 2 whole eggs and 3 yolks (reserving the whites), the butter, water, and vanilla; whisk until smooth.

2. In the clean bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat the remaining 3 egg whites at medium low speed until frothy, 1 to 2 minutes. with the machine running gradually add the remaining 3 tablespoons sugar, increase the speed to medium high, and beat until soft peaks form, 60 to 90 seconds. Stir one third of the whites into the batter to lighten; add the remaining whites and gently fold into the batter until no white streaks remain. Transfer the batter to the prepared pan, smoothing the top with a rubber spatula. Lightly tap the pan against the countertop two or three times to settle the batter. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 30 to 40 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through the baking time. Cool the cake in the pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes, then invert onto the wire rack and peel off the parchment. Invert the cake again and cool completely on the rack, about 2 hours.

3. FOR THE STRAWBERRY FILLING: Halve 24 of the best looking berries and reserve. Quarter the remaining berries; toss with 4 to 6 tablespoons sugar (depending on the sweetness of the berries) in a medium bowl and let sit for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Strain the juices from

the berries and reserve (you should have about 1/2 cup). In a food processor, give the macerated berries 5 pulses (you should have about 1 1/2 cups). In a small saucepan over medium high heat, simmer the reserved juices and the kirsch until syrupy and reduced to about 3 tablespoons, 3 to 5 minutes. Pour the reduced syrup over the processed, macerated berries, add the salt and toss to combine. Set aside until the cake has cooled.

4. FOR THE WHIPPED CREAM: When the cake has cooled, place the cream cheese, sugar, vanilla, and salt in the clean bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Whisk at medium high speed until light and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes, scraping down the bowl with a rubber spatula as needed. Reduce the speed to low and add the heavy cream in a slow, steady stream; when almost fully combined, increase the speed to medium high and beat until the mixture holds stiff peaks, 2 to 2 1/2 minutes more, scraping down the bowl as needed (you should have about 4 1/2 cups).

5. TO ASSEMBLE THE CAKE: Line the edges of a cake platter with strips of parchment paper to keep the platter clean. Use a serrated knife to cut the cake horizontally into three even layers. Place the bottom layer on the platter and arrange a ring of 20 strawberry halves, cut sides down and stem ends facing out, around the perimeter of the cake layer. Pour one half of the puree berry mixture (about 3/4 cup) in the center, then spread to cover any exposed cake. Gently spread about one third of the whipped cream (about 1 1/2 cups) over the berry layer, leaving a 1/2 inch border from the edge. Place the middle cake layer on top and press down gently (the whipped cream layer should become flush with the cake edge). Repeat with 20 additional strawberry halves, the remaining berry mixture, and half of the remaining whipped cream; gently press the last cake layer on top. Spread the remaining whipped cream over the top; decorate with the remaining cut strawberries. Remove the parchment strips from the platter and serve.