



Gingerbread Layer Cake

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS

We wanted the dark, moist crumb and spicy bite of gingerbread in a tender, sophisticated layer cake. For fiery flavor, we added 2 tablespoons each of ground ginger and freshly grated ginger, and we enhanced that heat with both white pepper and cayenne pepper. Molasses and coffee contributed moisture, rich color, and pleasantly bitter notes that worked well with the spices and sweetness. Cocoa powder, an unexpected ingredient in gingerbread, added depth to the color and the flavor and, as it is mostly gluten-free starch and fat, it increased the cake’s tenderness. To avoid the challenge of slicing thicker layers in half horizontally, we baked four thin layers in two batches. Finally, a silky, fluffy, and not-too-sweet ermine frosting, made by beating softened butter into a cooked gel made with milk, sugar, and starch, showed off the spicy, tender cake to its best advantage.



INGREDIENTS	INSTRUCTIONS	SERVES 12 TO 16
FROSTING 1 ½ cups (10 1/2 ounces) sugar ¼ cup (1 1/4 ounces) all-purpose flour 3 tablespoons cornstarch	<p>Transferring the milk mixture to a wide bowl will ensure that it cools within 2 hours. A rasp-style grater makes quick work of grating the ginger. Use a 2-cup liquid measuring cup to portion the cake batter. Baking four thin cake layers two at a time eliminates the need to halve thicker layers. Do not use blackstrap molasses here, as it is too bitter.</p> <p>1. FOR THE FROSTING: Whisk sugar, flour, cornstarch,</p>	

- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1** $\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk
- 24** tablespoons (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 2** teaspoons vanilla extract
- CAKE**
- 1** $\frac{3}{4}$ cups (8 $\frac{3}{4}$ ounces) all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup ($\frac{3}{4}$ ounce) unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2** tablespoons ground ginger
- 1** $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons baking powder
- 1** teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground white pepper
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1** cup brewed coffee
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup molasses
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda
- 1** $\frac{1}{2}$ cups (10 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces) sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup vegetable oil

and salt together in medium saucepan. Slowly whisk in milk until smooth. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly and scraping corners of saucepan, until mixture is boiling and is very thick, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer milk mixture to wide bowl and let cool completely, about 2 hours.

2. FOR THE CAKE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 8-inch round cake pans and line pans with parchment paper. Whisk flour, cocoa, ground ginger, baking powder, cinnamon, salt, pepper, and cayenne together in large bowl. Whisk coffee, molasses, and baking soda in second large bowl until combined. Add sugar, oil, eggs, and fresh ginger to coffee mixture and whisk until smooth.

3. Whisk coffee mixture into flour mixture until smooth. Pour 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups batter into each prepared pan. Bake until toothpick inserted in center of cake comes out clean, 12 to 14 minutes. Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 10 minutes. Invert cakes onto wire rack and peel off parchment; reinvert cakes. Wipe pans clean with paper towels. Grease and flour pans and line with fresh parchment. Repeat baking and cooling process with remaining batter.

4. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Add cooled milk mixture and vanilla; mix on medium speed until combined, scraping down bowl if necessary. Increase speed to medium-high and beat until frosting is light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes.

5. Place 1 cake layer on platter or cardboard round. Using offset spatula, spread $\frac{3}{4}$ cup frosting evenly over top, right to edge of cake. Repeat stacking and frosting with 2 more cake layers and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups frosting. Place final cake layer on top and spread remaining frosting evenly over top and sides of cake. Garnish top of cake with crystallized ginger, if using.

- 3** large eggs, beaten
- 2** tablespoons finely grated fresh ginger
- ¼** cup chopped crystallized ginger (optional)

Refrigerate cake until frosting is set, about 30 minutes.

(Cake can be refrigerated, covered, for up to 2 days. Let cake come to room temperature before serving.)

Technique: Three Stages of Ermine Frosting

For this cake, we chose old-fashioned ermine frosting, which deserves a revival. This frosting gets its name from an unlikely source: a weasel with a shiny white coat. It relies on a water-in-oil emulsion for its silky texture. As butter is whipped into a milk-based gel, air is incorporated and the frosting gradually emulsifies (the water in the milk is dispersed as tiny droplets in the butterfat), looking curdled before becoming light and fluffy.



COOL COOKED GEL



COMBINE WITH BUTTER



WHIP UNTIL VELVETY