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## Raspberry Charlotte

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 16: French Bistro Favorites

### WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

The classic Charlotte Russe, a grand dessert consisting of a Bavarian cream encased in sponge cake, has fallen out of favor, partly because it's fussy to make, and partly because lean sponge cake and bouncy gelatinized mousse don't hold much appeal for modern cooks. In our recipe, we swap the sponge for a simple and quick-baking chiffon cake, which is tender and moist but sufficiently sturdy. Instead of basing our filling on a high-moisture crème anglaise, we use a more foolproof homemade raspberry curd lightened with whipped cream with just enough gelatin to give it structure, and we pack in a full pound of berries for bright fruit flavor. Finishing with a swirl of raspberry jam and fresh berries gives our charlotte visual appeal and an extra jolt of flavor.

### Serves 12 to 16

It is fine to use frozen raspberries in the filling. Thaw frozen berries completely before using and use any collected juices, too. It is important to measure the berries for the filling by weight. If you wish to garnish the top of the charlotte with berries, arrange 1 to 1 1/2 cups fresh berries (depending on size) around the edge of the assembled charlotte before refrigerating. For clean, neat slices, dip your knife in hot water and wipe it dry before each slice.

### INGREDIENTS

#### Filling

- 1 1/4**    teaspoons unflavored gelatin
- 2**        tablespoons water
- 3**        large egg yolks (reserve whites for cake)
- 2**        teaspoons cornstarch
- 1**        pound (3 1/4 cups) fresh or thawed frozen raspberries
- 2/3**      cup (4 2/3 ounces) sugar
- 2**        tablespoons unsalted butter
- Pinch salt
- 1 3/4**    cups heavy cream

#### Jam Mixture

- 1/2**      teaspoon unflavored gelatin
- 1**        tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/2**      cup seedless raspberry jam

#### Cake

- 2/3**      cup (2 2/3 ounces) cake flour
- 6**        tablespoons (2 2/3 ounces) sugar

- 3/4**    teaspoon baking powder
- 1/8**    teaspoon salt
- 1/4**    cup vegetable oil
- 1**    large egg plus 3 large egg whites (reserved from filling)
- 2**    tablespoons water
- 1**    teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4**    teaspoon cream of tartar

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. FOR THE FILLING:** Sprinkle gelatin over water in large bowl and set aside. Whisk egg yolks and cornstarch together in medium bowl until combined. Combine raspberries, sugar, butter, and salt in medium saucepan. Mash lightly with whisk and stir until no dry sugar remains. Cook over medium heat, whisking frequently, until mixture is simmering and raspberries are almost completely broken down, 4 to 6 minutes.

**2.** Remove raspberry mixture from heat and, whisking constantly, slowly add 1/2 cup raspberry mixture to yolk mixture to temper. Whisking constantly, return tempered yolk mixture to mixture in saucepan. Return saucepan to medium heat and cook, whisking constantly, until mixture thickens and bubbles, about 1 minute. Pour through fine-mesh strainer set over gelatin mixture and press on solids with back of ladle or rubber spatula until only seeds remain. Discard seeds and stir raspberry mixture until gelatin is dissolved. Set aside, stirring occasionally, until curd is slightly thickened and reaches room temperature, at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour 15 minutes.

**3. FOR THE JAM MIXTURE:** Sprinkle gelatin over lemon juice in small bowl and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Heat jam in microwave, whisking occasionally, until hot and fluid, 30 to 60 seconds. Add softened gelatin to jam and whisk until dissolved. Set aside.

**4. FOR THE CAKE:** Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease 8-inch round cake pan and 8-inch square baking pan, line with parchment paper, and lightly grease parchment. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt together in medium bowl. Whisk oil, whole egg, water, and vanilla into flour mixture until smooth batter forms.

**5.** Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip egg whites and cream of tartar on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip until soft peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer one-third of egg whites to batter; whisk gently until mixture is lightened. Using rubber spatula, gently fold remaining egg whites into batter.

**6.** Pour 1 cup batter into round pan and spread evenly. Pour remaining batter into square pan and spread evenly. Place pans on rimmed baking sheet and bake until cakes spring back when pressed lightly in center and surface is no longer sticky, 8 to 11 minutes (round cake, which is shallower, will be done before square cake). Cakes should not brown.

**7.** Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 5 minutes. Invert round cake onto wire rack. Carefully remove parchment, then reinvert onto second wire rack. Repeat with square cake. Let cool completely, at least 15 minutes.

**8.** Place round cake in center of serving platter. Spread with 2 tablespoons jam mixture. Place ring from 9-inch springform pan around cake, leaving equal space on all sides. Leave clasp of ring slightly loose. Using sharp chef's knife, trim 1/8 inch off all edges of square cake. Spread square cake with 2 tablespoons jam mixture. Cut cake in half. Cut each half lengthwise into two pieces to make four equal-size long strips. Place cake strips vertically around round cake, jam side in, taking care to nestle ends together neatly. Fasten clasp of springform ring.

**9.** Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip cream on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer one-third of whipped cream to curd; whisk gently until mixture is lightened. Using rubber spatula, gently fold in remaining cream until mixture is homogenous.

**10.** Pour filling into cake ring and spread evenly to edge. (Surface of filling will be above edge of cake.) Drizzle remaining jam mixture over surface of filling. Using knife, swirl jam through surface of filling, making marbled pattern. Refrigerate for at least 5 hours or up to

24 hours.

**11.** To unmold, run thin knife around edge of ring (just 1/2 inch down). Release ring and lift to remove. Let stand at room temperature for 20 minutes before slicing and serving.

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## TECHNIQUE

### THE MANY FORMS OF FLAWED CHARLOTTES

While the components of tender sponge cake and creamy fruit filling were a constant in all the charlotte recipes we tried, how the two came together varied. In the end, all the traditional recipes that we tried looked quite different, yet they all had serious flaws.

**DOESN'T BEAR FRUIT:** Lacks fruit flavor.



**ROLL ON BY:** Requires ultrafussy jelly roll cake.



**LEAK-PRONE:** Filling seeps out.



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## TECHNIQUE

### MAKING RASPBERRY CHARLOTTE

**MAKE CURD:** Prepare and strain raspberry curd. Set aside and stir occasionally.



**PREPARE JAM MIXTURE:** While curd cools, prepare jam and gelatin mixture and set aside.



**BAKE CAKES:** Bake cakes and let them cool completely.



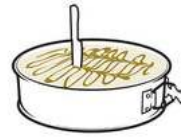
**PREPARE BASE AND SIDES:** Spread cakes with jam, cut square cake into strips, and assemble in pan.



**ADD FILLING:** Whip cream and fold into curd; then pour filling into cake-lined pan.



**SWIRL AND GARNISH:** Drizzle remaining jam mixture over cake and swirl. Garnish with berries.



## TECHNIQUE

### BYE-BYE BOUNCE

Traditionally, charlotte russe's filling is a Bavarian cream, in which a custard sauce known as *crème anglaise* gets combined with gelatin, whipped cream, and a fruit puree. The problem is that *crème anglaise* is so fluid that the filling requires a lot of gelatin to make it sliceable—which in turn creates an unappealing bouncy consistency. The solution? Instead of the usual *crème anglaise* as the main component of the filling, we turned to a fruit curd. The curd naturally has a more set—but not bouncy—consistency, so we were able to use less gelatin to get the necessary texture.

### UH-OH: JELL-O

Most fillings are overloaded with gelatin, giving them an unappealing bouncy texture.



## TECHNIQUE

### PIECE(S) OF CAKE

Surrounding a charlotte's creamy filling with sponge cake ladyfingers, as is often depicted in classic representations of this old-world dessert, certainly seems elegant. But in reality, the ladyfingers don't work that well—the filling seeps between the gaps, plus they taste lean and their texture is chewy. In our recipe, we swap the sponge for a more tender and rich chiffon cake. We bake part of it in a round cake pan and the rest in a square pan. The round cake serves as the base, while we cut the square cake into strips that fit snugly around its perimeter.

**SPRINGFORM PAN:** The charlotte is constructed inside the ring of the springform pan, right on the serving platter.



**A SQUARE FOR THE SIDES:** An 8-inch square cake is cut into four strips and used to line the sides of the pan.



**JAM ON THE INSIDE:** A mixture of jam, gelatin, and lemon juice is spread onto the cakes before assembly.

**A ROUND BASE:** A thin 8-inch round cake serves as the bottom of our charlotte.



