



Classic Birthday Cake

Birthdays: A time for singing, balloons, and (of course) cake. Some of us have a dedicated favorite, but perhaps no cake is more universally topped with candles than the classic yellow cake with chocolate frosting.

Despite its ubiquity in bakeries nationwide (and in mix form on grocery store shelves), great homemade versions of this chocolate-on-vanilla duo are somewhat elusive. But after months of testing, we think we've nailed it. This golden-hued, moist, tender vanilla cake with its layers of rich chocolate frosting is so good that we've declared it our **2019 Recipe of the Year**. Join us in celebrating this classic American cake and the birthdays it commemorates.

Baking gluten-free? For great results, substitute King Arthur Gluten Free Measure for Measure Flour for the all-purpose flour in this recipe; for details, see "tips," below.

Cake

- 2 cups King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour OR Gluten Free Measure for Measure Flour
- 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 4 large eggs
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1/8 teaspoon almond extract; optional, for enhanced flavor
- 1 cup milk (whole milk preferred)
- 4 tablespoons (1/4 cup) butter, cut into pats
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil

Frosting

- 1 1/4 cups natural cocoa powder (sifted if lumpy)
- 1 cup + 3 cups confectioners' sugar (sifted if lumpy)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup hot water
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 16 tablespoons (1 cup) butter, softened
- *See "tips," below for an alternative to natural cocoa.

Directions

1. **To make the cake:** Preheat the oven to 325°F with a rack in the center. Lightly grease two 8" x 2" or 9" x 2" round cake pans; for extra protection against sticking, line the bottom of the pans with parchment rounds (you can cut these yourself or use precut 8" or 9" rounds), and grease the parchment. If your 8" pans aren't at least 2" deep, use 9" pans.
2. Weigh your flour; you'll find its weight by toggling to "grams" at the top of the ingredient section above. Or measure it by gently spooning it into a cup, then sweeping off any excess.
3. In a small bowl, combine the flour, salt, and baking powder. Set aside.
4. In a large mixing bowl, either using an electric hand mixer or a stand mixer with whisk attachment, beat the eggs, sugar, vanilla, and almond extract, if using, until thickened and light gold in color, about 2 minutes at medium-high speed. If your stand mixer doesn't have a whisk attachment, beat for 5 minutes using the paddle attachment. The batter should fall in thick ribbons from the beaters, whisk, or paddle.



AT A GLANCE

PREP
60 mins.

BAKE
26 mins. to 42 mins.

TOTAL
3 hrs 1 mins.

YIELD
one 8" or 9" two-layer cake

WE'RE HERE TO HELP



BAKER'S HOTLINE

call | email | chat

855-371-BAKE (2253)

KINGARTHURFLOUR.COM/CONTACT

5. Add the dry ingredients to the mixture in the bowl and mix — by hand or on low speed of a mixer — just enough to combine. Scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl, then mix again briefly, to fully incorporate any residual flour or sticky bits.
6. In a saucepan set over medium heat or in the microwave, bring the milk just to a simmer. Remove the pan from the heat and add the butter and oil, stirring by hand until the butter has melted.
7. Slowly mix the hot milk-butter-oil mixture into the batter, stirring on low speed of a mixer until everything is well combined. Scrape the bowl and mix briefly, just until smooth.
8. Divide the batter evenly between the two pans. You'll use about 2 3/4 cups (about 580g) in each.
9. Bake the cakes until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean and the top feels set, 26 to 30 minutes for two 9" pans, or 38 to 42 minutes for two 8" pans; a digital thermometer inserted into the center of the cakes should read 205°F. Remove the cakes from the oven, carefully loosen the edges, and allow them to cool for 15 minutes in the pans. Then turn them out of the pans and transfer them to a rack, right-side up, to cool to room temperature.
10. **To make the frosting:** In a large mixing bowl or the bowl of your stand mixer, stir together - by hand or mixer - the cocoa powder, 1 cup (113g) of the confectioners' sugar, and the salt. Stir in the water and vanilla, scraping the bowl if necessary.
11. Add the butter and remaining confectioners' sugar, stirring to combine. Using an electric hand mixer or a stand mixer with paddle attachment, beat the frosting at medium-high speed for 1 to 2 minutes, until lightened in color and fluffy, stopping halfway through to scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl.
12. **To assemble the cake:** Place one of the cake layers on a serving plate; tuck pieces of waxed or parchment paper underneath the edge of the cake to keep the plate clean. Spread the bottom layer with about 1 cup of frosting, enough to make a 1/4" to 1/2"-thick layer. Center the second layer bottom-side up (for a flat top) over the frosted layer and press gently to set it in place.
13. If your schedule permits, place the cake in the refrigerator or freezer, uncovered, for at least 30 minutes (or up to 2 hours) to firm it up. This will make the layers less likely to slide around as you work, and the cake won't shed crumbs as you frost. If you're pressed for time, you can skip this step.
14. **To finish the cake:** For the best-looking cake, do the frosting in two steps. First, spread a very thin layer of frosting around the sides and across the top; this is called a crumb coat. You should be able to see the cake through the frosting in spots, it's that thin. Refrigerate the cake for 20 minutes to let this layer set. Again, skip this step if time is a factor.
15. Once the cake is chilled, use the remaining frosting to coat it thoroughly and evenly. If you have any leftover frosting, you can use it to pipe decorations on the top and/or around the base.
16. Store the cake, covered, at room temperature, or in the refrigerator if your kitchen is hot. Let it come to room temperature before serving.
17. **Storage information:** The cake will keep at room temperature, covered with a cake cover, for up to three days; in the refrigerator, covered, for up to one week, or in the freezer, well wrapped, for up to one month.

Tips from our bakers

- **To make this cake gluten-free,** substitute King Arthur Gluten Free Measure for Measure Flour 1:1 for the all-purpose flour. Follow the directions as written for preparing the cake batter, and bake the cakes until the tops are set and a cake tester inserted into the center of one comes out clean, about 36 to 40 minutes for two 9" pans or 43 to 47 minutes for two 8" pans; a digital thermometer inserted into the center of the cakes should read 205°F.
- While we typically call for unsalted butter in our recipes, we find that **this cake tastes just fine using either salted or unsalted butter.**

- **Dutch-process cocoa can be substituted for the natural cocoa** in the frosting if it's what you have in your pantry, or if you prefer a more robust, bittersweet chocolate flavor.
- **If you prefer a lighter chocolate frosting**, use just 1 cup (85g) of cocoa powder instead of 1 1/4 cups (106g). This slight change will result in a mellower flavored frosting as some of our fellow bakers have requested.
- **If you prefer a three-layer cake**, or your 8" pans aren't at least 2" deep, divide the batter into thirds and use three pans. If you only have two pans, bake the third cake in a second batch, reusing one of the cooled, cleaned, and newly greased pans. Bake the cakes for 22 to 27 minutes.
- **Make ahead tips:** Cake layers and frosting can be made up to three days ahead, refrigerated, and the cake assembled the day you wish to serve it. For storing, wrap the layers in plastic and transfer the frosting to an airtight container, or tightly cover the bowl in which you made it. When you're ready to assemble the cake, remove the frosting from the fridge and warm at room temperature until soft enough to spread easily. The whole cake (assembled and decorated) can be stored in the freezer for up to a month.