



Baked Alaska

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 17: Baked Alaska Showstopper

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Plenty of insulation is the key to a Baked Alaska that is toasty on the outside but still firm at the center. To this end, most recipes cover the ice cream in mountains of billowy meringue, which is effective but makes the dessert too sweet.

Most recipes use cake only as a base, but we use it to encase the ice cream entirely, thereby decreasing the amount of meringue by more than one-third without sacrificing heat resistance. To further improve the balance, we add cocoa to our cake, boosting flavor without adding sweetness.

Rather than packing softened ice cream into a specifically shaped mold (refrozen ice cream can be icy, and it can be hard to match cake pans and bowls), we simply cut the cardboard off two pints of firm ice cream and stick them together to form the core of our dessert. We opt for coffee ice cream, which complements the flavor of the cake and the sweetness of the meringue perfectly.

Serves 8

Coffee ice cream provides the best contrast with sweet meringue in this recipe, but other flavors may be substituted, if desired. A high-quality ice cream such as Häagen-Dazs works best because it is slower to melt. To ensure the proper texture when serving, it is necessary to remove the cake from the freezer before making the meringue. This recipe leaves just enough leftover cake and ice cream to make an additional for-two version (see related content).

INGREDIENTS

- 2 containers (1-pint) coffee ice cream

Cake

- 1 cup (4 ounces) cake flour
- 1/3 cup (1 ounce) unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2/3 cup (4 2/3 ounces) sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 6 tablespoons water
- 4 large eggs, separated

Meringue

- 3/4 cup (5 1/4 ounces) sugar
- 1/3 cup light corn syrup
- 3 large egg whites
- 2 tablespoons water

INSTRUCTIONS 1/2 cup salt 1/2 cup vanilla extract

1. Lay 12-inch square sheet of plastic wrap on counter and remove lids from ice cream. Use scissors to cut cardboard tubs from top to bottom. Peel away cardboard and discard. Place ice cream blocks on their sides in center of plastic with wider ends facing each other. Grasp each side of plastic and firmly press blocks together to form barrel shape. Wrap plastic tightly around ice cream and roll briefly on counter to form uniform cylinder. Place cylinder, standing on end, in freezer until completely solid, at least 1 hour.
2. **FOR THE CAKE:** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease 18 by 13-inch rimmed baking sheet, line with parchment paper, and lightly grease parchment. Whisk flour, cocoa, 1/3 cup sugar, baking powder, and salt together in large bowl. Whisk oil, water, and egg yolks into flour mixture until smooth batter forms.
3. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip egg whites on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium high and whip whites to soft, billowy mounds, about 1 minute. Gradually add remaining 1/3 cup sugar and whip until glossy, soft peaks form, 1 to 2 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.
4. Pour batter into prepared sheet; spread evenly. Bake until cake springs back when pressed lightly in center, 10 to 13 minutes. Transfer cake to wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes. Run knife around edge of sheet, then invert cake onto wire rack. Carefully remove parchment, then reinvert cake onto second wire rack. Let cool completely, at least 15 minutes.
5. Transfer cake to cutting board with long side of rectangle parallel to edge of counter. Using serrated knife, trim 1/2 inch off left side of cake and discard. Using ruler, measure 4 1/2 inches from cut edge and make mark with knife. Using mark as guide, cut 4 1/2-inch rectangle from cake. Trim piece to create 4 1/2 by 11-inch rectangle and set aside. (Depending on pan size and how much cake has shrunk during baking, it may not be necessary to trim piece to measure 11 inches.) Measure 4 inches from new cut edge and make mark. Using mark as guide, cut 4-inch rectangle from cake. Trim piece to create 4 by 10-inch rectangle, wrap rectangle in plastic, and set aside. Cut 3 1/2-inch round from remaining cake and set aside (biscuit cutter works well). Save scraps for Bonus Baked Alaska.
6. Unwrap ice cream. Trim cylinder to 4 1/2 inches in length and return remainder to freezer for Bonus Baked Alaska. Place ice cream cylinder on 4 1/2 by 11-inch cake rectangle and wrap cake around ice cream. (Cake may crack slightly.) Place cake circle on one end of cylinder. Wrap entire cylinder tightly in plastic. Place cylinder, standing on cake-covered end, in freezer until cake is firm, at least 30 minutes.
7. Unwrap cylinder and place on cutting board, standing on cake-covered end, and cut in half lengthwise. Unwrap reserved 4 by 10-inch cake rectangle and place halves on top, ice cream side down, with open ends meeting in middle. Wrap tightly with plastic and press ends gently to close gap between halves. Return to freezer for at least 2 hours and up to 2 weeks.
8. **FOR THE MERINGUE:** Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Spray wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet with vegetable oil spray. Unwrap cake and place on rack. Combine sugar, corn syrup, egg whites, water, and salt in bowl of stand mixer; place bowl over saucepan filled with 1 inch simmering water, making sure that water does not touch bottom of bowl. Whisking gently but constantly, heat until sugar is dissolved and mixture registers 160 degrees, 5 to 8 minutes.
9. Place bowl in stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment. Beat mixture on medium speed until bowl is only slightly warm to touch, about 5 minutes. Increase speed to high and beat until mixture begins to lose its gloss and forms stiff peaks, about 5 minutes. Add vanilla and beat until combined.
10. Using offset spatula, spread meringue over top and sides of cake, avoiding getting meringue on rack. Use back of spoon to create peaks all over meringue.
11. Bake until browned and crisp, about 5 minutes. Run offset spatula or thin knife under dessert to loosen from rack, then use two spatulas to transfer to serving platter. To slice, dip sharp knife in very hot water and wipe dry after each cut. Serve immediately.

TECHNIQUE**BONUS BAKED ALASKA**

Serves Two

Our Baked Alaska recipe leaves just enough leftover cake and ice cream to make an additional for-two version. (Following step 10, spread meringue over cake and bake as directed.

BONUS BAKED ALASKA

FOR THE CAKE: From the remaining cake, cut two 3 1/3-inch rounds and one 2- by 11-inch strip. Place the leftover ice cream disc on top of one cake round. Wrap the strip of cake around the sides of the disc. Place the remaining cake round on top, wrap tightly in plastic, and freeze.



TECHNIQUE

PERFECTING THE THREE COMPONENTS

Conventional recipes for Baked Alaska often look impressive but tend to be achingly sweet and hard to slice neatly. We reengineered all three components, including wrapping the entire ice cream core in cake, which allowed us to use less meringue, for a dessert that looks and tastes great.

CAKE

All cakes insulated the ice cream from heat to varying degrees; genoise and chiffon cakes were the most effective because they contain more insulating air bubbles that keep the ice cream colder. Both chiffon and genoise were also resilient enough to be wrapped around the ice cream, but we chose chiffon for its slightly richer flavor and more tender texture.

POUND CAKE: Too dense to be effective



BROWNIE: Also not a great insulator



CHIFFON: Airy, moderately rich, resilient



GENOISE: Airy but too lean



TECHNIQUE

MERINGUE

We wanted a creamy meringue that was easy to make. After experimenting with the three classic types, we chose a Swiss meringue and made it less cloying by replacing some of the sugar with corn syrup.

FRENCH: Easy to make, but grainy and not food-safe



ITALIAN: Creamy and smooth, but requires fussy hot syrup



SWISS: Creamy, smooth, and food-safe when cooked to 160 degrees



TECHNIQUE

ICE CREAM

Our goal was a complex-tasting, not-too-sweet frozen core.

VANILLA ICE CREAM: Rich and creamy but too sweet



RASPBERRY SORBET: Bright-tasting but too lean



COFFEE ICE CREAM: Creamy with a hint of bitterness



TECHNIQUE

THERMAL CONNECTION

Accounts vary, but many sources attribute the invention of Baked Alaska to Count von Rumford, an 18th-century physicist and pioneer of thermodynamics who is also credited with the invention of the double boiler, the modern kitchen range, and—most fittingly— thermal underwear. A popular version of the story is that Rumford's original name for the dessert, *omelette surprise*, changed decades later when chef Charles Ranhofer of Delmonico's in New York City dubbed it Baked Alaska in celebration of the United States' acquisition of the territory in 1867.

TECHNIQUE

ENGINEERING A NEW BAKED ALASKA

1. Cut ice cream tubs from top to bottom and peel away cardboard.



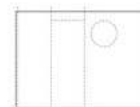
Place blocks on plastic wrap on their sides with wider ends facing each other.



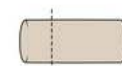
2. Wrap plastic tightly around ice cream and roll on counter to form even cylinder. Place in freezer, standing on end, for 1 hour.



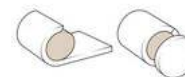
3. Trim 1/4 inch off left side of cake. Cut 4 1/2 by 11-inch rectangle, 4 by 10-inch rectangle, and 3 1/2-inch round. Save scraps for Bonus Baked Alaska.



4. Unwrap ice cream and trim cylinder to 4 1/2 inches in length. Return remainder to freezer.



5. Place ice cream on 4 1/2 by 11-inch rectangle and wrap cake around ice cream. Place cake circle on one end of cylinder. Wrap in plastic. Freeze, standing on cake-covered end, for 30 minutes.



6. Unwrap cylinder, stand on cake-covered end, and cut in half lengthwise. Place halves on 4 by 10-inch rectangle, ice cream side down, with open ends meeting in middle.

