Best Almond Cake

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 15: Almond Cake and British Scones

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:
To create an Almond Cake with a great appearance and superior almond flavor, we used finely ground almonds, which had a more pronounced almond flavor than almond paste, which is used in most cake recipes. And to create a light cake with a moist open crumb, we used the protein structure of eggs in place of the denser gluten structure created from using all-purpose flour.

Serves 8 to 10

If you can't find blanched sliced almonds, grind slivered almonds for the batter and use unblanched sliced almonds for the topping. Serve plain or with Orange Crème Fraîche (see related content).

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2	cups plus 1/3 cup blanched sliced almonds, toasted
3/4	cup (3 3/4 ounces) all-purpose flour
3/4	teaspoon salt
1/4	teaspoon baking powder
1/8	teaspoon baking soda
4	large eggs
1 1/4	cups (8 3/4 ounces) plus 2 tablespoons sugar
1	tablespoon plus 1/2 teaspoon grated lemon zest (2 lemons)
3/4	teaspoon almond extract
5	tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
1/3	cup vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Grease 9-inch round cake pan and line with parchment paper. Pulse 1½ cups almonds, flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda in food processor until almonds are finely ground, 5 to 10 pulses. Transfer almond mixture to bowl.

2. Process eggs, 1 1/4 cups sugar, 1 tablespoon lemon zest, and almond extract in now-empty processor until very pale yellow, about 2 minutes. With processor running, add melted butter and oil in steady stream, until incorporated. Add almond mixture and pulse to combine, 4 to 5 pulses. Transfer batter to prepared pan.

3. Using your fingers, combine remaining 2 tablespoons sugar and remaining 1/2 teaspoon lemon zest in small bowl until fragrant, 5 to 10 seconds. Sprinkle top of cake evenly with remaining 1/3 cup almonds followed by sugar-zest mixture.

4. Bake until center of cake is set and bounces back when gently pressed and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 55 to 65 minutes, rotating pan after 40 minutes. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 15 minutes. Run paring knife around sides of pan. Invert cake onto greased wire rack, discard parchment, and reinvert cake onto second wire rack. Let cake cool, about 2 hours. Cut into wedges and serve. (Store cake in plastic wrap at room temperature for up to 3 days.)

TECHNIQUE

HOW WE GOT THE BEST ALMOND FLAVOR—AND CAKE TEXTURE

For a rich, nutty taste and a consistency that's not too dense, we toast blanched almonds (we dislike the slight bitterness imparted by skin-on almonds) to deepen their flavor. Then we grind them in the food processor. The ground nuts give the crumb an open, rustic texture.

START WITH BLANCHED ALMONDS

TOAST UNTIL GOLDEN BROWN

GRIND WITH FLOUR, SALT, AND LEAVENERS

TECHNIQUE

EGG FOAMS: MIXER VERSUS FOOD PROCESSOR

The goal when mixing most cake batters is to incorporate a lot of air into the eggs so that the cake will bake up light and tall, and a mixer is usually the best tool to get the job done. For our Best Almond Cake, however, we wanted a flat, level top; just a moderate rise; and a texture that was neither too fluffy nor too dense. Ditching the mixer in favor of a food processor did the trick. Here's why: When eggs and sugar are whipped in a mixer, the whisk gently unfolds the protein strands in the eggs while incorporating lots of air, producing a foam with a strong network that holds on to that air. The outcome? A tall, well-risen, domed cake. A food processor, with its high rpm and very sharp blade, similarly unravels the eggs' protein strands and incorporates air, but it also damages some strands along the way. The result is just what we were after: a flatter, slightly denser cake.

MIXER: Tall and domed.

FOOD PROCESSOR: Perfectly flat.