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San Jose Burnt Almond Cake

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Amy

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A **Burnt Almond Cake** is a rustic-looking layer cake, filled with almond pastry cream, slathered in the BEST Swiss meringue buttercream frosting, then covered in candied almonds. It's famous in San Jose and is a favorite for those of us from the California Bay Area.

I get so many rave reviews from people who love this burnt almond cake, that I've adapted it into **Burnt Almond Cupcakes** per my San Jose born-and-raised husband's request!





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There are two bakeries in San Jose, California that are well-known for the same burnt almond cake. Since my husband grew up in San Jose, his family's loyalty is to Dick's bakery. But there is a strong following for Peter's Bakery, which is the other main contender for burnt almond cake supremacy in this sprawling Silicon Valley city.

I'm pretty certain that Dick's burnt almond cake was served the first time I met my husband's grandma at her house, which was pretty much just down the street and around the corner from Dick's Bakery.

I always loved Grandma Nash's cooking and have shared some of my favorite recipes that she passed on like her [English toffee](#), [poppyseed dressing](#), and [creamy apricot pork chops](#).

And she loved this cake, so it's no surprise that I would enjoy burnt almond cake as well.

But I'm convinced that both bakeries just use packaged commercial cake and pudding mixes to slap hundreds of these beloved desserts together each week for their customers.

Which is still tasty and fine, but since I'm a Bay Area transplant and don't hold a strong loyalty to either bakery's version of this cake, I'm going to state pretty unequivocally that a homemade burnt almond cake is superior to either bakery's version.

Which is great news for anyone NOT living in the California Bay Area because it means you can make one for yourself at home and enjoy a slice of this wonderful, burnt almond cake!

It's part of my lineup of California-inspired recipes in the ***American Eats*** series I have been doing on here where I feature some of the most iconic foods and flavors of each state in the USA, one state at a time.

Another key reason for including this cake in my California recipe collection is that it highlights another of California's major crops – almonds!

According to **this L.A. Times article from 2014**, California produces 82% of all the almonds IN THE WORLD, with 70% of California's almonds being shipped overseas! Kind of amazing, right?





What is Burnt Almond Cake?

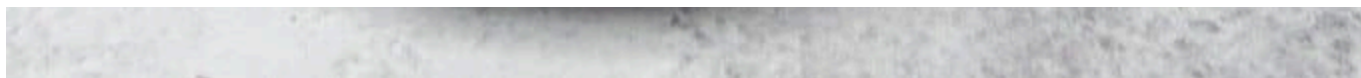
I'm not sure why it's called burnt almond cake when really the almonds are just toasted. There is no actual burning involved.

It's the same situation with my favorite **burnt almond fudge ice cream**. I think it must just be an old-fashioned way of describing well-toasted almonds.

In this case, they are sliced almonds that are toasted in the oven just until they start to turn brown and smell nutty, then candied with a quick caramel sauce. The flavor of a burnt almond cake has a timeless quality, even if you have never tried it before.

The cake itself is a tender white cake with a little almond extract replacing some of the vanilla for flavoring. It's based off of my favorite white cake recipe that I use in my **Day of the Dead cake** as well.





Two 8-inch round cakes are sliced in half horizontally to create the four layers, which is a departure from the classic San Jose versions but means more layers of wonderful almond pastry cream can be slathered between the soft white cake layers.

Then I used a Swiss meringue buttercream frosting to cover the outside of the cake before pressing the candied almonds all over to cover as much of the surface as possible. It gets a little messy, but there isn't any real technique involved and there is the upside that nobody will notice imperfections in your frosting technique since almonds will give the cake a rustic look anyway.

I think Swiss meringue buttercream is perfect for this cake because it is light and silky, and less thick and sweet than classic American buttercream. While this burnt almond cake recipe has a few different components that might make it look intimidating, it's really not that bad, especially since most everything can be made in advance.





How do you make San Jose Burnt Almond Cake?

One of my favorite things about making this burnt almond cake is that there are no fancy piping or decorating techniques involved. But there are a few steps involved.

First make the white almond cake layers. I modified the baking time of my favorite white cake recipe by increasing it up to 30-35 minutes to make two 8-inch round layers instead of 3.

Then I leveled the tops (you can use the scraps for snacking or making cake pops) and sliced the layers horizontally to get 4 thinner cake layers.

You could also just bake the cake in 3 separate pans for the original amount of time, which is 20-25 minutes, and skip the step of slicing the cake into thinner layers, but that means less space for the pastry cream. And trust me, the more pastry cream the better.

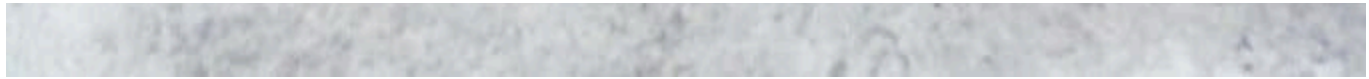
The almond pastry cream comes from my [French fruit tart recipe](#) and it's so easy to make! It's a classic French pastry cream, except flavored with a little almond extract and it's silky smooth and keeps the cake nice and moist without making it soggy inside.

The pastry cream will need to chill for 3 hours though, so give yourself enough time for that before attempting to assemble the cake.

I pipe a border of Swiss meringue buttercream around the outer edge of each cake layer when assembling the cake to hold in the pastry cream as additional layers get stacked on top.

This is easily done just by scooping some of the buttercream into a ziptight bag and snipping off one end to create a fairly wide tip then piping a circle. It doesn't need to look pretty since no one will ever see, but it will help act as a barrier so your pastry cream doesn't squish out under the weight of the top layers.





I use a full batch of pastry cream to fill this four-layer cake, then cover the outside with the fluffiest, almond flavored Swiss meringue buttercream.

Unlike American buttercream, which can get a little crusty when left out, Swiss meringue buttercream stays soft so there isn't a huge rush to get the candied almonds pressed into the top and sides of the cake.

But do make sure they have cooled completely since warm candied almonds would melt the butter in the buttercream.

How do you make Swiss Meringue Buttercream?

Swiss meringue buttercream is made by whisking egg whites and granulated sugar (not powdered sugar) in a double boiler until the sugar dissolves and the egg whites are hot. Then it gets whipped up into a beautiful glossy meringue until the mixture has completely cooled.

This is the longest part of the process and it's super helpful to have a stand mixer here because this can be anywhere from 10-20 minutes of beating with the whisk attachment until the meringue is no longer warm to the touch.

Cubed room temperature butter is then gradually added to the meringue, and beaten in to create the fluffiest, most wonderful frosting that can be flavored in lots of different ways. In this case, I used almond extract for even more almond flavor in this burnt almond cake.

If your swiss meringue buttercream seems too runny after adding in all the butter, chances are the meringue was still too warm. No worries – just pop the bowl in the refrigerator for 10-20 minutes to chill the frosting and firm things up just a bit, then pull it out and whip it up again.

If you would like an even more in depth tutorial on how to make Swiss meringue buttercream, I really like this one from [Sugar Hero](#).

If you plan to make this part in advance, keep the finished Swiss meringue buttercream in an airtight container in refrigerator for up to one week or in the freezer for up to 2 months. Let come to room temperature and rewhip in the mixer with the paddle attachment before using it to frost the cake. But it really is best made fresh, in my opinion.





Tips for Burnt Almond Cake

- Since there are four components to this cake, I recommend making the cake layers and pastry cream in advance. The cake layers can be cooled completely, then wrapped in two layers of plastic wrap and frozen for up to two weeks before you are ready to assemble the cake. The pastry cream can be refrigerated for up to a week.
- The Swiss meringue buttercream can be made a day in advance and left to sit out overnight. It can also be made farther in advance, then refrigerated for up to one week or even frozen for up to 2 months, then allowed to come up to room temperature before whipping it again to get it back to a smooth, spreadable consistency. But I personally find it easiest to make this part of the recipe closer to when I want to assemble the burnt almond cake.
- Assemble the cake over a large baking sheet to catch the candied almonds that will fall off when you are pressing them into the sides of the cake. I like to just cup some in my hand, then press them into the frosted sides of the cake, going back and filling in gaps with more candied almonds to finish the look.
- The cake is best the day it is assembled as the candied almonds tend to get a little sticky on Day 2. It's still completely delicious one days 2 and 3 (if it lasts that long), but the change in the texture of the almonds is something to be aware of.



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Burnt Almond Cake

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Amy Nash

PREP TIME	1 hr 30 mins	COURSE	Dessert
COOK TIME	35 mins	CUISINE	American
ADDITIONAL TIME	3 hrs	SERVINGS	14 people
TOTAL TIME	5 hrs 5 mins		

A Burnt Almond Cake is a rustic-looking layer cake, filled with almond pastry cream, slathered in the BEST Swiss meringue buttercream frosting, then covered in candied almonds. It’s famous in San Jose and is a favorite for those of us from the California Bay Area.

INGREDIENTS

1	2	3
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Vanilla Almond Cake

- ☐ 4 egg whites room temperature
- ☐ 1 large egg room temperature
- ☐ 1 cup buttermilk room temperature
- ☐ 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- ☐ 1 1/2 teaspoons almond extract
- ☐ 2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- ☐ 7 Tablespoons cornstarch
- ☐ 1 3/4 cups granulated sugar
- ☐ 1 1/2 Tablespoons baking powder
- ☐ 3/4 teaspoon salt
- ☐ 12 Tablespoons butter cubed, room temperature

Almond Pastry Cream

- ☐ 1 1/2 cups whole milk
- ☐ 1/2 cup heavy cream
- ☐ 1/2 cup sugar divided
- ☐ Pinch of salt
- ☐ 3 Tablespoons cornstarch
- ☐ 5 egg yolks
- ☐ 2 Tablespoons butter cubed
- ☐ 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ☐ 1/2 teaspoon almond extract

Swiss Meringue Buttercream

- ☐ 5 egg whites room temperature
- ☐ 1 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- ☐ 1 1/2 cups butter room temperature, cubed
- ☐ 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ☐ 1 teaspoon almond extract
- ☐ 1/4 teaspoon salt

Caramelized Almonds

- ☐ 1 1/2 cups 6 ounces sliced almonds
- ☐ 2 Tablespoons water
- ☐ 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- ☐ 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice
- ☐ 1/2 teaspoon salt
- ☐ 1 Tablespoon butter

Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark

INSTRUCTIONS

Vanilla Almond Cake

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lin the bottoms of two 8-inch round baking pans with parchment paper and spray with nonstick cooking spray. In a medium bowl, whisk together the egg whites (save the yolks for the pastry cream!), egg, buttermilk, vanilla, and almond extract, then set aside.
- 2 In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, combine the flour, cornstarch, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Add the butter one piece at a time, while the mixer is running on low speed, waiting 10 seconds between each addition.
- 3 Once all the butter is added, pour in the buttermilk and egg mixture in 3 batches, mixing on medium-low speed between each addition for about 1 minute and scraping the sides of the bowl. The batter should be light and fluffy. Once all of the liquid has been added, scrape the bottom and sides of the bowl well and mix for another 20 to 30 seconds.
- 4 Divide the batter evenly between the pans, then bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until a cake tester or toothpick inserted in the middle of the cakes comes out clean with just a few crumbs attached. Cool for 10 minutes before inverting the cakes onto cooling racks and removing the parchment paper from the bottoms. Flip the cakes back over and cool completely on the wire racks.
- 5 Level the tops of the cakes, then slice in half horizontally and wrap each cake layer with plastic wrap and chilling in the freezer for at least an hour before frosting.

Almond Pastry Cream

- 1 In a medium sauce pan over medium-high heat, combine the milk, cream, and half of the sugar, stirring occasionally until the liquid comes to a simmer. Meanwhile, whisk together

- the remaining sugar, salt, cornstarch, and egg yolks in a medium bowl until light and creamy.
- 2 Once the milk mixture is hot, slowly whisk 1 cup of the hot liquid into the egg mixture to temper the yolks. Pour the tempered egg mixture back into the saucepan with the hot milk mixture and reduce the heat to medium, continuing to cook while whisking constantly for about 30-60 seconds, until thickened and a few bubbles burst on the surface.
 - 3 Remove the pastry cream from the heat and whisk in the butter, vanilla, and almond extract, then transfer to a bowl and cover with a piece of plastic wrap placed directly onto the surface of the pastry cream so a skin doesn't form. Refrigerate until chilled and firm, about 3 hours.

Swiss Meringue Buttercream

- 1 Combine the egg whites and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer set over a pan of simmering water. Be careful not to let the bowl touch the water. Whisk until sugar is dissolved and the egg whites are hot (between 140-160 degrees F is enough to kill any bacteria in the egg whites and dissolve the sugar).
- 2 Transfer the bowl on the stand mixer and whip the sugar and egg whites on high using the whisk attachment until thick and glossy, forming stiff peak and the bowl feels room temperature to the touch, which can take anywhere from 10-20 minutes. The stiff peaks will form fairly quickly, but just let the mixer keep working to help bring the temperature of the meringue down. This can be done with a hand mixer, but it's much easier with a stand version.
- 3 Once the bowl is no longer warm to the touch, decrease the speed to medium-low and add the butter, 1 tablespoon at a time, beating until smooth after each addition. Once all of the butter has been beaten in to the meringue, mix in the vanilla and almond extracts and salt.
- 4 If the frosting looks curdled or clumpy, increase the mixer speed to medium-high and beat until smooth. Or if the frosting is too runny and thin, stick it in the fridge for 10 minutes to help it set up a bit, then whip it again. This is a problem I've encountered because I didn't let my meringue cool down enough before adding the butter, but the fridge fix worked great.

Caramelized Almonds

- 1 Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Cover a baking sheet with foil and spray it with nonstick cooking spray. Pour the nuts onto the baking sheet in an even layer and toast them in the oven while you prepare the caramel. Be careful to watch them so they don't actually burn. They should just start to turn a light, toasty brown and smell nutty.
- 2 Combine the water, sugar, lemon juice, and salt in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring just until the sugar dissolves. Insert a **candy thermometer** (*affiliate link*) and let the

mixture boil without stirring until it reaches 310 degrees F, then remove from the heat and stir in the butter and toasted almonds immediately.

- 3 Pour the caramelized nuts back onto the foil-lined baking sheet and use a spatula to spread them into as thin a layer as possible, trying not to have too many overlapping nuts. Cool completely, then break apart, chopping large chunks if necessary.

Assembling the Burnt Almond Cake

- 1 Place the bottom layer of cake on a cake stand and pipe a ring of the Swiss meringue buttercream around the edge to create a barrier for holding in the pastry cream. Scoop $\frac{1}{3}$ of the pastry cream onto the cake and spread it out to fill in the space inside the ring of buttercream. Repeat with the remaining cake and pastry cream to create a 4-layer cake with 3 layers of pastry cream.
- 2 Frost the top and sides of the cake with the remaining Swiss meringue buttercream. Press the almonds into the sides of the cake, letting excess almonds fall back onto the baking sheet below so they can be reused on top. Fill in gaps as needed with the almonds that fell off until the sides and top of the cake are covered.

NOTES

You can make the cake, pastry cream, and buttercream in advance, then make the caramelized almonds and assemble the cake the day you want to serve it.

If you are making the cake more than 2-3 days in advance, double wrap them in plastic wrap, then wrap in foil and seal in a freezer-safe ziptight bag.

This cake can be stored on the counter for a few days, or in the refrigerator. If stored in the fridge, bring to room temperature before serving.

Recipe inspired by [Sugar Hero](#).

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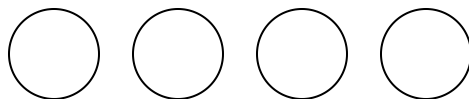


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hi! I'm Amy.

I enjoy exploring the world through food, culture, and travel and sharing the adventure with mostly from-scratch, family friendly recipes that I think of as modern comfort cooking.

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READER QUESTIONS AND REVIEWS

Georgie

October 14, 2018 at 8:58 pm

This looks absolutely heavenly!!! What a gorgeous recipe and love the story behind it!

REPLY**Donna McTaggart**

October 16, 2018 at 4:52 pm

I am so surprised to find your recipe on Pinterest for burnt almond cake! I too grew up in San Jose very close to Dick's bakery (which has yet to reopen after a fire a couple years ago) and on top of that, my maiden name was Nash! Wow! I had no idea another Nash family lived so close! We grew up having burnt almond cake to many celebrations! I can not wait to try your recipe, thank you!

REPLY**Amy**

October 16, 2018 at 9:33 pm

I have an even stranger fact to add to your comment which is that my mother-in-law is also named Donna, so there were actually TWO Donna Nashes there! I hope you like this version! It's a little work, but so delicious!

REPLY**Jennifer**

November 16, 2018 at 8:36 am

Thank you so much for posting your recipe. My family is also from San Jose, but now living in Southern California. We miss Dick's Bakery, so your cake recipe is heaven-sent! Every element of the recipe turned out perfect; however, I would never again make the

meringue frosting ahead of time. Anyone making this cake, please save yourself the heartache and make the frosting right before you want to assemble the cake. It whips up so beautifully – silky and fluffy! However, refrigerating and re-whipping ruin the texture – it still tastes good, but separates and becomes a clumpy buttery mess. This recipe will be our new go-to celebration cake – thanks again!

REPLY

Amy

November 17, 2018 at 7:52 pm

Thank you so much for your thoughtful review! I'm glad to hear your feedback about making the meringue frosting ahead of time and not having the texture be right the next day. Glad you enjoyed this and could have a taste of San Jose for your celebration!

REPLY

Margaret Murray

May 20, 2019 at 4:41 pm

Just beat the H out of it; it will come back! Also, be sure to scoop out the bottom as there is some liquification to address.

REPLY

MARIA VALLE

December 27, 2019 at 9:27 am

Yes, It will come back; and likely after you've given up hope...but hang in there!

REPLY

MARIA VALLE

December 27, 2019 at 9:45 am

Yes, just keep beating it. It will come together; but likely after you've given up hope. I use the Paddle, to avoid creating bubbles. It WILL work!

REPLY

Lindsay

September 18, 2020 at 8:25 am

Hello! I just wanted to let you know that you can whip up the frosting the next day it just needs a lot of extra whipping time. It looks like it will separate but then it comes together. the butter just needs to warm up. If you let it sit out for a little bit before you whip it again, it won't take long.

REPLY

Debi Smith

December 9, 2018 at 3:38 pm

So... I had never heard of a Burnt Almond Cake before today. My future son-in-law was saying it was his favorite... he referenced Dick's, but that's a sporting goods store here in Florida... so I was confused!

Then I read your article and it all made sense... I will have to make a PRACTICE version before I made a cake to share with him, but I sure am excited!!!!

Thank you.

REPLY

Amy

December 10, 2018 at 8:55 pm

Yay! I'm so glad I could help you out with this one!

REPLY**Joshua Helmhout**

December 17, 2018 at 7:02 pm

Just to maintain the reputation of Peters' Bakery and Dick's Bakery (now closed), both bakeries make their Burnt Almond Cakes from scratch. They would never consider using a mix for this iconic San Jose treat. The recipe you have described does look delicious and I'll definitely be making one but in reality, it bears little resemblance to the genuine old school Burnt Almond Cakes made by the historic San Jose bakeries. The ingredients and method of preparation are not the same. I know this because I was a baker and mixer at Peters' Bakery and I carefully followed the recipe as created by my Grandfather Tony Peters who was the founder of both bakeries and owner of Peters' Bakery for more than sixty years. While sadly Dick's Bakery is yet to reopen, Peters' Bakery is stronger than ever and I would encourage everyone to enjoy 'the taste of San Jose' that is their Burnt Almond Cake.

REPLY**lisa**

March 19, 2019 at 1:08 pm

I have to agree, after making this recipe. Was good, and I had never eaten at Dicks Bakery but my friend was devastated when it burned down and has asked me to try and help re-create the cake. This recipe was not anything like Dicks cake according to my friend. We just played hookie from work and road-tripped to San Jose last weekend to buy slices of cake from Peters bakery. The frosting/filling seems to me to be Custard powder with whipped cream. No frosting at all. And yes it was worth the trip! Delicious cake.

REPLY**Jenny Schmidt**

April 19, 2019 at 8:03 am

Joshua, I know there are trade secrets involved, but it would be awesome if you could give us out-of-state-San-Jose-Natives some hints on how its done! My MIL is pining away up here in WA State for "Everyone's Favorite Cake". It would be so nice to make it for her birthday.

Thanks!

REPLY

Joshua Helmhout

June 3, 2019 at 6:57 pm

Coincidentally I have also moved to Washington. I very much miss Peters' Bakery and the wonderful folks who work there.

My grandfather's recipe is less of a trade secret than it is a family secret. I've probably shared too much already. Lol

REPLY

Liz

May 28, 2019 at 9:39 am

Clearly understood, but for those of us who have trued this delicacy and have move far away, it is more than a quest to try an reproduce that magnificent flavor.

REPLY

Joe S

November 11, 2022 at 4:07 pm

Thanks for setting the record straight for the Peter's and Sota's. Boxed ingredients insults are very annoying for the pride and hard work our grandfathers put into those bakeries for decades!

Also, for anyone trying to get as close as possible to the real thing. When the cake is all done, hit the top of the cake in a tic tac toe pattern with hot metal bar to create the burn/sear

REPLY

Louise

April 13, 2024 at 7:03 pm

Joshua,

I love your insight on the history of both bakeries. I too am a san Jose native. Always bought the iconic cake from Dicks until the fire. I then started going to Peter's. Is there a difference in the recipe? I never thought it tasted quite the same. Dicks seemed to have a stronger flavor. Both were fantastic!!!!

REPLY

Cheryl Berg

December 21, 2018 at 11:40 am

I've been trying to duplicate a Dick's Bakery Burnt Almond Cake ever since I moved away from San Jose a couple decades ago. I was just getting ready to type up my recipe notes when I thought I'd do another internet search first, and so glad to have come across your story and recipe. It is also interesting to read Joshua's comment above that "the ingredients and method of preparation are not the same". My version is quite different, but I'm sure it's not the same either, especially since I make a few shortcuts with pre-packaged mixes. The end result however is delicious.

I have never used a buttercream frosting, because in my memory Dick's Bakery had a lighter consistency frosting. Your version of Meringue Buttercream sounds intriguing, but I have always used a Stabilized Whipped Cream Icing. (I wonder what Joshua thinks of that?)

I use French Vanilla cake mix substituting 1/2 cup water with 3/8 cup buttermilk and 1/8 cup amaretto and adding 1/8 tsp almond extract. For the pastry cream, I use a 5.1 oz pkg of instant vanilla pudding made with half & half instead of milk and add 1/8 tsp rum extract and 1/4 tsp almond extract. For the frosting, I make a stabilized whipped cream icing using

gelatin, whipping cream, powdered sugar, vanilla and almond extracts. I toast the almonds in a pan with powdered sugar.

I'm getting hungry now...

REPLY

Joshua Helmhout



January 7, 2019 at 2:37 am

You are quite right Cheryl, true Burnt Almond cakes do not include Butter Cream icing. Indeed, a lighter whipped cream based icing is used. The craft bakers at Peters' Bakery blend a special custard whipped cream icing for the bakery's signature Burnt Almond cakes. The blend creates a sweet but not too sweet flavor that sits perfectly between the white cake and roast almonds to create that amazing taste. Am I biased? You bet! 😊

REPLY

Marie Oxborrow

January 8, 2020 at 10:57 am

Joshua you may have known my grandparents. They were very loyal to Peter's Bakery from the 50's until the 90's. I miss visiting them and getting the pastries for breakfast. I guess my grandpa's favorite cake was the burnt almond. I'm trying to figure out how to make it as a memory for my mom of her dad. Any suggestions on changing this recipe or any pictures on how it looked?

REPLY

Heather Brown



December 22, 2018 at 8:27 pm

I made this today for my Mom's birthday and sorry but this is NOT better than Dick's bakery by a long shot. I followed the recipe to a T. I measured everything very carefully while following the directions perfectly. Everything looked great! Then we all had a taste of the finished product. It has a VERY strong taste. I think it might be the amount of almond extract. It's edible but two to three bites is more than enough. The smell is super strong as well. Like I said the cake, pastry cream, buttercream, and almonds came out JUST how the recipe called for. After we tried this, I went back and tasted the cake and creams individually. They ALL have this very overwhelming taste. I will not make this again. I would not recommend making this unless you put way WAY less almond extract. Although it could be something else – I'm just guessing it's that.

REPLY

Leslie



March 7, 2019 at 9:09 pm

I have made this cake once already and thought it delicious! Hard to believe, but I wasn't a big fan of Dicks Burnt Almond Cake, their orange cake though, now that was a cake! So delicious.

I'm in the middle of making this recipe for the second time and here is my question about the pastry cream: Is it right that you would use both vanilla and almond extract and if so, should you really add it right after you take it off the stove? I also happened to notice that it says to add the butter and vanilla, but never the almond, maybe a revision is needed here.

Thank you for all the work performed to compile this cake, I think it's delicious!

REPLY

Amy

March 11, 2019 at 5:48 am

Thanks for the heads up on that one. Yes, both the vanilla and almond extract are added after taking the pastry cream off the stove.

REPLY**amanda Velez**

May 21, 2019 at 12:12 pm

After living in San Jose for 26 years, and moving to Virginia I am missing my Burnt Almond cake. More so on my birthday, since that was my choice of cake every year. I am so excited to try this recipe out. Thank you so much for posting this!!!

REPLY**Terri**

August 23, 2019 at 1:26 pm

I also am from the San Jose area, and moved years ago. Haven't found this cake until recently. Found your recipe when I decide to attempt making this on my own. OMG! This cake is soooo good, my family says it's like crack! Thanks for sharing.

REPLY**Suzy K**

September 2, 2019 at 11:39 am

Really liked this cake...some things I noticed: the reverse creaming method for the cake worked nicely. The pastry cream didn't add anything to the cake (but I may not have added enough salt or extracts to it). The buttercream was great; I did need to give it 15 min in the fridge since it was soupy, but then it whipped up nice and light. Best part was the candied almonds – don't do what I did and wait to add the butter and spread it onto the pan, as it congeals quick. Happy baking everybody...

REPLY

E

September 11, 2019 at 7:58 am

The ingredient list for the vanilla almond cake calls for 7 tablespoons of cornstarch, but in the directions I don't see where/when you add the cornstarch.

REPLY**Amy**

September 16, 2019 at 6:03 am

Sorry about that! It goes in at the same time as the flour. I use the combination of all-purpose flour and cornstarch in place of cake flour, which I don't usually have on hand.

REPLY**Cathy**

September 16, 2019 at 4:36 pm

OK. So I actually made this cake TWICE. Crappy recipe. Has to be missing ingredients. As an experienced baker I first noticed that they do not say when to add the almond extract or the cornstarch. Of course, I can figure that out myself. Not rocket science. Both times I made this batter and baked it, it turned out like rubber. Yes, rubber. I could bounce a large knife off of it. and couldn't get through the side of it with the point of a sharp knife. It was a waste of 10 eggs. On the flip side the pastry cream is very tasty. I will use that to fill some cream puffs. LOL I drove to San Jose to purchase one for my nephews birthday. Flower Flour in Willow Glen had an amazing cake. What a gem of a bakery. (FYI)

REPLY**Linda Gonzalez Daley**

October 21, 2019 at 4:58 pm

I used to buy this cake for my husband every year. Since we have moved to Phoenix, I used your recipe this year instead. I made two at the same time as I was using new techniques I could get better at it and I had 30 guests.

A few suggestions I would do it as a three layer nine inch next time. Splitting the layers caused cracks and I would like a thicker layer of the almond pastry cream between layers. Make the Swiss Meringue buttercream on the day you assemble it. I did it both ways and the fresh one was much better to spread.

When I printed my recipe I thought some steps were missing, they were. My printer missed the top two lines of each page, If you compare the printed copy with the online copy you can fill them in. I enjoyed making this cake and my guests loved it.

REPLY

Amy

October 22, 2019 at 6:10 pm

Oh no! I didn't realize that was happening with the print button. I will have to talk with my developer and see if we can get that fixed!

REPLY

Monica Bryan

October 26, 2019 at 2:03 am

I have a question- the ingredient list for the cake layers list almond extract but it isn't mentioned in the directions. Do I add it instead of the vanilla or in addition to?

REPLY

Amy

November 4, 2019 at 5:57 am

Sorry about that! It's in addition to the vanilla.

REPLY**Sarah**

October 30, 2019 at 12:00 pm

I grew up with this cake and moved away from the Bay Area after college. I didn't realize it was regional to San Jose until I tried to find one in the Central Valley for my mom's birthday. I couldn't find a bakery that made one (a couple had't even heard of it!) so I googled and came upon this recipe. It was easy to follow, fun to make, and my mom LOVED it! Thanks for an awesome recipe, I will be making it again in the future!

REPLY**Amy**

November 4, 2019 at 5:38 am

You're welcome! I'm so glad you enjoyed it!

REPLY**Lisa**

December 3, 2020 at 12:48 pm

Hi Sarah, I grew up in San Jose, with a Burnt Almond cake coming from Dick's for every family event. I too moved to the Central Valley. I live in Oakdale & our bakery, Moss Rose has a Burnt Almond cake that is THISCLOSE to Dick's.

Cheers to memories!

Lisa

REPLY**Jill Squire**

April 26, 2020 at 7:29 am

In Pittsburgh we have Prantl's Bakery which receives orders from all over the US, mostly from people who have relocated from Pittsburgh, for their burnt almond torte, which they two day ship in cold packs. It is a divine cake and my daughter's favorite.

Your recipe is just as divine, if not more so, and I love that it comes from your grandmother's kitchen. Your instructions were very easy to follow for a cake with so many steps – thank you. I made it for my daughter's birthday – and she was beyond thrilled. Thank you. I am definitely subscribing!

REPLY

Priya

April 26, 2020 at 5:47 pm

Hi Amy! Thank you so much for posting this Beautiful recipe. I live in CA & I'm very much familiar with this cake, I ate it for the first time 2 yrs ago when my husband got this cake for my bday and since then I'm in love with this cake(we both 😊) so much so that I'm planning to make the very same SJ burnt almond cake for my daughter's 2nd bday coming Sunday, just wanted to know if you could share the eggless version of this cake or atleast some tips to make it eggless with same results..I'll be very grateful!!

Love

Priya

REPLY

Shelene McDonald

June 5, 2020 at 6:04 pm

I have made Burnt Almond cake before, and I tried this recipe today. I will start by saying that I was born and raised in San Jose and had many Burnt Almond cakes from Dick's Bakery over the years. I also worked in a two different bakeries which both made their own version of Burnt Almond cake. This cake was good, but not quite the same as the Burnt Almond cake from Dicks.

The bakery uses bavarian cream, which is custard mixed with whipped cream to both fill and frost the cake before adding the candied almonds. Not only does bavarian cream give

it a creamy, airy texture, but it also is a bit less sweet. I really do like the recipe for the Swiss Buttercream and will use it for other cake recipes. Thank you.

REPLY

Casey

June 7, 2020 at 2:46 pm

I cannot wait to take a bite of this cake.

REPLY

Kathy Herd Ferrell

November 17, 2020 at 11:01 pm

I grew up in San Jose and enjoyed Dick's burnt almond cake for years. I'm so thankful to have found your recipe!

REPLY

Donald

January 22, 2021 at 9:52 pm

Ok I am in Texas searching for a childhood cake that was bought from Dicks bakery in San Jose CA. What a coincidence.

REPLY

Tania

March 7, 2021 at 11:44 pm

Made this cake and got tons of compliments from my family saying it was the best cake they've ever had!! Love this!!!!

REPLY

Kathleen

May 1, 2021 at 12:00 pm

They make this at Butter, Sugar, Flour bakery in Sunnyvale. They have one chocolate cake layer. It is fabulous.

REPLY

Lolita P

May 6, 2021 at 2:53 pm

I also grew up near Dick's in San Jose and this cake was a beloved family tradition! I seem to remember it being sprinkled with powdered sugar. Am I crazy? Anyways, thanks so much for posting this. I will have to see if my marginal baking skills are up to the challenge! I would love to bring this back as a birthday tradition.

REPLY

Lisa

May 13, 2021 at 8:04 pm

If this is from Dicks(burnt down😭) you are saving Willow Glen their childhood memories

REPLY

jessica

February 13, 2022 at 9:26 am

Making this recipe today!

the swiss meringue came out beautifully! The only thing I would say is the pastry cream was a little tricky. You just said to make it hot- not bring it to a boil- i realized later i need to bring it to a boil so that was the only thing i had to do twice. Otherwise- great recipe- way better than dick's in san jose! 😊

REPLY

Katelyn



May 24, 2022 at 10:41 pm

Made this bad boy twice to make sure I got it right from my brother-in-law's birthday. My family really complained about the overwhelming almond taste in round one. My partner said the almond flavor burned her throat. I left out the almond extract in the cake for round 2, and that seemed to fix it.

Also: I'm a decent baker but this cake was more complicated than macarons. I know it's because I did something wrong... but in the first round, my candy thermometer hit 310 and a millisecond later it was charred into a ball. I don't exactly get how we got from using a Ziploc bag for piping to busting out our candy thermometers for the almonds, but I could have used a heads up earlier that I needed to find a candy thermometer. I also think I'm skipping the swiss meringue on warm days – even after refrigerating, it melted while being served. Overall, I'm glad I made it and kinda hope I don't have to make it again for a while.

REPLY

MK



October 3, 2022 at 3:06 pm

Unfortunately this didn't turn out great for us. The Swiss meringue buttercream frosting was interesting though, but the pastry cream was a little more pudding like than I expected. It's possible my spouse overmixed the cake, or it just wasn't the consistency I assumed.

REPLY**Denise**

March 19, 2023 at 12:19 pm

Took awhile to make, but well worth the time! Thank you for the recipe!! 😊

REPLY**Laura**

March 28, 2023 at 5:18 pm

Thank you for this and for the history. My family had been enjoying Dick's Burnt Almond Cake for over 5 decades. Sadly, their bakery burnt down and the children decided not to rebuild. I recently tried Peter's, but it just was not the same. I am so sad, we are celebrating my mother's 80th Birthday and I panicked over trying to find the true deal. The issues are two important things: first, the frosting is has a marscapone base, mixed with a whip cream based frosting. You just can not get the flavor without the marscapone. The second, is toasting the almonds with few other things that gives some crunch and apply to cake and then add powdered sugar. People are trying to copy the original and not keeping these two things in mind.

REPLY**Danielle**

April 26, 2023 at 11:18 am

Hi Amy, while I enjoyed this recipe I found it a bit laborious for what the cake actually is. And as someone who's born & raised in the South Bay, it is simply not a Dick's or Peter's sub. It's a good almond cake, (which should have a Bavarian cream instead) but I would not call it a Burnt Almond Cake ala the Bay Area. I appreciate the comment regarding not being beholden to the original, but then in my opinion why compare the cakes at all? As a native I am disappointed by the comment and the recipe as it is not comparable to the original.

REPLY**Amy**

April 27, 2023 at 4:38 pm

Thanks for your thoughtful comment, Danielle. I think this is a fair critique. To be honest, I worked on this recipe YEARS ago when I was still pretty new to food blogging and recipe development and it's probably time to revisit and see if I can do better. I'll add this one to my list and take your feedback into consideration! That said, I stand by this as still being a delicious cake. 😊 If I do update the recipe, I'll be sure to include the changes for anyone else who loves this version as currently written.

REPLY**Julie**

July 25, 2023 at 7:20 am

Made this cake for a friend who loves Burnt Almond Cake – and she is raving about this. Great recipe and thanks for the tips about making parts earlier – definitely helped!

REPLY**Janet Mayer**

October 4, 2023 at 1:59 pm

This looks so good! We've been finishing up some renovations at my home and my kids have been so darn helpful! I want to make a special treat for them as one of the ways to say thank you and this sounds awesome! We finally had our cabinets refaced so now that we've finished that, I can dive into this! Thank you for sharing!

REPLY

Amy

October 4, 2023 at 11:00 pm

I hope you enjoy the cake! Sounds like everyone deserves a good treat!

REPLY**Bea Leaker**

November 24, 2023 at 8:39 pm

OMG I can't wait to try this! I am a San Jose Native and my grandmother always had the burnt almond cake from Dick's! Thank you for posting!!!

REPLY**Missy**

November 25, 2023 at 11:43 pm



This is not at all like the Burnt Almond Cake from Dick's Bakery in San Jose, CA. Dick's does not add any Filling the layers are frosted and their frosting is a light almond color and some of the almonds are lightly chop before dusting the exterior of the cake with powdered sugar and the burnt almonds. I was introduced to Dick's Bakery's Burnt Almond Cake in the late 1970's and I can not even guess how long they have been in business.

REPLY**Jill**

November 26, 2023 at 9:42 am



The cake is a lot of work for just ok results. There was not enough filling for 3 layers. And the frosting was way too sweet. I'll try a different frosting next time. I was really hopeful as I miss Dick's Bakery. My grandparents lived a few blocks away and we always went there. There is still Peter's though!

REPLY**Sara**

April 2, 2024 at 4:59 pm

Hi, I'm not on social media but I wanted you to know I made your burnt almond cake for my 60th birthday. It was AMAZING!!! I struggled a little bit with making the candied almonds. The first batch wasn't crunchy, it was like taffy. I made them a second time and made sure to hit 310. They were better but still not like peanut brittle. After they cooled, I had to chop them up for use on the cake, they would not just break apart. The rest of the parts of the cake came out exactly as expected and when they all went together, it was perfection! I did take pictures but this comment box is not letting me upload them for you to see. Thanks for the great recipe!

REPLY**Amy**

April 6, 2024 at 10:02 pm

What a delicious cake to make! Happy 60th Birthday! Sounds like you did a good job with the cake! Maybe you can email me a picture? I would love to see it!

amy@houseofnasheats.com

REPLY**Shanna Nelson**

June 7, 2024 at 3:42 pm

I've made this but used the french vanilla cake mix as a short cut and it turned out pretty amazing. Dicks or Peter's no, but close enough to satisfy my taste buds and reminisce on childhood memories growing up in San Jose while living in Idaho. Made once and will definitely make again and again.

REPLY**Amy**

June 7, 2024 at 5:06 pm

I am so glad you made it! Yes, sometimes it hard to get it exactly like the original but this one is pretty close!

REPLY

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