

FLORA'S FAMOUS COURGETTE CAKE

This recipe was given to me by Flora Woods, who worked in Harrods Waterstone's when *How to Eat* came out, and is now at Books for Cooks. I love being given people's own or family recipes (and if that sounds like an invitation, it's meant to). I like to credit any recipe given to me, not only out of a sense of propriety, but because it makes it all the more interesting. Recipes don't, like Aphrodite, spring fully formed from their author's forehead: to give their provenance is a pleasure and more besides – it's where food and social history merge.

If courgette cake sounds dodgy to you, think about carrot cake for a moment; this is just an adaptation of that (though if you feel it's safer, don't tell people it's made of courgettes until after they've eaten it). One warning: don't do what I did for the picture (p17), which was to colour the lime-curd filling green. I don't know what got into me, but I got out my colour paste and my probe (a broken instant-read thermometer I use for mixing colours when I ice) and proved in one characteristically rash act that food is better left to its own devices. I decided we could just about live with the menacing green: things do go wrong in cooking and, generally, you can live with them. Still, I've learnt my lesson here, for all of us.

for the cake:

60g raisins, optional
250g courgettes (2-3), weighed before grating
2 large eggs
125ml vegetable oil
150g caster sugar
225g self-raising flour
1/2 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
2 x 21cm sandwich tins, greased and lined

for the filling:

see recipe on p344

for the icing:

200g cream cheese
100g icing sugar, sieved
juice of 1 lime, or more to taste
2-3 tablespoons chopped pistachio nuts

Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4.

If you're using raisins, put them in a bowl and cover with warm water to plump them up.

Wipe the courgettes with a kitchen towel (but don't peel them), then grate. The coarse side of an ordinary box grater is the best thing to use: anything too fine or too quick can turn them to a wet mush. When you've grated them, turn them into a sieve over the sink to remove excess water.

Put the eggs, oil and sugar in a bowl and beat them until creamy. Sieve in the flour, bicarb and baking powder and continue to beat until well combined. Now stir in the grated courgette and add the drained raisins. Pour the mixture into the tins, and bake for 30 minutes until slightly browned and firm to the touch. Leave in their tins on a rack for 5–10 minutes, then turn out and let cool on the rack until your filling and icing are ready.

If you don't want to make the lime curd for the filling, then just buy a good lemon or lime curd and sharpen with some freshly squeezed lime juice. To make the cream-cheese icing for the top, beat the cream cheese in a bowl until smooth, add the sieved icing sugar, beating well to combine, and then stir in the lime juice to taste. Now get your cakes ready for assembling. Put one cake on the plate and spread with completely cooled lime curd. Put on the top cake and smear it thickly with the cream-cheese icing. If you feel the icings need firming up a little, put the cake in the fridge for a while. Just before serving, scatter chopped pistachios over the top.

Serves 8.

VARIATION

As an alternative, cook the same mixture in those large (sometimes called 'Texas') muffin tins. When they're cooked and cooled, cut them in half and put the cream-cheese icing in the middle. Pour hot curd over the top, covering each little cake. Put the cakes in the fridge until cold and sieve icing sugar on top just before serving.

Makes 12.