

FOR THE LOVE OF GOOD FOOD

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Simnel Cake

The word simnal comes from the latin 'simila', which was the fine flour used for these cakes. Simnel cakes were traditionally baked and given by servant girls on Mothering Sunday so that they could be kept for the remainder of Lent and enjoyed at Easter (mothering Sunday is much earlier in Europe). Even today this richly fruited Simnel cake with its hidden layer of marzipan (almond paste) still marks the arrival of Easter and is decorated with 11 balls of leftover marzipan to symbolize Christ's faithful disciples. But whether you celebrate Easter or not it is a great cake to make for friends and family alike.

Ingredients

4oz butter, softened

finely grated zest of ½ orange

4oz soft brown sugar

finely grated zest of ½ lemon

½ tsp ground mixed spice (cinnamon, clove, ginger, nutmeg)

2 eggs, beaten

8oz yellow marzipan (almond

*paste)**

5oz self-raising flour

To Glaze

6oz currants or cherries

2tbsp apricot jelly

4oz golden raisins

1 egg yolk

2oz raisins

1. Preheat oven to 400 F. Lightly grease a 7inch cake tin and line with a double layer of waxed baking paper.
2. Place the butter, sugar and spice in a mixing bowl or processor and beat together until pale & fluffy. Butter should have similar consistency to beaten egg so they blend evenly. Add the egg a little at a time and beat until smooth. If the egg separates add a little flour and then beat.
3. Place the remaining flour with the fruit & citrus zest in a bowl and toss together. (Coating the fruit with flour prevents the fruit from sinking during baking.) Stir the flour mixture into the creamed mixture and spread about ½ into the cake tin.
4. Divide marzipan in ½, dust with a little flour and roll out into a circle that will fit into the tin. Spread the remaining mixture into the tin and bake in the centre of the oven for 30 minutes, then reduce the oven to 325 F and bake for a further hour, or until a skewer inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean.
5. Allow the cake to cool in the tin, then turn it out and trim the top level. Spread with warm apricot jelly, roll out 2/3 of the remaining marzipan to cover the top. Brush the surface of the marzipan with beaten egg yolk. Make 11 little balls from the leftover marzipan and position around the edge, brush once again with egg yolk and brown slightly under the broiler. The cake can be tied with a yellow ribbon and the top further decorated with sugar flowers.

* Almond paste is made with 4oz powdered sugar, 4oz ground almonds, 1 egg yolk & ½ tsp almond extract. Mix sugar and almonds together; add the essence, work in egg yolk and knead to make it soft and pliable.