



Citrus Sugar Pound Cake

*with Strawberry Balsamic, Basil and Black Pepper Preserves
and stabilized mascarpone whipped cream*

This started as a bundt cake I wrote down when my youngest was three, and it has been in the rotation ever since. Here it is halved and baked in layers, carrying three things off the pantry shelf that were not in my kitchen back then.

It is a make-ahead cake on purpose. Bake the layers one day, put it together the next, and when your people sit down all you have to do is brew the coffee.

EVERYTHING HOMEMADE IN THIS CAKE

Lemon citrus sugar · Fiore di Sicilia extract · Strawberry balsamic, basil and black pepper preserves

THE CAKE · TWO SIZES

INGREDIENT	TWO 6-INCH PANS	TWO 9-INCH PANS
Salted butter, softened	1 stick (113 g)	2 sticks (226 g)
White sugar, with citrus sugar folded in	1 1/4 cups	2 1/2 cups
Sour cream, room temperature	1/2 cup	1 cup
All-purpose flour	1 1/2 cups	3 cups
Large eggs, room temperature	3	6
Baking soda	1/4 tsp	1/2 tsp
Fine sea salt	1/8 tsp	1/4 tsp
Fiore di Sicilia extract, to taste	start at 1/4 tsp	start at 1/2 tsp
Batter per pan	about 410 g	about 825 g
Bake at 325°F	32 to 38 min	28 to 32 min
Serves, generously	6	8 to 10

A FEW NOTES BEFORE YOU START

If your citrus sugar is very strong, cut it with plain white. Zest strength varies enormously with the fruit, how finely you zested and how long the jar sat. Smell it, and taste a pinch. If it is sharp and assertive, go half citrus sugar and half plain. If it is soft and floral, use all citrus sugar and do not think twice. It is still sugar either way, so the cake bakes exactly the same.

The small cake bakes longer. That looks like a mistake and it is not. Two 6-inch pans hold deeper layers than two 9-inch pans do, and depth sets the bake time, not the width of the pan.

The salt is low because the butter is salted. Two sticks of salted butter carry roughly two thirds of a teaspoon on their own. If you use unsalted butter, go to a scant 1/2 teaspoon for the small cake and 3/4 teaspoon for the large, or it will taste flat.

THE CITRUS SOAK

Brushed onto the warm layers, this is what keeps a pound cake moist for two days and works your citrus sugar into the cake a second time. Make it while the layers bake.

INGREDIENT	FOR TWO 6-INCH FOR TWO 9-INCH	
Citrus sugar	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Water	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Yield	about 1/3 cup	about 2/3 cup

- 1 Combine the citrus sugar and water in a small saucepan.
- 2 Warm over low heat, stirring, until the sugar has completely dissolved. Do not let it boil. This is a syrup, not a candy.
- 3 Take it off the heat, let it cool a few minutes, and brush it on warm over layers that are still warm.

Set this sugar aside before you start the cake. It is easy to cream the whole jar into the butter and find yourself with nothing left to brush on.

Do the soak the same day you bake. Given overnight it moves down through the crumb. Brushed on the next morning it just sits on the surface.

Leftover soak keeps in a jar in the refrigerator for about two weeks. It is good over berries or stirred into iced tea.

BAKING THE LAYERS

- 1 **Set up.** Butter, eggs and sour cream out at least an hour ahead. Oven to 325°F. Line the pan bottoms with parchment, butter and flour the sides.
- 2 **Citrus sugar into the butter, on its own.** Substitute your citrus sugar for part of the white sugar and make up the rest with plain. About half a cup for the small cake, a cup for the large. Cream it into the butter before any other sugar goes in.

The flavor in citrus sugar lives in the oil, not the sweetness, and creaming is what releases it. Stirred in with the flour it does almost nothing. This one step is the difference between a cake that tastes of lemon and a cake that is only sweet.
- 3 **Cream.** Add the remaining sugar. Beat four to five minutes, until it is genuinely pale and light. This is a pound cake. The air you beat in now is most of the leavening it gets.
- 4 **Eggs, one at a time.** Scrape the bowl between each one. Rushing here is what makes the batter look curdled.
- 5 **Fiore di Sicilia, to taste.** Start at the smaller amount, taste, then work up. Homemade extract varies with how you built it and how long it sat, so tasting matters more than measuring.
- 6 **Whisk the dry.** Flour, baking soda and salt together in a separate bowl.
- 7 **Alternate.** Flour in three additions, sour cream in two, beginning and ending with flour. Mix only until it comes together. Overmixing is what makes a pound cake tough.
- 8 **Weigh into the pans.** Do not eyeball halves. Even layers matter more than usual when a jam line runs through the middle of every slice.
- 9 **Bake, then soak.** A skewer should come out with a few moist crumbs, not clean. Cool the layers ten minutes in the pan, turn them out, and brush the citrus soak on generously while they are still warm. The soak recipe is on the previous page.
- 10 **Wrap and leave them out.** Wrap barely warm, plastic then foil. Hot traps steam and gives you a gummy top. Stone cold has already lost moisture you cannot put back. Leave them on the counter overnight. Do not refrigerate.

Two layers gives you one jam line. If you would like a second, split each cooled layer horizontally with a serrated knife for four thin layers and three lines of jam. Pound cake splits cleanly. It is more handling, and worth it when the slice is the point.

Deep layers dome, and often crack across the top. That is what pound cake does and it is not a fault. Level them with a serrated knife once cool. The offcuts are the cook's portion.

CREAM, ASSEMBLY AND THE TABLE

Stabilized mascarpone whipped cream

INGREDIENT	FOR THE 6-INCH	FOR THE 9-INCH
Mascarpone, softened	4 oz	8 oz
Heavy cream, cold	1 cup	2 cups
Powdered sugar	1/3 cup	2/3 cup
Fiore di Sicilia, optional	a scant 1/8 tsp	1/4 tsp
Preserves, for the filling	about 1/2 cup	about 1 cup

- **Beat the mascarpone smooth on its own first**, then pour in the cold cream. Do it the other way around and you get lumps that will not whisk out.
- **Use powdered sugar, not granulated.** The cornstarch in it holds the cream together longer. That is stabilizing, before you have done anything else.
- **Finish by hand with a whisk.** With the extra fat in there, the gap between stiff and grainy is narrow. Take it most of the way with the mixer and feel the last of it yourself.
- **Keep the cream nearly plain.** The extract belongs in the cake. Floral in both places tips this from interesting to perfumed.

Putting it together

- Preserves between the layers and nothing else. No buttercream. The jam is the filling and it should not have to compete.
- Pipe a border around the top rim only, and leave the center open. Fill the bag half full and keep the rest in the refrigerator, because a full bag warms in your hands and the last of it pipes slack.
- Spoon preserves into the open center so the jam shows on top, not only inside.
- Finish with cracked black pepper and one small basil leaf.
- Chill until you are ready, then take the cake out **thirty to forty minutes before you cut it**. Cold butter cake tastes tight and dry, and people will blame the recipe rather than the refrigerator.

If you are serving it to company

- Layers the day before, assembled in the morning, out of the refrigerator before dinner. Pound cake is genuinely better on day two, so this is not a shortcut. It is the way the cake wants to be made.
- Always set a plate under the cake rather than putting it straight onto a good stand. Keep the plate smaller than the stand so a rim still shows all the way around, and you can lift the whole cake off to cut it.
- Then all you have to do is brew the coffee.