

Carrot Cake with Buttercream Frosting

This easy-to-make carrot cake evolved over several test batches, with the goal of creating a solid base and then layering in just enough extra flavor to make it special. The result is a cake that's unbelievably moist, richly spiced, and packed with flavor.

A few notes before you begin:

- Unsweetened applesauce adds moisture and tenderness, but carrot baby food can be substituted with great results.
- Unsweetened shredded coconut is optional, though it adds a pleasant texture and subtle depth.
- Walnuts can be replaced with any nut you prefer.
- Ground ginger is highly recommended—and, in my opinion, essential to the overall flavor.
- Nutmeg can be used in powdered form, but freshly grated nutmeg delivers the best flavor.
- For the carrots, use the fine side of a box grater; large shreds will affect the cake's texture.
- If you refrigerate the batter overnight (highly recommended), allow it to sit at room temperature for at least one hour before baking. If the batter is still cold, you'll need to increase the baking time.

Yield: Makes two 9-inch round cakes or one 9×13-inch cake

Ingredients

- ½ cup light or dark brown sugar, packed (110 grams)
- 1¼ cups granulated sugar (250 grams)
- ½ cup olive oil (108 grams)
- 1 cup canola or avocado oil (218 grams)
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten (200 grams)
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger (2 grams)
- ½ cup unsweetened applesauce (120 grams)
- 2 teaspoons vanilla paste or vanilla extract (10 grams)
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour *or* 2¾ cups bread flour (300 grams AP 330 grams Bread flour)
- 1 tablespoon plus 1¾ teaspoons ground cinnamon (18 grams)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda (5 grams)
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder (6 grams)
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt (9 grams)
- 4 cups finely grated carrots (about 5 large carrots packed but not compressed) (380 grams)
- 1 cup chopped walnuts (120 grams)
- ½ cup unsweetened shredded coconut (40 grams)
- Cooking spray, for greasing pans

Mixing Instructions

1. Prepare pans
Lightly coat two 9-inch round cake pans or one 9×13-inch pan with cooking spray.

For easier release, line the bottoms with parchment paper. Set aside.

2. Combine sugars and oils
In a large bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, granulated sugar, olive oil, and canola (or avocado) oil until smooth and fully emulsified.
3. Add eggs
Gradually whisk in the lightly beaten eggs until the mixture is thick, glossy, and well combined.
4. Add wet flavorings
Whisk in the applesauce, vanilla, and ground ginger until evenly incorporated.
5. Mix dry ingredients
In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder, and kosher salt.
6. Combine wet and dry
Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients in two additions, folding gently with a spatula just until no dry streaks remain. Avoid overmixing.
7. Fold in carrots and add-ins
Gently fold in the finely grated carrots, followed by the chopped walnuts and shredded coconut, mixing just until evenly distributed.
8. Optional rest (recommended)
Cover the batter and refrigerate overnight for improved flavor and texture. Before baking, allow the batter to sit at room temperature for at least 1 hour. If the batter is still cool, expect a slightly longer bake time.

Baking Instructions

1. Preheat oven
Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C).

2. Fill pans

Divide the batter evenly between the prepared pans or pour into the 9×13-inch pan. Smooth the tops gently.

3. Bake

- Two 9-inch round pans: Bake for 30–35 minutes
- One 9×13-inch pan: Bake for 40–45 minutes

4. Check for doneness

The cake is done when a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean or with a few moist crumbs, and the cake springs back lightly when pressed.

5. Cool

Let cakes cool in the pans for 20–25 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool completely before frosting.

Cream Cheese Buttercream Frosting

Ingredients

- 8 oz (225 g) full-fat cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 stick (113 g) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 4 cups (480 g) powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 teaspoon (5 g) vanilla extract or vanilla paste
- ¼–½ teaspoon (1-2 g) Kosher salt
- 3 tbsp (21-24 g) buttermilk powder
- Heavy cream or milk if needed to thin frosting

Mixing Instructions

1. Cream butter and cream cheese

In a large bowl or stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter

and cream cheese together on medium speed for 2–3 minutes, until completely smooth and creamy. Scrape down the bowl as needed.

2. Mix buttermilk powder and powdered sugar together and add gradually
With the mixer on low speed, add the powdered sugar mixture in stages to prevent a mess. Once incorporated, increase to medium speed and beat until smooth.
3. Flavor and balance
Add the vanilla and salt. Beat for another 1–2 minutes until light and fluffy.
4. Adjust consistency (if needed)
Add heavy cream or milk, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the frosting reaches your desired spreadable consistency.
5. Final whip
Beat on medium-high for 30–45 seconds to lighten the texture slightly. Do not overwhip.