



THE STORY

“I’m going to make this poppy seed cake,” Suzen announced. She flashed a picture before me. At least it had berries.

“What if I have to take a drug test?” I protested.

“Just tell them you are in a Twelve Step Program,” she uttered, unwilling to engage me.

“I only eat poppy seeds on top of challah!” I yelled after her.

“You’re getting cake!” She yelled back. “And you are eating it, too.”

I ate the cake, with relish. It is so good, with tangy crème fraîche fresh contrasting with those sweet berries. This is a perfect dessert.

Of course, I knew it would be great before it was out of the oven. I tasted the batter. No, I was not being a child, here. Tasting batter — cake batter or cookie dough — is like being a culinary detective. Is the batter rich and satisfying, like this one? Is it too thin, is there some tang that seems strange? You can tell a lot about how the final product will taste by sampling that batter. Don’t consider it an affectation. It’s your culinary responsibility.

I actually said that to Suzen when she caught me with a finger in the mixing bowl. She glared. I told her it was simply my responsibility thing. All I got back was a grunt. I tell my therapist that I don’t think my wife understands me. My therapist just writes something down but never says anything. Of course, I can change therapists, but I can’t change wives.

Berries have arrived in the stores. Please make this cake. You will be very, very happy. The batter and the cake reflect a bounty of ingredients: lots of sugar, egg and buttermilk. The resulting cake is soft, delicate and studded with hints of poppy seed flavor.

This lovely recipe is from *A Passion for Desserts* by Emily Luchetti. In her recipe, presented below, the cake is four layers high. You have options here. The picture above shows the cake served in just one layer [unsliced] with the berries on the side. Or you can do just two layers [by slicing one of the baked layers]; the second pan of cake can be baked, frozen and used on another night. Emily’s recipe also calls for cooking blueberries in sugar as a filling/topping for the layers. If you wish, if you are in a hurry, then simply sprinkling the berries with a hint of sugar and using them whole is fine. And, instead of blueberries, you can use blackberries as we did. Think of this lovely cake as a berry platform.

With poppy seeds.

Berry Crème Fraîche Cake

THE BASICS

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Preparation Time: 90 minutes including cake cooling time

THE INGREDIENTS

For the cake:

- • 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- • 1 teaspoon baking soda
- • ½ teaspoon salt
- • 1 teaspoon baking powder
- • 8 ounces unsalted butter, softened
- • 2 cups sugar
- • 4 large eggs
- • 1 cup buttermilk
- • 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- • ¼ cup poppy seeds

For the crème fraîche berry filling:

- • 1 pint blueberries
- • ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- • 2 cups crème fraîche
- • ⅔ cup whipping cream
- • 1 pint raspberries [or strawberries]
- • 1 teaspoon baking soda

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease the bottom and sides of two 9-inch cake pans. Line the bottoms with parchment paper.

To make the cake: In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, baking soda, salt and baking powder.

Beat the butter with the sugar until light, 1 minute on medium-high speed with a stand mixer or 3 minutes with a handheld mixer. On a medium speed, add the eggs, one at a time, beating

for 30 seconds with a stand mixer or 1 minute with a handheld mixer after each addition. Periodically scrape down the sides of the bowl.

Stir together the buttermilk and the vanilla. On low speed, add half of the buttermilk. Mix until incorporated and the scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add half of the dry ingredients. Mix until combined and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the remaining buttermilk and the dry ingredients in the same manner. Stir in the poppy seeds.

Divide the batter between the two pans. Evenly spread it in the pans. Bake the cakes on the middle oven rack until a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean, 15 to 20 minutes.

Cool the cakes in their pans for 10 minutes. Unmold the cakes by running a small knife around the inside edges of the pans. Place a plate or wire rack on top of each cake and invert the cake and plate. Remove the pans and let the cakes cool completely. Carefully peel off the parchment paper.

Using a serrated knife, cut each cake in half horizontally, making a total of 4 layers.

To make the filling: Cook the blueberries and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the sugar in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, stirring often, until the sugar has dissolved and the berries have popped open and become juicy, about 5 minutes. Let cool to room temperature.

Whip together the crème fraîche, cream, and remaining two tablespoons sugar until stiff enough to hold its shape but is still smooth.

To assemble the cake: Place a cake layer on a serving platter. Spread one quarter of the crème fraîche filling top of the cake. Top with one quarter of the blueberry sauce and then one quarter of the raspberries. Place a second cake layer on top and repeat with crème fraîche, blueberries, and raspberries on top as you did with first cake layer. Repeat with the third and fourth layers, ending with the berries on top of the cake.

If not serving within an hour, refrigerate the cake. Once removed from the refrigerator, let it sit at room temperature for 15 minutes before serving for optimal flavor.

Planning ahead: The cake layers can be made up to 2 days in advance, wrap well in plastic wrap and store at room temperature. The blueberries can be cooked 2 days in advance and kept refrigerated. The crème fraîche and cream should be whipped just before assembling. The cake should be assembled the day it is going to be eaten.

On buttermilk: if don't want to buy buttermilk, then you can make one faux cup of buttermilk by adding one teaspoon of lemon juice to one cup of whole milk. Stir and let sit for 5 minutes.

THE CREDITS

Recipe Source: *A Passion for Desserts* by **Emily Luchetti** 2003, Chronicle Books

Photography: Canon T2i, 158-55 mm lens, f5.0 for 1/60second at ISO 1250 [no flash]

ABOUT COOKING BY THE BOOK

Cooking by the Book has offered culinary adventures for 25 years. We pioneered the concept of culinary team building and offer events for corporations and individuals. We create recipes, test cookbooks, blog about the best in cookbooks and recipes. Please contact us for further information.

Cooking by the Book § 13 Worth Street, NY, NY 10013 § 212-966-9799