

BASIC YELLOW CAKE

MAKES TWO 9-INCH LAYERS

Everyone needs a good go-to yellow cake recipe in their recipe file. Yellow cake has become the most common birthday cake flavor. Its neutral flavor profile allows the cake to be dressed up with any filling and frosting from chocolate to fruit. This recipe is moist, buttery, and perfectly simple.

Cooking spray

3½ cups cake flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup buttermilk

½ cup sour cream

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

½ pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2 cups sugar

5 large eggs

3 large egg yolks

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line the bottoms of two 9 x 2-inch cake pans with parchment paper rounds. Coat the pan and paper with cooking spray.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk the buttermilk,

sour cream, and oil.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce the speed to low, add the whole eggs one at time, beating well after each addition. Beat in the egg yolks and vanilla until incorporated. On medium speed, alternate adding the flour mixture and the buttermilk mixture to the batter in several additions, ending with the buttermilk mixture. Scrape down the bowl with a rubber spatula and beat until the batter is blended well.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pans and place both pans on the same oven rack. Bake until the cake springs back to the touch and a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean, 30 to 40 minutes; rotate the pans from front to back halfway through.

Let the cakes cool completely in the pans before filling and frosting.

chef it up!

Coconut Cake: Spread the bottom layer with [Coconut Custard](#) and top with the second layer. Frost the top and sides with [Swiss Buttercream](#). Lightly toast shredded coconut in the oven and cover the cake (top and sides) with the toasted coconut.

Strawberry “Shortcake”: Spread the bottom layer with a thin layer of raspberry jam. Top with [Whipped Cream](#). Top with 1/2 cup sliced strawberries, keeping them toward the center (you don’t want them poking out when you put the top layer on). Put the top layer on and frost the top and sides with more whipped cream. Shave white chocolate curls on top.

INSIDER TIP • DRIES AND WETS

Many batters start out with a base of butter, sugar, and eggs to which are then added the dry ingredients and the wet ingredients.

Typically the “dries” (flour, baking powder, baking soda, cocoa powder, etc.) are mixed together in a separate bowl. And the “wets” (milk, juice, oil, flavorings, or other liquids) are mixed together in yet another bowl. The dries and wets are then added alternately to the creamed butter and sugar. The reason for alternating their addition is to make a smooth batter. If you were to add all the wets first, followed by the all the dries, the batter would not be homogeneous; the fat would be separated out and the resulting cake would be greasy and flat.

BASIC CHOCOLATE CAKE

MAKES TWO 9-INCH LAYERS

This basic chocolate cake is what is called a “high-ratio cake,” meaning it contains a large amount of sugar and fat (butter and/or oil)—compared to lower-fat cakes like sponge cakes—which makes it extremely moist. Because high-ratio cakes are so moist, they are too heavy to use for multitiered cakes—like wedding cakes—and instead are used to make only two or three layers. (Typically, a wedding cake would be a lighter cake, such as a sponge cake.) The addition of coffee is a common technique used to both deepen the flavor of the chocolate and add moisture.

Cooking spray

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2 cups sugar

2 large eggs

2 tablespoons vanilla extract

1³/₄ cups + 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted

1¹/₂ teaspoons baking soda

1/2 teaspoon + a pinch of baking powder

3/4 teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup hot brewed coffee

1/2 cup + 1 tablespoon buttermilk

1/2 cup + 1 tablespoon canola oil

1/2 cup sour cream

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line the bottoms of two 9 x 2-inch round cake pans with parchment paper rounds. Coat the pans and paper with cooking spray.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce the speed to low and add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in the vanilla.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the coffee, buttermilk, oil, and sour cream. On medium speed, alternate adding the flour mixture and the buttermilk mixture to the butter-egg mixture in several additions, mixing until everything is combined. Scrape down the bowl with a rubber spatula and beat until the batter is blended well.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pans and place both on the same oven rack. Bake until the cake springs back to the touch and a cake tester comes out clean, 20 to 35 minutes; rotate the pans from front to back halfway through.

Let the cakes cool completely in the pans before filling and frosting.

chef it up!

Chocolate Raspberry Cake: Stir $\frac{1}{4}$ cup raspberry jam into $\frac{1}{2}$ cup [Vanilla Pastry Cream](#) and spread that over the bottom layer. Top with fresh raspberries. Top with the second layer and frost the top and sides with [Ganache Filling](#). Decorate the top with more fresh raspberries.

Chocolate Hazelnut Cake.

INSIDER TIP • CREAMING BUTTER AND SUGAR

If you've done any baking at all, you've probably seen the instruction "cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy." But did you know that you can take it too far? If you go beyond the "fluffy" stage (the mixture will look curdled), the butter will have gotten too warm,

releasing the air bubbles that you beat into it. The result? A flat cake or cookie.

