



PLAIN CHEESECAKE

SERVES 8 TO 12

The crust here is the classic graham cracker crust, but any cookie can be used to take the cheesecake in a slightly different direction. Try chocolate wafer cookies, shortbread, vanilla wafers, or gingersnaps. As for the batter itself, I like to use a mix of both heavy cream and sour cream to give the cake a more creamy consistency. When baked, sour cream sets harder than straight heavy cream, so the cream is necessary for the smooth soft texture.

GRAHAM CRACKER CRUST

Cooking spray

2 cups graham cracker crumbs (preferably Teddy Grahams)

1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 pound (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

BATTER

4 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, at room temperature

1 1/2 cups granulated sugar

1 teaspoon kosher salt

5 large eggs, at room temperature

3/4 cup crème fraîche or sour cream, at room temperature

1/4 cup heavy cream, at room temperature

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

MAKE THE CRUST: Preheat the oven to 325°F. Line the bottom of a 10-inch springform pan with a parchment paper round and coat the

paper with cooking spray. Wrap the outside of the pan with foil, just at the bottom where the seam is. (The pan is going into a water bath and you don't want any water to get in.)

In a bowl, stir together the crumbs, confectioners' sugar, and salt. Add the butter and vanilla and mix until blended well. Press the crumb mixture onto the bottom and 1 inch up the sides of the pan. Bake for 10 minutes to set the crust. Take the crust out of the oven and set aside to cool completely. Leave the oven on.

MAKE THE FILLING: In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the cream cheese, granulated sugar, and salt on medium speed until creamy, about 2 minutes. Reduce to low speed and beat in the eggs one at a time. Beat in the crème fraîche, heavy cream, and vanilla. Scrape down the bowl with a rubber spatula and beat on medium speed until the filling is blended well but not aerated.

Choose a roasting pan that will hold the springform pan. Place the roasting pan on a pulled-out rack in the oven and place the springform pan in the center of the roasting pan. Pour the batter into the springform, then pour hot water into the roasting pan (staying well away from the springform, so you don't get any water into the cheesecake batter) to come halfway up the sides of the springform pan. Gently slide the rack back into place and close the oven door.

Bake until the center slightly jiggles, about 1 hour 20 minutes. Turn off the oven and leave the cheesecake inside to completely cool, about 6 hours. Take it out of the water bath, cover, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

Remove the pan sides and cut into slices.

chef it up!

When I make a cheesecake for a restaurant, I freeze it after it's been chilled. There are two reasons for this. One is that I always remove the cheesecake from the bottom of the springform pan because it makes a nicer presentation, and the best way to do that

without a disaster is to freeze the cheesecake first. Also, a frozen cheesecake gives you much cleaner slices. When I serve a slice of this, I like to top it with [Cinnamon Whipped Cream](#).

INSIDER TIP • NO-CRACK CHEESECAKES

Cheesecakes are delicious no matter what they look like, but if you want to bake one like a pro, then you have to take some steps to be sure that the top doesn't crack as it bakes. Here's what you have to do to avoid that: First, always make sure your ingredients are at room temperature. If the mixture is cold, then the cake will crack when it hits the hot oven. Always bake the cake in a water bath, which will create gentle, even heat for cooking the custard-based batter, and then allow the cake to cool completely in the water bath in a turned-off oven.