

Cakes

FIRST PRIZE

The 2000 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Layer Cakes"

Old-Fashioned Buttermilk Wedding Cake

CAKE:

1 cup (2 sticks) butter or margarine,
softened

3 cups sugar

4 cups cake flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

2 teaspoons baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

2 cups buttermilk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

½ teaspoon butter flavoring

½ teaspoon almond extract

6 large egg whites

FROSTING:

8 ounces cream cheese, softened

3 cups confectioners' sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour three 9-inch round cake pans.

For cake: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Pour in the buttermilk and begin mixing slowly. Continue to mix until well blended. Add the flavorings and stir. Wash and dry the beaters.

In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff. Fold the egg whites into the cake batter. Divide the batter evenly among the prepared pans. Bake for 20 minutes at 350°F, then lower the heat to 300°F and bake for about 25 minutes more, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove the cakes from the oven and cool on racks. After 10 minutes, remove the cakes from the pans and continue cooling on racks.

For frosting: Combine all of the ingredients in a mixing bowl and beat until smooth. When the cake is completely cooled, frost the layers and assemble. **Makes 12 to 16 servings.**

—Diane Niebling, Overland Park, Kansas



S E C O N D P R I Z E

The 2000 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest: "Layer Cakes"*

Peachy Almond Cake

CAKE:

1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened

2 cups sugar

4 large eggs

3 cups all-purpose flour

3½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1¼ cups milk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon almond extract

FILLING:

1 cup (7-ounce package) almond paste

2 ripe peaches, peeled, pitted, and sliced

**1 cup peach preserves, softened in
microwave oven or stirred, divided**

FROSTING:

2 cups heavy cream

½ cup confectioners' sugar, or to taste

½ teaspoon almond extract, or to taste

**1 teaspoon vanilla extract, or to taste
caramel sauce (optional)**

peach slices (optional)

mint sprigs (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour two 9-inch round cake pans.

For cake: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating briefly after each and then until the mixture is as light as whipped cream. In another bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt, and set aside.

In a small bowl, blend the milk and extracts. Alternately add the dry ingredients and the milk to the butter mixture, stirring to blend after each. Spread the batter equally in the prepared pans and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove the cakes from the oven and cool them on wire racks.

For filling: Place one cake layer on a serving plate. Divide the almond paste in half and roll each portion into a 9-inch round (roll the paste between two layers of waxed paper or plastic wrap). Place one sheet of almond paste over the first cake layer. In a small bowl, mix the peach slices with ¾ cup of the peach preserves and spread over the almond paste. Add the second cake layer and brush with the remaining ¼ cup peach preserves. Top with second round of almond paste.

For frosting: Whip the cream until stiff, then add the sugar and extracts to taste, stirring to blend. Frost the cake with the whipped cream and refrigerate until serving time. If desired, drizzle a little caramel sauce on the dessert plates before putting the cake on it and garnish each serving with a few peach slices and a sprig of fresh mint. **Makes 8 to 10 servings.**

—TerryAnn Moore, Oaklyn, New Jersey

CAKE MISTAKES

■ If you're having a problem with your cake, here are some possible reasons why.

IF THE CAKE . . .	IT COULD BE DUE TO . . .
Has peaks or cracks	Too much flour, a too-hot oven
Is sunken	Too little flour, too much sugar, too much fat, a too-cool oven, underbaked
Is too dark or too pale	A too-hot or a too-cool oven, underbaked or overbaked, wrong size pan
Tastes flat, bitter, or unpleasant	Poor-quality ingredients
Is coarse	Too much fat, eggs beaten too much, mixed too little, a too-cool oven
Is too dense	Eggs beaten too much or too little, mixed too much, a too-hot oven
Is crumbly	Mixed too little
Has tunnels	Mixed too little, a too-hot oven
Has a hard, thick crust	Too much flour, too much sugar, a too-cool oven, overbaked
Is dry	Too much flour, too little fat, eggs beaten too much, overbaked
Is soggy	Too little flour, too much fat, mixed too little, underbaked
Is tough	Too much flour, too little fat, mixed too much, a too-hot oven, overbaked

BATTER MATTER

- Prepare cake pans with butter and flour—before you mix the batter. Use waxed paper cut to fit and buttered, as well as butter on the bottom and sides of the pan.
- Sift dry ingredients. Sifted flour is aerated and fluffed, making it lighter and easier to incorporate with the other ingredients.

THIRD PRIZE

The 2000 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Layer Cakes"

Millennium Chocolate Cake With Mocha Frosting

CAKE:

⅓ cup butter, softened

1¾ cups sugar

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

**2½ ounces unsweetened baking chocolate,
melted and cooled**

2½ cups sifted cake flour

¼ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

¼ cups sour milk or buttermilk

FROSTING:

6 cups confectioners' sugar

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened

½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder

**⅓ cup strong brewed coffee (use part
coffee-flavored liqueur, if desired)**

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease two 9-inch round cake pans, then line the bottoms with waxed or parchment paper. Grease the paper well. Dust with flour and shake out the excess.

For cake: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs and vanilla, and beat on high speed for 5 minutes, scraping the bowl occasionally. Add the chocolate and stir to blend.

In a separate bowl, whisk the flour with the baking soda and salt. Add the flour to the cake batter alternately with the sour milk, mixing well after each addition. Divide the batter equally between the two prepared pans and bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove the cakes from the oven and let them cool in the pans on wire racks for 10 minutes. Then invert the cakes from the pans to cool completely on the racks. Carefully peel off the waxed paper.

For frosting: In a medium bowl and with an electric mixer, beat the confectioners' sugar with the butter until smooth. Add the cocoa, coffee (and liqueur, if using), and vanilla, and beat on low speed until well blended. Beat for 1 minute more at medium speed. Chill for 20 to 30 minutes, or until the mixture reaches spreading consistency. Frost the layers and assemble. **Makes about 12 servings.**

—Josephine D. Piro, Easton, Pennsylvania



HOW TO SOUR MILK

n To make sour milk, add one tablespoon of lemon juice or distilled white vinegar to 1 cup of milk. Let it stand for 5 minutes before adding to a recipe.

NO - SKILL , ALL - FRILL , DECORATING IDEAS

- Fresh flowers lend an easy elegance.
- Sweet, ripe berries or chopped nuts add color, flavor, and style.
- Store-bought candies and cookies add instant glitz, especially to children's cakes.
- Chocolate shavings, made with a frozen chocolate candy bar (dark or white) and a vegetable peeler, dress up a plain vanilla frosting.
- Chocolate leaves (see page 239 for directions).

THIRD PRIZE

The 2004 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Apples"



Easy Three-Bowl Apple Cake

4 apples, peeled, cored, and diced

1¾ cups sugar

1½ tablespoons lemon juice

3 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

2 teaspoons cinnamon

dash of salt

2 large eggs, beaten

1 cup oil

1½ teaspoons vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 13x9-inch baking pan. In bowl 1, combine the apples, sugar, and lemon juice and mix well. In bowl 2, sift together the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. In bowl 3, lightly mix the beaten eggs, oil, and vanilla. Combine bowl 1 (the apple mixture) and bowl 3 (the egg mixture) and add to bowl 2 (the dry ingredients). Mix well (the batter will be stiff). Spread the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 45 minutes, or until browned or a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. **Makes about 20 servings.**

—Helen D. Lomupo, Gilboa, New York

H O N O R A B L E M E N T I O N

The 2000 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Layer Cakes"

Oatmeal Date Cake With Cinnamon–Cream Cheese Frosting

CAKE:

- 1½ cups boiling water
- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon grated nutmeg
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅓ cup chopped dates

FROSTING:

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 4 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon

For cake: Pour the boiling water over the rolled oats, stir, and let stand for about 40 minutes. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour two 8-inch round cake pans. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, and nutmeg and set aside. In a large bowl and with an electric mixer on medium speed, beat the butter. Add the sugars and beat until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating after each. Add the vanilla and the cooled oat mixture and stir to blend well. On low speed, beat in the flour mixture a little at a time. Add in the dates and stir until well blended. Pour an equal amount of batter into each cake pan and bake for 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove the cakes from the oven and let them cool on racks in the pans for 10 minutes. Invert the cakes onto the racks and continue cooling.

For frosting: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, whip the cream cheese and butter together until fluffy. Add the sugar, vanilla, and cinnamon. Mix until smooth. Frost the layers and assemble. **Makes 10 to 12 servings.**

—Jennifer Walsh, Creston, Iowa



H O N O R A B L E M E N T I O N

The 2000 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Layer Cakes"

Triple-Lemon Layer Cake

CAKE:

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter or margarine,
softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 large eggs
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon lemon extract
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon vinegar or lemon juice

FILLING:

- 1½ cups sugar
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 2 large egg yolks, well beaten
- 2 tablespoons butter

FROSTING:

- ⅓ cup butter, softened
- 4 cups confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 tablespoon white corn syrup
- 1 tablespoon lemon extract
- 1½ to 3 cups frozen whipped topping,
thawed

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour two 8- or 9-inch round cake pans.

For cake: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. In a separate bowl, mix together the flour and salt. Add it to creamed mixture alternately with the buttermilk, stirring to blend after each addition. Add the vanilla and lemon extracts and stir to blend. In a separate small bowl, dissolve the baking soda in the vinegar. Add it to the creamed mixture, stirring to combine. Pour an equal amount of batter into each prepared pan and bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes and remove from the pans. Cool completely, then cut each layer in half horizontally.

For filling: In a saucepan, mix the sugar and cornstarch. Add the lemon juice, egg yolks, and 1 cup of water. Cook on medium-high heat until thick, stirring constantly. Bring to a boil for 1 minute. Stir in the butter. Cool completely. Spread the filling thinly on the tops of three cake layers and stack the layers. Place the fourth layer on top.

For frosting: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, beat the butter, confectioners' sugar, milk, corn syrup, and lemon extract until fluffy. Fold the whipped topping into the creamed mixture a little at a time, stirring until you have the desired consistency for spreading. Frost and assemble the cake. Refrigerate until ready to serve. **Makes 10 to 12 servings.**

—Fara Murray, Carrollton, Texas

H O N O R A B L E M E N T I O N

The 2000 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Layer Cakes"

German Chocolate Cake

CAKE:

½ cup boiling water

1 bar (4 ounces) sweet cooking chocolate

2 cups sugar

1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened

4 large eggs, separated

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2¼ cups all-purpose flour or 2½ cups cake flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup buttermilk

FROSTING:

5 large egg yolks

1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk

1½ cups sugar

1 cup (2 sticks) butter

1½ teaspoons vanilla extract

2 cups flaked coconut

1½ cups chopped pecans

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease three 8- or 9-inch round cake pans and line the bottoms of the pans with waxed or parchment paper.

For cake: In a mixing bowl, pour the boiling water over the chocolate. Stir until the chocolate is melted and set aside to cool. In a medium bowl and with an electric mixer, beat the sugar and butter until light and fluffy, then add the egg yolks one at a time, beating after each. Add the melted chocolate and vanilla and beat on low speed to blend. In a separate bowl, mix together the flour, baking soda, and salt. Add the dry ingredients to the egg mixture alternately with the buttermilk, beating after each addition until the batter is smooth. Wash and dry the beaters.

In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff, then fold the egg whites into the batter. Pour an equal amount of batter into each baking pan. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes, then remove the cakes from the pans and cool them completely on wire racks.

For frosting: Wash and dry the beaters. In a two-quart saucepan and with an electric mixer, beat the egg yolks and evaporated milk. Stir in the sugar, butter, and vanilla. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring constantly, and cook for 10 to 12 minutes, or until thick. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the coconut and pecans. Beat the frosting until it is a spreadable consistency. Frost the tops of the layers, assemble the cake, and frost the sides. **Makes 10 to 12 servings.**

—Karen Parish-Foster and Kim Aikens, Whittaker, Michigan



Best Chocolate Cake

Use the Mocha Frosting recipe on page 232 or your favorite chocolate frosting.

3 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate

1⅓ cups strong coffee, divided

¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter

2¼ cups packed brown sugar

2 large eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease two 9-inch cake pans. Line each one with waxed paper. Butter the waxed paper. In a saucepan, melt the chocolate in ⅓ cup coffee over very low heat, stirring constantly. Set aside to cool. In a medium bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and brown sugar. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating after each. Add the vanilla and chocolate and beat well. In a separate bowl, combine the dry ingredients. Add alternately to butter mixture with 1 cup coffee, mixing just enough to blend. Pour the batter into the prepared pans. Bake for 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. (Do not remove the cake too soon or it will fall.) Cool the cakes for 10 minutes in the pans. Remove them from the pans (the layers are fragile; handle carefully) and cool them on a rack. Frost and assemble the cake. **Makes 12 to 16 servings.**

Great-Grandmother's Sponge Cake

CAKE:

4 large eggs

2 cups sugar

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon salt

1 cup hot milk

¼ cup (½ stick) butter, melted

FROSTING:

2 cups whipping cream

½ cup sugar

2 cups fresh berries (any variety)

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour a 10-inch tube pan.

For cake: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, beat the eggs and sugar until fluffy. In a separate bowl, sift the flour with the baking powder. Add the flour to the egg mixture, stirring to blend. Add the vanilla, salt, milk, and butter and stir to combine. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool and cut in half horizontally.

For frosting: In a large bowl, whip the cream with the sugar. Frost the bottom layer of the cake with half of the cream and arrange 1 cup of berries on it. (If using strawberries, slice before placing. Raspberries and blackberries may be mashed before spreading, if desired.) Assemble the cake and frost the top with the remaining cream and berries. **Makes 12 servings.**

The World's Best Cheesecake

CRUST:

2 cups crushed graham crackers

½ cup (1 stick) melted butter

¼ cup crushed walnuts

FILLING:

**3 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese,
softened**

1½ cups sugar

5 large eggs

3 tablespoons lemon juice

TOPPING:

1 pint (2 cups) sour cream

½ cup sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

For crust: In a medium bowl, combine the graham crackers, melted butter, and walnuts. Using your fingers, press the mixture evenly across the bottom and up the sides of a 10-inch springform pan.

For filling: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the cream cheese and sugar. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly after each. Beat in the lemon juice. Pour the filling over the crust. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, without opening the oven door. Remove the cheesecake and reduce the heat to 300°F.

For topping: Put all of the ingredients into a small bowl and mix to blend thoroughly. Spread the topping over the cheesecake. Return the cake to the oven and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the cheesecake from the oven and cool it on a rack for several hours. Refrigerate overnight. **Makes 10 to 12 servings.**

TOPPERS FOR CHEESECAKE

- Fresh fruit in season, such as blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries, as well as sliced kiwifruit, strawberries, and peaches. Arrange the fruit in overlapping rings or rows.
- Fruit preserves. Heat 1 cup of preserves until thin, then drizzle over the top of the cheesecake. Garnish with fresh berries or sliced fruit.
- Canned or homemade fruit pie fillings such as cherry, pineapple, or blueberry. Spread a layer of filling evenly over the top of the cheesecake.
- Chocolate shavings or chocolate leaves (recipe on page 239).

AN EASY WAY TO CRUSH GRAHAM CRACKERS

- Place a few graham crackers into a zipper-sealed plastic bag, push out the air, and seal the bag. Put the bag on a countertop or other hard surface and roll over it a few times with a rolling pin. Repeat the process until you have the correct amount of crushed crackers.

HOW TO MAKE CHOCOLATE LEAVES

■ Collect 12 fresh, nontoxic leaves about the size of a rose leaf. Keep a bit of the stem attached. Wash them thoroughly with warm soapy water, rinse completely, and pat dry between two paper towels.

Over low heat, melt about 3½ ounces of good-quality chocolate. Use a pastry brush to brush the melted chocolate to a thickness of about ⅛-inch onto the underside of each leaf. Place each leaf chocolate side up on a cookie sheet lined with waxed paper. Place the cookie sheet in the refrigerator for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the chocolate is firm. Then, with the chocolate side down, hold the leaf stem and carefully peel the leaf away from the chocolate, working quickly so that the chocolate doesn't melt. Place the chocolate leaves in a waxed-paper-lined container and keep refrigerated until ready to use. Makes 12 chocolate leaves.

The Best-Ever Carrot Cake

The secret ingredient in this cake is pineapple.

CAKE:

1¾ cups sugar

¾ cup vegetable oil

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

4 large eggs

2 cups all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1½ teaspoons cinnamon

2 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

2 cups lightly packed shredded carrots

1 can (8 ounces) pineapple tidbits,
drained

¾ cup chopped walnuts

FROSTING:

2 packages (3 ounces each) cream cheese,
softened

6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter, softened

1 teaspoon minced orange peel

2 to 2¼ cups sifted confectioners' sugar

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour a 13x9-inch baking pan.

For cake: In a medium bowl and with an electric mixer, beat together the sugar, oil, and vanilla until just combined. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat after each. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, nutmeg, cinnamon, baking powder, and baking soda. Add to the wet ingredients and stir to blend. Add the carrots, pineapple, and nuts and stir only until combined. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 45 minutes, or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Remove the pan from the oven, place it on a rack to cool.

For frosting: In a medium bowl and with an electric mixer, beat the cream cheese, butter, orange peel, and 2 cups of the confectioners' sugar until smooth. Adjust the amount of confectioners' sugar to desired consistency. Frost the cake.

Makes 15 to 20 servings.

Rulltårta (Swedish Jelly Roll)

My mother made this quick jelly (or applesauce) roll when unexpected company dropped by.

3 large eggs
¾ cup sugar
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon ground cardamom
½ cup jelly or applesauce
1 tablespoon sugar
sugar or cinnamon/sugar mix, for topping

Preheat the oven to 475°F. Line a large cookie sheet or a jelly-roll pan with wax paper. In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, beat the eggs and sugar until fluffy. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and cardamom before gently adding that to the egg mixture. Spread the batter in the prepared pan. Bake for 5 minutes. Remove the cake from the oven and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon of sugar. Cut a second piece of wax paper slightly larger than your pan and spread it on your work area. Turn the cake upside down onto the paper. Peel off the wax paper from the bottom of the cake and discard. While the cake is still warm, spread the jelly or applesauce over the cake and carefully roll it into a log. Sprinkle with sugar or sugar/cinnamon mix. Slice to serve. **Makes 8 to 10 servings.**

—Mare-Anne Jarvela

Cookies and Bars

FIRST PRIZE

The 1989 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Holiday Cookies and Bars"

German Hazelnut Cookies

4 cups all-purpose flour, divided
3 cups (6 sticks) cold, unsalted butter
3 cups confectioners' sugar
3½ cups ground hazelnuts or walnuts, divided
3 large eggs, well beaten
juice and grated peel of 1 lemon
1 egg beaten with 1 tablespoon water, for glaze

Measure 3 cups of flour into a bowl and cut in the butter as for pastry. Stir in the confectioners' sugar, and then 3 cups of the nuts. Add the eggs, lemon juice, and peel and mix thoroughly. Wrap the dough tightly in plastic wrap and chill for at least 2 hours.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease two cookie sheets. Remove a small amount of dough from the refrigerator (keep the rest of the dough refrigerated). With some of the remaining flour, dust a board or counter surface. Roll out the portion to a ¼-inch thickness on the board. Dust the top of the dough with flour to prevent sticking. Using cookie cutters, cut out shapes and place them on a cookie sheet. (Note: The dough can also be dropped by teaspoonfuls; cookies will flatten into wafers as they bake.) Brush the cookies gently with the egg-water mixture and sprinkle with pinches of remaining ground nuts. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, or until golden. **Makes about 5 dozen cookies.**

—Betsy P. Race, Euclid, Ohio



QUICK FIX

■ **Allow a cookie sheet to cool completely before filling it with the next batch.**

SECOND PRIZE

The 1989 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest: "Holiday Cookies and Bars"*

Apricot Almond Bars

TOPPING:

1½ cups sugar

3 cups sliced, blanched almonds

4 large egg whites

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon cinnamon

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

BARs:

2½ cups all-purpose flour

½ cup sugar

1 cup (2 sticks) butter

2 large egg yolks

APRICOT GLAZE:

½ cup apricot preserves

CHOCOLATE GLAZE:

3 ounces semisweet chocolate

1 ounce unsweetened chocolate

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a 15½x10½x1-inch jelly-roll pan with foil.

For topping: Combine all of the ingredients in the top of a double boiler over hot water on medium-high heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture reaches 110°F on a candy thermometer. Remove from the heat and set aside.

For bars: In a large bowl, combine the flour and sugar. Cut in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Add the egg yolks. With your hands, work the batter into a smooth dough and press it into the prepared pan. Prick the dough with a fork in several places. Bake for 15 minutes. Remove the bars from the oven and spread with the almond topping. Return the bars to the oven and bake for 20 minutes more.

For apricot glaze: Put the apricot preserves into a small saucepan. Add 1 tablespoon of water and cook over medium heat until boiling, stirring occasionally. Strain the preserves through a fine sieve, reserving the juices and discarding the chunks. Brush the glaze over the bars immediately after the pan comes out of the oven. Cool the pan on a rack. When the bars have cooled, cut them into 2-inch squares.

For chocolate glaze: In the top of a double boiler over hot water on medium-high heat, melt the two types of chocolate together. Using a small spoon, drizzle the glaze over the squares and allow to set. **Makes about 6 dozen bars.**

—Carolyn Rosen, Nashville, Tennessee

COOKIE BITES

- For chewy cookies, be careful not to overcream the butter and sugar, and underbake the batter a bit.
- For firm cookies, allow the cookies to “cook” on the cookie sheet for a minute or two out of the oven after baking, before transferring them to a cooling rack.
- Cookies baked on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper slide off the sheet easily, and stop cooking as soon as they’re out of the oven.
- Separate crisp and soft cookies so that their respective textures will be preserved. Well packed, your homemade cookies will keep fresh in the kitchen for about a week.
- Layer soft cookies between sheets of waxed paper in containers with tight lids to retain moisture. Add an apple slice if necessary to add humidity.
- Store crisp cookies in a container with a loose-fitting lid.

SECOND PRIZE

The 1993 Old Farmer’s Almanac *Recipe Contest*: “Chocolate”

Chocolate Peppermint Creams

COOKIES:

3 cups all-purpose flour

1¼ teaspoons baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter

1½ cups brown sugar, packed

12 ounces semisweet chocolate chips

2 large eggs

FILLING:

3 cups confectioners’ sugar

⅓ cup butter, softened

¼ teaspoon peppermint extract, or to taste

¼ cup milk

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease your cookie sheets.

For cookies: In a medium bowl, sift the flour, baking soda, and salt together. Put the butter, brown sugar, and 2 tablespoons water into a large saucepan over low heat and stir as the butter melts. Add the chocolate chips and stir as the chocolate melts. Remove the pan from the heat and set aside to cool slightly. Add the eggs to the chocolate mixture and, with an electric mixer, beat to blend. Add the flour mixture and stir to combine. Drop by heaping teaspoonfuls onto the prepared cookie sheets. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from the oven, transfer to racks, and allow to cool.

For filling: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream all of the filling ingredients until smooth.

Sandwich pairs of cookies together with 1 teaspoon of filling. **Makes about 3 dozen sandwich cookies.**

—Roselie A. Aiello, Mount Shasta, California

THIRD PRIZE

The 1989 Old Farmer's Almanac *Recipe Contest*: "Holiday Cookies and Bars"

Chocolate Orange Delights

BARS:

3 ounces unsweetened chocolate

¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, softened

1 cup brown sugar

1 cup sugar

½ cup sour cream

2 eggs

2 teaspoons grated orange peel

2 cups sifted flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

2 cups chocolate chips

GLAZE:

3 ounces semisweet chocolate

1 teaspoon orange extract

4 tablespoons butter

candy sprinkles (optional)

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Lightly grease your cookie sheets.

For cookies: In the top of a double boiler over hot water on medium-high heat, melt the unsweetened chocolate. Set it aside to cool. In a large bowl and with an electric beater, cream the butter and sugars thoroughly. Add the sour cream, eggs, orange peel, and melted chocolate and beat well. Add the flour, baking soda, and salt and stir to combine. Add the nuts and chocolate chips and mix. Drop the batter by rounded teaspoonfuls onto the cookie sheets. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes. Remove from the oven and transfer the cookies to wire racks to cool.

For glaze: In a small saucepan over low heat, melt the semi-sweet chocolate. Add the orange extract and stir to combine. Add the butter, 1 tablespoon at a time, and stir until smooth. Spread on cookies. If desired, decorate with candy sprinkles before the glaze sets. **Makes about 6 dozen cookies.**

—Frances E. Callahan, Chester, Vermont



Classic Sugar Cookies

3½ cups all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
⅔ cup sugar
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1 tablespoon light corn syrup
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

In a medium bowl, mix together the flour and salt. In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar. Add the egg, corn syrup, and vanilla and beat to combine. Add the flour mixture, one-third at a time, and mix until thoroughly incorporated. Shape the dough into two flat disks, wrap each in plastic, and chill for 1 to 2 hours, or until it is firm enough to roll out. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Cut two pieces of waxed paper the size of your rolling surface. Unwrap each dough disk and roll it out between the papers until it is ¼-inch thick. Using a cookie cutter or drinking glass, cut out cookies. Transfer them to a cookie sheet with a spatula, leaving about 1 inch between them. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes. **Makes 3 to 4 dozen cookies.**

Best Butter Cookies

1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 egg
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
2½ cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder

In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar. Add the egg, orange juice, and vanilla and beat well. Add the flour and baking powder and stir to blend. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator to chill for 2 to 3 hours, or until firm. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Cut two pieces of waxed paper the size of your rolling surface. Roll out portions of the dough between the papers to ¼-inch thick, keeping the remainder chilled. Using a cookie cutter or drinking glass, cut out cookies. Using a spatula, place the cookies onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake for about 8 minutes, or until lightly browned. Cool completely before frosting. **Makes about 4 dozen.**

TWO WAYS TO DECORATE SUGAR OR BUTTER COOKIES:

Creamy-Flavored Frosting

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons melted butter or margarine
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1 teaspoon flavored extract (vanilla, orange, or raspberry)
- 4 drops food coloring (optional)

Just before you are ready to frost the cookies, combine all the ingredients in a small bowl and beat with a fork until smooth and creamy. Spread thinly onto cooled cookies; decorate further with nonpareils, chocolate sprinkles, or colored sugar, if desired. Allow the frosting to dry before stacking or covering the cookies. **Makes enough to frost about 3½ dozen small cookies.**

NOTE:

If using orange extract, combine 2 drops of yellow food coloring and 2 drops of red to make orange frosting. If using raspberry extract, use 4 drops of red food coloring for pink frosting. For vanilla, leave the frosting creamy white.

Egg Paint

- 1 egg yolk
- liquid or paste food coloring

In a small cup or bowl, stir together the egg yolk and a small amount of liquid or paste food coloring to obtain the desired color.

Using a paintbrush, decorate the unbaked cookies with egg paint, freehand or with a stencil. Bake at 375°F for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the cookies begin to brown on the edges. Remove the cookie sheet from the oven and place it on a wire rack to cool for 5 minutes. Transfer the cookies onto the rack to finish cooling.



STORAGE FIX

- When storing or freezing frosted cookies, very delicate cookies, soft cookies, or bars, place layers of waxed paper between them.

Aunt Sophie's Magic Cookies

2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened
4 cups all-purpose flour
1 pint vanilla ice cream, softened
¾ cup sugar
¼ cup pecans or walnuts, chopped fine
2 tablespoons cinnamon

Cut the butter into the flour. Add the ice cream and blend it into the mixture with your hands. (Add more flour if necessary to make the dough easy to handle.) Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight. The dough will become hard.

When you're ready to bake, preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, combine the sugar, nuts, and cinnamon. Sprinkle some of the sugar mixture onto a pastry cloth or smooth (not terry cloth) dish towel. On top of the sugar mixture, roll out a small piece of the dough to form a 4- to 5-inch circle that is ⅛-inch thick. Turn the dough over once during rolling so that both sides are covered with the sugar mixture. Cut the circle into quarters and roll each from the outside to the center. Repeat until all the dough and sugar mixture are used. Bake on a cookie sheet for 20 minutes or until browned. **Makes 6 to 7 dozen cookies.**

Oatmeal–Chocolate Chip Cookies

**1 cup (2 sticks) butter or margarine,
at room temperature**
½ cup sugar
½ cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 large egg
2 cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 cups quick-cooking rolled oats
2 cups chocolate chips
½ cup chopped nuts (optional)

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Lightly grease your cookie sheets. In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugars until smooth. Add the vanilla and egg and mix to blend. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda. Add to the butter mixture and stir to combine. Add the oats and mix to blend. Stir in the chocolate chips and nuts. Drop by spoonfuls onto cookie sheets and bake for 10 minutes, or until lightly browned. **Makes 4 dozen cookies.**

Carrot Cookies With Orange Butter Frosting

COOKIES:

½ cup shortening

½ cup (1 stick) butter or margarine

¾ cup sugar

2 eggs

1 cup cooked and mashed carrots

2 cups flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

¾ cup shredded coconut

FROSTING:

1½ cups confectioners' sugar

3 tablespoons butter or margarine

2 teaspoons grated orange peel

1 tablespoon orange juice

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Lightly grease your cookie sheets.

For cookies: Into a medium bowl, put the shortening, butter, sugar, and eggs and mix thoroughly. Add the carrots and stir to blend. Add the flour, baking soda, and salt and mix. Add the coconut and stir. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto a cookie sheet, leaving about 2 inches between them. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until no imprint remains when touched lightly. Remove from the oven and transfer to a rack to cool. Cool completely before frosting.

For frosting: In a medium bowl and with an electric beater, beat all of the ingredients together until smooth. If needed, add a few drops of water to thin the frosting enough for spreading. **Makes 5 dozen cookies.**



Gingerbread Men

- 1 cup brown sugar**
- 1 cup dark molasses**
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon**
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 4 cups flour**

In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, bring brown sugar, molasses, and butter to a boil. Remove from heat and let cool slightly. Dissolve the baking soda in ⅓ cup of water and add it to the molasses mixture. Add the remaining ingredients and stir until well blended. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill for at least 8 hours.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease a cookie sheet. Roll out the dough to ⅛-inch thickness on a floured board. Cut with a gingerbread-man cookie cutter. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, or until crisp and golden. Allow the cookies to cool before decorating. **Makes about 4 dozen cookies.**



Best Brownies

Everyone has a favorite brownie recipe, but these are hard to beat.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened**
- 2 cups sugar**
- 1 tablespoon corn syrup**
- ⅓ cup cocoa**
- 4 large eggs**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 13x9-inch baking pan. Into a large bowl, put the butter, sugar, corn syrup, cocoa, eggs, and vanilla and stir to blend. In a separate bowl, combine the flour and baking powder. Add the flour to the batter, mixing well. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake for about 30 minutes, or until the top is shiny and the center is set. Allow to cool in the pan before cutting into squares. **Makes 24 brownies.**

Pumpkin Cheesecake Bars

These luscious bars have a hint of cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg.

CRUST:

- 1 package ($\frac{1}{3}$ pound) graham crackers**
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup packed light-brown sugar**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cinnamon**
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**

FILLING:

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened**
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup packed light-brown sugar**
- 1 large egg**
- 1 egg yolk**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon each cinnamon, ground ginger, and nutmeg**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup canned pumpkin**
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup heavy cream**

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9-inch square pan.

For crust: Break the crackers into a food processor. Add the brown sugar and cinnamon, and process to a fine meal. Add the melted butter and process again. Press the crust into the bottom of the pan and slightly up the sides. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool. Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F.

For filling: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the cream cheese, brown sugar, egg, and egg yolk. Add the vanilla and stir to blend. Add the remaining ingredients and stir until smooth. Pour the filling into the crust and bake for 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool on a rack. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours before slicing. **Makes 9 bars.**



Peanut Butter and Jelly Bars

Kids love these as breakfast-on-the-run or for after-school snacks. Substitute your favorite flavor of jam or jelly.

½ cup smooth peanut butter
7 tablespoons margarine, softened
1 cup packed brown sugar
1¼ cups flour
1¼ cups quick-cooking oats
¾ cup strawberry jam or jelly

Preheat the oven to 300°F. In a large bowl and with an electric mixer, cream the peanut butter, margarine, and brown sugar until the mixture is light and fluffy. Add the flour and oats and mix well. Press half of the mixture into an 8x8-inch baking pan. Gently spread the jam over the mixture. Layer the remaining oat mixture over the jam and press lightly. Bake for about 40 minutes. Cool and cut into bars.
Makes 16 bars.

Lemon Squares

CRUST:

2 cups all-purpose flour
½ cup confectioners' sugar
1 cup (2 sticks) margarine

FILLING:

4 large eggs, beaten
2 cups sugar
⅓ cup lemon juice*
¼ cup all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
confectioners' sugar for dusting (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

For crust: Put the flour and confectioners' sugar into a large bowl and mix. Cut in the margarine. Press the crust into a 13x9-inch baking pan. Bake for 25 minutes.

For filling: Put all of the ingredients into a large bowl and stir to combine. Pour the filling onto the baked crust. Return the pan to the oven and bake for 25 minutes more. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar, if desired. Cut into squares when cool. **Makes 24 squares.**

***NOTE: If desired, add 2 tablespoons of fresh-grated lemon zest to the filling. Or, substitute key lime juice for lemon juice, and omit the lemon zest.**

Chocolate Hazelnut Dream Bars

BARS:

- 1 cup whole skinless hazelnuts**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- 2 tablespoons cocoa powder**
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter**
- 1½ teaspoons hazelnut liqueur**
- 1 large egg, slightly beaten**
- 1¼ cups vanilla wafer crumbs**
- ½ cup flaked coconut**
- 1 ounce white chocolate, melted,
for garnish**

FROSTING:

- ⅓ cup butter**
- 2 tablespoons hazelnut liqueur**
- 3 cups sifted confectioners' sugar**
- 2 to 3 tablespoons half-and-half**

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

For bars: Spread the hazelnuts on a cookie sheet and toast in the oven for 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Reserve 36 for garnish. Chop the rest fine. Put the sugar and cocoa into a heavy saucepan and stir to combine. Add the butter, hazelnut liqueur, and egg. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until the butter melts and the mixture thickens. Remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the chopped hazelnuts, vanilla wafer crumbs, and coconut. Press the mixture firmly into an 9-inch square pan. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and chill for 20 minutes.

For frosting: In a large bowl and with an electric mixer at medium speed, cream the butter. Add the hazelnut liqueur and stir. Gradually add the confectioners' sugar, alternating with the half-and-half and beating between each addition. (Begin and end with the confectioners' sugar.) Beat until mixture reaches spreading consistency. Spread the frosting over the cooled hazelnut bars. Cover with plastic wrap and chill for 25 minutes. Cut the bars into 1½-inch squares. To garnish, dip the reserved hazelnuts into the white chocolate and place one on each square. Store in the refrigerator. **Makes 36 bars.**



PAN SIZES AND EQUIVALENTS

■ You don't need to own pans in every size; you can substitute one for another. However, you must keep in mind that if you change the pan size, you may have to change the cooking time. For example, if a recipe calls for using an 8-inch round cake pan and baking for 25 minutes, and you substitute a 9-inch pan, the cake may bake in only 20 minutes because the batter forms a thinner layer in the larger pan. (Use a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake to test for doneness. If it comes out clean, the cake has finished baking.)

Also, specialty pans such as tube and Bundt pans distribute heat differently; you may not get the same results if you substitute a regular cake pan for a specialty one, even if the volume is the same. Here's a plan for those times when you don't have the correct-size pan:

PAN SIZES	VOLUME	SUBSTITUTE
9-INCH PIE PAN	4 cups	8-inch round cake pan
8x4x2½-INCH LOAF PAN	6 cups	Three 5x2-inch loaf pans two 3x1¼-inch muffin tins 12x8x2-inch cake pan
9x5x3-INCH LOAF PAN	8 cups	8x8-inch cake pan 9-inch round cake pan
15x10x1-INCH JELLY-ROLL PAN	10 cups	9x9-inch cake pan two 8-inch round cake pans 8x3-inch springform pan
10x3-INCH BUNDT PAN	12 cups	Two 8x4x2½-inch loaf pans 9x3-inch angel food cake pan 9x3-inch springform pan
13x9x2-INCH CAKE PAN	14 to 15 cups	Two 9-inch round cake pans Two 8x8-inch cake pans

■ If you are cooking a casserole and don't have the correct-size dish, substitute a baking pan. Again, think about the depth of the ingredients in the dish and lengthen or shorten the baking time accordingly.

CASSEROLE SIZE	PAN SUBSTITUTE
1½ quarts	9x5x3-inch loaf pan
2 quarts	8x8-inch cake pan
2½ quarts	9x9-inch cake pan
3 quarts	13x9x2-inch cake pan
4 quarts	14x10x2-inch cake pan

