

Simnel Cake

Simnel cakes were originally baked in two layers with a filling of almond paste in between. If serving this traditional cake for Easter it can be decorated with eleven marzipan balls to represent the apostles without Judas. The cake can of course be decorated with almond paste, icing and colourful spring flowers. For a quicker version add the almond paste in cubes during baking

Ingredients

285g/10oz raisings
285g/10oz golden sultanas
115g/4oz chopped glace fruits
70ml/ 1/8 pint dry sherry
225g/8oz butter
225g/8oz soft brown sugar
4 eggs, lightly whisked
225g/8oz plain flour
½ tsp baking powder
Rind of 1 lemon, finely grated
1 tsp mixed spice
½ tsp nutmeg
85g/3oz ground almonds
Few drops of vanilla essence

Almond Paste

170g/6oz ground almonds
85g/3oz caster sugar
85g/3oz icing sugar
A little almond essence and vanilla flavouring
1 egg

Method

Soak the raisins, sultanas and glace fruit overnight in the sherry. Prepare a round, deep 23cm/9 inch tin by lining well with either waxed or greaseproof paper.

Cream the butter and soft brown sugar until light and fluffy. Then alternatively add the lightly whisked eggs with vanilla essence and sieved flour. I find it a good idea to add a little flour before the eggs, this prevents the mixture curdling. Add the eggs and flour in three to four additions and add the baking powder with the last of the flour. Next add the finely grated lemon rind, mixed spice, nutmeg and ground almonds, mixing well. Finally add all the marinated fruit and ensure it is evenly dispersed throughout the cake.

To make the almond paste, mix the ground almonds with the icing sugar and caster sugar. Add the vanilla flavouring and almond essence and sufficient beaten egg to give a pliable but not sticky paste. Cover a board with a little sieved icing sugar turn out the paste

and knead until smooth. Roll out and cut out a circle the size of the tin. If using almond paste to decorate the top of the cake, repeat this process. I like to allow at least 170g/6oz quantity of almond paste for the centre and the same for the top. The layer in the centre of the cake should be approximately 1-1½ cm (½ - ¾ in.) thick.

Spoon half the mixture into the lined tin and level the top. Place the layer of almond paste on top and finally the remainder of the cake mixture and again level the top. Bake in the oven at 160°C/325°F or regulo 3 for 2½ - 3 hours or until cooked and firm. Leave the cake in the tin for 15 minutes to cool before turning out to prevent the cake from splitting at the marzipan layer. When cold, decorate the cake as you wish.

This cake can be decorated in several ways. Use almond paste to create a traditional Simnel cake. Or cover with almond paste and royal icing, then decorate with candied spring flowers to create a cake which is ideal for Mothering Sunday.