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LEMON OLIVE OIL CAKE

Prep time: 1 hour

Cook time: 45 minutes

Yield: 1 cake

Difficulty: Moderate

This delicious lemon cake is packed with nutritious, heart-healthy olive oil and tastes like summer. Even die-hard butter lovers will have to admit this cake is moist and tasty.

My Italian grandmother used to make a traditional olive oil cake topped with strawberries and dusted with powdered sugar, but it wasn't until I started living in California and had my own Meyer lemon tree that I added the distinctive lemon curd filling. These lemons make the curd "Goldilocks-tested": not too tart, not too sweet.

INGREDIENTS

Lemon Olive Oil Cake:

1 cup extra virgin olive oil
5 large eggs, separated (reserve 1 white)
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large lemon, juiced and zested
1 cup cake flour, sifted
1/2 teaspoon salt

Lemon Curd Filling:

5 large egg yolks
1 cup granulated sugar
1 zest of a lemon
1 cup lemon juice
5 tablespoons butter, large diced

Topping:

1 pound fresh strawberries, sliced

PREPARATION

Lemon Olive Oil Cake:

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease a 9-inch springform pan with the olive oil, then line the bottom with round parchment paper. In an electric mixer, beat together the egg yolks and 1/2 cup sugar until pale and thick on high for about 5 minutes. Reduce speed to medium and add olive oil and lemon juice until combined. On low, add flour and mix until just combined—do not over mix.

Using a clean mixing bowl and whisk, beat 4 egg whites with 1/2 teaspoon salt on medium until foamy, then add 1/2 cup sugar a little at a time, beating continuously on high until stiff, shiny peaks form. Gently fold 1/2 of the whites into the yolk mixture to lighten, then fold in the remaining whites gently. Transfer batter to pan and gently tap to release air bubbles.

Bake until golden for 30-40 minutes. A toothpick inserted in the center should come out clean. Cool for 10 minutes, then run a thin knife around the edge of the pan to remove it.

Cool the cake on a cooling rack to room temperature. Remove the bottom of the pan and parchment and place the cake on a serving plate.

Lemon Curd Filling:

Prepare a double boiler with 2 inches of water in the bottom pan. Bring to a gentle simmer. Add egg yolks, sugar, lemon zest and juice. Whisk the ingredients until the curd thickens and coats the back of a spoon. Remove bowl from simmering water and add butter, stirring until melted and smooth. Strain curd into a bowl, cover with plastic pressed down to the surface to prevent a skin from forming and refrigerate until ready to use.

Slice cake in half and fill with lemon curd filling. Serve with sliced strawberries on top or to the side.

CHANGE IT UP

- Use lemon-flavored olive oil instead of regular olive oil. Remember to only use extra virgin oil! You can find flavored and specialty-type olive oils in most fine grocery stores.
- Try different kinds of berries like blueberries, blackberries or even mango slices.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

You can substitute olive oil for other oils in your cooking and baking on a one-for-one basis. If a recipe calls for 1/2 cup vegetable oil, you can use 1/2 cup olive oil instead. Try this with other cakes: carrot or chocolate cake, for instance.

OLIVE OIL—WHAT MAKES IT SO HEALTHY?

The main type of fat found in olive oil is called monounsaturated fatty acid, which is a healthy fat. If you replace saturated and trans fats with fats like olive oil that are mostly unsaturated, you can gain measurable health benefits. (Saturated fats are found in meat, high-fat dairy products, and tropical oils. “Partially hydrogenated” fats include margarine and shortening).

Most importantly, monounsaturated fats can help reduce bad cholesterol levels, which in turn can lower your risk of heart disease

and stroke. These healthy fats can also provide nutrition for the healthy development and maintenance of your body's cells.

SAVE TIME

You can buy lemon curd already made in many stores. Just make sure you look for lemon curd, not lemon pie filling. Lemon curd is a traditional English recipe, and the texture is smoother and the flavor more intense than pie filling, which is thickened with flour or cornstarch. Lemon curd uses egg yolks, lemon juice and zest.

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