



Fresh fig cake with honey cream-cheese frosting in New York, Sept. 2, 2017. Chopping fresh figs and folding them into cake batter is not something you usually see, but that's exactly what happens in this recipe for fig cake, and it turns out to be an excellent idea. (Andrew Scrivani/The New York Times)

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Figs are showy fruit.

They can't help themselves. Even the plainest, drabbest fig will reveal a scarlet belly, flecked with shimmering seeds, once you take a bite. Whether they're sliced or halved, arranged in a tart shell, on a crostini or just on a plate, there are few visions more enticing. This is why most fig recipes put the fruit front and center, so you can admire its fleshy beauty before you gobble it up.

It follows that chopping fresh figs and folding them into cake batter is not something you usually see, but that's exactly what happens in this recipe for fig cake. It turns out to be an excellent idea.

You see, most fig cakes rely on fig jam or dried figs for flavor. This works to some extent, adding an almost candied, caramelized sweetness. What you don't get is the lusciousness of fresh fruit.

Not here. In this recipe, the fresh figs melt into the batter as the cake bakes, sweetening it and adding moisture, while imparting a deeply rich, fruity taste. There's still fig jam to accentuate the sweetness, while spices — cinnamon, ginger and cardamom — give the cake an autumnal, almost carrot-cake-like appeal that's underscored by the cream-cheese frosting swirled on top.

I got the original recipe from Eli Zabar, who owns Eli's Table and E.A.T. on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. He started putting fresh figs in cake as a way to take advantage of an overabundant harvest from what he calls his rooftop fig-tree forest. It's a rare thing to have too many figs, but using them in cake was an inspired idea.

I fiddled with his recipe just a bit, changing the spices and adding honey to the cream cheese frosting. The honey gives the frosting more depth than usual. It also makes the cake a good option to serve as dessert for a Rosh Hashana dinner — a meal at which consuming lots of honey is a symbolic way to usher in a sweet new year.

Along those same lines, if you can't get fresh figs, you could substitute chopped apple in the batter. (Apples are another symbolic Rosh Hashana food.) The cake won't be as deeply figgy, but it will still be just as sweet, which is perfect for the Jewish New Year and beyond.

Fresh-Fig Cake With Honey Cream-Cheese Frosting

Yield: 12 servings

Time: 1 1/2 hours, plus cooling

For the cake:

Butter, for greasing the pan	3/4 cup chopped fresh figs (3 to 4 figs)
3 cups all-purpose flour, more for flouring the pan	3/4 cup fig jam
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon	3/4 cup chopped pecans or walnuts
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger	For the frosting and topping:
1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom	12 tablespoons unsalted butter (1 1/2 sticks), softened
3/4 teaspoon baking soda	2 cups/16 ounces cream cheese, softened
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt	1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
1 1/2 cups sugar	3 tablespoons honey
4 large eggs	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil	3 2/3 cups powdered sugar
2 tablespoons buttermilk or plain yogurt	1 cup sliced fresh figs (about 5 figs)

1: Make the cake: Heat oven to 325 degrees. Butter and flour a 10-inch cake pan (or two 9-inch pans), and line the bottom with parchment paper.

2: In a large bowl, whisk together flour, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, baking soda and salt.

3: Using an electric mixer, whisk to combine sugar and eggs until light and fluffy, about 4 minutes. Whisk in oil and buttermilk or yogurt to combine.

4: Using a rubber spatula, gently fold dry ingredients into egg mixture just until combined. Fold in figs, jam and pecans.

5: Scrape into prepared cake pan and bake until browned and springy to the touch, about 65 to 75 minutes (or 35 to 45 minutes for the 9-inch pans). If the top gets too dark before the cake is finished baking, cover it with foil. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool completely.

6: While cake is cooling, make the frosting: Using an electric mixer, beat butter, cream cheese and salt on low speed until smooth. Beat in honey and vanilla, then beat in powdered sugar.

7: To assemble the cake, remove cooled cake from pan and peel off parchment paper. Slice cake in half horizontally, so you end up with 2 layers. (You don't need to do this for the 9-inch cakes.) Spread half the frosting between the layers, sandwiching it. Dollop remaining frosting in a thick layer on top of the cake, leaving a 1-inch border on the top of the cake, and the sides, bare. Chill until ready to serve. Just before serving, top with sliced figs.