

Irish Christmas Cake

It's that time of year when the shops are full of plump mixed fruit, candied fruit peel, cherries and what were once exotic Christmas spices, nutmeg and cinnamon, according to tradition, the spices are meant to represent the middle eastern spices brought by the three wise men.

Baking of the Irish Christmas Cake starts about 12 weeks before Christmas, the dried fruit, currants, raisins and sultanas, mixed peel and glace cherries are soaked in Irish Whiskey to plump them up.

Once baked the cakes are left to age, regularly fed with more whiskey, until a week before Christmas when they are decorated with a thin layer of marzipan and iced with a snow-white icing.

You will need a cake tin size 9"/23cm round or 8"/20cm square.

Ingredients

For the pre-soaking:

575g currants)

225g sultanas)

225g raisins)

60g chopped glacé cherries

60g mixed chopped candied peel

100ml whiskey

For the cake:

275g plain flour

½ teaspoon salt

¼ level teaspoon nutmeg, freshly grated

½ level teaspoon ground mixed spice

275g dark brown soft sugar

5 medium eggs

1 tablespoon black treacle

275g butter

60g chopped almonds)

zest of 1 lemon and 1 orange

For feeding and topping:

Whiskey to 'feed' the cake

Marzipan

Icing

Decorations and Ribbon

Method:

- Put all the pre-soak ingredients in a bowl and mix them with the whiskey, cover with a cloth and leave them to soak for a minimum of 12 hours.
- When you're ready to cook the cake, pre-heat the oven to 140°C, gas mark 1.
- Now sift the flour, salt and spices into a very large roomy mixing bowl then add the sugar, eggs, treacle (warm it a little first to make it easier) and butter and beat with an electric hand whisk or food mixer until everything is smooth and fluffy.
- Now gradually fold in the pre-soaked fruit mixture, chopped nuts and finally the grated lemon and orange zests.
- Next, transfer the cake mixture into the prepared tin, spread it out evenly with the back of the spoon.
- Finally take a double square of baking parchment with a E2-sized hole in the centre (for extra protection during the cooking)
- Bake the cake on the lowest shelf of the oven for 4 hours until it feels springy in the centre when lightly touched. Sometimes it can take 30–45 minutes longer than this, but in any case don't look at it for 4 hours.
- Cool the cake for 30 minutes in the tin, then remove it to a wire rack to finish cooling.
- When it's cold, 'feed' it by making small holes in the top and bottom with a cocktail stick and spooning in a couple of tablespoons of whiskey, then wrap it in greaseproof paper and store in an airtight tin.
- You can now 'feed' it at odd intervals until a week before you ice it.
- Cover with marzipan and leave for a few days before icing and decorating.

Sure, no Irish Christmas is complete without a cake, but if you don't want to bake your own, I'll be baking an extra one this year for raffle at the Belmont National School Christmas Play.