As-you-like-it Christmas cake

Use your choice of dried fruit, nuts, citrus zest and booze (or even tea) and get your cake made up to six months in advance

Ingredients

1kg mixed dried fruits (any blend of raisins, sultanas, currants, mixed peel, dried cranberries, gla-cé cherries, chopped dried apricots, dates, dried figs or dried pineapple)

150ml sherry, brandy, rum or brewed tea, plus extra for feeding

zest and juice 2 oranges, 2 lemons or 4 clementines

250g pack unsalted butter, softened, plus extra for the tin

250g light, soft brown sugar

2 tsp vanilla extract

4 eggs

200g plain flour

2 tsp mixed spice

100g whole or flaked almonds, chopped hazelnuts,

1. Put your chosen dried fruit mixture into a large bowl with your choice of alcohol or tea, citrus zest and juice. Mix well, cover and leave overnight.

2. Heat oven to 160C/140C fan/gas 3. Butter and double-line a deep cake tin - 20cm round or 18cm square - with enough baking parchment to come about 2.5cm above the top of the tin. Wrap the outside of the tin with a few sheets of newspaper, securing with staples or string.

3. Beat the butter, sugar and vanilla until creamy, then beat in the eggs one by one. Tip in the flour, mixed spice, soaked dried fruit and any liquid from the bowl, plus your chosen nuts, if using. Stir everything together, then scrape into the cake tin. Using the back of your spoon, make a slight dent in the centre of the mixture, then bake for 1½ hrs.

4. Reduce oven to 140C/120C fan/gas 1, loosely cover the top of the cake with a double sheet of foil or baking parchment, and bake for another 45 mins-1 hr or until a skewer poked right to the bottom comes out clean. Cool in the tin, then lift out and wrap in greaseproof paper or baking parchment. Keep in a cake tin with a tight-fitting lid, or wrapped in a large sheet of foil, in a cool, dark place for up to 6 months. Open the cake every week or two to feed by poking with a skewer in several places and dribbling over a little more of your chosen alcohol or tea.

Per serving
681 kcalories, protein 8g, carbohydrate 112g, fat 24 g, saturated fat 14g, fibre 3g, sugar 97g, salt 0.26 g
Simmer-&-stir Christmas cake

Ingredients
175g butter, chopped
200g dark muscovado sugar
750g luxury mixed dried fruits (one that includes mixed peel and glacé cherries)
finely grated zest and juice of 1 orange
finely grated zest of 1 lemon
100ml/3½ fl oz cherry brandy or brandy plus 4 tbsp more
85g macadamia nuts
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
85g ground almonds
200g plain flour
½ tsp baking powder
1 tsp ground mixed spice
1 tsp ground cinnamon
¼ tsp ground allspice

Makes a 20cm round cake

Preparation and cooking times
- Prep 1 hr - 1 hr 15 mins
- Cook 1 hr - 2 hrs 30 mins
(Cooking time 2 hrs 30 if gas oven)

Method
1. Put the butter, sugar, fruit, zests, juice and 100ml/3½ fl oz brandy in a large pan. Bring slowly to the boil, stirring until the butter has melted. Reduce the heat and bubble for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

2. Remove the pan from the heat and leave to cool for 30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 150C/gas 2/ fan 130C and line the cake tin. Toast the nuts in a dry frying pan, tossing them until evenly browned, or in the oven for 8-10 minutes - keep an eye on them as they burn easily. When they are cool, chop roughly. Stir the eggs, nuts and ground almonds into the fruit mixture and mix well. Sift the flour, baking powder and spices into the pan. Stir in gently, until there are no traces of flour left.
Simmer-&-stir Christmas cake (continued)

4. Spoon the mixture into the tin and smooth it down evenly - you will find this is easiest with the back of a metal spoon which has been dipped into boiling water.

5. Bake for 45 minutes, then turn down the heat to 140C/gas 1/ fan120C and cook for a further 1 -1½ hours (about a further 1¾ hours if you have a gas oven) until the cake is dark golden in appearance and firm to the touch. Cover the top of the cake with foil if it starts to darken too much. To check the cake is done, insert a fine skewer into the centre - if it comes out clean, the cake is cooked.

6. Make holes all over the warm cake with a fine skewer and spoon the extra 4tbsp brandy over the holes until it has all soaked in. Leave the cake to cool in the tin. When it's cold, remove it from the tin, peel off the lining paper, then wrap first in baking parchment and then in foil. The cake will keep in a cupboard for up to three months or you can freeze it for six months.

Recipe from Good Food magazine, November 2002
Simple gingerbread house – for the more adventurous among you!

Ingredients

FOR THE GINGERBREAD
250g unsalted butter
200g dark muscovado sugar
7 tbsp golden syrup
600g plain flour
2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
4 tsp ground ginger

TO DECORATE
200g bag flaked almonds
2 egg whites
500g icing sugar, plus extra to dust
125g pack mini chocolate fingers
generous selection sweets of your choice, choose your own colour theme
1 mini chocolate roll or a dipped chocolate flake
few edible silver balls
Gluten free ginger Christmas Cake

This traditional cake has been jazzed up with lots of ginger - you'd never know it's gluten-free and dairy-free. Perfect for Christmas

**Ingredients**

- Oil, for greasing
- 100g each dried currants, sultanas and raisins
- 225g each semi-dried figs and prunes, roughly chopped
- 200g tub crystallised ginger
- 100g stem ginger, from a jar, chopped
- 2 tbsp stem ginger syrup
- 4 tbsp Cointreau
- 1 tsp each ground ginger and mixed spice
- Zest 2 lemons
- 150ml olive oil
- 175g light muscovado sugar
- 4 eggs
- 225g gluten-free flour
- 1 tsp gluten-free baking powder

**FOR THE TOPPING**

- 4 tbsp apricot jam
- 1 tbsp Cointreau
- 450g mixed fruit, including figs, prunes, dates and apricots

**Method**

1. Heat oven to 140C/fan 120C/gas 1. Lightly oil a 7 1/2 cm deep, 25 cm round cake tin, and line it with a double layer of baking parchment.

2. Mix the dried fruits, ginger and syrup, Cointreau, spices and lemon zest. Put the olive oil, sugar and eggs in a bowl, whisk together until light and fluffy. Sift the flour and baking powder into the mixture and tip in the fruit. Fold and stir together well.

3. Spoon the mixture into the cake tin. Bake in the centre of the oven for 2-2 1/2 hrs, or until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Cover with foil if the cake begins to over-brown. Take from the oven and leave to cool in the tin. Remove, leaving the baking parchment in place until you decorate.

4. For the topping: warm the jam and Cointreau together until the jam is liquid, allow to cool. Arrange the fruit on the cake and brush with the jam.

**Making ahead** Make the cake to the end of step 3 up to one month ahead, then wrap in foil. Arrange and glaze the fruit a few days before Christmas.

**Per serving for 10** 600 kcalories, protein 7g, carbohydrate 107g, fat 18 g, saturated fat 3g, fibre 4g, sugar 43g, salt 0.33 g