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Apple Walnut Caramel Kuchen

Makes One 9-inch Cake, 8 - 10 Servings

Apples, walnuts, and caramel – what could be bad? Here is a cake made with a nutty press-in pastry that is filled with layers of caramel-coated sliced apples and toasted walnuts. The cake is finished with a topping of buttery streusel crumbs. Be sure to serve this cake slightly warm.

AT A GLANCE:

PAN: 9-inch springform pan

PAN PREP: Butter generously/line with parchment

OVEN TEMP: 350°F

BAKING TIME: 55 to 60 minutes

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

CRUST:

1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour, spooned in and leveled

1/3 cup walnuts, lightly toasted

2/3 cup sugar

1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes, partially frozen

2 large egg yolks

3 tablespoons milk

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest

CRUMB TOPPING:

2/3 cup all-purpose flour, spooned in and leveled

1/4 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

Pinch of salt

1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted and cooled to tepid

FILLING:

3 medium Granny Smith apples (about 1 pound), peeled, halved, and cored

1/2 teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

1/4 cup water

2/3 cup sugar

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/3 cup heavy cream

1 cup coarsely chopped, lightly toasted walnuts

1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Powdered sugar, for dusting



Apple Walnut Caramel Kuchen, (continued)

MAKE THE CRUST:

1. Position the rack in the middle of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Generously butter a 9-inch springform pan, line the bottom with parchment, and place in the refrigerator until ready to use.
2. Place the flour, walnuts, sugar, baking powder, and salt in the work bowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Pulse 8 to 10 times. Add the chilled butter, pulse 10 to 12 times, then process for 5 to 7 seconds, or until fine crumbs are formed.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together the egg yolks, milk, vanilla, and lemon zest. Add to the processor and pulse 6 to 8 times, or just until the mixture begins to gather together and form a ball.

SHAPE THE CRUST:

4. Remove the dough from the work bowl and place it on a lightly floured surface. With lightly floured hands, pat it into a disk. Place the disk into the chilled baking pan and with a floured hand, press the dough into the bottom of the pan, working from the center out. Then press the dough against the side of the pan, forcing it upward to form a wall 1/2-inch thick and 3/4-inch deep. Because the dough has a tendency to be thick at the crease of the pan, bend your index finger and press against the crease of the pan. Then press the bottom of the pan to smooth the surface. Check the dough for evenness by inserting the tip of a small knife at intervals around the pan. Refrigerate the dough while preparing the topping and filling.

MAKE THE CRUMB TOPPING:

5. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Add the melted butter and stir with a kitchen fork until small crumbs form. Set aside.

MAKE THE FILLING:

6. Cut the apples into scant 1/4-inch slices and place them in a large bowl. Toss them with the lemon zest and 2-1/2 teaspoons of the lemon juice. Set aside.
7. Place the water in a 2-quart heavy saucepan measuring 7 inches across the top. Add the sugar, the remaining 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice, and the salt, and stir gently. Cook on medium-low heat until the liquid comes to a boil. If some sugar crystals remain on the bottom of the saucepan, gently stir the syrup to dissolve them. On low heat, continue to cook until the mixture turns a medium amber color. (This can take from 5 to 15 minutes, depending on the thickness of the saucepan). When the color of the sugar begins to change, watch carefully, as it can burn in a matter of seconds.
8. Remove the caramel syrup from the heat, immediately add the heavy cream (the mixture will bubble up), then stir until the caramel is smooth. Return to the heat and simmer for 3 to 4 minutes, or until big bubbles begin to form on the surface. Watch carefully or the caramel will become too dark. Off the heat, stir in the chopped walnuts and vanilla. Let cool for 5 minutes.



Apple Walnut Caramel Kuchen, (continued)

9. Fold the caramel/nut mixture into the apples; it's okay if some of the nuts cluster together. Spoon the fruit and nuts carefully into the dough-lined pan, arranging the apples and nuts to fill in the spaces, slightly mounding them in the center.

10. Take a handful of the streusel crumbs and squeeze gently to form a large clump. Then break the clump into smaller pieces and sprinkle them evenly over the filling. Repeat until all of the crumbs have been used and the apples are covered.

FINISH THE CAKE:

11. Place the pan on a strip of heavy-duty aluminum foil and mold the foil around the pan to catch any leakage. Bake for 55 to 60 minutes. The cake is done when it begins to pull away from the side of the pan and the crumbs are golden brown.

12. Remove the cake from the oven and let stand on a cooling rack for 20 minutes. Release and remove the side of the pan and let cool for 30 minutes longer. To remove the bottom of the pan and the parchment, place a 12-inch strip of aluminum foil directly on top of the cake, cupping the foil around the side to hold the topping in place. Cover with a cooling rack, invert the cake, and carefully lift off the bottom of the pan and remove the parchment. Immediately cover with another rack, invert again, and remove the parchment. Immediately cover with another rack, invert again, and remove the foil. This cake is best served slightly warm.

STORAGE:

Store under a glass cake dome or tightly covered with aluminum foil for up to 2 days. For longer storage, refrigerate for up to 5 days. Reheat before serving in a 325°F oven for 15 minutes or until slightly warm. This cake may be frozen.