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Pumpkin Crêpe Cake

Makes about 1 "cake" – Serves 10-12

If you're looking for a stunning dessert presentation that's full of Thanksgiving flavors, but is a bit unique and different, try this pumpkin crêpe "cake." Based on the French *gâteau de crêpes* (cake of crêpes), or *gâteau mille crêpes* (cake of a thousand crêpes), this creation features autumn-spiced crêpes stacked flat with alternating layers of pumpkin custard and vanilla custard. The result is not only visually stunning, but is scrumptious to eat. In fact, it's beyond delicious, it's the sort experience that cravings are made of!

Assemble the *gâteau* in four do-ahead steps: (1) make the crêpes, (2) blend the pumpkin custard, (3) cook the vanilla custard, and (4) assemble the *gâteau*. Thoroughly chill the crepes and custards, then build layer-by-layer. Re-chill the assembled *gâteau* thoroughly – at least 4 hours or overnight.

Making the Crêpes:

Crêpe Ingredients: *(makes approximately 20-24 crêpes)*
(Halve the recipe and make 2 batches of batter if easier)

1/2 cup brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon allspice
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
Pinch of ground cloves
8 large eggs
3 cups whole milk
2 tablespoons pure vanilla extract
12 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
2 cups all-purpose flour
Oil for the crêpe pan (flavorless, such as canola oil)

Crêpe Directions:

(1) Combine the sugar, salt, spices, eggs, milk, and vanilla in the bowl of food processor or a large mixing bowl. Pulse or whisk until evenly combined.

(2) Stream in the melted butter and continuing pulsing or whisking. Add the flour and combine until well mixed; avoid over mixing. The batter will be very thin with the consistency of heavy cream.

(3) Allow the batter to sit for several hours or overnight in the refrigerator. This chilled resting period is key to forming a good batter.

Continued on Page 2



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Page 2, Pumpkin Crêpe Cake, continued

(4) When it's time to make the crêpes, prepare a landing place for the finished crêpes by lining a half sheet pan with parchment paper (to prevent sticking to the pan).

(5) Over medium heat, oil a nonstick crêpe pan or low-sided skillet with a paper towel dipped in a flavorless oil. Pour a thin layer of the crêpe batter into a nonstick crêpe pan, or a low-sided nonstick skillet. Spread the batter to evenly coat the bottom of the pan. As the batter begins to cook and show signs of drying at the edges and the batter set at the center, about 30-60 seconds, turn the crêpe and cook on the other side for 15-30 seconds or until fully cooked and nicely browned. Transfer the cooked crêpe to the prepared pan and repeat until all the batter has been used, about 20-24 crêpes (not a thousand!).

(6) Allow the crêpes to cool individually, then stack with a square of parchment paper placed in between the crêpes to prevent sticking. Wrap the entire stack well to prevent drying out and to prevent odors from invading the flavor of the crêpes until ready to assemble the cake.

Making the Pumpkin Custard Filling:

Pumpkin Custard Filling Ingredients: Makes about 4 cups

1-1/2 cups whole milk
1-1/2 cups pumpkin puree (one 15 oz. can)
6 large egg yolks
3/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon allspice
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
Pinch of ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
1/3 cup cornstarch
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

Pumpkin Filling Directions

(1) Heat the milk to scalding, just prior to a simmer, in a medium, 3-4 qt. saucepan.

(2) Whisk together the pumpkin puree, egg yolks, brown sugar, spices, salt, and cornstarch until smooth. Stirring continuously, stream in 1/2-cup of the hot milk. Gradually add the remaining hot milk continuing to stir constantly. (This process, known as "tempering," gradually increases the temperature of the mixture without curdling the egg yolks.)

Continued on Page 3



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Page 3, Pumpkin Crêpe Cake, continued

(3) Pour the mixture back into the saucepan used to heat the milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring continually, until the mixture comes to a boil. Allow to boil 1-2 minutes, continuing to stir all the while. Remove from heat.

(4) Add the vanilla extract and cubes of butter. Stir until the butter is melted and combined into the mixture. Set aside to cool to room temperature. Place a piece of plastic wrap on the surface of the pastry cream to prevent the formation of a "skin." Store in the refrigerator until ready to assemble the *gâteau*.

Making the Vanilla Custard Filling:

Vanilla Custard Filling Ingredients - Makes about 4 cups

2 cups whole milk
1 cup heavy cream
3 large eggs
3 large yolks
3/4 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
3 tablespoons cornstarch
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

(1) Heat the milk to scalding, just prior to a simmer, in a medium saucepan.

(2) Whisk together the cream, eggs, egg yolks, sugar, salt, and cornstarch until smooth. If necessary, strain through a fine sieve. Stream in 1/2-cup of the hot milk stirring continuously. Gradually add the remaining hot milk continuing to stir constantly. (This process, known as "tempering," gradually increases the temperature of the mixture without curdling the eggs and egg yolks.)

(3) Pour the mixture back into the saucepan used to heat the milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring continually, until the mixture comes to a boil. Allow to boil 1-2 minutes, continuing to stir all the while. Remove from heat.

(4) Add the vanilla extract and cubes of butter. Stir until the butter is melted and combined into the mixture. Set aside to cool to room temperature. Place a piece of plastic wrap on the surface of the pastry cream to prevent the formation of a "skin." Store in the refrigerator until ready to assemble the *gâteau*.

Continued on Page 4



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Page 4, Pumpkin Crêpe Cake, continued

Assembling and Finishing the Gâteau:

Topping: Cinnamon-spiced Whipped Cream Ingredients:

1 cup heavy cream
1/4 cup powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon cinnamon, plus additional for dusting

(1) Smear a teaspoon of the pumpkin filling in a circle on the bottom of the presentation plate. This will help to steady the final stack of *crêpes*.

(2) Place a *crêpe*, centered, on the plate. Spread about 2-3 tablespoons of the pumpkin filling and spread in a thin, even layer. Top with a *crêpe*. Similarly, spread 2-3 tablespoons of the vanilla filling on top and spread in a thin, even layer. Repeat the sequence of alternating layers until all the *crêpes* are stacked finishing with a *crêpe*.

(3) Wrap the *gâteau* well to prevent drying out and to deter any odors in the refrigerator transferring to the dessert. Chill the assembled *gâteau* for 4 hours or overnight.

(4) Just prior to serving, stir the heavy cream, powdered sugar, vanilla extract, and cinnamon until the sugar is dissolved. Whip the mixture to stiff peaks. Spread a thick layer of the whipped cream on top of the *gâteau*. Or, using a piping bag and star tip, pipe the whipped cream on top of the *gâteau* in an interesting design of your choice. Dust the top lightly with additional cinnamon.

(5) To serve, cut narrow wedges of the *gâteau* with a long knife. Lay each slice on its side on an individual dessert plate. Serve with extra whipped cream if desired.