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Strawberry Chocolate Icebox Cake

Makes a 9 x 13 pan – about 15 pieces

When the summer heat becomes relentless, an old-fashioned icebox cake is an order! This dessert immediately conjures up a 1950s scenario where packaged foods really came of age and food companies began selling their foods by including recipes featuring their prepared products. We've used chocolate graham crackers in our version which takes on the character of old-fashioned ice cream sandwiches as they soften while chilling. We've altered a few items in this icebox cake, but kept the basic concept – ease and taste – as some of summer's best fruits are showcased.

Ingredients:

8 oz. (1 pkg) cream cheese, softened
1 14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk
2 teaspoons vanilla
Pinch of salt
3 cups heavy cream
24-28 (1 box) chocolate graham crackers
2 lbs. strawberries, divided
1 tablespoons sugar

Directions:

1. In a deep mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese until smooth and slightly lightened in texture. Add the sweetened condensed milk, vanilla, and salt; beat until smooth. Add the cream and continue beating for 3-4 minutes until the mixture is smooth and has the texture of a very thick whipped mixture and soft peaks.
2. With half of the strawberries, hull and dice into quarter-inch pieces.
3. In a 9 x 13 pan, arrange one layer of the chocolate graham crackers. Spread one-fourth of the whipped mixture on top smoothing into an even layer. Dot the top with one-third of the chopped strawberries.
4. Place a second layer of chocolate graham crackers on top followed by another quarter of the cream filling and one-third of the chopped strawberries. Repeat with a third layer of crackers, cream, and strawberries. Add a fourth layer of crackers and cream (omitting the chopped strawberries on this top layer.)
5. Cover the pan well and chill in the refrigerator for 2 hours or overnight. During chilling, the crackers will soften and the layers will set.
6. Just prior to serving, hull and slice the remaining strawberries. Sprinkle one tablespoon of sugar over the top and gently toss. Allow to macerate for 5 minutes while occasionally tossing.
7. Cut slices of the icebox cake, plating on individual dessert plates. Top with generous spoonfuls of the sliced strawberries.