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Half-Dressed Vanilla Cake
Makes (3) 8-inch cake layers

Spring into party mode! A beautifully layered cake is easier to make than you might think. Just use quality baking pans, only the best ingredients, and apply a little patience. This half-dressed cake is sparingly frosted on the outside, with rich, creamy, buttercream applied between each layer of a very vanilla-y cake. We feature a wreath of buttercream flowers and leaves on top, but fresh berries, or edible flowers would also be a stunning presentation.

Cake Ingredients:

3 cups cake flour
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
2-3/4 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup whole milk, room temperature
1/2 cup buttermilk, room temperature
1-1/2 cups unsalted butter (3 sticks), room temperature
2-1/4 cups sugar
4 eggs, room temperature
2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste
1/2 teaspoon almond extract

Vanilla Simple Syrup:

(heat the ingredients in a small saucepan and stir until the sugar is dissolved. Let cool, then use to lock in moisture into the baked cake)

1/4 cup water
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 tsp pure vanilla extract

Frosting:

Vanilla Buttercream (use our recipe)
Buttercream Flowers and Leaves

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Place the baking racks one-third from the bottom and two-thirds from the top of the oven. Prepare three 8-inch cake pans with parchment rounds, and spray the insides well with baking spray.

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2. Using a whisk, mix the dry ingredients (flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt) together in a large bowl until evenly combined with no lumps appearing. Set aside.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk together the milk and buttermilk until evenly combined. Set aside.
4. In a large stand mixer, cream the butter and sugar together for 3-5 minutes until smooth and creamy.
5. Add the eggs, vanilla, and almond extract to the creamed butter and mix until fully incorporated.
6. Alternate adding the remaining dry and wet (milk and buttermilk) ingredients, beginning and ending with the flour mixture. Beat until just blended. Do not over mix, but do make sure that the batter is smooth, and not lumpy. Pour the batter equally into the three prepared pans.
7. Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until the center of the cake springs back from a light fingertip touch, and a toothpick inserted in the center returns clean.
8. Cool the cakes on top of a cooling rack for 10-20 min, then run a dull blade around the edge of the pan to loosen the sides. Invert the cake using a plate, and place the cake onto a cooling rack. Allow the cake to continue completely cooling before layering and frosting.
9. Place a cardboard cake circle on a revolving cake stand using a little smear of frosting to secure it. Dab another smear of buttercream on the top of the secured cardboard round, and place the first layer of cake in the center. Trim the layer horizontally with a long serrated bread knife to obtain a flat top. Brush the cake with a thin coat of vanilla simple syrup.
10. Once the simple syrup has dried, about 15 minutes, evenly frost the top of the layer with a 1/4" thick layer of buttercream. Finish building the cake by adding layers alternating with cake and frosting. Use the bottom side of a cake as the final layer, as it will have the strongest edge.
11. Add the buttercream frosting to the sides of the cake, frost lightly, while turning the cake. Scrape any excess frosting off the sides with a icing scraper for a "half-dressed" look.
12. Add buttercream icing to the top of the cake spreading it in a thick, even layer. Finish the frosting process by cleaning up the top edge of the cake with an offset spatula.

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13. Add any other decorations to the cake, as desired.

14. To make buttercream roses and leaves, as shown on the top of our cake, cut pieces of parchment paper into 2 inch squares. Use various shades of buttercream and a petal tip to pipe and layer the rose flowers onto each square of parchment. Use a leaf tip to create the leaves. Let these shapes harden or crust slightly -- about 30 minutes or longer. (A short stint in the freezer may help to stabilize the shapes.)

15. When ready, remove each flower from the parchment piece by sliding a sharp knife under each flower and transferring them carefully to the frosted cake. Use additional buttercream on the top of the cake underneath the flowers and leaves to build a little height and depth to the decorations.