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Mini Pumpkin Cheesecakes

Makes 12 mini cheesecakes

Everyone needs a signature pumpkin dessert – this may be yours! All the flavors of autumn baking are captured in cheesecake form and served as individual portions. These mini pumpkin cheesecakes elevate and enhance classic pumpkin flavors, and come together in less than an hour! You'll find that they are a delicious alternative to pumpkin pie! Happy Thanksgiving!

Crust Ingredients:

25 small gingersnap cookies
1/4 cup pecan halves
2 tablespoons brown sugar
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Pumpkin Filling:

8 oz (1 package) cream cheese, room temperature
1/2 cup packed brown sugar, packed
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1/8 teaspoon allspice
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/8 teaspoon salt
2 eggs
1/4 cup heavy cream
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup pumpkin puree

Whipped Cream Topping:

1/2 cup heavy cream
1/8 cup powdered sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon cinnamon

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PREPARE THE CRUST:

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Place the gingersnaps and pecans in a food processor and pulse until an even fine crumb is formed. Add the brown sugar and pulse to combine. Add the melted butter and pulse once again.

2. Lightly spray a mini cheesecake pan with nonstick cooking spray. Press the crumb mixture firmly into the bottom of each cavity to form a crust, using a small glass or a spoon. Bake in the oven for 8 minutes or until the edges just begin to brown. Remove from the oven and allow the crusts to cool in the pan.

PREPARE THE PUMPKIN FILLING:

3. Mix the cream cheese, brown sugar, spices, and salt together with a stand mixer until the mixture is smooth and the spices are evenly distributed. Continue beating the mixture until it becomes slightly fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the sides and add the eggs, one at a time, until just incorporated. Add the cream, vanilla extract, and pumpkin puree, beating until just combined; do not overbeat.

4. Evenly distribute the filling into the cavities of the mini cheesecake pan and return the pan to the oven. Bake the mini cheesecakes until just set, roughly 25 minutes. Remove the mini cheesecakes from the oven and let them cool in the pan for another 25 minutes. Once cooled to room temperature, cover with plastic wrap and transfer to the refrigerator. Continue chilling for at least 4 hours, or overnight.

NOTE: The freshly baked cheesecakes will be slightly sticky to the touch and may sink a little after they have cooled; any swale that develops becomes the perfect place to dollop some whipping cream.

PREPARE THE WHIPPED CREAM:

5. Mix together the cream, powdered sugar, and vanilla extract in a small bowl or in a stand mixer on medium speed until soft peaks form. Dollop the whipped cream on top of each mini cheesecake and sprinkle with cinnamon. Use a small spoon to dollop the whipped cream and sprinkle cinnamon over the cheesecake through a fine mesh sieve.