



### Almond Tarragon Cake

*Superb tasting desserts don't have to be complicated, and this simple cake exceeds all expectations. Rich with the flavors of almonds, sweet butter and vanilla and studded with tiny green leaves, these are beautiful golden cakes full of tantalizing, complex flavor. The almond paste gives a velvety fine crumb, and tarragon imparts a subtle but extraordinary hint of spice. The cakes also taste refreshing when served with the tarragon cream from our tropical fruit salad recipe; this combination of warm cake and cool cream creates an earthy and striking dessert perfect for spring. Although perfectly acceptable when prepared in a larger pan, small individual desserts always take the cake, although they require slightly more effort.*

*8 servings*

### Ingredients

5 ounces almond paste, room temperature  
½ cup sugar, divided use  
½ cup butter, room temperature  
3 eggs, separated  
½ vanilla bean, seeds only or ½ teaspoon vanilla extract  
½ cup flour  
¼ teaspoon baking powder  
A pinch of salt  
1 tablespoon finely chopped tarragon leaves

Powdered sugar for dusting (optional)  
Fresh tarragon sprigs for garnish (optional)

### Equipment

8 2-inch ring molds, fine mesh sieve, handheld or electric mixer

### Preparation

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Liberally butter the insides of 8 2-inch round ring molds.

Using an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the almond paste with ¼ cup sugar until the paste is finely broken up and smooth. Add the butter and beat until thoroughly combined and light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Add the egg yolks one at a time, mixing well and scraping down the sides of the bowl after each addition. Add the vanilla seeds or extract. Sift together the flour, baking powder and salt. Add the dry ingredients and the chopped tarragon to the almond mixture and mix just until incorporated. In a separate clean bowl, begin whipping the egg whites. When frothy, start adding the remaining ¼ cup of sugar a little bit at a time until shiny medium peaks form. Fold the whipped whites into the batter in three additions, taking care not to deflate them.

Fill each ring mold ¾ full with the batter. Bake in the preheated oven for 10-12 minutes, until the cakes are golden and springy to the touch. Cool the cakes slightly and carefully remove from the molds. Serve the cakes warm and garnish with fresh tarragon sprigs and a light dusting of powdered sugar.

*[Chef's Note: Almond paste can be a little finicky to work with, as its thick texture often makes it impossible to fully incorporate into a smooth batter. It may help to slightly microwave the almond paste for 30 seconds before mixing with the sugar.]*

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### Variations

Omit the tarragon and add another herb, spice or citrus zest. Serve with the tarragon cream from our tropical fruit salad recipe.

#### *For the tarragon cream:*

4 egg yolks  
¼ cup sugar  
2 tablespoons honey  
½ cup water  
1 tablespoon fresh tarragon, chopped  
½ vanilla bean, seeds only (optional)  
A pinch salt  
½ cup heavy cream, whipped to medium peaks

#### *Prepare the tarragon cream:*

Combine the egg yolks, sugar, honey, water, tarragon, vanilla seeds and salt in a double boiler or a medium shallow bowl set over a simmering pot of water, making sure the bottom of the bowl does not touch the water. Cook, whisking constantly until the mixture thickens and appears foamy, glossy, and has tripled in volume, for about 4-5 minutes.

Remove from heat and cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Chill in the refrigerator until cooled. Using a fine mesh sieve, strain the cream to remove any bits of tarragon.

Once cooled, gently fold the whipped cream into the base. Set aside until service.

*[Chef's Note: This cream is actually a variation of a sabayon or a cousin of the light, egg-based Italian dessert zabaglione. The sabayon must not get too hot or boil during cooking or it will become grainy. It should never get so hot that you cannot stick a clean finger in it - but, if it begins to feel too hot, remove the bowl briefly from the heat, beating continuously, until the mixture cools slightly, and then return the bowl to the heat and continue cooking. Allow the cream to cool before straining, so the tarragon will impart a deeper flavor in the final product. It will keep covered and refrigerated for up to 3 days.]*

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