



King Cake

A traditional New Orleans Mardi Gras dessert, the king cake evolved from the “galette des rois” served in celebration of Twelfth Night (January 6), and according to legend, to honor the three kings who visited the Christ child on Epiphany. King cake is a brioche-like dough baked into the shape of a ring, often filled with a cream cheese or nut paste filling, and baked with a “baby” or a coin inside. Tradition holds that the person who gets the piece with the baby gets to wear the crown, receives a year of good luck and must host the next king cake party.

Makes 1 12-inch diameter cake

Ingredients

For the dough:

2 envelopes active dry yeast
½ cup sugar
½ cup warm milk, about 110° F
1 stick unsalted butter, melted
5 large egg yolks, room temperature
4 cups all purpose flour, more or less as needed
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon grated orange zest
1 teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon dried nutmeg
1 ceramic baby, dried bean or clean coin
1 teaspoon oil (for oiling the bowl)
2 tablespoons milk (to brush over the cake before baking)

For the bourbon pecan filling:

1 (8-oz) package cream cheese, room temperature
¾ cup confectioner’s sugar, sifted
¼ cup light brown sugar
2 tablespoons bourbon
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup chopped pecans

For the icing:

1 ½ cups confectioner’s sugar, sifted
1-2 tablespoons milk
1 tablespoon orange juice
1 tablespoon bourbon
1 teaspoon vanilla
Purple, green and gold tinted sugar

Equipment

4-inch ring mold, parchment paper or silpat, pastry brush, rolling pin, electric stand mixer, whisk

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Preparation

Prepare the dough:

Pour the warm milk into a small bowl and sprinkle the yeast and 2 teaspoons of sugar into it, whisking to dissolve. Allow the mixture to rest in a warm place for ten minutes, or until the yeast bubbles up and almost doubles in size. Mix thoroughly.

Place the rest of the sugar in the work bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Add the yeast mixture and the melted butter. Beat at medium-low speed to combine. With the mixer running, add the egg yolks one at a time, beating thoroughly after each addition. Add the flour, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg and orange zest and beat until all are incorporated. Increase the speed to high and knead until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl, forms a ball and appears satiny and elastic. A little more flour may be necessary to achieve a smooth dough.

Coat the inside of a large bowl with the oil. Remove the dough from the bowl, form into a smooth ball and place in the bowl, turning to coat the entire surface in the oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and set aside in a warm, draft-free place until it doubles in size, about 1 ½ to 2 hours.

Prepare the bourbon pecan filling:

Place the cream cheese, confectioner's sugar, brown sugar, bourbon, vanilla and cinnamon in the work bowl of a standing mixer. With the paddle attachment, beat until thoroughly combined and smooth. Add the pecans and mix on low speed until incorporated. Set aside until ready for use.

Finish the cake:

Once raised, lightly punch down the dough. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and roll into a 30"x10" rectangle. Spread the bourbon pecan filling evenly on top of the dough, leaving about a ½-inch border on each side. Place the baby or coin somewhere on top of the filling. Starting at the long side, roll the dough jellyroll fashion, shaping into a cylinder. Brush the final edge lightly with milk and press to seal the seam. Place the dough, seam side down, onto a parchment or silpat-lined baking sheet. Shape into a ring and pinch the edges together to seal. Lightly oil the 4-inch ring mold and place in the center of the dough ring. Cover the dough lightly with plastic wrap or a clean towel and place in a warm, draft-free area until doubled in size, about 30 to 45 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Using a pastry brush, brush the top and sides of the risen cake with milk. Bake in the preheated oven until golden brown, about 25 minutes, rotating the pan mid-way through the baking time. Remove from the oven and cool completely on a wire rack.

Prepare the icing:

Stir together the confectioner's sugar, orange juice, bourbon and vanilla, blending well. Add milk to reach the desired consistency for drizzling. Spread the icing over the top of the cake and immediately sprinkle with the colored sugars, alternating in individual rows about 2 inches wide.

Service

Place the cake on a large round serving platter and garnish with Mardi Gras beads. Cut the cake into 2-3 inch pieces and *laissez les bon temps roulez!*

Variations

King cakes can come with a variety of fillings. Try almond paste or cream, fruit spreads or a buttery caramel for an alternate filling.

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