

Japanese Christmas Cake

Ingredients

For the Cake

1 tablespoon soft butter or cooking spray
1/2 cup rice bran oil, or sunflower oil
6 large eggs, separated, whites reserved for the meringue
3/4 cup milk
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
1 1/2 cups caster sugar
2 level teaspoons baking powder
For the Meringue

1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
For the Filling

1 1/2 pounds fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered
4 cups cold heavy cream

Make the Cake

Gather the ingredients. Preheat the oven to 325 F.

Lightly grease or spray a 9 1/2-inch round cake tin, then line the bottom and sides with baking parchment with the paper on the sides standing 2 to 3 inches above the tin as this cake will rise very high. Set aside.

In a stand or electric hand mixer, whisk together the oil with the egg yolks and milk.

In a separate large baking bowl, lightly mix together the flour, 3/4 cup of the sugar and the baking powder. Tip this mixture into the egg mixture and whisk until all incorporated.

In a scrupulously clean bowl, beat the egg whites, using a stand or electric hand mixer on medium speed until they turn slightly opaque. Add the cream of tartar and continue to whisk. The eggs will start to go white and thick. With the mixer running, slowly add the remaining sugar and the eggs will now turn glossy and thicken even more after a few minutes. Finally, add the vanilla and continue to mix for a minute more.

Stir 1/3 of the meringue mixture into the cake batter then, slowly and carefully using a large metal spoon, fold in one-third more and, when incorporated, add the final third, again folding, not mixing so you do not lose the air from the egg whites.

Pour the batter into the lined cake pan, gently level the top with the back of the spoon, then lift the cake pan 6 inches from the countertop and carefully drop as this will release any large air bubbles from the cake to ensure an even rise. Bake in the middle of the oven for 55 minutes, checking from time to time to make sure the cake is not browning too quickly; if it is, lower the heat slightly.

Check that the cake is cooked by inserting a fine metal skewer into the center on the tin; it should come out clean and if not, bake a while longer.

Leave the cake in the tin on a cooling rack for 15 minutes, then remove from the tin and leave to cool completely. Once cooled, remove the paper.

Decorate the Cake

Once the cake is completely cold, slice across horizontally into 3 even slices.

Whip 2 cups of heavy cream to medium to firm peaks (the cream should stand up nicely when the beaters are lifted out), taking care to not over whip and make the cream too thick and hard. Cut the strawberry quarters into half and fold into the whipped cream.

Place the bottom layer of the cake onto a cake stand or plate and spread evenly with half of the strawberry and cream mixture. Place the middle layer on the top and repeat. Finish with the top layer, then place in the refrigerator to chill slightly.

Whip the remaining cream to firm peaks and using a palette knife, cover the cake in an even layer across the top and sides. The cream can either be smoothed out with the palette knife or left fluffy, as you wish. Decorate with strawberries and don't forget Santa Claus.