

TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS CAKE

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

SERVES 12-16

- 225 g / 8oz plain flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp mixed spice
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 200g/7oz dark brown sugar
- 2 tbsp black treacle
- 1 tbsp marmalade
- ¼ tsp vanilla essence
- 4 free-range eggs, lightly beaten
- 800g/1¾ lb mixed dried fruits
- 100g/3½ oz chopped mixed peel
- 150g/5oz glace cherries, halved
- 100g/3½oz blanched almonds, chopped
- brandy

TO DECORATE

- 200g/7oz marzipan
- 1-2 tbsp apricot jam warmed

FOR THE ROYAL ICING

- 3 free-range egg whites
- 600g/1lb/5oz icing sugar sieved
- 1½ tsp liquid glycerine – optional
- 1 tbsp lemon juice

THIS CHRISTMAS CAKE PULLS OUT ALL THE STOPS. IF YOU HAVE THE TIME FEED IT WITH BRANDY IN THE RUN UP TO CHRISTMAS.

WHAT TO DO

1. Heat the oven to 150C/300F/Gas2. Grease a 20cm/8inch round or an 18cm/7inch square cake tin and line the bottom and sides with baking parchment.
2. Sieve the flour, salt, mixed spice and cinnamon into a bowl.
3. Cream the butter and the sugar in a large mixing bowl and then mix in the sugar, treacle, marmalade and vanilla essence until light and fluffy.
4. Mix the eggs a little at a time into the mixture adding a tablespoon of flour mixture with the last amount.
5. Fold in the remaining flour mixture until well mixed and then mix in the dried fruit, mixed peel, glace cherries and the almonds.
6. Turn the mixture into the prepared tin and make a slight hollow in the centre.
7. Bake in the oven for 3 hours and then test with a skewer. If not ready bake for up to another hour testing every 20 minutes until the skewer comes out clean.
8. Remove from the oven and leave to cool in the tin for 15 minutes.

9. Turn out on to a wire rack and leave to cool.
10. Once cool, make a few holes in the cake with a skewer and pour over 3-4 tbsp of brandy. Let the brandy soak into the cake.
11. Store the cake wrapped in foil and in an airtight tin or plastic container, holes side up.
12. OPTIONAL: For a rich and moist cake, spoon over a few tablespoons of brandy every week until you are ready to ice and decorate your cake.
13. To decorate the cake, place the cake on a foil board or cake plate.
14. Dust your hands and the work surface with a little icing sugar and knead the marzipan until soft.
15. Roll out half the marzipan to fit the top of the cake and roll out the rest in strips to fit around the sides of the cake.
16. Brush the cake all over with the warmed apricot jam and then place the marzipan on top and around the cake.
17. Cover the cake with a clean tea towel and then leave in a cool place for at least one day.
18. To make the icing, lightly whisk the egg whites adding the sugar at intervals. Beat well until the icing reaches soft peaks. Add the glycerine if using and the lemon juice.
19. Spread icing all over cake either flat iced using a clean ruler or by forming soft peaks. Decorate with Christmas ornaments.

