

Merry Christmas Cake

This enriched fruitcake, with extra spices and brandy, makes a Christmas cake to remember.

Ingredients

375g (12 oz) seedless raisins
375g (12 oz) currants
375g (12 oz) sultanas
175g (6 oz) chopped mixed peel
75g (3 oz) glace cherries –
 quartered, washed and dried
grated rind of 1 lemon
375g (12 oz) butter, softened
300g (10 oz) light or
 dark brown sugar
4 medium or large eggs
300g (10 oz) plain flour, sifted
pinch of salt
2 teaspoons mixed spice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg
3 tablespoons brandy
 or sherry
3 – 4 tablespoons brandy for
 soaking, optional
1 quantity apricot glaze
875g (1 ¾ lb) Marzipan
1 kg (2 lb) Royal Icing
23cm (9 inch) square
 silver cake board

To decorate:

4 oz white fondant moulding paste
 (optional)
silver ribbon
holly sprig
icing sugar, for dusting

Preparation Time: about 20 minutes, plus icing and decorating

Cooking Time: 3 ½ - 3 ¾ Hours

1. Heat the oven to 150 °C (300 °F), Gas Mark 2. Grease and double-line a 20cm (8inch) Square cake tin with greased proof paper or non-stick baking paper.
2. Mix together the dried fruits, peel, glace cherries and lemon rind. Cream the butter and sugar together until pale coloured. Beat in the eggs one at a time, following each with a tablespoon of flour. Sift the remaining flour with the salt and spices, and fold into the creamed mixture, followed by the brandy or sherry. Add the fruit mixture and combine the ingredients well.
3. Turn the mixture into the prepared tin, level the top, and make a slight hollow in the centre. Wrap several thicknesses of brown paper or newspaper around the outside of the tin and bake for 3 ½ -3 ¾ hours or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean.
4. Cool in the tin, then unmould on to a wire rack. Store in an airtight container or wrapped in aluminum foil until required. If using extra brandy, pierce the cake all over with a fine skewer and drizzle 3-4 tablespoons of brandy over it before storing.
5. To prepare the cake for decoration, brush the top and sides with apricot glaze, then cover with marzipan. Leave the marzipan to dry for a minimum of 24 hours.
6. Make the royal icing and attach the cake to the board with a dab of it. Flat – ice the sides of the cake, then spread the remainder over the top, peaking it with a palette knife. Leave to set.
7. If liked, cover the top of the cake board with moulding paste. Tie the silver ribbon around the cake and top with the holly sprig, dusted with icing sugar.

Serves 8