

Chocolate Cherry Cheesecake Cake

Poetry & Pies

prep time: 65-75 minutes

bake time: 35-45 minutes

freeze time: 3-8 hours (*overnight is ideal*)

defrost time: 2-3 hours

total time: about 13 hours (*includes 2 hours to prep, bake, and assemble*)

servings: 12-16



Ingredients

- one batch of [tart cherry pie filling](#) (or 28 ounces store bought)

for the chocolate cake layers

- 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups (335g) granulated sugar
- 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups (226g) flour, sifted
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (75g) unsweetened cocoa powder, sifted
- 2 teaspoons (8g) baking powder
- 1 teaspoon (5g) baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon (3g) sea salt
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 cup (236g) buttermilk, room temperature*
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (108g) avocado oil (can sub vegetable or canola oil)
- 1 tablespoon (13g) pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup (240g) very hot, light roast coffee (or very hot water)

for the graham cracker crust crumbles

- 4 full graham crackers
- 2 tablespoons (25g) sugar
- 2 tablespoons (28g) butter, melted

for the chocolate ganache drizzle (this makes a little extra)

- 4 ounces (113g) semi-sweet or dark chocolate chips (or baking chocolate, chopped)
- 3 ounces (85g) heavy whipping cream

for the cheesecake filling

- 8 ounces (227g) cream cheese, room temperature
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (65g) powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon (4g) pure vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (77g) heavy whipping cream

Instructions

1. Ideally, make the [cherry pie filling](#) ahead of time so it can cool and set. It will keep for 2-4 weeks in the fridge, if well-sealed.

make the chocolate cake layers

1. Preheat your oven to 325F/165C. Lightly grease and flour three [6" cake pans*](#) (or use [baking spray](#)) and line the bottom with [parchment paper](#) or [silicone baking mats](#). This is also a great time to set your coffee to percolate (unless using hot water or espresso and hot water, which is what I do).
2. Whisk together the sugar, flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in the bowl of your stand mixer or a large mixing bowl, sifting everything but the sugar (unless yours is fine enough to sift--go for it!). Set aside.
3. In a separate medium mixing bowl, whisk the eggs, buttermilk, oil, and vanilla together until well-blended and fully emulsified, about 1 minute.
4. Very, very slowly stream the hot coffee or water into the wet ingredients, whisking vigorously and constantly as you pour to avoid scrambling the eggs. Feel free to do this in segments if it's easier. If you do scramble some of the eggs, you can run the mixture through your fine mesh sieve to remove the cooked egg bits.
5. Using the paddle attachment, turn your stand mixer to low (or use a hand mixer) and slowly pour the wet ingredients into the dry. This should take about 30 seconds or so. The batter will clump up then thin out. Once you've poured all the wet ingredients, immediately turn off the mixer. Scrape down the bottom and sides. Beat on medium for exactly 2 minutes (set a timer).
6. Evenly divide batter between prepared pans. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the middle of each cake comes out with just a few moist crumbs (ideally not fully clean, as this could mean they're over baked). Check early and rotate halfway if not using convection.
7. Let cool 5-10 minutes in the pans then remove to a cooling rack to cool completely. Cake layers can be made in advance, cooled *completely*, double wrapped in plastic and frozen for up to 1 month.

make the graham cracker crust crumble

8. While the cakes bake, make the graham cracker crumble. In a small food processor or blender, grind the graham crackers and sugar until a sandy texture. Add melted butter and pulse a few times until blended.

9. Pour out mixture onto a parchment lined baking sheet or small baking pan. Use clean hands to squeeze the crumbs into roughly pea-sized pieces. Some will be larger and some smaller.
10. For the no-bake option, freeze the crumbs in the pan until ready to use. If making ahead, cover with plastic wrap or place in a well-sealed freezer safe bag so the grahams don't become stale or absorb the smells of your freezer (doesn't matter how clean your freezer is--this is just a reality of freezers). It will last 1-2 months in the freezer.
11. For the crunchier baked option, bake the crumbs at 350F/175C for 5-10 minutes. They'll puff up but not really change color much--you'll see just a bit of darkening on some tops. Let cool completely in the pan then transfer to a well-sealed container until ready to use. These will last 3-5 days on the counter or 1-2 months in the freezer.

make the chocolate ganache drizzle

12. Combine the chocolate and heavy cream in a heatproof bowl. Bring 1-2" water to a boil in a small to medium saucepan that can hold the bowl on top in such a way that all or almost all of the ingredients are over the water and not over the stove.
13. Once the water boils, turn down the heat to medium low or low and place the bowl over it. You want it to stay simmering without getting too hot. Stir constantly with a rubber spatula until the chocolate is mostly melted. Remove from heat and stir or whisk vigorously until it is all melted and smooth. Return to heat if some chunks remain, but don't worry if the color looks a little streaky (usually only noticeable in a glass bowl). It's best not to overheat the chocolate because it will become grainy and separated.
 - i. *Note: some brands of chocolate will look like they're seizing up (i.e. a clumpy mess) right before they smooth out and melt completely. Just keep stirring and keep the heat low and the ganache should come together.*
14. Set aside or place in a drip bottle to cool slightly, about 20 minutes. You can also make this up to 2 weeks ahead of time and keep refrigerated. About 10 minutes before you're ready to assemble the cake, place the drip bottle in a glass of hot (just below boiling) water or microwave in 10 second intervals until smooth and drizzle-able.

make the cheesecake filling

15. Place the heavy whipping cream in a large mixing bowl. Beat with a handheld mixer (or use the whisk attachment and bowl of a stand mixer) on medium until frothy. Increase speed to high and beat until soft peaks form. It should hold its shape slightly if you turn the beaters upside down but should still be a bit floppy and shiny. Place in the fridge.

16. In a medium bowl, combine the softened cream cheese, powdered sugar, and vanilla. Beat with a handheld mixer (or use the whisk attachment of a stand mixer—for either option you don't need to wash the beaters/whisk) on medium until combined. Turn up the mixer to high and beat for about 1-2 minutes, until very soft and fluffy and smooth, similar to frosting that is easily spread on a cake.
17. Fold in the whipped cream $\frac{1}{3}$ at a time, using a rubber spatula and mixing until fully blended each time. It will deflate after the first addition but should be very smooth and fluffy by the third addition. Refrigerate until ready to use. This can be made ahead and will last 2-3 days in the fridge.

assemble cake

18. When the cake is cooled, cut off any domed tops from the cake. If you previously froze the cake, let it sit on the counter for 30-60 minutes so it's just thawed enough to cut the domed tops off. You can technically cut these before you freeze it, but I've found that it dries out even with plastic wrap if frozen longer than a few days.
19. Prepare your work station by placing the bottom layer of cake on a clean work surface. Wrap a strip of [acetate](#) around it, making sure it is both snug against the side of the cake and perfectly upright/perpendicular to the work surface. Secure it with tape at the bottom and top, leaving about 1 inch of overlap. Take your time doing this—it's very helpful to have it perfectly straight.
20. Spread about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the ganache on top of the cake, smoothing it out evenly and getting all the way to the edge.
21. Sprinkle $\frac{1}{3}$ of the graham cracker crumbs on top of that, making sure they are spread evenly and getting it all the way to the edge so it's visible through the acetate.
22. Spread about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the cherry pie filling on top of the crumbs, dropping it on top to avoid moving the crumbs around too much. Spread the top evenly, all the way to the edge.
23. Finally, spread about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the cheesecake mixture on top, again dropping small spoonfuls all around on top of the cherry pie filling to make it easier to spread. Smooth out evenly, all the way to the edge so it is visible through the acetate.
24. Repeat this process, adding the next layer of cake (cut side up) and layering all of the filling on top. As you go, once you are about 1" from reaching the top of the acetate, apply another strip *inside* the bottom piece and overlapping them by about 1". It's important to place it inside to avoid any filling leaking down the sides. In total, I used 3 strips of acetate.
25. Once the final layer is complete, smooth out the top of the cream cheese filling then cover the entire thing in plastic wrap or foil (with the acetate still on). Freeze for at least 3 hours, but ideally overnight

26. Transfer the cake to the fridge to defrost for at least a few hours before serving. Remove the acetate right before cutting. Cake can be made up to 1-2 days ahead and kept in the freezer, well covered, until ready to defrost and serve.

Enjoy!

Cake should be stored in a truly airtight container and kept frozen until ready to defrost and serve. If you have any leftovers, place a piece of plastic wrap right against the cut sides to seal it. Leftovers can be refrigerated for 3-5 days (they may fall over after a few days) or frozen up to 2 months.

**This is a Milk Bar style cake made with cake pans instead of the traditional method of making a 9x13" cake and cutting it with a cake ring. I don't own cake rings, so I like this method much, much better. Plus, I like that the edges of my cake layers aren't cut (by the cake rings) and thus stay fresh longer through all of this freezing and refrigeration.*