

Carina Contini's Christmas Cake Recipe

When I got married one of the very special trousseau gifts was Victor's granny, Nonna Maria's cake tin. It's old, it's rusty but its tradition, part of our heritage and it's family. Every year I've baked my Christmas cake in this same tin. I love doing it. No 1 daughter will decorate when she comes home for the holidays. Four generations connected through a cake tin.

500g currants
150g sultanas
150g dried cranberries
100g cherries
225 plain flour
225g soft dark brown sugar
225g unsalted butter
pinch of salt
1 tablespoon treacle
3 large free range eggs
zest of 2 unwaxed orange
1 teaspoon of ground spice
1 bottle of brandy or Glengoyne 10 yr old to soak the fruit and to treat the cake once it's baked



Place all the dried fruits, not the cherries, in a large bowl and pour a really good slug of brandy to wet the fruit.

(This year I found last year's old fruit in the cupboard so I used that and soaked it for two days in half a bottle of rum. I'll let you know how I get on.)

Leave the fruit overnight in a larder or airing cupboard

Double or triple line a 18cm x 10 cm cake tin. Be as neat as possible as you want the mixture to sit neatly in and bake evenly so when you come to marzipan and ice the cake it's easier.

I always make this recipe entirely by hand as I feel it's the best way to keep the fruit from breaking up and bursting.

Choose a big old fashioned granny's baking bowl or pot if you don't have one big enough.

The butter has to be at room temperature or it will be too difficult to cream.

Cream the butter until light and airy and then add the sugar. Continue to cream until it's lovely and fluffy.

Add the treacle and orange zest and beat together

Add an egg and a little sieved flour to stop the mixture curdling

Continue to add the eggs and flour until incorporated

Sieve in the spices and salt.

Drain the fruit and fold this into the cake mixture

Transfer to the cake tin, which I wrap in newspaper or more baking paper to protect the edges of the cake from getting too dark.

Bake in the simmering oven of the Aga or 140°C for 4 - 5 hours. Cover half way through with baking paper if the cake starts to brown on top. Remove when a knife comes clean from the cake.

Allow to cool. Remove the paper. Prick the top of the cake with a toothpick and pour a little whisky to start treating the cake. Wrap in greaseproof and tin foil. Check weekly, turning the cake over and add more whisky as required.

Decorate as you wish with marzipan and fondant icing or with glace fruits for a fancier finish.

Enjoy baking happy memories.