



OVER
150
Magical
DESSERT
RECIPES

Baking Magic

AWAKEN YOUR
INNER PASTRY CHEF

by
SASHA NARY

FOUNDER OF
SASHA CAKES CHICAGO

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Love, Sasha





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A NOTE FROM SASHA

The recipes, tips, tricks, and my ultimate secrets that I am sharing here are for bakers of any level and type of experience: from a novice or hobby baker to experienced pastry chefs and professionals. Some of the recipes are my family's treasures, signatures that I have translated from our language, improved, and adapted to US ingredients. Plus, my own, highly cherished, and coveted recipes that were developed, tested, and held onto for years. I am giving it all to you, with all my heart full of love of desserts, decorating, designing, and inspiring others. This book is my "Magic of Baking", that will awaken the pastry chef in you. Every recipe and every photo, from classic to inventive, has my own personal flair and touch.

From Ukrainian nostalgia and my families' signature desserts that will leave you drooling after just reading the ingredients list (including eggless), to my go-to long awaited "tested, tried, and tested again" best cake recipes including Sugar-Free options, and the magical pastries, plus my ultimate passion: macarons, pavlova's and meringue treats, and mini tarts. In this book I am also sharing my two inventions: the Reuse/Reduce Macaron Recipe, plus the ultimate "earthquake" in the baking world as we know it: The Eggless Heat and Humidity Resistant Buttercream.

Dive in, have a lot of fun, experiment, practice, celebrate even the smallest wins, and don't forget to share with me your delicious creations by tagging @sashacakeschicago and #BakingMagicBook.



INTRODUCTION

I dream of desserts

Every other night I wake up with a new recipe idea, decorating vision, or construction of a dessert. That is why there is a notebook on my nightstand.

When it comes to sharing what baking, dough, batter, and frosting mean to me—I could never quite clearly explain that, until the time when I started writing this book. Why is that you ask? It's not just that a "party without a cake is just a meeting" as Julia Child said, it's more than that. Some connections/memories of baking are bittersweet, such as my sweet grandma Lyuda who whipped up the most fairy-like sweets and treats in her tiny kitchen of Sevastopol, Soviet Union's apartment building. I remember the windows open, the Black Sea breeze and cherry tree aromas, mixing with her magical slowly bubbling rose jam and strawberry coulis on the stove, while meringue cookies are baking in the oven. I baked my first cake and cookies alongside my grandma when I was 8 years old. Just like all my family members: I am obsessed with sweets, desserts, cakes, chocolate, and ice-cream. True story: when I was about 12 years old, I announced that from now on I am on a chocolate diet, and I committed to eat exclusively chocolate for 2 weeks. Obviously, I lasted only a day or so, but my mom and sister still talk about "that amazing diet of mine." We have baked a lot together with my grandma and I was so fascinated of how skillfully she breaded the dough for her pies, how she piped the tiny roses and leaves with a paper piping bag (no tips) on the Kiev Cake. She passed away when I was 11, and baking with her, playing with seashells on the beach, and reading together are the most vivid dreams of my childhood.

Fast forward 3 years or so and you'll find me in the kitchen again, baking with my mom—who due to lack of money, nationwide poverty following the crash of USSR and the loss of her job has become extremely creative with previously canned fruits, vegetables, and ginormous bags of sugar and flour (which is all we had left at some point). Mom whipped up the most creative sweet and savory pies to brighten up our days and satisfy our sweet tooth—from braiding the prettiest canned apple and cherry pies, to vegan cookies, to made from scratch pizza's.

While the middle, high, and music schools, university, and an overwhelming move from Ukraine to USA didn't leave me much time to bake as often as I desired—I caught up later in my life. As things settled (and started) in the USA—from acclimatization, to learning a completely new language, studying at night in yet another, now USA University, meeting the love of my life and now husband. Then planning a wedding/getting married, finally getting our rainbow pregnancy (walking down the

stage for my diploma in heels and 8 months pregnant). Not long after having our second son and all while always needing and wanting to work—my only creative outlets for 17 years were makeup artistry and the skincare field. This industry gave me freedom of expression, career growth and opportunity to inspire, teach, and manage others. It also helped many people become happy and educated about skincare, makeup, and self-care. And then a miracle happened: as we had our third and long-awaited daughter, life gears shifted completely. While on semi-bed rest, and on maternity leave later, I started baking more and more from baking for special family gatherings only, to every day. My main goal was to master all the French desserts that I had the pleasure of devouring while visiting Paris a few years back. And so, it started. It will never end. I found my way of “experimenting and creating”, that girl that got all A’s and took the 1st place in all Chemistry classes and even National competitions back in Ukraine, that girl that only wanted to eat chocolate for 2 weeks, that girl that learned so much from her grandma and mom about the science of baking, while melting in happiness seeing others devour her bakes—finally found herself. But I didn’t do it on my own. That path of finding “me” was accompanied in partnership with incredible husband, kids, family, friends, and relatives’ support. From a dear friend and client of mine who pushed me to start posting my bakes on social media and made me believe in myself and referred me to every single person she has ever come across to, to the most important, my one and only—my husband. He saw “it” before I did. He ran home one day after work, cheerfully handing my first cake turntable, piping bags, and collection of piping tips and said: “Go for it! You never know where it will take you.” He supports my every move, my every crazy idea. As unbelievable as it sounds (even to me)—he went all in with my decision to leave a career of an Account Executive for a major fashion and cosmetic company, to starting my own business as a baker, content creator, and recipe developer. Don’t even get me started on who is first to try all my new recipes and how much he has to try.

And here I am, 4 years have passed since I’ve made this life-changing career decision. I’ve gone from learning how to make macarons to clients all over the USA that get my desserts shipped to them from across the nation. Then to numerous partnerships and collaborations with world renowned brands and companies, to teaching online baking and decorating courses, creating my own line of baking supplies, to being a contestant on Food Network and numerous features on local TV channels. I am here to simply inspire you by sharing my story. I want to inspire you to jump forward in pursuit of your dreams and desires (even if they’re not baking related), or most importantly—inspire or wake up a Baking Magician in you. Yes, you. If you ever think: “I cannot do that, I’ll fail.” I ask you to please grab this book and read this page again. If I could do it, after barely baking for 20 years while immigrating, studying, surviving, then building a family—then you can also. We all have our own natural clock, and nothing is ever too late, nothing is ever impossible. So, let’s make it magical, let’s bake, and let’s create.

CHAPTER 1

Baking 101

Before you jump into actual recipes, I would love to share the Essential Supplies and Equipment list that I personally started and continue working with.

SUPPLIES & TOOLS

Besides the standard baking supplies such as measuring spoons, bowls and whisks, here are some things that will make your baking and decorating process easier. They are essential to have for the execution of the recipes in this book.

- Stand and Hand Mixers
- Digital Kitchen Scale
- Candy Thermometer
- Oven Thermometer
- Three 6 x 3-inch round cake pans
- Two 8 x 3-inch round cake pans
- Wilton Easy Layers Set 8-inch
- Wilton Easy Layers Set 6-inch
- Bundt Baking Pan
- Baking Non-Stick Spray (I prefer Wilton's Bake Easy Spray)
- Baking Strips *see note below
- Cake Decorating Turntable
- Cake Rounds/Drums/Boards
- Offset and Silicone Spatulas
- Small and Large Cake Scrapers
- Piping Bags
- Piping Tips (by Wilton: 1A, 2A, 1M, 1D, 8B, 134, 34)
- Rolling Pin
- Parchment (Silicone Free) Paper
- Cling Film/Kitchen Plastic/Glade
- Silicone Baking Mats (preferred)
- Mini Tart Mesh Rings (or any mini tart baking molds/pans)
- Cookie Cutters
- Cake Leveler or Serrated Knife
- 12 Cavity Cupcake Baking Pan
- Cupcake Tins
- Heatproof Bowls
- Mesh Sifter

- Drip Bottle (for chocolate ganache drips)
- Striped Combs, such as a Bengal Comb by Ester Cakes
- Optional: edible luster or metallic dusts, edible gold leaf, sparkling sugars, sprinkles
- Optional: Wilton Christmas Tree Baking Pans
- Optional: printed large heart and Christmas templates
- Measuring/Weighing Ingredients

I cannot stress enough how important it is to use a Digital Kitchen Scale to measure your ingredients. My favorite one is from good old Amazon—it has worked perfectly for 10 years already and was inexpensive. It is not accurate to measure your ingredients in volume/cups, especially when you are scooping the measuring cup with dry ingredients. A small change of volume will tremendously alter the recipe with the worst possible results. All the recipes in this book are in grams, for maximum precision.

BAKING TEMPERATURES

Using a separate oven thermometer will open your eyes. All ovens are different, and sometimes even the age of the oven affects its temperature's performance. Hang your separate oven thermometer on the middle rack and compare its readings to the actual oven's thermometer/display. Almost always you will see a discrepancy, sometimes a tremendous one. Go with a separate, in-oven thermometer. This is especially important when it comes to baking macarons.

Always bake your cakes on the middle rack and use only as many cake pans as can fit on that rack at one time. Blocking the oven's heat on the top or bottom racks will result in improperly baked, raised cake, possible browning/burning, and even unbaked/soggy centers.

You will learn in all my cake recipes that I recommend using the "low and slow" oven baking method. This means baking pretty much anything at lower temperatures for a longer time. The result: evenly raised beautifully baked cakes, cupcakes, and cookies. Plus, you have the assurance of keeping the colored baked goods from browning

COOLING AND LEVELING/TORTE OF BAKED CAKE LAYERS

My main advice when it comes to baked cake layers is to never try leveling or cutting it (torte) when it's at room temperature: you will end up with a crumbled, uneven, broken mess. Always flip the cakes upside down on a wire rack with the baking pan still intact. This will promote flat tops if yours didn't bake as such to begin with. Once the cake/baking pan has cooled off to room temperature, remove the pan and wrap the cake layer with one or two layers of kitchen plastic/cling film/Glad. Place into the refrigerator or freezer for at least a few hours, but I highly recommend leaving them there overnight. You may place a cake round in between each wrapped plastic cake layer to prevent

them pushing down on each other. Working with cold cake layers is 100% easier than when they are at room temperature.

INGREDIENT TEMPERATURES

Always use room temperature ingredients, unless mentioned otherwise in the recipe. Room temperature ingredients emulsify and combine with each other better than cold. Remember: your sugar, flour, salt, and cocoa are at room temperature, always and forever. When you add cold eggs, butter, or milk—what kind of reaction will take place? It will curdle, which will result in dense, dry, hard cakes. The best way to prepare your ingredients is to simply remove your normally cold ingredients from the refrigerator and keep them at room temperature for at least an hour before starting to work on any cake recipe. What if you forgot to do that? Here are my tricks:

Eggs: place in the bowl with warm water for 5–10 minutes.

Milk: microwave or heat on stove's lowest heat for 30 seconds.

Butter: pour hot water into a bowl. Then pour the water out and cover your sticks of butter with that warm bowl for a few minutes. Voila—room temperature butter.

Sour cream: measure out needed weight of sour cream and place that cup/bowl in another bowl with warm water.

HOW TO/DIY

Caster and Powdered Sugar: make your own by pulsing a granulated sugar in your blender/food processor. A few pulses will give you super fine or caster sugar. If you pulse longer, you will get powdered sugar.

Freeze-Dried Fruit Powder: simply pulse in your blender or food processor.

Baking Strips: if you've seen my viral Instagram video—I make my own and highly recommend for you to do the same. That is unless you already have or prefer to buy the baking strips (Wilton is one of the brands that sells them). Simply cut out strips from any fabric: old sheets, kitchen towels, tea towels (or any old and washed fabric) long enough to tie around your baking pans.

Baking Spray: if you are not using the Bake Easy Spray by Wilton or any other nonstick cooking spray—here is how to prep your pans without it: grease the bottom and sides of pans with butter and then lightly dust with flour. Alternatively, you may use parchment paper rounds on the bottom of your pans.

Now that you have “graduated” my Baking 101 class, it is time to dive into the Recipes.



CHAPTER 2

Buttercream Basics



7 DELICIOUS, EASY-TO-MAKE BUTTERCREAM RECIPES,
INCLUDING THE SUGAR-FREE, EGGLESS, AND MY NEW INVENTION,
THE HEAT AND HUMIDITY RESISTANT BUTTERCREAM

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EGGLESS CONDENSED MILK BUTTERCREAM—A FAMILY CLASSIC

I am starting this chapter with the famous, loved, and mega easy to make Condensed Milk Buttercream. How can I not love everything about it if I was probably born with it in my feeding bottle? This Buttercream, simply made with butter and condensed milk, is a signature frosting in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union countries. Almost every single dessert that I've ever eaten while growing up in Ukraine was made with this delicious frosting: from pastries, cookies, to simple and intricate cakes. To be honest, I understand why. It is light, silky, fluffy, incredibly delicious, and pipes beautifully. But most importantly for any home, hobby, or even savvy baker—it is easy to make, and it develops color beautifully—requiring less food coloring than most of the buttercreams. You've got to know a few tips and tricks, and that's what I'll help you with today.

To make this Buttercream you just need butter and sweetened condensed milk, adding salt and vanilla (or other flavorings) is optional. In my recipe below I skipped salt and vanilla since I love the taste of condensed milk. Because it is not too sweet or overwhelming there is no need to add anything else, but this can be a personal preference.

CONDENSED MILK BUTTERCREAM USES

The possibilities for using this Buttercream are endless: from filling and decorating your sponge/chiffon cakes, to beautifully piped cupcakes, macarons, and many other desserts. It also takes color beautifully—my suggestion is to always use gel food colorings.

STORING CONDENSED MILK BUTTERCREAM

I highly recommend using Condensed Milk Buttercream within just a few hours of making it. Since it's so easy to make, there is no need to whip up large amounts. However, if you do have leftovers or had to make it in advance, store your freshly whipped Buttercream in airtight containers. You can refrigerate it for up to 7 days or freeze it for up to 30 days. Before rewhipping your refrigerated or frozen Buttercream let it come to room temperature.

INGREDIENTS:

226 g (1 cup, 2 sticks) unsalted butter,
at room temperature

397 g (1 can) sweetened condensed
milk, at room temperature

1 tsp. vanilla extract or emulsion,
optional

Pinch of salt, optional

Directions:

1. In the bowl of a mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, whip the butter for approximately 8 minutes or until it has tripled in volume and becomes light and fluffy. Stop to scrape the bottom of the bowl a few times.
2. Add 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract or emulsion and the salt to the whipped butter. Now add 14 oz. sweetened condensed milk in thirds, whipping for about 8–10 seconds after each addition. Don't forget to scrape the bottom of the bowl after each addition.



TROUBLESHOOTING THAT IS APPLICABLE TO ANY OTHER BUTTERCREAM RECIPES

What may go wrong while making Condensed Milk Buttercream? Truly not much, if you carefully follow this recipe. Bring your sticks of butter to room temperature for an hour before making this buttercream. Whip it on high speed for no less than 8 minutes, and add your room temperature condensed milk carefully, in small portions while mixing on medium speed. These are the most important tricks. If your butter was too soft prior to adding the condensed milk, you may see your buttercream starting to separate. Don't panic, simply pop your mixer bowl with separated buttercream into the refrigerator for 10 minutes and then rewhip again. If your workspace is cold, Condensed Milk Buttercream may not whip up light and fluffy. In that case, just place half of it into a microwave safe bowl, warm up for 5-10 seconds, and rewhip with the other half.



✦ ✦ ✦ DULCE DE LECHE BUTTERCREAM ✦ ✦ ✦

INGREDIENTS:

226 g (1 cup, 2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

397 g (1 can) homemade Dulce de Leche, at room temperature

Directions:

1. In the bowl of a mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, whip the butter for approximately 8 minutes or until it has tripled in volume and become light and fluffy. Stop to scrape the bottom of the bowl a few times.
2. Reduce the speed of the mixer to the lowest setting and add the previously prepared and cooled homemade Dulce de Leche in thirds, whipping for about 8–10 seconds after each addition. Don't forget to scrape the bottom of the bowl after each addition.



✦ ✦ ✦ SUGAR-FREE SILKY BUTTERCREAM ✦ ✦ ✦

INGREDIENTS:

300 g (from 9 eggs) fresh or carton egg whites

150 g (¾ cup) monk sugar

¼ tsp. salt

565 g (2 ½ cups, 5 sticks) room temperature/soft unsalted butter (leave out of fridge overnight)

1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Prepare a double boiler. Use a pot slightly larger in diameter than your mixing bowl. Fill it with a bit of water and place on medium-high heat.
2. Wipe your mixing bowl and whisk attachment with a bit of lemon juice or vinegar on a piece of paper towel. Place your egg whites, monk sugar, and salt into your mixer bowl and place the bowl into the pot with boiling water. Make sure that your mixer bowl with the egg whites and sugar does not touch the boiling water. Reduce the heat to medium-low to ensure that the water is barely simmering.
3. Whip your egg whites/sugar mixture with your whisk nonstop for approximately 3 minutes or until your sugar thermometer reaches 140 degrees/60 degrees. I use the whisk mixer

attachment—fewer steps, fewer dishes to wash. Then check the mixture with your fingers—you should not be feeling any grains of sugar.

4. Transfer your mixing bowl to a stand mixer and start mixing on low speed. Gradually increase the speed to the highest setting. Mix it for 8 minutes until you get stiff peaks, meaning—when 8 minutes have passed, pull your whisk out and check the meringue's peak—it should just slightly curve.
5. Decrease mixer speed to medium and slowly add your 565 grams of unsalted butter, 1 tablespoon at a time. Then add 1 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract and mix on high speed for 4 minutes. At some point you might be seeing that your buttercream is looking soupy—do not panic. As you continue adding butter while mixing, the consistency will change.



✦ ✦ ✦ MIND-BLOWING EASY EGGLESS ✦ ✦ ✦ CHOCOLATE BUTTERCREAM FROSTING

INGREDIENTS:

397 g (1 can) sweetened condensed milk, at room temperature

375 g (1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature

3–5 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder

Directions:

1. Add all ingredients to the mixer bowl, fitted with a whisk attachment, and mix on high speed for approximately 5 minutes or until it doubles in volume, becomes fluffy and silky.



SIGNATURE TRADEMARK: HEAT AND HUMIDITY RESISTANT EGGLESS BUTTERCREAM

INGREDIENTS:

448 g white chocolate morsels (2 ½ cups), chips, or bar

230 g (1 cup) full fat sour cream

339 g (1 ½ cups, 3 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 tsp. gelatin or agar powder (if preferred)

1 Tbsp. cold water

pinch of salt

clear vanilla or any other clear extract

Directions:

1. Place gelatin (or agar) powder and cold water into a small bowl, mix and set aside to bloom for 5 minutes.
2. Place white chocolate, salt, vanilla, and sour cream into a mixer bowl and over the double boiler, continuously mixing with a silicone spatula. Keep heating until all the chocolate melts.
3. Meanwhile, place butter into your mixer bowl fitted with the whisk attachment and whip the butter for at least 5 minutes or until it doubles in volume, becoming lighter and fluffy.
4. Take the chocolate/sour cream mixture from the double boiler.
5. Melt bloomed gelatin in microwave for 5–10 seconds and mix it into the sour cream/chocolate mixture.

6. Stop the mixer and add the chocolate/sour cream mixture into the whipped butter.
7. Allow the buttercream to mix on low speed for about 1–2 minutes.
8. Remove the bowl from the mixer, cover it with kitchen plastic and place into freezer for 15 minutes or refrigerator for 30 minutes.
9. Once the buttercream has cooled off/stabilized—place it back into the stand mixer and whisk again on medium speed for a few minutes, then on high speed for an additional 4 minutes.
10. To remove any excess air/bubbles beat the buttercream with a silicone spatula by hand or whip in mixer fitted with pedal attachment on low speed for a few minutes.



SIGNATURE SWISS MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM

INGREDIENTS:

300 g (from 9 eggs) fresh or carton egg whites

250 g (1.1 cups) caster or superfine sugar

¼ tsp. salt

565 g (2.5 cups or 5 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Prepare a double boiler. Use a pot slightly larger in diameter than your mixing bowl. Fill it with a bit of water and place it on medium-high heat.
2. Wipe your mixing bowl and whisk attachment with lemon juice or vinegar on a piece of paper towel. Place your egg whites, caster sugar and salt into your mixing bowl and place the mixing bowl into the pot with boiling water. Make sure that your mixing bowl with egg whites and sugar does not touch the boiling water. Reduce the heat to medium-low to ensure that the water is barely simmering.
3. Whisk your egg whites/sugar mixture with your whisk nonstop for approximately 3 minutes or until your sugar thermometer reaches 140 degrees Fahrenheit/60 degrees Celsius. I use the whisk mixer attachment—fewer steps, fewer dishes to wash. Check mixture with your fingers—you should not be feeling any grains of sugar.
4. Transfer your mixing bowl to the stand mixer and start mixing on low speed, gradually increasing the speed to high. Mix on high for 8 minutes until you have stiff peaks. Meaning when 8 minutes have passed, pull your whisk out and check the meringue's peak—it should just slightly curve.
5. Decrease mixer speed to medium and slowly add your 565 grams of unsalted butter, 1 tablespoon at a time. Then add 1 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract and mix on high speed for 4 minutes. At some point you might be seeing that your buttercream is looking soupy—do not panic. As you continue adding butter while mixing, consistency will change.
6. Once 4 minutes have passed, decrease mixer speed to low and continue mixing for 2–4 minutes or longer, when possible, otherwise your Swiss Meringue Buttercream will have a lot of bubbles.



SIGNATURE FRENCH SILK BUTTERCREAM

INGREDIENTS:

100 g (½ cup) granulated sugar
33 g (2 ¼ Tbsp.) water
5 large egg yolks

227 g (1 cup, 2 sticks) unsalted butter,
at room temperature
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
pinch of salt

Directions:

1. Combine sugar and water in a medium saucepan. Stir to combine and heat over low heat until sugar dissolves. Increase heat to medium-high and bring it to a boil.
2. Put the egg yolks in a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment and beat until thick and foamy, about 5 minutes.
3. Cook the sugar and water syrup until it reaches 240 degrees Fahrenheit on sugar thermometer. Immediately remove from the heat. With mixer still running, slowly drizzle hot syrup into a bowl with yolks, making sure that the sugar syrup is pouring directly on the egg yolks between the

whisk attachment and the side of the bowl. Make sure not to get any sugar syrup onto the whisk attachment.

4. Continue mixing on high speed for approximately 5 minutes or until the bottom of the bowl is cool to the touch and the yolk mixture has cooled to room temperature.
5. Once the egg yolk/sugar syrup mixture has cooled, reduce the mixer speed to the lowest speed and add in butter one tablespoon at a time, allowing each piece to incorporate before adding the next. Add vanilla and salt. Continue mixing until buttercream is smooth and creamy, for about 5–6 minutes.



CHAPTER 3

From Ukraine with love



14 OF MY SIGNATURE FAMILY RECIPES REVAMPED AND MODERNIZED BY ME, ADAPTED TO MODERN INGREDIENTS, INCLUDING THE USE OF USA AND INTERNATIONAL QUALITY OF SUPPLIES AND COMPONENTS.

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BEST KEPT FAMILY SECRET: THE ULTIMATE CHOCOLATIEST CAKE

THIS CAKE IS EVERYTHING! Chocolatiest indulgence at its best. You will not believe how easy it is to make it and how incredibly delicious it is until you try this recipe. This cake has been an ultimate staple in my family for three generations: every holiday, every birthday, requested by family, friends, neighbors year after year. I have never shared this recipe, cherishing and holding onto it for a moment as this one and now it proudly opens up my first book. Enormous thanks to my sister who kept the original recipe, handwritten by my grandmother, and gave it to me when I started baking full time few years ago. *PRO TIP: For Gluten Free version of this recipe, simply substitute the all-purpose flour with 1:1 Gluten Free flour.

CHOCOLATE CAKE:

300 g (1 ½ cups + 2 Tbsp.) granulated sugar
3 eggs, at room temperature
305 g (1 cup) sweetened condensed milk, at room temperature
3–5 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
360 g (1 ½ cups) sour cream, at room temperature
270 g (2 ⅞ cups) all-purpose flour
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
½ tsp. baking soda

CHOCOLATE CREAM:

1 can (397 g) sweetened condensed milk, at room temperature
395 g (1 ¾ cups, 3 ½ sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
5 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder

GARNISH:

Grated chocolate bar/chocolate shavings and finely chopped walnuts (optional)

Chocolate Cake Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 320 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Sift together flour and baking soda and set aside
3. Add eggs and sugar to the bowl of a stand mixer, fitted with a whisk attachment, and mix on high speed for approximately 5 minutes or until the mixture becomes fluffy and lighter in color.
4. Reduce the mixer speed to low (stir) and add condensed milk, cocoa powder, sour cream, and vanilla while the mixer is still whisking on the lowest speed.
5. Once all ingredients in the bowl are fully mixed in/incorporated, add pre-sifted soda and flour. Allow the dry ingredients to incorporate while mixer is on low speed, then gradually increase the speed to high and mix for approximately 5 minutes.
6. Fill two of the 8-inch x 3-inch greased cake baking pans with the batter and bake on the middle rack of your oven for 30-40 minutes. Bake until an inserted toothpick comes out clean, dry, and free of crumbs.
7. Once cakes are baked, flip them over/ upside down onto your cooling rack. Do not remove the baking pans until they cool to room temperature. Once the pans have cooled, remove the baked cake layers. Wrap each cake layer into a kitchen plastic/cling film and refrigerate for at least a few hours. Alternatively, you may freeze the plastic wrapped cake layers overnight or longer. Before filling and decorating the cakes, allow the frozen cakes to thaw in refrigerator for a few hours or overnight.
8. Level, if needed, and cut each cake layer in half horizontally once it has chilled in the refrigerator or freezer.

Chocolate Cream Directions:

1. Add all ingredients to the mixer bowl, fitted with a whisk attachment, and mix them on high speed until they double in volume and become fluffy and silky, approximately 5 minutes.
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Assembly:

1. Once you have torted your cakes and cut each baked layer in half (resulting in 4 cake layers), it is time to fill and stack the cake.
2. Place your cake drum/board on a turntable and add a small amount of the chocolate cream to the center of the cake drum/round.
3. Place one cake layer over a smoothed small amount of cream, lightly press, and then spread approximately half a cup of the chocolate cream over the cake layer. Smooth and straighten it out with the offset spatula.
4. Repeat with the remaining cake layers and cream. Smooth and even out the sides of the cake with a bench or cake scraper.
5. Refrigerate the filled cake for at least 30 minutes or freeze for 15 minutes. Then finish decorating with grated chocolate and walnuts, if desired.
6. Cut, serve, and enjoy.



GRANDMA'S SIGNATURE HONEY CAKE (AUTHENTIC RECIPE)

If you have ever dived into classic eastern European baking recipes, chances are you have heard of Medovik—The Honey Cake. It is known to be one of the more difficult ones to make, however I've never understood why. Maybe because I have such a fantastic recipe? These super thin, porous, honey cookie-like layers that absorb the delightful sour cream-based filling will not leave you dissatisfied—a true honey indulgence for a true honey lover. This is one of those desserts that taste the absolute best the next day, as the cake layers need time to absorb the filling. *PRO TIP: For Gluten Free version of this recipe, simply substitute the all-purpose flour with 1:1 Gluten Free flour.

HONEY CAKE LAYERS:

180 g (½ cup) honey
50 g granulated sugar
110 g (½ cup, one stick) unsalted butter
1 tsp. baking soda
4 large eggs, at room temperature
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla extract
450 g (3 ⅝ cups) all-purpose flour

FILLING:

460 g (2 cups) sour cream
1 can (397 g) sweetened condensed milk
113 g (½ cup, one stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

HONEY SWISS MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM:

300 g (from 9 eggs) fresh or carton egg whites, at room temperature
225 g (1 cup) caster or superfine sugar
¼ tsp. salt

565 g (2 ½ cups, 5 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

4 Tbsp. honey

DECORATIONS:

White Chocolate Honeycomb Shards, Honey drip

Honey Cake Directions:

1. In a saucepan combine butter, honey and sugar and place on medium heat. Simmer for 3–4 minutes, until it changes color to a darker shade. Stir in the baking soda. Take off the heat and set aside for 2–3 mins. Beat eggs in a separate bowl with a hand whisk, and slowly drizzle the eggs into the hot butter/honey mixture, continuously whisking it the whole time. Whisk it until the eggs are completely incorporated.
2. Stir in the salt and vanilla. Fold in flour in portions of 3. This is going to be thick sticky dough.
3. Immediately pour out the dough onto a clean floured surface or onto a floured baking paper. Sprinkle flour over the dough. Lightly roll it into a thick tube just enough to be able to cut it into 14 equal parts. Dust with more flour as needed.
4. Place another parchment paper coordinating with your baking sheet in size onto your work surface, dust the parchment paper with flour. Place one dough ball on it, dust some flour over it and gently start rolling it to make a big cookie more than 8 inches in diameter. To trim it into a neat 6-inch cookie I used a 6-inch cake pan. You could use a 6-inch plate or anything of that approximate size. Save the trimmings and use them for rolling/cutting more cake layers. Poke the cookie with a fork to avoid bubble formations while baking.

5. Preheat oven to 380 degrees Fahrenheit. To make the handling easy and less time consuming, just slide in the parchment paper with the cutout cookie round onto a baking tray and bake for 6–7 minutes until it turns a nice golden-brown color. In the meantime, repeat the above steps with remaining dough.

6. After 6–7 mins in the oven, it should be a little firm and darker on the sides. Do not peel parchment paper off the honey cookie until it has completely cooled off on a cooling rack.

Honey Swiss Meringue Buttercream Directions:

1. Prepare a double boiler. I use a pot slightly larger in diameter than my mixing bowl. Fill it with a bit of water and place it on medium–high heat.
2. Wipe your mixing bowl and whisk attachment with lemon juice or vinegar on a piece of paper towel. Place your egg whites, caster sugar and salt into your mixing bowl and place the mixing bowl into a pot with boiling water. Make sure that your mixing bowl with egg whites and sugar does not touch the boiling water. Reduce the heat to medium–low to ensure that the water is barely simmering.
3. Whisk your egg whites/sugar mixture with your whisk nonstop for approximately 3 minutes or until your sugar thermometer reaches 140 degrees Fahrenheit/60 degrees Celsius. I use the whisk mixer attachment—fewer steps, fewer dishes to wash. Check mixture with your fingers—you should not be feeling any grains of sugar.

4. Transfer your mixing bowl to a stand mixer and start mixing on low speed, gradually increasing the speed to the highest. Mix on high for 8 minutes until you have stiff peaks, meaning when 8 minutes have passed, pull your whisk out and check the meringue's peak—it should just slightly curve.
5. Decrease the mixer speed to medium and slowly add your 565 grams of unsalted butter, 1 tablespoon at a time. Then add 1 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract, honey, and mix on high speed for 4 minutes.
6. Now, an important step—once 4 minutes have passed, decrease mixer speed to low speed and continue mixing for 2 minutes, otherwise your Swiss Meringue Buttercream will have a lot of bubbles.
7. Coloring your Swiss Meringue Buttercream: I love to use Roxy & Rich Fondusts, Wilton Color Right System Gels, as well as Americolor and Chefmaster Gels.

Assembly:

1. Once the cake/cookie layers have chilled, start building the cake by alternating honey cake layers with sour cream filling.
2. Place the stacked cake into the refrigerator for at least one hour or into a freezer for 30 minutes.
3. After the honey cake has chilled and settled, it is ready for frosting with honey Swiss meringue buttercream, honey drip, and chocolate decorations.

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