



INGREDIENTS:

CAKE LAYER

8 Tbsp (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup granulated sugar

1 tsp lemon zest

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 cup King Arthur cake flour (or a gluten-free equivalent like Bob's Red Mill GF One-to-One Baking Flour)

1 tsp baking powder

4 egg yolks (reserve egg whites for the meringue)

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk

MERINGUE LAYER

4 egg whites

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp cream of tartar

1 cup + 2 Tbsp granulated sugar

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup sliced raw almonds

CREAM FILLING

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup heavy whipping cream

2 Tbsp granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh strawberries, $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice

GARNISH

2 Tbsp powdered sugar

12 whole strawberries

DIRECTIONS:

CAKE LAYER

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Prepare a 9-inch square baking pan by brushing it with neutral flavored oil and lining it with a 12-inch square piece of parchment paper.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter and sugar together for 3 to 5 minutes until light and fluffy. Add the lemon zest and vanilla extract, mixing well to combine.

Sift together the flour and baking powder. With the mixer running at low speed, gradually add the sifted ingredients to the butter mixture, mixing until you have a smooth paste.

In a separate bowl, whisk the egg yolks and milk together. With the mixer set to medium speed, gradually add the egg yolk mixture to the batter in three additions, mixing for 30 seconds after each addition. Use a spatula to scrape down the sides of the bowl, ensuring all ingredients are well combined.

Pour the cake batter into the prepared baking pan.

MERINGUE LAYER

Clean and dry the mixer bowl. Using the whisk attachment, beat the egg whites on medium-high speed. Sprinkle in the salt and cream of tartar. Once the egg whites become foamy, gradually add the sugar, and continue to whisk on high speed for 5 to 8 minutes, or until the meringue becomes shiny and holds firm peaks.

Scoop the meringue onto the top of the cake batter, smoothing it so it covers the cake. Sprinkle the sliced almonds evenly over the meringue.

Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until the meringue is dry to the touch and almonds are golden brown.

Let cool for 15 minutes. Run a paring knife around the edges of the pan to loosen the cake. Carefully lift the cake out of the pan using the overhanging parchment paper and place it on a wire rack to cool completely.

CREAM FILLING

Clean and dry the mixer bowl. Fit the stand mixer with the whisk attachment

and whip the heavy cream on medium-high speed. Gradually add the sugar and continue to whip until the cream is firm but not curdled in texture.

Fold the diced strawberries gently into the whipped cream. Keep the mixture chilled until you're ready to assemble the cake.

ASSEMBLY

When the cake has completely cooled, remove the parchment liner and cut the cake in half, to make two $4\frac{1}{2}$ -inch x 9-inch pieces.

Place one piece of the cake, almond-side down, on your serving plate. Spread the strawberry whipped cream evenly over this layer. Top with the second cake half, almond-side up. Chill the assembled cake for 30 minutes to firm it up for slicing.

Using a serrated knife, gently cut the cake into $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch slices, taking care not to squeeze out the filling. Before serving, dust the top of each slice with powdered sugar and garnish with fresh strawberries. Enjoy!

This cake is inspired by the Norwegian cake known as verdens beste, "the world's best." The story behind it is almost as good as the cake itself. In the 1930s, Hulda Ottestad, a café owner in Harstad, a town on Norway's largest island, Hinnøya, bought two recipes from a Danish pastry chef. She transformed one of them into what's known today as Kvæfjordkake. Over the years, the cake's popularity surged, and in 2002, it was crowned Norway's National Cake. I'd never baked a sponge cake and meringue in the same pan and was intrigued. I tried several variations, settling on the following recipe, which uses sweetened whipped cream in place of custard. The luscious combination of sponge cake, almond meringue, berries and cream comes together with surprising ease, making it a great addition to any Mother's Day brunch!

- Leslie Mackie