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Strawberry fans will fall in love with this luscious layer cake

By *Susie Iventosch*

Fresh Strawberry Layer Cake Photo Susie Iventosch

I recently had a visit with one of my friends, who had just come from a bicycle tour in Natchez, Mississippi. She asked me if I'd ever had strawberry layer cake. Apparently it is a famous dessert in Mississippi (I've yet to visit Mississippi), and she couldn't get enough of it. I'd never actually eaten strawberry layer cake. She raved about it, so I decided it was time to give it a try!

This little project turned into three different cakes, four batches of frosting, a batch of strawberry curd and two batches of homemade strawberry purée to get things just right. It was definitely worth it and I think this is finally the perfect combo of light cake with a perfect crumb, luscious strawberry purée reduction and oh, so strawberry-tasting buttercream frosting with a hint of cream cheese.

What makes this cake so delicious is that it's made with real strawberry purée reduction, which gives it a natural and intense strawberry flavor. Of course, if you can find juicy, ripe fresh strawberries, those are ideal,

but I found that frozen strawberries were excellent in the strawberry reduction. Simply take one pound of frozen or fresh strawberries or even a combination, cook them with some sugar, sieve out the excess pulp and you have a beautiful strawberry sauce that can be used in both the cake and the frosting, or even all by itself over your favorite vanilla frozen concoction.

When it comes to making strawberry cake, there is a caveat. Strawberries turn kind of a brownish-gray color when baked in a cake, so you are going to have to add a little bit of food coloring in order to have an appealing cake. It's best to use gel coloring in baked goods, because it holds its color in the baking and you use much less of it, so it doesn't interfere with the liquid quantities in the cake. I used Sunny Side Up Bakery "deep pink" squeeze gel color for my cake and frosting. It took about 5-6 drops to get this pretty pink color, but you can adjust for your own personal preference. This gel coloring is available at Hobby Lobby, but Michael's also carries cake decorating supplies and should have a pretty pink, as well. Also, if you like all of the wavy decorative swirls on the top and sides of the cake, pick up a #824 open star cake decorating tip, the complementary coupler, and a pastry bag.

This cake is not a simple project, but it's fun and worth the time, especially if you are a big strawberry fan. Be sure to make your strawberry puree reduction ahead of time, so it is completely cooled by the time you make the cake. You can speed the process along by chilling it in the freezer for about 10 minutes, but be sure not to freeze it!

Strawberry Layer Cake with Strawberry Buttercream Frosting

INGREDIENTS

Strawberry Purée Reduction

1 lb. fresh or frozen strawberries, stems removed and quartered

3/4 cup granulated sugar

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

Cake

3/4 cup butter, softened to room temp (6 oz or 1 1/2 sticks)

1/2 cup strawberry purée reduction (recipe above)

1 1/2 cups granulated sugar

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

4 large eggs, at room temperature

3/4 cup milk, at room temperature

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Pink gel food coloring (5-6 drops, or as many as the color you like requires)

Strawberry Buttercream Frosting (this recipe makes enough to both frost and decorate the cake)

1 cup (2 sticks or 8 oz.) unsalted butter, at room temp

4 oz. cream cheese, at room temp

8 cups (+/-) powdered sugar, sifted

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/4 cup strawberry purée reduction

2 drops gel food coloring

DIRECTIONS

Strawberry Puree Reduction - make ahead of time

Place berries, sugar and lemon juice into a saucepan. Slowly bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring

frequently. The juices from the berries will create enough liquid to form a sauce. Continue to cook on a low boil for about 10 minutes, or until berries are very soft.

Remove from heat and strain sauce through a strainer, pressing the solids through the strainer to create a thick sauce or puree. Use a spatula on the bottom of the strainer to capture any strawberry puree that is coating the outside of the strainer. Discard any strawberry pulp that doesn't get through the strainer.

Bring the strained puree to a low boil and cook until reduced to about 1 cup of puree. This sauce will be thick enough to coat a spoon. Remove from heat, and cool to room temperature. Use part in the cake and part in the frosting.

Strawberry Cake

Butter the bottoms and sides of two 9-inch cake pans and dust with flour. Preheat oven to 350 F.

Sift all dries together into a small bowl. In a separate bowl, mix milk, strawberry puree reduction and vanilla extract. Set both aside.

In a large mixing bowl, or in the bowl of your mixer, place butter and beat on high speed until creamy and light colored. Slowly add sugar and continue to beat until well-integrated and fluffy.

Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Scrape the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula as you go.

Add dries and liquids to butter mixture, alternately, beginning and ending with dries.

Divide batter evenly between the two 9-inch cake pans.

Bake for about 20-25 minutes, or until a cake tester comes out clean when inserted into the middle of the cake. Remove from oven and cool for about 5 minutes. Then, turn cakes out of the pans and directly onto a cooling rack. Once cool, refrigerate for about 30 minutes and then sliced each layer in half horizontally using a long bread knife or a cake slicing knife. (Chilling the cakes makes slicing them a bit easier.) If the cake layers are significantly domed on top, flatten them out by cutting the rounded part off the top using the same knife.

Strawberry Buttercream Frosting

While the cake is baking, begin the frosting. Place softened butter into the bowl of your mixer. Beat until fluffy. Slowly add powdered sugar and cream together until the mixture is like a paste. Stir in vanilla extract. Now alternate with the remaining powdered sugar (reserve 1/2 cup of the powdered sugar for fine tuning later) and the strawberry reduction puree until both are used up, beating well after each addition. Finally, beat in the softened cream cheese. If you feel the frosting is too soft, add a bit more powdered sugar, and if you feel it's too stiff, add a splash of milk or a bit more strawberry puree. Frosting consistency will depend upon the softness and moisture content of the butter, so it's always good to be a bit flexible when making it. Also, you can totally make this frosting without the cream cheese, if you prefer.

To Assemble Cake

Take the bottom of one of the cake halves and place it on your cake platter. Spread a thin layer (about 2 tablespoons) of the strawberry puree reduction over the cut side of the cake. Allow that to sink in. Then, add a layer of frosting right on top of the puree.

Place the top half of that layer right on top of the frosting. Spread more frosting on top of that half. Repeat the pattern with the second layer of cake ending with the top of the cake on top.

When all four cake layer halves are in place, frost the entire top and sides of cake with a thin layer (a crumb coat) of frosting using a frosting spatula, to smooth out the cake and to cover up any crumbs. Now, you can add a bit more frosting over that before decorating with the swirls.

Using a #824 open star cake decorating tip inserted into a pastry bag with the matching coupler, start making your decorating pattern using sort of wave-like patterns to cover the top and bottom edges of the cake.

Serve with a scoop of vanilla or strawberry ice cream. Also, a drizzle of homemade chocolate sauce is delicious on this cake!





Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

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